

Oberlin

Digital Commons at Oberlin

Honors Papers

Student Work

2014

Anxious Seas: Reading Affect in Dazai and Murdoch

Joseph B. Lubitz
Oberlin College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.oberlin.edu/honors>



Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Lubitz, Joseph B., "Anxious Seas: Reading Affect in Dazai and Murdoch" (2014). *Honors Papers*. 299.
<https://digitalcommons.oberlin.edu/honors/299>

This Thesis - Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at Digital Commons at Oberlin. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Papers by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons at Oberlin. For more information, please contact megan.mitchell@oberlin.edu.

Oberlin College

A n x i o u s S e a s
Reading Affect in Dazai and Murdoch

Joseph Lubitz
25 April 2014
Comparative Literature
Honors Thesis

Advisor: William Patrick Day
Readers: William Patrick Day, John Harwood, Ann Sherif

Contents

Preface	3
Introduction	5
I. The Sea in Dazai	10
II. Ningen Shikkaku, Suicide, and <i>Shishosetsu</i>	18
<i>Disqualified Being</i>	19
<i>The Terms of Suicidal Narrative and Shishōsetsu</i>	24
III. Painting an Anxious Sea	29
<i>Self-Portraiture and Ekphrasis</i>	30
<i>The Realist Impulse</i>	32
<i>The Representation of Anxiety as Affect</i>	34
<i>Heidegger's 'Stimmung' in Art</i>	39
<i>The Uncanny Staging of Anxiety in Murdoch</i>	43
IV. The Sea in Murdoch	47
<i>Realism, Affect and Murdoch's Moralism</i>	51
<i>'Thrownness' in <u>The Sea, The Sea</u></i>	58
Postscript	62
Bibliography	65

P r e f a c e

Looking over my writing, I have found myself led to a literary criticism that in some general senses seems to more easily lend itself to the study of genres and aesthetics, than to the ontological questions about affect. How do those questions, which repeat themselves in my scattered attempts to read the self in literature, inform my critical interpretations of literary works and their form? In order to begin to frame the way to ask mythic questions, the questioning itself necessitates the interpretation of the particularities of writing about the self. How do the technologies of literature represent and produce the self?

In this search then, I take to heart Jean-Luc Nancy's recollection of the romance of a primordial story that "repeats itself indefinitely, with regularity, at every gathering of the hordes, who come to learn of their tribal origins, of their origins in brotherhoods, in peoples, or in cities—gathered around fires burning everywhere in the mists of times."¹ It is what the philosopher conceives of as the myth of that primal myth itself. He instructs us through the Heideggerian incantation that "with myth, the passing of time takes shape, its ceaseless passing is fixed in an exemplary place of showing and revealing."² As I write, I remember walking away from the smolder of a beach-fire, a place of sharing. Turning to look back on that light it was suddenly unfamiliar, set against the inclement deep darkness of a seascape that barely distinguished itself from the sky.



¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, "Myth Interrupted" in *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 44.

² Nancy, 45.

For his sense of humor and great conversation, for taking on this project, and for countless hours of thoughtful and considered reflection I am indebted to Pat Day. My thanks are also due to Ann Sherif, for her extensive insights in my struggles with Japanese and the work of Osamu Dazai, and to John Harwood for nurturing my interest in aesthetics and challenging my intellectual rigor. Without whose encouragement, humble pedagogy and, for lack of better words, inspired genius I would have never stumbled into what he terms the circling existential malaise of Comparative Literature, I owe my deep thanks to Jed Deppman. For truly teaching me to feel the limits and grace of sharing with one another—and of course, for trips to the beach—it is with love that I thank my longtime friend Richard Brandt. There are no words for my gratitude to Rebecca Nieto for her help in revising this paper and for her companionship, to my friends for their encouraging ignorance of my faults and for making our time at Oberlin more special than I could have imagined, and to my family—Kari, Michael and Sammy— for their love, strength, and unwavering support.

Introduction

...in self-depreciation, in whining hypocritical repentance and in a mere passive state of mind—these are not compatible with any frame of mind that can be counted beautiful, still less with one which is to be counted sublime.

—Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*

If this paper takes one idea as its starting point, it is Martin Heidegger's statement in *Being and Time* that "prior to all psychology of moods, a field which, moreover, still lies fallow, we must see this phenomenon as a fundamental existential and outline its structure."³ The philosopher's phenomenological approach to mood stands in contrast to the psychological. Heidegger contends that mood must actually be thought as something more than an internal mental state. Speaking broadly, psychodynamic approaches to that nebulous notion of "moods" find origin in the categorization of the disorders afflicting the self in order to produce a conceptual framework and scientific knowledge of the human mind. In the production of this knowledge for ultimately therapeutic means, thinking about feelings in terms of the psychological has the ideological consequence of construing affects as neurosis in the construction of the anxious modern subject.

The field that makes up the psychology of moods seems less "fallow" however, as recent critical study has taken up "affect" as a key field of inquiry. Frederic Jameson produced the contentious theoretical assertion of what he famously called the "waning of affect"⁴; in postmodernity, and under the material conditions of late-capitalism, the representation of stable subjects and their emotions has given way to works of art reliant on the production of what

³ Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 130.

Lyotard called “intensities.” This periodizing thesis has indeed become the grounds of refutation for the instatement of affect as a critical tool and the basis for a larger theoretical project. In *Feeling in Theory*, Rei Terada determines that “Jameson memorably phrases what many people have suspected that there is some kind of contradiction in attributing emotion, or at least strong and clear emotion, to anything other than a subject. Emotion and subjectivity seem to be deeply connected.”⁵ She claims however, that the advent of poststructuralism (rather than a mere disaffected postmodernism) provides a theoretical model for thinking affect in spite of the notion that “a discourse and ideology of emotion exist; that poststructuralist theory shows their relation; and that the effect of this exploration is to suggest that we would have no emotions if we *were* subjects.”⁶ My research intersects with the work of Terada specifically in this assertion that feelings *understand* the imposition that is subjectivity; the interpretation of affect itself necessarily calls for a deconstruction of the subject.⁷

The novel, as the staging of bourgeois subjectivity turned anxious in modernity, becomes the theatre of my argument⁸. This paper takes as its task the investigation—not of the status of emotion following the dissolution of the anxious subject of modernity—but the possibility of understanding literature of the anxious self as already radically alternate to its formulation through a bourgeois subject extant in some version of modernity, now nostalgically past. Rather than re-affirming this logic of supersession, I call for a re-invigorated attempt at reading an

⁴ Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late-Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 10.

⁵ Rei Terada, *Feeling in Theory: Affect after the Death of the Subject* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 2.

⁶ Terada, 4.

⁷ Related theories—although not necessarily specifically grounded in the address of poststructuralism—found in the work of Lauren Berlant, Brian Massumi and Sianne Ngai, and others seek to address how affect can and cannot be restored, or at least thought as critical tools that figure as disruptive of discourse, literature, politics and the limits of what constitutes theory itself.

⁸ See Frederic Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2013), which I discuss at more length later on, for further explication of the relationship between the realist novel and the bourgeois subject.

understanding of anxiety that falls outside the enforced logic of anxious modernity as such, starting with the imposition of Heidegger's fundamental ontological departures from the subject.

I have selected two modern literary works that exemplify distinct approaches to the depiction of the self: Osamu Dazai's work *Ningen Shikkaku* (also known by its English title, *No Longer Human*) and Iris Murdoch's novel *The Sea, The Sea*. They both depict the self through the first-person writings of a self-conscious narrator. These works relate obliquely to the canon of modern literature of the modern novel and the high modernist avant-garde. While their selection as the subject of this research may seem historically or culturally disparate it is through the both their distinct representations of a peculiarly modern anxiety and through a shared tendency towards a tradition of pathologizing interpretation as a literary strategy of subjection that they come into relation.

Ningen Shikkaku was published in Japan in 1948, just after the end of the Second World. In the context of the question *is Japan modern?* the work has attained a contested literary status. While contemporaneous Japanese criticism shunned other so-called "I'-novels" as low-literary or not living up to a Western literary aesthetic, *Ningen Shikkaku* now figures as a major modern literary work that signifies Japanese literature's "achievement" of modernity through its representation of a self plagued by suicidal anxiety. In its famous depiction of anxiety, I want to re-read the narrator's self-reflection not as the ultimate example of the modern anomie that threatens and affirms subjectivity, but as also opening up possibilities for investigation in the text's refusals: both its narrator's strange failure to understand himself as a human, and the text's formal resistance to categorization as a novel.

Iris Murdoch's novel *The Sea, The Sea* contrasts with Dazai's work in its anachronistic appeal to the realist novel par-excellence. Published in 1978 as Murdoch's 20th novel, the work

received the prestigious Booker Prize, representing its highly successful assimilation into the discourse of the novel's readership. Unlike Dazai's work, its oblique relationship to modernity comes from its ultimate lack of, and refusal to engage with modern and postmodern vanguardist aesthetics. It exemplifies a conservative relationship to literature in its approbation of the tactics of the realist novel and its notion of the subject. Narrated by the pompous musings of the retired stage director Charles Arrowby setting out to write his memoirs, the theatre of it "staging" becomes a key term in this paper for an interpretation of the uncanny that must be read radically in its anxieties.

The reinterpretation of modern literature and its contingent relationship to the so-called 'age of anxiety' has important consequences for a staging of the self that takes shape in literary studies. The interpretation of modern literature has become mutually constitutive with a psychological framework for interpretation. One basis of this interpretive discourse appears historiographically through the periodization of modernity apprehended in the term pathological notion of "anxiety" and its reliance on literary self-reflection. For Kant and the discourse of aesthetics thereafter, the consideration of art (including literature, poetry having priority) appeared as a special class of objects with a unique relationship to subjectivity. Rather than a Kantian subject of aesthetic judgment aspiring to pleasure, beauty, and the sublime, the modern individual can be defined for Freud through the neurotic projection of negative affects that describe its agonistic consciousness and relationship to the world.⁹ This ubiquitous and

⁹ I hope to show generally the relationship between Kant and Freud's strategies of subjection as they relate to the discourse of aesthetics itself. Freud makes representation in artworks evidence, which aside from art historical event of surrealism finds expression in his analysis of "The Uncanny" in literature, which I hold at arms length through this paper: "As good as nothing is to be found upon this subject in comprehensive treatises on aesthetics, which in general prefer to concern themselves with what is beautiful, attractive and sublime—that is, with feelings of a positive nature—and with the circumstances and the objects that call them forth, rather than with the opposite feelings of distress and repulsion." Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny" in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), 219.

seemingly natural drama of the self necessitates the ideological imposition of bourgeois subjectivity, more broadly reinforced through a tradition inherited from the enlightenment's paradigmatic institution of the subject and the object as the fundamental organizing feature of aesthetics itself.

In the first section, "The Sea in Dazai," the textual representation of the sea in *Ningen Shikkaku* figures as a departure from other aesthetic configurations of the relationship between landscape and the self. The sea figures as site for an aesthetic of failed or limited capacities of representation, illustrating the affective significance of a disqualified self in terms of an anti-sublime ontological appeal to anxiety. While continuing the explication of disqualification as it is represented affectively, the second section, "*Ningen Shikkaku*, Suicide, and *Shishōsetsu*" considers Dazai's text both in terms of the interpretive precedents for the highly specific Japanese literary form known as *shishōsetsu*, and the discourse of suicidal narrative in Japan. The third section, "Painting an Anxious Sea," further defines the articulation of an affective dimension of aesthetics in both *The Sea*, *The Sea* and *Ningen Shikkaku* through a comparison of the works' literary investment in the metaphor of painting and their incorporation of ekphrasis. I also examine the ekphrastic element in Heidegger's text "The Origin of the Work of Art." In addition, the ideological implications of realism as defined through Jameson's text *The Antinomies of Realism* serves as a framework for understanding the strategies employed in the representation of the self in relationship to the bourgeois subject in both works. The final section, titled "The Sea in Murdoch" analyzes the depiction of the seascape in the text in relationship to Murdoch's investments in realism and her distrust of modernism. As both the revelation of the fictional memoir's artifice, and the basis for the retrospective construction of a neurotic subject, this section advances the claim that reading for anxiety exposes "staging" as a key term for

understanding the formal function of affect in the text. Reading Heidegger's terminology of "thrownness" and "attunement" against the representation of affect in *The Sea, The Sea*, allows for an understanding of the novel's investment in a psychoanalytic subject amenable to the moral judgments of realist aesthetics, while suggesting the radical possibility of reading against the interpretive and intentional constructions of subjectivity that frame the novel.

At stake in the interpretation of these works are the politics not only of mood, but also of representation itself. The texts exemplify, through their contradictory positions at either end of a post-war period, an age already understood anxiously, and apprehend their version of modernity retrospectively. In the work *Ugly Feelings*, Sianne Ngai investigates affects minor to the Enlightenment tradition of aesthetic inquiry. Acknowledging its "centrality across periods and knowledge formations (literature, literary culture, philosophy, psychoanalysis)," she asks, "how does anxiety come to acquire its special status in Western culture as the distinctive 'feeling-tone' of intellectual inquiry itself."¹⁰ Engaging these two novels in relation to one another allows for a critical apprehension of anxiety as it affects a self quite different from an ontology and aesthetics of modernity structured by psychoanalytic consolidation of anxiety into the conservative pathology of the subject. I will show that it is not through sublime revelation or beautiful recollection, but through their anxious orientation that these texts reveal an affected self, as phenomena other than the inherited concept of bourgeois subjectivity.

The Sea in Dazai

Waves of anxiety crash, rising and falling only to be reformulated into an opaque textual sea, without revelation or depth. What is certain about *Ningen Shikkaku* is neither the

¹⁰ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 215.

orientalist's peaceful meditation nor the pathological raving of a suicidal maniac. The alienness of the introspective prose commands a striking realism of sorts. Reading the work itself is to subject oneself to the peculiarly dreadful, unmitigated by any mystical revelation or pleasure in the beauty of things. Its narrator indeed seems disqualified from the type of "humanness" that might craft the images adorning a delicate screen, or the poetic representations that figure in the *waka* and *hokku* harkening back to the lilting genteel of Heian Japan.

However, the depiction of blue waves glinting in springtime, draws attention. It seems innocent of his suicidal abjection. In this brief refrain from introspection, Yozo seems identifiable as an artist, a young man aspiring to be painter, capable of eschewing momentarily his course of self-examination fraught with dread to create beauty in recording his perceptions of the sea:

On the shore, at a point so close to the ocean one might imagine it was there that the waves broke, stood a row of over twenty fairly tall cherry trees with coal-black trunks. Every April when the new school year was about to begin these trees would display their dazzling blossoms and their moist brown leaves against the blue of the sea. Soon a snowstorm of blossoms would scatter innumerable petals into the water, flecking the surface with points of white which the waves carried back to the shore. This beach strewn with cherry blossoms served as the playground of the high school I attended. Stylized cherry blossoms flowered even on the badge of the regulation school cap and on the buttons of our uniforms.¹¹

This is a primal moment, the depiction of a view of the seascape. The writer's attempt to capture in language the object of perception. This image of the sea, if interpreted as un-anxiously decorative in its poetry, would stand alone as such in *No Longer Human*. Is this passage—which marks Yozo's departure from his parent's household, and the beginning of his coming of age—a glimpse of the narrator's pleasure in remembering the sea of his youth, and of an otherwise impossible pleasure in being Human?

¹¹ Dazai Osamu, *No Longer Human*, trans. Donald Keane (New York, NY: New Directions, 1958), 41-42.

Like the cherry blossom design sewn into the school uniforms, this passage from the beginning of Oba Yozo's second notebook seems to be a stylized kernel of beauty, an object of aesthetical reflection. It is stitched into Yozo's memory, written in his notebook, and it will haunt Yozo as he continues to write. The simple landscape in the memory of Yozo's childhood, this impression of the seashore, functions within *Ningen Shikkaku* not only as some sort of realization of the pleasure of nature's beauty; but in its exceptionality already resonates as it rhymes with that cold water into which Yozo and his lover will throw themselves. The narrative will never break free from the logic of disqualification, which makes the depiction of the view outside of Yozo's self impossible, his being constituted through anxiety as a state of abjection.

In the passage quoted above, Keane renders Dazai's writing in translation as a unified poetic image. Yozo looks through the sakura trees. He describes their blooming along with the changing season, setting it against the timeless breaking of waves. Reading this as a Japanese "novel," the decadent and artful depiction seems indicative of the season, as a sort of establishing image, references a long literary and art historical tradition of natural imagery. Many students of the Japanese language will recognize the customary epistolary practice of beginning even an informal note with a seasonal reference to nature. In this act of transcribing his perception of the landscape, it is even fruitful to think of Yozo momentarily like Basho. Recall the father of the haiku at the seashore in his work *Oku no Hosomichi* also looking upon or remembering a particular landscape and composing *hokku*:

Turbulent the sea—
Across to Sado stretches
The Milky Way.¹²

¹² Bashō Matsuo, *The Narrow Road to Oku*, trans. Keane (New York: Kodansha America, 1996), 127.

In Basho's hokku, or any version of the unavoidably iconic print *Wave* by Hiroshige, it is the unpredictable danger of a rough sea, and its representation as a perfected work of craftsmanship, which is notable. In Hiroshige's print, the line of sight, extending towards Mt. Fuji as the focal point of the series *Thirty Six Views of Mt. Fuji*, is obstructed literally and compositionally by the imposing wave. The sea that surrounds the islands of Japan—and from which, according to the Shinto creation myth, the gods raised the land of Japan—is at once the aesthetic object of pleasure and an imposing subject, an obstacle and a barrier made permeable.

Basho's hokku verse folds around the particle “や” which has been translated (I chose Keane's translation) as an em-dash at the end of the first line. This particle structures the comparison between the sea and the night sky. It acts as hinge through which a sublime “motion” (to use Kant's terminology) modifies the specificity of the sea as it “stretches” and transforms poetically to incomprehensible celestial magnitudes. *Ama no gawa*, translated as “The Milky Way” also translates more literally as “heaven's river.” The torrent of the sea obstructs the island of Sado, prominent in the Japanese historical imaginary as a place of banishment and exile. The metaphor that exceeds reality in this form of poetry and provides my brief close-reading with its most fundamental thrust reveals the radically contrasting way the representation of the sea figures in *Ningen Shikkaku*.¹³

Unlike Basho—whose work composes and coalesces these poetic essences of places, whose meditation becomes and is activated by this textuality of hokku—Yozo's observation betrays innocence and not mastery. Dazai writes a narrator who lacks the ability to transcribe his perception so that it may become this sort of enigmatic and ideal sublime, implicating the

¹³ I do not mean to compare Dazai and Basho in order to assert that the sea in Dazai is surprisingly calm, with its cherry blossom petals falling on a bright blue day, the small peaks of waves glinting in the sunlight of his

anxiety of writing itself as an aesthetic object. In the original text of *Ningen Shikkaku*, the Japanese, while equally poetic, betrays a feeling of immediacy of an anxious present. Dazai renders in the text the process of perceiving and remembering through a desperation in Yozo's writing in a way that the translation cannot quite. Instead of Keane's five sentences, each containing a new idea, the view of the sea comprises a single sentence. This sentence is punctuated with commas into a fragmented set of clauses. I have translated it in attempt to maintain that structure so it reads as follows:

At the sea—where the waves break, you could say it was that close to the shore, wild sakura trees with pitch black bark, about twenty fairly large ones stood there—when the new school year is about to start, the wild sakura, their new leaves sticky and brown, set against the background of the blue sea, there the dazzling blossoms open, and then, when the blossoms fall in opulence, innumerable petals scatter into the ocean, sprinkling the surface and floating, the breaking waves carry them back to the water's edge, it was that beach with those cherry blossoms, which served as the schoolyard...¹⁴

The repetition of the demonstrative pronoun “*sono*” which I have translated as “*there* the dazzling...”, “it was *that* beach”, “*those* cherry blossoms” reflects Yozo's attempts to locate and describe his perceptions, to *get it down*. In this way, the text implicates the act writing, with Yozo as writer, and his failure to delineate the scene in such a way so as to vanish the self completely.¹⁵

Basho's *Oku no Hosomichi* however, still reflects the viewpoint of the bard, the poet whose self is transcended in order to present to an audience the intoxication of profound and arbitrated wisdom. While I cannot and do not intend to investigate the many differences between

remembered youth. Rather I hope to better understand how the usage of the sea Dazai specifically differs from the literary function of this particle in Basho as a method of comparison and sublimity.

¹⁴ Dazai Osamu, *Ningen Shikkaku* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, Shōwa 54, 1979), 113. My translation.

¹⁵ It might be that Keane opted for a more legible sentence structure in order to avoid comparisons to stream-of-consciousness writing or other recognizable textual experiments of modernism. Japanese accommodates sentences like this readily, often omitting subjects that might be implied, and incorporating multiple clauses. While I wouldn't argue that this is an experimental style, it does read as colloquial. Furthermore, it is worth noting that this type of sentence structure is not uncommon within the work.

the role of *Haibun* in Japanese literature and Western or other bardic traditions, I read Dazai's work set in relief to a propositional notion of Basho's works as constituting a very different relationship to selfhood. As indicated in "*Oku no Hosomichi*," the title of Basho's haibun, through the pun of "interior" and the wilderness of the "deep north" (*oku*), Basho transcends the self through a writing of the "interior." The poesis of the *hokku* seems to rely on this achievement of self-realization. On the inheritance of this notion of the self in *shishōsetsu*, the peculiar genre of modern Japanese literature, which *Ningen Shikkaku* emerges from, the scholar of Japanese literature Edward Fowler writes that

the achievement of selfhood in the Japanese context, then, means in a very positive sense the loss of one's individuality. This is a recurrent theme in many *shishōsetsu* but most conspicuously in those of Shiga Naoya, whose "Kinosaki nite" (At Kinosaki) and *An'ya Kōro* (A dark night's passing) are particularly powerful depictions of the authorial persona's communion with nature and of what the early twentieth-century philosopher Nishida Kitarō calls "emptying the self," achieved by the perceiving subject's identification with the object.¹⁶

While I will return to a closer analysis of *Ningen Shikkaku*'s place within the genre form of *shishōsetsu* with specific attention in the next section of this paper, it suffices to say that it is precisely its difference from this notion of the self that distinguishes Dazai's work. Yozo does not make a literary comparison in the attempt to write a poem, and does not attempt to commune with nature, seeming rather distant from the Zen aesthetic project of "identification with the object." He lacks the ability to transcribe the sea or its being as some kind of aesthetic object, resisting or failing the enigmatic terms of *hokku*. Identification as a possibility of "communion" is an impossibility for Yozo. The anxiety that inflects this representation of the sea, as the disclosure of the failed possibility of communion defines the disqualification of the self in Dazai's work.

¹⁶ Edward Fowler, *The Rhetoric of Confession: Shishōsetsu in Early Twentieth-Century Japanese Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 14.

In this passage Yozo attempts to transcribe a perception of the sea. As a description of the landscape, the sea figures in the work as a prop, a painted screen, and a set piece. But as the term landscape already suggests, it is also something outside the self, which surrounds. In the passage from *Ningen Shikkaku* above—where I argue that Yozo expresses at once an inability to constitute the sea completely, and an innocent, or at least youthful viewpoint—the confused action of transcribing the observation of the scene contrasts peculiarly with the calm spring weather, and the casual breaking of waves that carries the delicate and abundant springtime blossoms. Unlike Basho’s, this landscape, the sea, derives its significance not from Yozo’s being, but from its own system of interactions and temporal relationships: the season and its weather, the wind which strikes and carries each petal, the position of the sakura above the water. These relationships form a system revealed through the very inability of the text to represent them, a literary impulse that shows itself and the truth of being through its own brokenness: a revelation not of the sublime, but a critique of the ideological claim that representation makes to the epistemological in modern literary realism.¹⁷ I am continually inspired and instructed as I work through understanding of the sea as it functions in the paradox of “landscape” (and in its relationship to the—as yet insufficiently articulated—primary role of the “self”) by Eve Sedgwick’s reading of Proust, which works against the many rich psychoanalytically determined readings of *À la recherche du temps perdu*:

Surprise is the mark of reality, insofar as what is real—what surrounds the subject, the weather of the world—has to exceed the will of the subject, including its will to arrive at truth. At the same time, surprise with its promise of an ever-refreshed internal world is the mark not only of reality, but of the mystical orientation that allows Proust to cherish that reality. It’s in this context that one might compare Proust’s love of the weather with

¹⁷ I am indebted in my language to Frederic Jameson’s work *The Antinomies of Realism*, which figures prominently in the later section of this paper entitled “Painting an Anxious Sea.” He asserts that “Realism, as I argued elsewhere, is a hybrid concept, in which an epistemological claim (for knowledge or truth) masquerades as an aesthetic ideal, with fatal consequences for both of these incommensurable dimensions.” Frederic Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2013) 5-6.

the more overtly philosophical *amor fati*, the love of fate or necessity, that Nietzsche declared to represent his own “inmost nature.”¹⁸

Despite its decontextualized presentation here, this analysis of Proust brings into relief several important differences that characterize *Ningen Shikkaku*. In the passage from Dazai, the sea does exceed the will of the subject and its actions are cherished in their delicacy and abundance. However, the relationship between that Nietzschean affirmation of that which is outside of the will of the subject encounters a curious play in Dazai’s work.

Yozo cannot will it into text, and the ultimate apprehension of the sea’s reality is Dazai’s failure to “mark” it. This coincides with Fowler’s characterization of the *shishōsetsu*’s author, who “rather than attempt to create a fictional world that transcended his immediate circumstances, he sought to transcribe the world as he had experienced it, with little concern for overall narrative design” and who “compiled this record less out of a sense of his own self-importance than out of skepticism that experience other than his own could be recorded with complete confidence.”¹⁹ In this interpretation, Yozo’s presentation of the sea, contrasts with the ideal of a poetic representation organized by the epistemological gathering together of an omniscient author-function. Instead I read *Ningen Shikkaku* in its concern with a (de)-constitution of the self as a realism of a different sort, invoking the epistemological only as it must always remain limited. The ontological promise which characterizes Proustian novelistic weather in its ability to surprise the subject contrasts with a sea that cannot be described unless through that ultimate expression of will, suicide. Yozo’s youthful description of the sea, already haunted by the suicidal narration of *Ningen Shikkaku*, becomes the landscape against which Dazai writes the anxious self, forever banished, disqualified by the turbulent suicidal sea, on that

¹⁸ Sedgwick, Eve. “The Weather in Proust” in *The Weather in Proust*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 34.

¹⁹ Fowler, *The Rhetoric of Confession*, xxiii-xxiv.

island of Sado. This point begins to articulate the role of the self in Dazai's text as oriented in the world through an anxious alienness that cannot "cherish reality." And yet, the writing of the self in *Ningen Shikkaku* cannot be reduced to the modern alienated individual whose eschatological anxiety stands at one end of a history begun by the stable bourgeois subject.

In *Ningen Shikkaku* the sea itself figures in many ways and comes in many waves. The sea in Dazai should not be read in terms of any radical departure from either "traditional" Japanese depictions of the sea, or precedents of inflecting the sea with a certain mood. Instead, by reading Dazai's varied preoccupations with the sea, I articulate a positioning of the self that represents the sea in *Ningen Shikkaku*, in its liminality, characterized by oblique and negative relationships to both Western and Japanese notions of the self, that allow me to read Dazai's text as producing an ontology of anxiety.

Ningen Shikkaku*, Suicide, and *Shishōsetsu

This investigation risks a reading of the status of the self in *Ningen Shikkaku* as a horizon for an understanding of affect as critical of subjectivity. This necessitates inquiry into the status of the work's relationship to the Western notion of the novel form and its conventions of interpretation, in addition to the specific concerns regarding autobiographical literature. Three fictional "notebooks" written by the character Oba Yozo, together with a short epilogue and prologue narrated by someone who finds the notebooks at a later date, make up the work. The notebooks, as Yozo's diaries, are a work of fiction. However, their resemblance to Dazai's own biography, and more importantly, *Ningen Shikkaku's* reception within the tradition of the *shishōsetsu*, or "I-novel," complicate the notion of the fictive as it relates to an understanding of the autobiography's non-fictive claims.

Read as autobiography, *Ningen Shikkaku* could be understood through the fetishized psychological state Dazai himself, and as a product of the cultural context that a historical reading of the work would set him against. The author would function in this way as emblematic of modernity; the work would serve as a memorialization of the decadent, suicidal soul of the artist set against the backdrop of postwar Japanese defeat, shame, violence, and chaos. In this way, Yozo's confessions serve to exemplify Dazai's own significance as experiencing the event of "no longer" being able to be "human," and the anxious tonalities of the work read as symptomatic. Without invalidating the possibility of such a reading, I instead assert a reading of the work through its vexed relationships to autobiography and any stable Western notion of the self achieved through an ideological investment in the subject, with specific attention to the hermeneutic context of the literary genre of *shishōsetsu*. From this critical position emerges an analysis of the very terms of suicidal "disqualification" in the self-conscious investigation of human being that—in addition to being readable in terms of the realities of the pop-cultural and literary edification of Dazai's biography—represents anxiety as fundamental to being in the world.

Disqualified Being

While the title given to the work by its English translator Donald Keene is *No Longer Human*, looking at the original Japanese—*Ningen Shikkaku* (人間失格)--illustrates the various interpretative possibilities not necessarily evident in the English. *Ningen* (人間) is translated as "human," not in the biological sense, but in the sense of human being. *Shikkaku* (失格), which is translated by the scholar of Japanese literature Donald Keene as "No longer," might be more literally translated as "Disqualified," making the title of Dazai's novel "Disqualified Human."

This betrays the reason Keene used “no longer human” as the title. In addition to being less awkward, it creates a grammar of temporality, which “Disqualified,” despite being in the past tense, does not. But why not translate it as “Disqualified [as]/[from being] Human?” The almost juridical notion of disqualification seems to suggest something different than the sense of loss inspired in “no longer” being human. Keene’s title alludes to Dazai’s biographical narrative, and the historical context of post-war Japan as defined by feelings of extreme loss and lack. In this way, the two possible titles open onto two different readings of the novel. Without negating Keane’s interpretation, but looking instead to the notion of *disqualification* as a state of human being, Dazai’s work evokes a question about the meaning of being as a literary possibility.

More than sensory experiences, imagery, or even its plot, the work is heavily comprised of passages, which detail Yozo’s interpretation of his state of being. After moving to Tokyo to study painting, Yozo’s art school dilettante friend Horiki takes him to a Marxist reading group in Tokyo. Much of the narrative prior to Yozo’s first suicide attempt follows his engagement with this radical political community. Despite eventually becoming an integral member of the Party, he knows from the start that the logic of Marxian economics and historical materialism—their agreeable system of theorization—do not fully encompass the fundamental ontological condition of humanity. He describes his first meeting, recalling

a lecture on Marxian economics delivered by an extraordinarily ugly young man, the guest of honor. Everything he said seemed exceedingly obvious, and undoubtedly true, but I felt sure that something more obscure, more frightening lurked in the hearts of human beings. Greed did not cover it, nor did vanity. Nor was it simply a combination of lust and greed. I wasn’t sure what it was, but I felt that there was something inexplicable at the bottom of human society which was not reducible to economics. Terrified as I was by this weird element, I assented to materialism as naturally as water finding its own level. But materialism could not free me from my dread of human beings; I could not feel the joy of hope a man experiences when he opens his eyes on young leaves.²⁰

²⁰ Dazai, *No Longer Human*, trans. Donald Keane, 66.

In his agreement with the explanations provided by Marxism, he recognizes also that which exceeds its explanation. This recognition is described through an affective knowledge of something inexplicable, registered as fear. Not fear of an unknown or the unknowable, but the very knowledge acquired through the experience of what he calls “this weird element.”

The comfort he takes in his involvement with the community of Marxist political radicals derives not from any political ideals or radical intention, both of which involve an investment that because of his fundamental disqualification from human being he cannot indulge. He recounts how he found it “uproariously amusing to see [his] ‘comrades,’” their faces tense as though they were discussing matters of life and death, absorbed the study of theories so elementary they were on the order of ‘one and one makes two.’”²¹ Despite their acceptance of him as a jovial presence, and tasking him with important obligations, Yozo’s outward identification with the community he encounters as his “comrades” never becomes a true or authentic identification in his own words. “Comrade” itself is written in quotation marks. Yozo is always already unable to overcome his own alienness.

This alienness does not refer to alienation as such, where the stable subject no longer finds individual fulfillment (as in the “anomie” articulated in the sociology of Emile Durkheim, or, more pertinently, the alienation described as a function of capitalism by Karl Marx). Rather, *Ningen Shikkaku* articulates alienness through an anxiety that upsets the possibility of the assent to the “human” sphere. He refers to being agreeable to Marxian analysis as the natural and always occurring process of “water finding its own level.” Such gravity of purpose— the possibility of teleological resolution in a theory of materialism—elicits the anticipation of its disruption by something frightening and still unexplained that causes his feeling of alienness.

²¹ Dazai, *No Longer Human*, 66.

When Yozo writes that he “cannot feel the joy of hope a man experiences when he opens his eyes on young leaves,” the image evokes an immediate intertextual retrospection involving the image of the sea that decorates the beginning of the second notebook, where he observed and transcribed “the wild sakura, their spring leaves sticky and brown.”²² In level water, Yozo’s reflection elicits an uncanny²³ feeling “at the bottom” that makes such springtime hopefulness the very material of his dis-identification, articulated as his “dread of human beings.”

In addition to the conflicted representation of landscape and the attendant aesthetic and affective questions in *Ningen Shikkaku*, the sea serves in Yozo’s writing as a metaphor for the possibility of escape from the unending dread that he feels in his state of disqualification. Further examining his relationship to the Marxist reading group he says he attends “because I liked to,”²⁴ the sardonic tone of such an affirmation is disrupted by a more confusing realization about his part in the group, going beyond “any common affection derived from Marx”²⁵ to something more basic:

Irrationality. I found the thought faintly pleasurable. Or rather, I felt at ease with it. What frightened me was the logic of the world; in it lay the foretaste of something incalculably powerful. Its mechanism was incomprehensible, and I could not possibly remain closeted in that windowless, bone-chilling room. Though outside lay the sea of irrationality, it was far more agreeable to swim in its waters until presently I drowned.²⁶

Something named “irrationality” calls to Yozo as the “faintly pleasurable” logic of these illicit meetings, an escape from the more dreadful “logic of the world.” Keane translates the Japanese

²² Dazai, *Ningen Shikkaku*, 114. My Translation.

²³ It is worth noting that this is not the “uncanny” in Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny” in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), 241., where “every affect belonging to an emotional impulse, whatever its kind, is transformed, if it is repressed, into anxiety.” This conception of uncanny (*unheimlich* in German) as the transformation of any affect into anxiety, while similar to the inflection of Yozo’s original hopeful image of the sea, comes from the ultimate priority of his “dread.” In this way anxiety structures the very relationship between Yozo and the world, rather than emerging from his “repressed” subconscious.

²⁴ Dazai, *No Longer Human*, trans. Keane, 67.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

word *higōhō* exceptionally as “irrationality.” Like his translation of the title *Ningen Shikkaku*, itself he avoids juridical connotations. Here however, it is not just connotation. The word *higōhō* means quite literally, illicit and unlawful activities²⁷ or those unlawfully engaged. Similarly, the word that carries over in Keane’s translation as “logic” in Dazai’s text is the word *gōhō*. *Higōhō* is merely the word *gōhō* with the addition of the prefix having the characteristics of “un-” or “non-.” This creates a distinct binary between Yozo’s sense of the “faintly pleasurable” *unlawful* or *illicit* aspect of the reading group and its radical ideas, and the *lawful* or *licit* aspect of “the world.” This “world” he compares through metaphor to a sense of a “windowless” and “bone-chilling” confinement refers to the world of human society.

The sense of this whole quotation is strangely confused when the comparison of ‘irrationality’ (unlawful, illicit) and ‘logic’ (lawful, licit). The “irrationality” which referred to his reflections on his participation in the Marxist meeting group, extends to something much larger in the metaphor of a “sea of irrationality.” Furthermore, the notion of mystery confuses the sense of these lines. Mystery is attributed to the logic by which the world functions, its “incomprehensible mechanism”, but also seems present in this idea of “irrationality” that which is outside. The anxiety in the confusion of this binary belies the notion of a “disqualified” human. As alien, Yozo perceives more mystery in the notion of a world from which he is always apart, itself a mysterious, or at least dreadful sentiment. Yozo portrays himself not as disqualified *tout court*, but trapped in a foreboding apparatus or logic he represents as a foreign law apprehended through fear rather sense. The pleasure he associates with Marxism, and the Marxist community’s “irrationality” is also limited as a methodone-fix for the anxiety that

²⁷ Based upon collated diction entries from kotobank.jp including the digital *Daijiten*.

circumscribes Yozo's self. The pathologizable vectors of Yozo's dreads and fears are therefore underwritten by a deeper sense of anxiety.

What Keane renders through translation as, "more agreeable to swim in its waters until presently I drowned," suggests a certain 'irrational' passivity, where the original text extends to this statement the same agency that accompanies the rest of the first-person introspection. It might be better translated to retain this intentionality as the frightening sentiment, "I cannot stay seated in the penetrating chill of its room, it is without a window, but outside there is the preferable sea of unlawfulness, into which I would rather dive and swim, to finally meet my death, at ease."²⁸ Despite Keane's translation, and a tradition, which would undermine suicide as an "irrational" act, Yozo articulates a sense of the pleasure in the unlawful as a term in his own writing, rather than merely being an "irrational" character. He asserts that there is a pleasure that might attenuate the affective dissonance that characterizes his state of disqualification. It would derive from the act of total disqualification itself, that teleological potential for final resolution in suicide.²⁹

The Terms of Suicidal Narrative and Shishōsetsu

Suicide is the destruction of the self. It is in this way that I want to reinvigorate *Ningen Shikkaku*'s classification as *shishōsetsu*. Its difference from Western literary convention is its suicidal confession. Fowler writes that the form "as confession, pales before its western

²⁸ Dazai, *Ningen Shikkaku*, 126. My Translation.

²⁹ Oddly, this failure to identify with a human community, when considered as a part of the reception and circulation of *Ningen Shikkaku* as a canonical Japanese text also means the 'success' of the published work. Yozo's inability to be Human forms one failed resolution, while his failure to successfully commit suicide is the other. In his study of Dazai's work, *Suicidal Narrative in Modern Japan*, Alan Wolfe seeks to show how suicide functions discursively. He convincingly claims that "In the case of Dazai, there is a significant merging of the sociological syndrome of alienation and the literary historical paradigm of the nonconformist writer as hero to yield the cultural indicator of successful modernization par excellence, the alienated artist or intellectual...The case of Dazai Osamu may be said

counterpart...confession in the interest of atonement or self-analysis or even self aggrandizement is the catalyst for some resolution or action that gives the work its shape and direction. In short, fiction and autobiography in the west have as one of their formal properties a sense of forward movement and purpose.”³⁰ *Ningen Shikkaku*, true to Fowler’s analysis, does not respond to modernity with any sort of revelatory mode, its anxiety is not that of Bataille... It does not attain its movement and purpose through a teleological sense of arriving at death. Suicide works as an interruption, and the imposition of anxious self-consciousness.

In Edward Fowler’s account of the hermeneutics of *shishōsetsu* in *The Rhetoric of Confession*, he argues that both the form itself, and the practice of its reading, differ essentially from the novel (whose multiplicity of forms he admittedly collapses for rhetorical purpose). The modern novel in Western literary convention is treated as an autonomous work—the most pure novels judged as such by their ability to reach an autonomous state (he uses the examples of Flaubert or Joyce). To the contrary, he writes that the *shishōsetsu*’s “meaning derives from an extraliterary source, namely, the author’s life... see[ing] the work as meaningful only insofar as it illuminates the life. The Japanese reader constructs a “sign” out of the signifying text and the signified extraliterary life, with no misgivings about this apparent blending of “intrinsic” literary and “extrinsic” biographical data.”³¹ Fowler’s work convincingly argues that despite this popular tradition of interpretation, the genre already opens up possibilities beyond its consideration as an artifact or as an aspect of the author’s life. However, he warns that to call this *shishōsetsu* fiction, is to construct the binary distinction with non-fiction (and specifically autobiography) to a genre which already evades that opposition in its emergence from a Japanese

both—and simultaneously—to constitute and to undermine the very notion of coherent modernity with which this array of producers of the ‘modern text of Japan’ have brought forth this foremost of ‘non-western miracles.’”

³⁰ Fowler, *The Rhetoric of Confession*, xx.

³¹ Ibid, xviii.

tradition.³² I have spilled the ink of introducing Fowler's characterization of *shishōsetsu* to say that the degree to which *Ningen Shikkaku* is "representative" of the form is contentious. In terms of periodization, it was published in 1948, after the height of *shishōsetsu* as a pop-cultural form, during the Taisho Period. Fowler explains that after that period, work in the genre of *shishōsetsu* is often considered to have "undergone a transformation...variously described as a "fictionalizing" or "distorting" of the form." Nishida Masayoshi, a Japanese medievalist who, at the time, was one of the only non-European critics examining *shishōsetsu* as a form, asserts this decline in Dazai's work pejoratively as "nihilistic."³³

Unlike the "novel" and the autobiography, whose subject is realized in its movement towards revelation and death, that moment when it all must end, Yozo confesses that he and his momentary lover "threw [them]selves into the sea at Kamakura that night."³⁴ It is not a revelation but a record. Yozo survives, and explains in an uneasily plain tone how "she untied her sash, saying she had borrowed it from a friend at the café, and left it folded neatly on a rock. I removed my coat and put in the same spot. We entered the water together." Yozo must continue living, towards suicide, towards the sea. *Ningen Shikkaku*, while inescapable tied to the life of Dazai Osamu, also writes an anxious notion of Human Being, where Being is always its disqualification, Yozo does not become disqualified from Human Being, but considers himself to

³² Many interpreters of *Shishōsetsu*, Japanese and otherwise, have characterized the form as the opposite. Fowler writes that "Its personal orientation makes it a thoroughly modern form; yet it is the product of an indigenous intellectual tradition quite disparate from western individualism. Progressive critics have ridiculed it over the decades as a failed adaptation of the western novel, while traditionalists have reveled in its difference. The difference lies not so much in its autobiographical "purity" (as the Japanese literary establishment, or *bundan*, would have us believe), however, as in its ultimate distrust of western-style realistic representation from which it has presumably borrowed so heavily" (Fowler, xvi). Fowler wants to stake the claim that, despite being historically considered a "Japanese version" or a "distortion" "of European naturalism" it is instead a unique form emerging from Japanese literary tradition that differs essentially from Western literature" (Fowler, xvii). As I proceed with my work I must heed this argument, and also understand how a literary critical, or even ontological framework emerging from the west changes my reception of this work.

³³ Fowler, 292.

³⁴ Dazai, *No Longer Human*, trans. Keane, 87.

have been from the start, he does not die, but always already lives in this orientation towards suicide. The confessional mode of Dazai's work, rather than propelling the narrative in a revelatory forward movement, orients the work as an anxious account of Being.

At the same time that the complex orientalist and Japanese constructions of a national images of suicide from *seppuku* to *kamikaze* appropriate Dazai's suicide, Alan Wolfe asserts in *Suicidal Narrative in Modern Japan* that Dazai's texts "reveal what might now be termed a 'deconstructive edge' in that his posthumous status as a monument of negativity is already perceived and undone in his autobiographical narratives of suicide."³⁵ The subject of Dazai Osamu's work, *Ningen Shikkaku*, is the failure of Oba Yozo, constituted by anxiety. Yozo is self-isolated by the idea that he was born irreconcilably alienated from society, consistently repeating over and over his inability to become human. He reflects on his abject being as something other than human being. He writes his childhood self as "clowning" everyone around him, so that through his playful persona he might avoid being understood for what he really is, (or at least what he understands himself to be) incapable of being Human. In doing so, the text of *Ningen Shikkaku* is Yozo's confession of his not being Human, and the anxious record of his suicidal life as an artist.

Rather than autobiography as a contained and fixed literary understanding of subject-hood or the self, Dazai scholar Alan Wolfe proposes that Michel Beaujour's notion of the "self-portrait" more adequately encompasses the particularity of Dazai's *shishosetsu*, within "a genre that denies the very possibility of self-representation."³⁶ Wolfe asserts this reading in relationship to and resisting the tradition of another Western literary tradition, that of autobiography. Beaujour posits this genre as a distinct form from autobiography, whose aim is the chronological

³⁵ Alan Wolfe, *Suicidal Narrative in Modern Japan: The Case of Osamu Dazai* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), xiv.

documentation or *telos* that culminates in a complete literary version of one's life and achievements—something at which Yozo's notebooks clearly fail. Instead, paraphrasing from John Michael's review of Beaujour's *Poetics of the Literary Self-Portrait* (or *Miroir d'encre*) in *MLN*, “the attempt to embody the author's unique individuality as it is at the moment of writing in the language of his text, to incorporate himself in his corpus, that is essential to the genre. The autoportrait is not the retelling of a life but the representation of a self.”³⁷ Leaving the question of the “author's [...] individuality” (in this case Dazai's) as the thing to be represented to the side, *Ningen Shikkaku* does not work to constitute the stable realized subject of the autobiography.

Rather, in faithfully painting the perceptions of a private self the text works towards a de-constitution of self. Of course in *Ningen Shikkaku*, this is always the type of perception, which is incapable of representing that which is outside the disqualified workings of Yozo's perceptions of himself. Beaujour's characterization of the genre is a trans-historical reach to excavate fragmented works from the understanding of “autobiography” into a genre called the self-portrait. Following Wolfe's appropriation of the notion of the self-portrait as the attempt to represent the self—in this case the representation of the failed self of Yozo—underscores a capacity to read critically Dazai's relationship to Western literary forms.



Re-reading anxiety in literature, I have addressed the specific anxieties of form that emerge from reading Dazai's *Ningen Shikkaku* from and against western literary and aesthetic conventions. An understanding of the ontological character of a literary representation of anxiety is legible partially in looking at Dazai from an undefined West, in terms of “literature,” “the

³⁶ Wolfe, Alan. *Suicidal Narrative in Modern Japan*. xv.

novel” or “autobiography” and “the self.” This paper frames this comparative research through its coinciding engagements with another author: the British novelist Iris Murdoch, writing her novel *The Sea, The Sea* thirty years, and a world away from Dazai. Both of these works interact in my reading as they represent authorial selves in the first-person, not autobiographically, but understandable through the writing of the self. Their coincidentalness elicits a primary concern in my paper, to uncover and be attentive to the ways in which these works are dissimilar in terms of the aesthetic of anxiety in representing the self. The way in which anxiety figures in the construction of the self becomes apparent in the role of the sea, as both landscape and metaphor, which problematizes the distinct employment of a Realist impulse inherent in the two works’ writing of the self.

P a i n t i n g a n A n x i o u s S e a

Ningen Shikkaku and *The Sea, The Sea* both articulate a literary understanding of the self that requires interpretation beyond a pathologized reading of their narrators’ anxiety. When Oba Yozo recounts the cherry blossoms falling onto the sea in springtime, he does so in the staccato of an impression. It reads as an attempt at realizing a representation of the natural world: a painting of the sea. The text’s realism is its disqualification from the aesthetic possibility of beauty, and its representation of the reflexive involvement with an inner sea of anxiety in the limited first-person perspective of *shishōsetsu*. The question of the aesthetic, as it is structured by the fundamental anxiety of the narration, is at issue in *Ningen Shikkaku*.

³⁷ Michael, John. Review of *Miroir d’encre: Rhétorique de l’autoportrait* by Michel Beaujour. *MLN*. John Hopkins

Self-Portraiture and Ekphrasis

Looking at selections from both of these texts' treatment of artistic production, beyond the literary, and also their treatment of other works of art, painting emerges in both works as a key site for locating my critique. I argue that painting is (and the ekphrastic: paintings are) an anxious aesthetical site for the possibility of self-realization and its failure. In *The Sea, The Sea*, Charles Arrowby is particularly affected by Titian's painting *Perseus and Andromeda*, which he sees as the uncanny mirror of his own peculiar haunting by a monster from the sea. Oba Yozo aspires to an aesthetic treatment of the grotesque that he attributes to Modigliani and Impressionism. In this section ekphrasis, and the literary metaphor of painting, is understood as the site for an elaboration between the self and the world, a process of representing aesthetic relationships between subject and object, which when read for their anxieties, are comprised by a Heideggerian reading of affect. Additionally, in attempting to articulate the stakes of representing and reading anxiety in these two literary works, this section examines Jameson's articulation of Realism in *The Antinomies Of Realism* alongside Heidegger's own poetic representations of affect, and his ekphrastic exposition of artwork in "The Origin of the Work of Art."

Wolfe's citation of Beaujour's term "*l'autoportrait*," activates the metaphor of painting to think about the ways in which a literary work represents the self. Yozo's disqualification is not finalized by suicide, but it is the suicidal self-portrait that is always already a condition of his being. In *Ningen Shikkaku*, Yozo also aspires, and fails, to be a painter. In his youth he was inspired by the attraction of Western painting to that which is not beautiful, but uncanny. In one of his many reflections on his own orientation towards the idea of human-being, inspired by

being shown a Modigliani portrait, Yozo writes “There are some people whose dread of human beings is so morbid that they reach a point where they yearn to see with their own eyes monsters of ever more horrible shapes.”³⁸ Yozo’s fascination with this perspective, his identification with the artistic community whose primary motivation is a “dread of human beings” extends to his understanding of “Impressionism” as well. Distraught by his own paintings he admires how

The masters through their subjective perceptions created beauty out of trivialities. They did not hide their interest even in things which were nauseatingly ugly, but soaked themselves in the pleasure of depicting them. In other words, they seemed not to rely in the least on the misconceptions of others. Now that I had been initiated by Takeichi into these root secrets of the art of painting, I began to do a few self-portraits, taking care that they not be seen by my female visitors³⁹

Yozo aspires to be a painter, and is especially driven by the possibility of the self-portrait to transform something “nauseatingly ugly” into art through “subjective perception.” The irony here is the misinterpretation of impressionism. Plein-air depictions of haystacks, sunsets, peasant life, gardens, the sea, evoke a certain realism through the assertion of a subjective perception as a stylized interpretation of its subjects, but “Impressionism” in painting hardly signals a sort of aesthetic interest in the horrifying or profane. This mis-identification with and of Impressionism illustrates a confused relationship to the aesthetic, where the judgment of a work as producing “beauty out of trivialities” but most specifically “ugly” resonates with Yozo’s own self-depiction. This mistaken, or at least esoteric, exposition of Impressionism underscores a distancing of Dazai as author from the narration of Yozo. This is, of course, at odds with a tradition of interpretation of *shishōsetsu* that validates the texts through their fundamental conformity to the veracity of the author’s life. That being said, the affinity between Modigliani and Dazai, as fatally tragic artists recuperates Yozo’s art historical failure as it presents a

³⁸ Dazai, *No Longer Human*, 53.

troubling reading of impressionism as the dark underside of those pretty paintings. The elongation in Modigliani's oil portraits might be analogous to the disturbing self-portrait that is *Ningen Shikkaku*'s distortion, its steady sinking tone, Yozo's description of his "own harsher current of gloom like a "withered leaf settling to rest on the stones at the bottom of a pool."⁴⁰ Yozo's investment in his odd notion of impressionism is not just a position that asserts "ugliness" as a critical possibility for aesthetic judgment, but also a sort of temporally structured ugliness, which arises out of a disjuncture between the subject and the object. The "impressionist" self-portrait then becomes a model for understanding the particular way in which *Ningen Shikkaku* writes (or paints) the self.

The Realist Impulse

The inclusion of works of art, the description of representation as such in literary realism presents an alternative to the narrative mode.⁴¹ In the context of the narrative, the term "ekphrasis" takes on broader implications as the "painterly moment." Returning to Yozo's observation of cherry blossoms falling into the sea in the spring—what I argued to be "a prop, a painted screen, a set-piece"—I assert that the sea has the capacity to figure in such a sense as non-narrative suspension of narrative, illuminating an important coincidence of the problematics of affect and literary representation as such.

³⁹ Dazai, 55.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 80.

⁴¹ Frederic Jameson contrasts the narrative and non-narrative components of realism. In Jameson's study, the genre of realism "coalesce[s]" "heterogenous materials" through its narrative approach, easily ascribe to be a natural mode of novelistic discourse. Exploring the non-narrative element of the realist novel starting with Balzac, Jameson identifies "judgements, for example, such as the moral a storyteller might want to add on at the end", but also, more germanely asserts that "the most inveterate alternative to narrative as such reminds us that storytelling is a temporal art, and always seems to single out a painterly moment in which the onward drive of narrative is checked if not suspended altogether...the ancient rhetorical trope of ekphrasis." Fredic Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (New York: Verso, 2013), 8.

The suspensions of novelistic narrative coincide in the affective preoccupation with rendering literary anxiety in the *The Sea*, *The Sea* and *Ningen Shikkaku*. For Jameson's dialectical articulation of realism in *The Antinomies of Realism*, the impulse towards rendering affect as a realist practice comprises one "antinomy" of realism. According to his articulation, "A new concept of realism is...made available when we grasp both these terminal points [antinomies] firmly at one and the same time."⁴² Jameson diagrams this dialectical structure as an irreducible tension between the force of the tale, its utility capitulated in the ideological construction of a Bourgeois subject, and the possibility of its dissolution in a realism that prioritizes the non-narrative "literary representation of affect." In my examination of Dazai and Murdoch's anxieties, the ideological imposition of a unified subject is at stake for modern literature. They both take as their object the autobiographical construction of a narrator's self, fictions which rely on the proposition of realism as an "aesthetic ideal," as the terminus of literary possibility provides an understanding of the being of literature itself as this fundamental representational impulse towards an epistemological claim.

Realism, despite its periodizing capacity and its historical contingency and specificity, is also fundamental to the very structure of the literary in Jameson's work. Anxiety, colloquially speaking, also seems to have this contradictory discursive existence, at once symptomatic and specific, while also fundamental and ontological. Jameson's antinomial dialectic of realism subsumes notions of realism as defined through binaried opposition to other literary constructs—such as modernism such as "realism vs. modernism"⁴³ or, I might add, realism vs. Eastern literature, or realism vs. the "I-novel." Yet, this understanding of realism as the ontological condition of literature, a part of its soul, seems undermined by the other periodizing binary

⁴² Jameson, *Antinomies of Realism*, 10

⁴³ Ibid, 2.

examined in Jameson's oeuvre: modernism and postmodernism. In differentiating between the outlooks of so-called "high modernism" and "postmodernism" he wrote in his seminal work *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* that "Edward Munch's painting *The Scream* is, of course, a canonical expression of the great modernist thematics of alienation, anomie, solitude, social fragmentation, and isolation, a virtually programmatic emblem of what used to be called the age of anxiety."⁴⁴ This reading of the Munch painting as symptomatic of a larger sociological pathology of anxiety provides foil for the postmodern condition's prognosis, Jameson's famous "waning of affect"—cause: "schizophrenia."

The Representation of Anxiety as Affect

My objection to the thesis of a "waning of affect" here may be different than Ngai's, who argues in her monograph *Ugly Feelings* that "negative affects" have become functional aspects of contemporary capitalism. She asserts a reading of negative affects as "signs that not only render visible different registers of problem (formal, ideological, sociohistorical) but conjoin these problems in a distinctive manner."⁴⁵ In this way, Ngai provides groundwork for a theory of affect's capacity for political critique. While we do agree in pursuing to "recuperate [...] negative affects for their *critical* productivity"⁴⁶, in the investigation at hand, anxiety must be understood not as a symptom of a problem arising in the subject, but instead as a larger ontological structure. Affects, prior to Marxist or psychoanalytical approaches, might therefore be understood as political, but in a quite different manner, as they are rendered in these literary works in an aesthetic that reveals a deconstructive impulse in the bourgeois ideological

⁴⁴ Frederic Jameson, "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 11-12.

⁴⁵ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005), 3.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 3.

framework of subject and object. In doing some critical exposition of Jameson's positioning of anxiety squarely in modernity, his framing of the postmodern as a schizophrenic horizon, while utilizing his grounding of literature in a realism composed of an affective antinomy, I hope also to position my re-reading of anxiety as an ontological condition, rather than a pathologizable symptom of modernity.

Jameson, while finding theoretical basis in Deleuze and Freud, and the bodily present,⁴⁷ simultaneously finds inspiration, as this paper does, in the possibility of finding an origin for a theory of affect in Heidegger's fundamental ontology. He traces Heidegger's use of the term *Stimmung*, usually translated as mood, to conceive of affect phenomenologically:

I have for some time found suggestive Heidegger's inaugural invocation of affect—the starting point, not only of Sartrean phenomenology but also of Merleau-Ponty's attempts to formulate embodiment—and that turns on the German word “*Stimmung*,” of which the English “mood” is but a pale and one-dimensional equivalent. Heidegger wanted to show that *Stimmung* was neither subjective nor objective, neither irrational nor cognitive, but rather a constitutive dimension of our being-in-the-world⁴⁸

It is worthwhile to bring in Jameson's reference here as the exemplification of the conflict between psychoanalytical and Heideggerian interpretive models of affect. Affect differs in the sense of *Stimmung* from a model of feeling that finds its origin in a psychoanalytic *stimulus*, reliant on a subject perceiving an external object—the bourgeois subject which must remain solid as it transverses the distances between past, present, and future. This is the same bourgeois subject ideologically affirmed in literary realism, against which affect must therefore be

⁴⁷ While “affect” points to technical and clinical theorizations of that which exceeds language and has political or historical implications, “feelings” and “emotions” indicate that which is named, and which in that way can be positioned in terms of historical and culturally specific understandings. In Jameson's reading of Deleuze and Guattari the schizophrenic horizon co-terminates with the realization of the representation of affect as a “contemporary or postmodern ‘perpetual present’ [evident in a] ‘reduction to the body,’ inasmuch as the body is all that remains in any tendential reduction of experience to the present as such.” It is clear that the representation of affect perplexes in as much its realization in literature occurs on a historical horizon for Jameson, but is also defined in terms of a temporal structure outside of historicity. Jameson's usage of affect seems indeed to mean his conflicted investment in the use of affect as both a historical and phenomenological term, or pathological and ontological respectively. Jameson, *Antinomies*, 28-29.

understood temporally, as the non-narrative presencing which undoes a stable narrative of the self.

It is possible also to read the self-portraiture of Dazai and Murdoch along these lines, where anxiety itself delineates the limitation of internal and external, and therefore is the final inscription of realism's self-realized subjectivity. However, this analysis elides "alienation" and "anxiety" in such a way as to ignore the actual implications of understanding of affect informed by Heidegger's *stimmung* in favor of a periodization that makes possible the projection of a schizoid postmodernity. Jameson's observation in *Postmodernism, or, The Logic of Late Capitalism* that *The Scream* "underscores its own failure"⁴⁹ in its attempt, and ultimate inability, to realize the sound of the emanating scream itself through the language of the painting's title and its paint medium, is kindred to the Yozo's disqualification in *Ningen Shikkaku*, his mistaken interpretation of impressionist painting, and the ultimate failure of his self-portrait to realize its realist aspirations and solidify Yozo's bourgeois personhood (Ironically it is the this failure itself received as alienation that is the ultimate marker of Bourgeois personhood in modernism). Rather than an alienation which only serves to re-evaluation the bourgeois subject, I assert the failure described in *The Scream* to constitute a stable subject, the echoes of the scream drawn out of the body into that reverberating present to form ripples in the water and sky, as the deconstruction of a stable subjectivity and the location of anxiety outside of a subject object relationship. The subject is the scream itself: anxiety preceding any stable subject as a mood, which is not projected, externalized, or stimulated. Likewise, it is in this way that understanding

⁴⁸ Jameson, *Antinomies*, 38.

⁴⁹ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 14. Jameson argues that the representation of anxiety itself, as it can be understood through Munch's canonical representation of high modernism's anxiety, relies on a "concept of expression [that] presupposes indeed some separation within the subject, and along with that a whole metaphysics of the inside and outside, of the wordless pain within the monad and the moment in which, often cathartically, that "emotion" is then

The Sea, The Sea and *Ningen Shikkaku* as self-portraiture, the unstable attempt to represent the self through non-narrative means, locates a representation of affect which can re-read anxiety specifically as a constitutive way of being-in-the-world.



In *The Sea, The Sea*, the ekphrasis of Titian's painting *Perseus and Andromeda* plays a very different role than Yozo's flawed hopeful investment in a mistaken idea of Impressionism in *Ningen Shikkaku*. While they both illustrate a non-narrative anxiety, Murdoch uses the painting as a prop amongst others, as a part of a larger theatrical staging of an uncanny self-reflection. The importation of art objects into the novelistic narrative, as quoted in Jameson above, is part of a "coalescing" of differing forms into the text. While the role of paintings *qua* art objects incorporated into the text of a literary work might usually capitalize on the ekphrastic economy of the work—the importation of the position of the original artwork's historical and discursive context—it is the non-narrative rupture that Murdoch addresses. She writes anxiety as a forcing open. Forcing open, as the failure of intention in the bourgeois subject's self-reflection, and of a certain expectation of objects, material and textual which do not quite *coalesce* as expected. Coalescing disrupts itself, narrative disrupted, and disrupted by plot. While Dazai renders anxiety through the notion of "disqualification," where the suicidal self-portrait's flat tone never reaches for the sublime or revelatory, anxiety emerges as an affective peak in *The Sea, The Sea* inasmuch as it emerges as a break or fissure in the novel's obsessive plot.

Disturbing objects and odd hallucinations haunt the protagonist Charles Arrowby during his retirement to a ramshackle seaside home. The sea births from its froth a horrifying vision of a

projected out and externalized, as gesture or cry, as desperate communication and the outward dramatization of inward feeling." 11-12.

sea-serpent, immediately compromising his intention to comfortably retire to the sea—as he states in the first pages of his “prehistory”, to “abjure magic” for a “period of meditation”⁵⁰:

I was sitting, with this notebook beside me, upon the rocks just above my ‘cliff’, and looking over the water. The sun was shining, the sea was calm. (As I have described it in the first paragraph of this notebook.) Shortly before this I had been looking intently into a rock pool and watching a remarkably long reddish faintly bristly sea-worm which had wreathed itself into curious coils prior to disappearing into a hole. I sat up, then settled myself facing seaward, blinking in the sun. Then, not at once, but after about two minutes, as my eyes became accustomed to the glare, *I saw a monster rising from the waves*.⁵¹

It is not only the “long thickening body with a ridgy spiny back” that “*coiled* itself so that the long neck circled twice” through which he “*could see the sky*” that so violently disturbed Arrowby’s opportunity for moral self-reflection. This vision, described in so much detail, is only one image among a mass of strange moments that affect the narrator. In the exposition of his house, called “Shruff End”, he describes the drawing room as “more of a lookout point than a room. It is dominated by a tall black-painted wooden chimney piece, with a lot of little shelves with little mirrors above them. A collector’s item, no doubt, but it looks a little too like the altar of some weird sect.”⁵² This small detail could be a throwaway sentiment, however, the movement that occurs between the appraisal of the antique as “a collector’s item” and his creeping feeling that it might have an altogether different existence as a ceremonial object for the obliquely pop-cultural idea of “some weird sect” taps into the uncanny as a feeling generated in the movement, or tension between the settled and unsettled. Furthermore, it is through an accumulation of these seemingly insignificant observations that the novel builds an uncanny tone.

⁵⁰ Iris Murdoch, *The Sea, The Sea* (London, England: Penguin Books, 1980).

⁵¹ Ibid, 19.

⁵² 15.

Arrowby describes his curious attachment to a “hideous green vase” but notes that behind it there is “a shallow alcove which looks as if it should contain a statue, but empty resembles a door.”⁵³ The confusion of what should have the properties of alcove according to its function and construction and its enigmatically resembling “a door” opens up the possibility of confusing symbolic intrusions and an odd affective dissonance. Among the references to small objects and architectural spaces as a primary locus for the narrator’s representation of uncanny feeling Arrowby’s characterization of “the space of the upper landing” where he says, “I call this a ‘space’ because it is rather odd area with an atmosphere all its own. It has the expectant air of a stage set,”⁵⁴ merits specific critical attention. With Arrowby’s emphasis on the concept of “space,” the narration seems to attribute a changing or intrinsic mood to the architecture of the house itself. In this way, “atmosphere” seems to articulate an understanding of an uncanny anxiety about where feeling itself is occurring, and what it would mean for it to be generated, and *felt*, outside the self of the self-reflective bourgeois subject.

Heidegger’s Stimmung in Art

Jameson describes the location of affect in the object (or perhaps the attribution of subjectivity to the object, its animation) however, in contradiction to Heidegger’s *stimmung*, when he calls up the work of Gaston Bachelard (who also seems especially relevant here in terms of the narrator’s focus on ‘space’):

Heidegger wanted to show that *Stimmung* was neither subjective nor objective, neither irrational nor cognitive, but rather a constitutive dimension of our being-in-the-world; and his term goes well beyond the characterization of a cloudy sky as “ominous” or a

⁵³ Murdoch, 17.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 17.

particular kind of lighting as “sinister,” as in Gaston Bachelard’s psychoanalysis of the elements (joyously rippling streams, stagnant pools).⁵⁵

Following along the lines explicated here by Jameson would put a Heideggerian theory of affect in contradiction to my portrayal of the uncanny moments in Murdoch. However, in conceiving of these uncanny moments and objects *staged* textually, the theater of Murdoch’s prose invites us to ascertain how the fact that anxiety is rendered literarily, and therefore aesthetically, might interface with Heidegger’s fundamentally ontological understanding of *Stimmung*. As I have alluded to in quoting Ngai above, the theorization of affect forms the basis for a critical theoretical practice. My thesis addresses anxiety’s specificity as an affect, finding origin in a Heideggerian “destruktion” of the subject and object of aesthetics, where anxiety works towards revealing *unheimlich* as constitutive of being-in-the-world.

In working towards an affect theory contrived through the notion of *Stimmung*, the role of the literary becomes a problematic site for explicating a Heideggerian ontology. The formulation of Jameson’s—while making the important and fundamental distinction between affect qua *Stimmung* and any psychoanalytic approach which ‘treats’ affects through its interpretive grammar of objectification (its primary and original technology is the observation and description of the analysand in service of an epistemological key to the psyche of Bourgeois subjectivity)⁵⁶—must be extended to account for literary tonality and the representation of affect as legitimate and justified sites for a Heideggerian inquiry into affect. In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger advances a relationship between the artwork and his fundamental ontology

⁵⁵ Jameson, *Antinomies*, 38.

⁵⁶ Sianne Ngai notes the term “affect” itself originates in a psychoanalytical necessity to categorically distinguish between “emotions” as those things felt by the analysand, and “affects” as extrapolations or abstractions: “at the end of the day, the difference between emotion and affect is still intended to solve the same basic and fundamentally descriptive problem it was coined in psychoanalytic practice to solve: that of distinguishing first-person from third-person feeling, and, by extension, feeling that is contained by an identity from feeling that is not.” Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 25.

with the notion that “poetry is the saying of the unconcealment of Being.”⁵⁷ In his expositions of equipment, it is in fact through the ekphrasis of a painting, Van Gogh’s shoes that Heidegger arrives at what constitutes the distinct being of equipment, and artwork. Referring not to the representation in Van Gogh’s painting but to the materiality of peasant shoes themselves Heidegger explains that

The peasant woman wears her shoes in the field. Only here are they what they are. They are all the more genuinely so, the less the peasant woman thinks about the shoes while she is at work, or looks at them at all, or is even aware of them. She stands and walks in them. That is how shoes actually serve. It is in this process of the use of equipment that we must actually encounter the character of equipment.⁵⁸

It is quite curious of course, then, that Heidegger stages the encounter with the being of equipment through the literary exposition of an artwork. He also acknowledges this when he begins to describe Van Gogh’s painting with the caveat that “From Van Gogh’s painting we cannot even tell where these shoes stand. There is nothing surrounding this pair of peasant shoes in or to which they might belong—only an undefined space [...] A pair of peasant shoes and nothing more. And yet.”⁵⁹ The painting of shoes itself is a selection; a representation of *just* the shoes, and in this sense cannot render the system of contingent relationships to the world that actually constitutes their being. It is through the fragment—“And yet.”—that Heidegger emphasizes the capacity for artwork itself, through its origin in poesy, to disclose being. The philosopher incorporates the painting to reveal the being of the specific type of thing called “equipment,” in this case peasant’s shoes, whose qualities evoke “the toilsome tread of the work”, “the accumulated tenacity of [the peasant woman’s] slow trudge through the far-

⁵⁷ Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art” in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrel Krell (New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977), 198.

⁵⁸ Heidegger, 159.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field”, and “the dampness and richness of the soil.”⁶⁰

Poetry then has a special ability to paint, out of its object of representation, the earth itself in which beings dwell, and to reveal being itself as being-in-the-world. Where, in the example of a representation of peasant’s shoes revealing their being as equipment, and the structure of equipment’s essential being as such, Heidegger also advances the claim that “The equipmental quality of equipment was discovered [...] Not by a description and explanation of a pair of shoes actually present [...] but only by bringing ourselves before Van Gogh’s painting. [...] In the nearness of the work we were suddenly somewhere else than we usually tend to be.”⁶¹ Like the famous segment on ‘broken tools’ in *Sein und Zeit*, it is only through a transportation, or movement, the apprehension con-text itself, that the truth of being is un-concealed. In the addendum Heidegger clarifies that truth must be understood precisely as “‘to place’ and ‘to set’ and ‘to lay’ [...] as for instance, letting a statue be set up.”⁶² This famous passage from Heidegger’s oeuvre, while not directly related to his exposition of *Stimmung*, proves the way in which his ontology relies on the representation that happens in artwork, not as an aesthetics of subject and object, but in its ability to reveal. Furthermore, the implication of the textuality itself, its ekphrasis, in the structure of Heidegger’s argumentation, figures as the central rhetorical move to bring about an understanding of artwork. In this way not only does he say that “Van Gogh’s painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes, *is* in truth”⁶³ or more dauntingly, “Art is truth setting itself to work”⁶⁴ but that this happens through the hermeneutic process of being written about an artwork in order to explicate his notion of equipment. His rich analysis here must be taken as showing how fundamental existential

⁶⁰ Heidegger, “Work of Art,” 159.

⁶¹ Ibid, 161.

⁶² 207.

⁶³ 161.

structures are revealed in truth (*aletheia*) not through their correspondence to some authentic notion of the objects of representation, but through their very happening as textual works, as the staging of ekphrasis.

Heidegger reroutes attention from an aesthetic ideology of art by suggesting a radical notion of artwork as the unconcealment of the truth of being, outside of and without a Kantian, or as I apply it here, psychoanalytic subject: “Setting and placing here never mean the modern concept of commandeering things to be placed over against the self (the ego-subject).”⁶⁴ I have departed from Murdoch so unwittingly and at such length in explicating Heidegger’s notion of “setting to work” in order to adequately re-imagine Murdoch’s ekphrasis and her representation of anxiety, just as that, a *staging* which has ontological claims despite its possible reduction to a psychoanalytic reading, where the uncanny appears as a trope, a mere technique for writing the subject, rather than an affective work.

The Uncanny Staging of Anxiety in Murdoch

In *The Sea, The Sea* anxiety figures legibly in many instances through the device we are most accustomed to calling the “uncanny.” It is through the economy of a device like the uncanny, that the movement of anxiety is represented ekphrastically. In my interpretation, I read the novel for an understanding relationship between the uncanny moments and the anxious self constructed in the work, in terms of a setting-up of an understanding of anxiety that questions rather than affirms the bourgeois subject of a psychoanalytic reading of anxiety.

Contributing to the uncanny of certain objects in *The Sea, The Sea* is Charles’ sense that there must be some explanation for their seemingly inexplicable weirdness. The objects are set

⁶⁴ Heidegger, “Work of Art,” 165.

⁶⁵ 207.

against his long passages of introspection or his descriptions of the seashore, so that they stand out as non-narrative interruptions in the coalescing of novelistic text. Murdoch's novel works by way of this staging of uncanny moments through in the theatre of Charles' life. Considering theatre, comparing it to other arts, and waxing about his off-stage life he uses the medium of memoir to philosophize: "Have I abjured that magic, drowned my book? Forgiven my enemies? The surrender of power, the final change of magic into spirit? Time will show."⁶⁶ The uncanny objects disrupt even this sort of non-narrative retrospection. After a break in the text, Charles references his own writing, as he both breaks into the present, and re-enters the magical theatre of uncanny set pieces:

Something rather odd and distressing just occurred. I wrote the above sitting outside on my lawn [...] I went into the house and up the stairs [...] I was at once aware that something had *happened*, although I could not understand what. Then I realized that my lovely big ugly vase was gone from its pedestal. It had fallen on to the floor and was broken into a great many pieces. But how?⁶⁷

He continues to question what scenario could have caused the heavy vase to fall: the wind? Did he shift it while dusting, or was there an earthquake? Later, he questions the locals about poltergeists, quoting himself as saying "Did you ever hear that there was one at Shruff End?"⁶⁸ Charles' line of questioning itself creates a movement in this representation of an object—the prop—to stage a textual affectation of the uncanny.

That most uncanny object, the sea serpent itself, accounts for a peculiarly intense fixation. He tries to attribute, in his peculiarly fuddy-duddy way, his initial vision to a hallucination brought on as a flashback to an LSD trip, or perhaps to a mere visual effect created by the transposition of a small coiled worm he was watching at the time. While his attempt to locate the source of these uncanny occurrences, to render them mere props by means of explanatory resolve

⁶⁶ Murdoch, *The Sea, The Sea*, 39.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

are at times successful—the broken vase turns out to have been a purposeful attempt at frightening him by his ex-lover, the actress Rosina—his resolution of the sea-serpent hallucination bears the peculiar mark of a revelatory explanation that stinks of theatrical “magic.”



It is through the peculiar ekphrasis of the Titian painting, “Perseus and Andromeda,” that the staging of the novel’s anxiety, and ultimate refusal of novelistic resolution and revelation is revealed. Returning to London, ironically, to escape the drama of the seascape, Charles decides to visit the Wallace Collection, a museum he remembers from childhood. Upon entering the empty main picture gallery there is a moment of high suspense, then the reveal: an uncanny event of almost kitsch proportions comes into being through ekphrasis itself. Charles recounts, “The gallery was empty. Then I noticed something that seemed odd, a sort of resonant coincidence.”⁶⁹ The sea monster appears through ghostly means, the anxious non-narrative horizon of the novel through an intertextual recalling of the earlier appearances of uncanny objects; Charles identifies its source, Titian’s painting “Perseus and Andromeda.” While he does describe the composition, the painting’s significance comes from its ability to illicit Charles own memory as he writes “I seemed to notice suddenly, though I had seen it many times before, the terrible fanged open mouth of the sea dragon [...] and the memory of that hallucination or whatever it was, was suddenly more disquieting that it had ever been since the first shock of its appearance.”⁷⁰ This ekphrasis eschews meaningful content as an aspect of the incorporation of this actual painting. Instead, incorporating it into the text for its “disquieting” potential, as the most significant object of uncanny in the novel. It seemingly offers an origin for Charles’ sea

⁶⁸ Murdoch, *The Sea, The Sea*, 54.

⁶⁹ Murdoch, 171.

monster while ultimately only strangely slant-rhyming as “The sea dragon did not quite resemble my sea monster, but the mouth was very like.”⁷¹

Much of the suspense already relieved in the realization of this uncanny moment, Murdoch heightens the dramatic flair to the level of spectacle with the literal introduction of a prop: “I began to walk away down the long room and as I did so the hammering of the workmen down below seemed to be becoming more rhythmic, clearer, faster, more insistent, like the sound of those wooden clappers, which the Japanese call *hyoshigi*.”⁷² The diagetic sounds of the workmen become the folly of a theatrical sound. Charles implicates the suspense of the moment directly, unpacking his metaphor in the explanation that they “are used to create suspense or announce doom in the Japanese theatre, and which I often used to use myself in my own plays.”⁷³ His self-portrait is in fact a staging of various theatrical devices, the uncanny that residue from the failed abjuring of a theatrical logic. In this moment of heightened anxiety, every element, art objects, his memories, the techniques of realism, and affect itself has been transformed in this climactic section of the novel into a prop on the play of Charles’ memoir. The magic of each set piece its evocation of an uncanny that Charles ironically misses as the production of his own ‘direction’, rendered comically here in his admission that the very suspense of his own life is rendered by way of metaphor as a theatrical trick of his own devising. In addition to the Titian painting and the *hyoshigi*, all of the Charles primary concerns in the novel—his delusional desire for his long lost and idealized childhood lover, Hartley, and his manipulative but also sincere relationship with her wayward and alienated son—seem to resolve (or dissolve?) in this suspenseful logic of theatrical appearance: “I turned quickly and found

⁷⁰ Murdoch, 171.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

myself face to face with, directly opposite, Rembrandt's picture of Titus. So Titus was here too. Titus and the sea monster and the stars and holding Hartley's hand in the cinema over forty years ago."⁷⁴ ⁷⁵The paintings in the gallery and the lights of the cinema appear in the novel as props appear on stage, devices incorporated to produce a revelation of metaphor in the narrative. In this sense there is a complex relationship between their non-narrative evocations of the uncanny, which occurs in temporal present analogous to the Kantian motion of the sublime, and their staging as objects that produce as much as they interrupt plot. These anxieties of the novel inform my reading of anxiety as literary affect inasmuch as an explication of mechanics of the novel itself (its anxious tone) disrupts the fiction of Charles' attempt represent himself in autobiography or memoir. Their configuration in the novel as a part of the narrative then raises the technical question of how Murdoch's text, to fall back on Jameson's articulation of realism, coalesces various forms and devices in its representation of affect as it stages a logic of theatrical appearance through the uncanny.

The Sea in Murdoch

The Sea, *The Sea* opens with Charles Arrowby, having left "the theater" and retired, describing the seashore in solitude. It is drab, detailed, subdued and somewhat uninteresting in the early summer haze:

The sea which lies before me as I write glows rather sparkles in the bland May sunshine. With the tide turning, it leans quietly against the land, almost unflecked by ripples or by foam. Near to the horizon it is a luxurious purple, spotted with regular lines of emerald green. At the horizon it is indigo. Near to the shore, where my view is framed by rising heaps of humpy yellow rock, there is a band of lighter green, icy and pure, less radiant, opaque however, not transparent. We are in the north, and the bright sunshine cannot

⁷⁴ Murdoch, 171.

⁷⁵ He even lists his ex-lovers as being the subjects of various paintings: "Lizzie by Terborch, Jeanne by Nicolaes Maes, Rita by Domenichino, Rosina by Rubens..."

penetrate the sea. Where the gentle water taps the rocks there is still a surface skin of colour. The cloudless sky is very pale at the indigo horizon which it lightly pencils in with silver. Its blue gains towards the zenith and vibrates there. But the sky looks cold, even the sun looks cold.⁷⁶

He struggles to describe exactly the complexity of the light's effect on even the most mundane "band of lighter green," calling it "icy and pure, less radiant, opaque however, not transparent." Charles' representation of the view comes into focus through his attention to locating within his field of vision a horizon line, and from there, filling in colors and forms. It is its quality as "framed"—like an oil seascape—"by rising heaps of humpy yellow rock" that brings his description into focus. The narration functions through painterly metaphors, so that Charles' view itself constitutes the locale— as a moment in time, the day, the particular local climate effects, the flat feeling of late spring stasis, the geographical context of "the north"—through the specific strokes of detail he writes. His attention to the specific hues of color imposes them like the intentional application of pigment to a canvas. Conversely, the description also writes the world of the seashore on its own terms and as functioning beyond the confines of a painting. It describes the "tide" as "turning" while "lean[ing] quietly against the land." The "water taps the rocks," the very "blue" that the narrator names "vibrates," and the rocks that themselves "frame" his view are also "rising." The most important agency, of the subject's more than grammatical relationship to the object, in Charles' imperious attempt at memoir, is his rather trite illustration of the drab North Sea. However, Charles' 'painting' also attributes the intentional grip of the brush to the "cloudless sky", giving it the capacity to "pencil" the "indigo horizon" "with silver."

At the level of the textual depiction of visual "views," these are the same questions of representation (primary in all inquiries into aesthetics) that this paper immediately raised in relationship to the image that began this essay in Dazai's presentation of the sea. *Ningen*

⁷⁶ Murdoch, *The Sea, The Sea*, 1.

Shikkaku's "realism" premised a narratorial assertion in the tradition of *shishōsetsu* that limits the text's ability to risk description outside the terms of the confined subjectivity of Yozo himself, for the most part precluding the depiction of landscape. Unlike *Ningen Shikkaku*, *The Sea*, *The Sea* abounds with similar depictions of the seashore as landscape, attributing affective significance through a literary strategy other than through the *shishōsetsu*'s peculiar angst of disqualification that qualifies the suicidal despair of Yozo's self-portrait. In the interpretive confluence of the analysis of anxiety, uncanny, and the aesthetic claims problematized by the affective valence of their view of the seascape, these two works coincide. While their formal strategies largely differ, they both exemplify a tangent relationship to the modernist literary vanguard. Where the nomenclature of self-portraiture and its failure characterizes the technical strategy of self-reflection in *Ningen Shikkaku*, Murdoch's novelistic fiction establishes a type of retrospective fiction that stages—in the sense that invokes its own formal artifice—anxiety through the formal failure of the autobiographical narrative of its protagonist.

This analysis refrains from, in fact eschews the very possibility, of suggesting that *The Sea*, *The Sea* radically intends a new novelistic subject or aesthetic paradigm. Instead, a thread of interpretation transverses the paper that relies on an critical understanding of the strategies of subjection that lack a vanguardist or destructive literary practice in order to suggest alternate interpretive modes that re-read modern literary anxiety. This critical orientation foregrounds the possibility of posing the question of how can we impose to read the self in these works in a contradictory, rather than conservative relationship to the neurotic subject.

Immediately following Charles' description of the view, the perspective of the narrator changes. The writing of the landscape no longer occurs in the present as it is interrupted by a new voice, that of him writing at a later date: "I had written the above, destined to be the opening

paragraph of my memoirs, when something happened which was so extraordinary and so horrible that I cannot bring myself to describe it even now after an interval of time.”⁷⁷ The novel derives an element of realism from its retrospective narration. The present tense of Charles’ narration must be re-formed to the past tense by the retrospective comments of later writing. The play between the writing of the view, imagined as occurring near simultaneously to the event of observation, and the writing of the retrospection, where the event described has already occurred, generates an aesthetic claim to reality. When Charles refers to his previous writing, the fiction of the memoir gains credence from the narrator’s self-conscious articulation of the act of writing itself.

The novel and the fiction of Charles’ memoir conflict. The realism deriving from the intimacy with the character that also acts as the retrospective narrator contrasts with moments of uncanny rupture, those set pieces that stage the interruption of the narrative of the novel by plot. When Charles writes, “something happened [...] so horrible that I cannot bring myself to describe it” this is only the first instance where the novel figures plot as an additional element superficial to the interaction between the narrative and non-narrative elements of Charles’ retrospection, such that it interrupts Charles’ ‘painting of the sea.’ Objects in his house, and the expected and unexpected arrival of guests from London impose plot and distract from his objective of setting down a “record of mingled thoughts and daily observations: ‘my philosophy’ my *pensées* against a background of simple descriptions of the weather and other natural phenomena.”⁷⁸ The most emblematic of these objects is the sea serpent he refers to from the very opening of the novel in the section titled “Prehistory.” The first interruption which haunts him throughout the novel, dramatically emerging from the painting of the sea itself (including the

⁷⁷ Murdoch, 1.

Titian painting) literally transforming ekphrasis or landscape observation, the illusion of setting as reality, into a stage for setting the plot in motion.

Charles fails as the “director” of his own writing. Despite his notion that “Of course there is no need to separate ‘memoir’ from ‘diary’ or ‘philosophical journal’ [...] why not? It can all come out naturally as I reflect. Thus unanxiously (for am I not now leaving anxiety behind?) I shall discover my ‘literary form’”⁷⁹, anxiety ultimately and ironically emerges from the narrator’s attempt to reflect “naturally” when we investigate the formal aspects of novel. As Murdoch’s novel situates itself as a late 20th century realist novel, while the narrator sets out to articulate himself autobiographically, through various forms of retrospection and descriptions of setting in terms of personal history. Rather than a complete and “unanxious” articulation of the self after the fact, where the novel might constitute a cohesive writing of the subject, signified by the titling of the sections of the novel “Prehistory” and “History”, I assert that the novel *stages* the retrospection of the self, and the ultimate constitution of the self through an anxious failure of the very notion of a stable autobiographical subject, in the structure of its coalescing of forms and the interruption of Charles’ personal historical account of himself by plot itself. The “uncanny” then can be understood additionally as a technical aspect of the novel’s formal representation of the self.

Realism, Affect and Murdoch’s Moralism

Charles obsesses over the formalities of his writing, which in addition to the various temporalities of the narrator’s writing itself incorporates the text letters from friends and comments on the accuracy of the dialogue he reproduces from conversations. I asserted above

⁷⁸ Murdoch, 2

that the self-conscious narrator of this type of retrospective fiction generates an aesthetic claim to reality. In one of many prominent interviews with Iris Murdoch in *The Paris Review*, she characterizes her definition of the authoritative authorial persona capable of producing good art as grounded in a notion of justice that she explicitly links to the aesthetic claims of realism: “There is a conception of truth, a lack of illusion, an ability to overcome selfish obsessions, ... Good art, whatever its style, has qualities of hardness, firmness, realism, clarity, detachment, justice, truth...bad art is the soft, messy self-indulgent work of an enslaved fantasy.”⁸⁰ Murdoch seems to be, by her own definition, a “good artist”, in the “firmness” of moral judgment⁸¹ that emphasizes and contrasts her authorial judgment, with the narrator’s, Charles’, personae as engaged in the “messy self-indulgent work of an enslaved fantasy.”

The novel for Murdoch becomes the distant stage she can direct. The imaginative work of the writing of literature produces a distance that allows for “detachment.” Murdoch aspires in her literary orientation to the works of “Dickens, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy” as “wise moralistic writers who portray the complexity of morality and the difficulty of being good.”⁸² In her construction of a realist literary tradition as the context for the authorship of her work, notable differences between her stagings of Arrowby’s self-reflection in *The Sea*, *The Sea*’s realism and the earlier tradition of the high realist novel emerge.

According to literary critical tradition, realism in literature, and as an aesthetic paradigm itself, has been called into question after its encounter and disassembly by literary modernism.⁸³

⁷⁹ Murdoch, 2.

⁸⁰ Iris Murdoch, interview by Jeffrey Meyers, “Iris Murdoch, The Art of Fiction No. 117”, *The Paris Review*, Summer, 1990. <<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2313/the-art-of-fiction-no-117-iris-murdoch>>

⁸¹ Exploring the non-narrative element of the realist novel starting with Balzac, Jameson identifies “judgements, for example, such as the moral a storyteller might want to add on at the end” as a type of non-narrative impulse in realism. Jameson, *Antinomies*, 8.

⁸² Iris Murdoch, interview.

⁸³ In Jameson’s listing of the binaried constructions of realism, he concluded with “realism vs. modernism” as the “most rehearsed.” Jameson, *Antinomies*, 2.

In this sense, Murdoch's construction of a realist context for her novelistic production encounters modernism through its rehearsal of an antimodernist "conservative" position. Murdoch scholar Bran Nicol convincingly argues in her work *Iris Murdoch: The Retrospective Fiction* that that "Modernism often functions in her thought as the antithesis of nineteenth-century realism, and the frequency and vigor with which she positions herself against it prove just as important to her work as her desire to return to realism."⁸⁴ The realism of *The Sea, The Sea* derives from Murdoch's presentation of the memoir form in order to construct a narrative account of the narrator's self, and in doing so represents her protagonist as a novelistic self averse to and against modernism.

In *The Antinomies of Realism*, Jameson describes the movement from a realism of an early "first" period in modernity which *demystifies* as it constructs Bourgeois subjectivity, and a later realistic novel that *defamiliarizes* as a weakening of the realist novel's negative function.⁸⁵ It is precisely what might be called a refusal to engage with a vanguardist literary practice that Jameson articulates as a historical trajectory of realism that interests me as I read the paperback edition of *The Sea, The Sea*. In terms an investment in a realism that stands outside those particular boundaries, or revolutions, of periodization, Murdoch's novels raise the particular question of how to interpret the function of realism after that "later realistic novel" (a designation under which Jameson includes a notion of the modernist novel proper). While the historical materialism undergirding all of Jameson's periodizing asserts that art produced under the late-capitalist conditions of production as essentially postmodern, I additionally understand *The Sea, The Sea* as postmodern inasmuch as it exhibits the "anti-modern" impulse to resurrect a realist aesthetic in the fiction of Charles Arrowby's retrospection. Assuming realism has some intrinsic

⁸⁴ Murdoch, 3.

⁸⁵ Jameson, *Antinomies*, 4.

“negative” function as an aesthetic strategy, how does it—in the instance of a recovery of a bourgeois subject of a realism extant prior to its ‘defamiliarization’ in modernism—unfold in a works like Murdoch’s?

Thinking about the subject of realism, the question of interpretation must return to the representation of the self (already the primary concern and organizing thematic in the *The Sea*, *The Sea*) produced in such a reflection. Rather than the anxious self of modernity—screams failing to sound in paint that merely makes marks on canvas, unable to escape its acknowledged frame—Murdoch reaches back to a tradition of a realized novelist subject. While I will not do justice to Murdoch’s vast philosophical output, I want to highlight what Bran Nicol in *Iris Murdoch: The Retrospective Fiction* argues about Murdoch’s understanding of “the soul” in her essay *Against Dryness*. She writes that Murdoch’s invocation of the “soul” complicates both the ‘postmodern’ and ‘liberal’ understandings of subjectivity. [...] Murdoch proposes that one area is especially neglected: ‘for the Liberal world, philosophy is not in fact at present able to offer us any other complete and powerful picture of the soul’.”⁸⁶ Indeed, rather than the language of a *return* to the bourgeois subject of early modernity—perhaps the “Liberal” subject of earlier British writers to whose inheritance she aspires—Murdoch attempts to “regenerate” a “soul” of the lost subject through her novels.

Nicol argues that “her attempt to regenerate the liberal conception of the soul chiefly involves recourse to the works of Freud.”⁸⁷ Extending my earlier assertion about her realist strategy as a conservative faith in the subject and the necessity for moral judgment as the primary economy of the novel-form, the premise becomes clear that in Charles’ narration the affective inflection of his retrospection, interpreted as neuroses, constitutes the material on which such a

⁸⁶ Bran Nicol, *Iris Murdoch: The Retrospective Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 24-5.

“moral” judgment might draw evidence. In this type of history, as the object of retrospection, writes Nicol, “the past is continually made present in her fiction: through guilt, nostalgia, the uncanny and the attempt to understand the past through rational investigation.”⁸⁸ In this interpretation, *The Sea, The Sea* has departed in its regeneration of a soul for the subject from realist project predicated on social critique of the bourgeois variety, to the affirmation of psychoanalytic ontology of a neurotic subject.

In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud asserted that instances of unhappiness, what we might refer to in the discourse at hand as negative affects, allow us to comprehend, and in fact constitute, subjectivity. While “our possibilities of happiness are already restricted by our constitution” for Freud it is through the common experiences of unhappiness that we apprehend “our own body”, “the external world” and “our relations to other men” as “we are threatened with suffering from [these] three direction.”⁸⁹ In *The Sea, The Sea*, Murdoch stages Charles’ retrospection through a thematic of failure; interrupted by plot, the uncanny return of people from his past, and the coalescing of anxious textual elements (objects in the story, the plot, and even the techniques of representation) producing a theatre of the self in which “unhappiness” is certainly constitutive. However, from a psychoanalytical perspective, affects act “As warning signals”⁹⁰ though most basically to “apprehend” danger, but thereby also serving interpretively as neurotic expressions of the constitution and delineation of an affected subject. I assert in my reading, to the contrary, that the literary use of affect in the novel, both through its formal anxieties and the failures of its realism more basically problematizes the very aesthetic claim to a stable subject.

⁸⁷ Nicol, 24-5.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961), 26.

Even after the careful exposition of the techniques for representing anxiety as an affect in the novel, my reading does not divorce the negative affects in the novel from their functions to reproduce the ideology of a neurotic modern subject. In reading these works, a rehearsed psychoanalytic interpretive framework assimilates the skillfully crafted relationship between negative affect, and Murdoch's investment in a realism attuned to the first principle of moral judgment dependent on determining the individual as a stable subject. His hope to "abjure" the magic of theatre when he says, "I am tired of it all. There has been a moral change,"⁹¹ reads ironically in the ultimate perception of Charles' failure to eschew his reputation as an egotistical tyrant. In essence, the staging of Charles' neurosis through the various failures rendered in the memoir as uncanny events that motivate plot or through the regret, shame, desire that comprise the anxious tone and characterizes the narrators retrospection serve to construct another level of failure, the subtle divide between Charles' narration and the novel's realist horizon as a theatre for the moral judgment of its subjects.

The novel stages Charles' hope to reflect his selfhood in writing about his life and times, after his retirement from theatre to the sea. That anticipatory affect of hope fails in the sense that it ultimately mutates into another anticipatory affect of anxiety. Anxiety emerges amidst the realism of Charles' descriptions of the landscape and the recollection of a personal history from distressing uncanny moments and an interruptive staging of plot. Murdoch debases the novel form's armature of plot to the most histrionic artifice of literal *plotting*, which centers around the theatricality of Charles' absurd, and unethical attempt to ensnare his long lost childhood "love" Hartley, now an average elderly woman dissimilar to him and settled into old-age and marriage.

⁹⁰ Freud, 26.

⁹¹ Murdoch, 3.

While autobiography assumes the stasis of the present author, in *The Sea*, *The Sea* the uncanny sets the stage for a propelled by the anticipatory logic of Charles' anxiety.

After his desperate and repeated intervening into Hartley's life, she secretly visits his home unbeknownst to her jealous husband. Charles lies to her about the time until she has stayed late enough that her husband will realize she has been to visit him. Charles reflects on this moment, writing, "I ought to have rushed after her like a flash, like a faithful dog. I ought to have dragged her back and kept her in the house by force. Instead some stupid instinct made me pause to pick up the candles."⁹² Motivated by regret at his failure, the protagonist's desires are the subject of his recollection and the audience's moral scrutiny at character's insipid ignorance of his own mania. This romantic quest, the failed anxious attempt to capture Hartley, the plotting that drives Charles' to write these episodes manifests neurotic. Affect is staged ironically then, as a means for producing an ethical judgment critical of the narrator's delusion.

A different kind of affective significance emerges when Charles recounts how he ran outside to retrieve Hartley in vain, only a moment too late: "I ran out into blue almost-darkness and the silent emptiness of the rocky shore...I could at first see nothing , and it struck me in an odd way that while I was talking to Hartley I had forgotten about the sea, forgotten it was there and now felt confounded and at a loss to find myself half blind among those terrible rocks."

⁹³The backdrop of the sea, which had receded as the plot took control of the novel, emerges again to striking effect. Charles remembers himself as set against the sea. This logic of appearance mimics the uncanny movement of other moments in the work by which the strange is introduced into the staging of the self. Charles feels "confounded" and "at a loss" as the seemingly constant "backdrop" of the sea suddenly emerges from a state of forgetting. However

⁹² Muroch, 233.

⁹³ Ibid.

this feeling occurs not as neurosis, but as an aspect of a larger scene, of finding himself in terms of the spatialized strangeness “among those terrible rocks” and through the temporal event of being “struck...in an odd way.” The realization of the temporal structure of retrospection itself, as the means by which Charles exists as a self, is fundamentally understood through an affective relationship to the sea that resists the plot. The uncanny figures then as the provocation of interest through which affect moves as interaction between the narrative and non-narrative writing of Charles’ anxious self. In this way, I read this instance of feeling in the novel as an anxiety that articulates a notion of being distinct from or ulterior to the subject of realism apprehended through moral judgment and the psychoanalysis of neurosis.

‘Thrownness’ in The Sea, The Sea

Constituting affect as an aesthetic experience of being thrown into the world, in *Being and Time* Heidegger uses the term “thrownness” to characterize the apprehension of the temporal structure of Being. Heidegger understands anxiety as a mood through “thrownness” where mood points towards an orientation in, or understanding of Being alternative to a subjectivity and affects that are the result of stimulus from or projection onto objects. In this way, his theorization of mood can inform a definition of affect as a fundamental revelation of Being. Heidegger elaborates “Thrownness” as a frustration or dejection of the matter of fact quality of our already contingent being-in-the-world. He explicates our relationship to the temporality of our past, what he calls the ontological quality of “that it is” through the revelation of thrownness through attunement, “Dasein is always already brought before itself, it has always already found itself, not as perceiving oneself to be there, but as *one finds one’s self in attunement* [emphasis added]....Mood does not disclose in the mode of looking at thrownness, but as turning toward

and away from it”⁹⁴ Heidegger’s use of the spatial metaphors of “turning toward and away,” along with the temporal aspect of Dasein as thrown, allows us to see mood, or as I appropriate it for an understanding of affect, as an orientation in the world.

Rather than the aesthetic terminology of “perceiving” and “looking” problematized in Charles’ view of the seascape in *The Sea, The Sea*, Heidegger articulates an experience of mood as an anxious relation to the fact of always already being in a mood. The “turning toward and away” that defines the disclosure of being as thrown in “attunement” asserts an understanding of affect as “an existential, fundamental way in which Dasein is its there. It not only characterizes Dasein ontologically, but is at the same time of fundamental methodological significance for the existential analytic because of its disclosure.”⁹⁵ Being in a mood, even in turning away from the structure of Being itself, in “thrownness” discloses it as such. This framework intervenes in the history of modern thought with an understanding the disclosure of Dasein in “thrownness” through “attunement” as a contingent relationship of the self to the world, proposing that affects themselves describe a self radically opposed to the therapeutic ethos of a modern subjectivity.

The narrator of memoir, having initially set out to look back from the present perspective, eye to his past and to the simple seascape, after his own failure, expresses shame and regret in his own retrospection. After the novel climaxes with Charles being pushed to his near death into a chasm in the seaside cliffs near his home, his illusory quest falters. He writes in the section titled, which I can’t help but read as camp, “Epilogue: Life Goes On...” that “Of course I do not believe in those ‘blasphemies’ which I wrote earlier. ...But would not forgiving her finally defeat the purpose of this psychological game I have been playing with myself.”⁹⁶ In a sense,

⁹⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2010), 132.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 135-6.

⁹⁶ Murdoch, 491.

Charles own writing has diagnosed his neurosis. His revelation, that “I accused Hartley of being a ‘fantasist’...but what a ‘fantasist’ I have been myself”⁹⁷ provides a certain closure in the final self-conscious realization of his failures that serve as “blasphemies” of his own memoir. As Nicol argues however, “[w]here modernist first-person retrospective narrative is typified by the sense of proximity between author and narrator, in these novels, Murdoch subtly problematizes her hero’s point of view.”⁹⁸ The final redemptive sentiment of moral composure that allows Charles to title all of his early writing as “History” expresses an ultimate irony of the novel, for it also must be interpreted in its aspect as redacted into antimodernist staging.

The novel’s anti-modern attempt to circumscribe a subject through Murdoch’s elaborate staging of Charles’ writing of the self also marks the failure of realism. The narrative reveals its formal imposition as artifice through its uncanny plot and the anxiety that inflects the retrospection. This staging, of plot and of Charles as subject, remains in conflict with the sense that the seascape reveals an anxious ontological event of an affective tone that escapes the novel’s mechanisms.

Charles’ has the odd experience of half-remembering his own near-death experience. After going for a swim in the sea, he describes how he began to feel strange and then, recounting his remembering, he writes, I remembered that, just before my head cracked against the rock and the blackness came upon me, I had seen something else...*The monstrous sea serpent had actually been in the cauldron with me.*⁹⁹ This memory resurfaces through the staging of the uncanny that takes place in *The Sea, The Sea*. However the sea serpent no longer warrants a rational investigation, and Murdoch’s fiction instead points to the artifice of the memoir and its inability to contain the involuntary emergence of anxiety. It was his swimming just prior that brought

⁹⁷ Murdoch, 499.

about his strange memory of the sea serpent. Charles recounts how “The cold shock, then the warmth, then the strong gentle lifting motion of the quiet waves reminded me terribly of happiness. I swam about feeling the loneliness of the sea and that particular sensation which I now identified as a sense of death which it seemed to have always carried into my heart.”¹⁰⁰ The feeling of the waves evokes a memory of “happiness,” the failed sublime of the sea. That evocation of the past anxiously anticipates the confluence of “loneliness” and “a sense of death.”

For Heidegger, the structure of “attunement” finds its most “authentic” expression in anxiety: “In anxiety, Dasein finds itself *faced* with the nothingness of the possible impossibility of its existence... Being-toward-death is essentially anxiety.”¹⁰¹ I am tempted to assert the reflection of the Heideggerian concept of “being-towards-death” as it seems implied in Charles’ sense of ontological anxiety. At the same time, I am attentive to the disclaimer that the philosopher packages with this theoretical insight. In Heidegger’s footnote to this explication he writes—in a typical gesture to distinguish his terminology as part of an irreducible grammar—that this anxiety he is describing is “certainly not anxiety as a mere emotion.”¹⁰² In *Ningen Shikkaku*, anxiety as “disqualification” brings Yozo before himself in that fact of his inability to write the stable subject of aesthetics. The sea for Dazai could only be apprehended through the revelation of anxiety, as the suicidal disclosure of his individuation. However, as part of a novel, the representation of anxiety in *The Sea, The Sea* seems to more easily fall into an analysis that understands Charles’ “loneliness” and “particular sensation” of the “sense of death” as the mere emotional projections of a complex and reflective character.

⁹⁸ Nicol, *Iris Murdoch*, 147.

⁹⁹ Murdoch, 466.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 464-465.

¹⁰¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 254.

¹⁰² Ibid.

This anxious swim serves as affective understanding of Charles' unhappiness, and as an uncanny impetus for Murdoch's invocation of the other uncanny memory of the sea serpent. More broadly both the uncanny and anxiety function in *The Sea, The Sea* as affect modes for constructing a novelistic representation of selfhood that functions through a literary staging of the retrospection. This staging of Charles' retrospective failure never accedes to the schizophrenic or fractured interventions into subjectivity that characterize Jameson's postmodernism, or evoke Terada's "death of the subject." *The Sea, The Sea* is postmodern in as much as it is looking back on modernity, attempting to restore the anxieties of a neurotic modern subjectivity. Where a psychoanalytic reading would be a conservative reading affirming a therapeutic recovery of the anxious subject, I instead suggest that bringing Heidegger's mood to bear can reveal the strategies of subjection that comprise Murdoch's text

P o s t - s c r i p t

And the myth of myth, its truth, is that fiction is in effect, in this ontogony, inaugural. In sum, fiction is the subject of being. Mimesis is the Poesis of the world as true world of gods, of men, and of nature. The myth of myth is in no way an ontological fiction; it is nothing other than an ontology of fiction or representation: it is therefore a particularly fulfilled and fulfilling form of the ontology of subjectivity in general.

Jean-Luc Nancy, "Myth Interrupted" 55.

In this paper, the ideological construction of aesthetics and the theorization of affect are understood through their inseparability in the defining the self. As the study of the subject's reflection judgment of the object that finds wellspring in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, the conventions of the term aesthetic itself oppose the move to incorporate Heidegger's ontology into my analysis. Heidegger defines the self through the neological advent of *Da-sein*, literally meaning Being-there. He explains that "in being in a mood, Da-sein is always already disclosed

in accordance with its mood as *that* being to which Da-sein was deliver over in its being as the being which it, existing, has to be.”¹⁰³

In some ways I do not think I have truly done a “Heideggerian” reading of these literary works. From the wake of modern literature neither the fictional memoir penned by Iris Murdoch nor Dazai Osamu’s suicidal *shishōsetsu* seem the most exemplary choice of works to interpret anxiety *against* an aesthetic organized by a psychoanalysis of the bourgeois subject. Even before this interpretation of affect that finds origin in Heidegger’s concept of *Attunement*, these literary works lack the qualities Heidegger describes in the Greek Temple, which “standing there, ...The steadfastness of the work contrasts with the surge of the surf, and its own repose bring out the raging of the sea.”¹⁰⁴ These literary works do not stand steadfast and in their anxious constructions of the self and seem to resist that capacity to set up this primordial relationship. Their realism of an anxious self contrasts with the realism that Heidegger reads in C.F. Meyer’s poem as “truth put into the work.”¹⁰⁵ The modern novel as an apparatus of subjection paints the sea through the subjective perceptions, as a view or landscape in the narrative

However, inasmuch as the ontological fiction of an anxious subject finds its myth in the techniques of the modern novel, there is the undercurrent of the anxious “turning towards and away” that characterizes the form’s poetry as it struggles to apprehend the self. Indeed *Ningen Shikkaku* has been treated distinctly from the novel-form in its inability to comprise anxiety as a revelatory narrative uncanny.

The desire to let my feeling provoke my thinking serves as the impetus for this research. It began with the confounding feelings I have at the Oregon Coast. Here, now, in Oberlin, Ohio those feelings are the objects of intellection, of writing. In Jean-Luc Nancy’s words, with

¹⁰³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 131.

¹⁰⁴ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 36.

literature, “showing and revealing” takes place, “fictioning is the subject of being.”¹⁰⁶ We find it on the seashore, sitting on the sand or in amongst the prying dune grass. Rain comes down, the driftwood damp, the horizons low, and the undergrowth strong as I think about the sea, I remember it how, perhaps we can think of the aesthetic ideal of subject, “like a wave breaking on a rock, giving up / Its shape in a gesture which expresses that shape.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 38.

¹⁰⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy, “Myth Interrupted,” 44.

¹⁰⁷ John Ashbery, “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror” in *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*, ed. Jahan Ramazani (New York: Norton, 2003), 31-32.

Bibliography

- Bashō Matsuo. *The Narrow Road to Oku*. Translated by Donald Keane. New York: Kodansha America, 1996. 127.
- Fowler, Edward. *The Rhetoric of Confession: Shishosetsu in Early Twentieth-Century Japanese Fiction*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Translated by James Strachey. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961. 26.
- . “The Uncanny” in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Translated by James Strachey. London: The Hogarth Press, 1955. 219.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*. Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996.
- . *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Translated by Albert Hofstadter. 1971. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001.
- Jameson, Frederic. *The Antinomies of Realism*. Brooklyn, New York: Verso, 2013.
- . *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late-Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991.
- Kant, Immanuel. *The Critique of Judgment* [1790; also known as “The Third Critique”]. Translated by J.H. Bernard. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. 2000.
- Michael, John. Review of *Miroir d'encre: Rhétorique de l'autoportrait* by Michel Beaujour. *MLN*. John Hopkins University Press, 96: 5. 1981. 1206.
- < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2906253> >
- Murdoch, Iris. *The Sea, The Sea*. 1978. New York: Penguin Books, 2001.

———. interview by Jeffrey Meyers, “Iris Murdoch, The Art of Fiction No. 117”, The Paris Review, Summer, 1990. < <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2313/the-art-of-fiction-no-117-iris-murdoch>>

Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Inoperative Community*. Translated by Peter Connor et al. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.

Nicol, Bran. *Iris Murdoch: The Retrospective Fiction*. 2nd ed. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Ngai, Sianne. *Ugly Feelings*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.

Sedgwick, Eve. *The Weather in Proust*. Edited by Jonathan Goldberg. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.

Terada, Rei. *Feeling in Theory: Affect after the Death of the Subject*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.

Wolfe, Alan. *Suicidal Narrative in Modern Japan: The Case of Osamu Dazai*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990.