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Analysis of Naturalistic Elements in Selected Works of Ōe Kenzaburō

Analýza naturalistických elementů ve vybraných dílech Ōeho Kenzaburóa

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I declare that I have written this bachelor thesis independently under the supervision of my supervisor and that all the sources have been cited and acknowledged in the bibliography section of this paper.

Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucí bakalářské práce a jen s použitím uvedených pramenů a literatury.

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## Anotace

V této práci jsou analyzována vybraná díla Óeho Kenzaburóa s ohledem na japonský a francouzský naturalismus. Aby byla práce relevantní, jsou zde vytyčeny prvky charakteristické pro jak japonský, tak francouzský naturalismus. Práce je rozdělena na čtyři části, kdy v první části je definován literární a historický kontext obou děl, v části druhé je popsán život a literární styl autora, v části třetí je analyzován román *Rvát výhonky a střílet mlád'ata* a v části čtvrté je analyzována povídka *Chov*.

Klíčová slova: naturalismus, Kenzaburó Óe, román, povídka.

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## Editorial Note

All Japanese words and names are written in the English transcription; the Czech transcription is used only in the bibliography or in the footnotes for the Czech sources. Japanese names are written in the order of surname and given name. All foreign words, including the original book titles, are written in cursive for better text clarity. First mentions of Japanese words in English transcription are followed by their equivalent in Japanese in parentheses and then by their translation to English in quotation marks. The English translations cited in the section *Prize Stock* are my own as there was no English translation available.

## Introduction

There is no such thing as a perfect being. Humans are flawed creatures at their core who are driven by their ego and their selfish desires. However, it is precisely because they are flawed that they can be called human. Otherwise, they would be nothing more than hollow dolls moving precisely as they have been programmed and predictable in everything they do. It is the twisted human nature which makes them so fascinating to watch as they develop.

It is for the same reason that I became fascinated by the literary works of Ōe Kenzaburō and decided to study them carefully in relation to the literary style naturalism. The literary works chosen for this thesis are a novel *Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids* and a short story *Prize Stock* since they deal with similar themes and are written with the same narrative style. In this thesis, I aim to analyse these works concerning Japanese and French naturalism and thus determine whether they can be considered to be purely naturalistic, or whether they have been only inspired by French and Japanese naturalism.

This thesis is divided into four large chapters which are as follows, Literary and Historical Context, Ōe Kenzaburō and His Literary Style, *Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids*, and *Prize Stock*. The first chapter is written concerning the cultural situation in post-war Japan, as that seems to be a crucial time for Ōe and his literary works. This chapter also includes an analysis of French and Japanese naturalism as it is critical to establish major features of each one in order to distinguish these features in the analysis of *Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids* and *Prize Stock*.

The second chapter focuses on Ōe, his early life and literary style. This chapter focuses on life as a young boy, including his family life, education from elementary education through high school to university education. This chapter also includes an overview of Ōe's early literary style, including the authors, by whom Ōe was inspired as well as reoccurring motifs which can be found in his literary works.

The third chapter is the analysis of *Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids*, which includes the plot overview and an analysis of its literary style. The literary style analysis includes further analysis of themes, language, characters and the use of space implemented in the novel.

The fourth chapter is the analysis of the short story *Prize Stock*, which also includes a plot overview and an analysis of the literary style in which the story was written. The

literary analysis is built in the same manner as the one used in the analysis of *Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids*.



# 1 Literary and Historical Context

To understand the post-war literature, it is of utmost importance to understand what was happening during the Second World War and how the restrictions put on the authors during that time affected their future work.

## 1.1 Post-war Literature and Culture in Japan

Even though the duration of the Second World War in the West is said to be from 1939 to 1945, the duration was very different for Japan, which had been in war with China since 1937. Therefore, the duration of the Second World War for Japan were the years between 1937 and 1945 or between 1941 and 1945 as Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941 and the United States of America declared war on Japan the next day. Censure in literature had already been a common practice since the Meiji Restoration in 1868.<sup>1</sup> However, the wave of small scale arrests of proletarian authors in early 1932 and the brutal murder of Kobayashi Takiji in 1933,<sup>2</sup> which the police claimed to be a heart attack, illustrates the brutality of the government towards authors who did not comply with their agenda.<sup>3</sup> A great example of the military trying to influence the public opinion via literature are the *penbutai* (ペン部隊), i.e. “The Groups of the Pen,” which were Japanese war correspondents, who were sent to frontlines to write heroic stories about Japan’s success and the animosity of the enemies. Notwithstanding, the enforcement of new literary rules was not a simple task, and so the government formed a new institution called *naikaku jōhōkyoku* (内閣情報局) “Bureau of Information.” Its primary purpose was to dictate what kind of artistic expressions were against Japan’s policy and were therefore banned, as well as persecution and issuing the appropriate punishments.

Many authors did not want to write what the regime was commanding them to and so they ceased publishing altogether. Instead, they kept writing in secret and hid their works until the time was right and they no longer feared persecution. However, those who decided to keep on writing had to either write propaganda or to bypass the rules and find topics which were deemed harmless to nationalistic Japan. One of the more notable literary schools of the post-war period is, for example, *sengoha* (戦後派), i.e. “Post-War

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<sup>1</sup> Vasiljevoá, "Hnutí za svobodu a demokratická práva," 348.

<sup>2</sup> The corpse of Kobayashi Takiji showed signs of being beaten and tortured to death. See Keene, "Japanese Literature and Politics in the 1930s," 227.

<sup>3</sup> Keene, "Japanese Literature and Politics in the 1930s," 226-227.

Generation,” which included four generations of authors. Those generations can be specified as the authors who stopped writing completely throughout the Second World War and begun writing after the war ended; the people who lived through it as adults; those who had seen it as children; the ones who had not directly seen it but wanted to express their opinion about it. *Sengoha* had launched a movement, whose main aim was to discard the outdated traditions and reinvent contemporary literature employing new experimental techniques.<sup>4</sup>

However, as Japan was on the losing side of the Second World War, many authors who were considered to hold right-wing party ideals were forced to go through *tenkō* (転向), i.e. “Changing Direction.” *Tenkō* was an ideological conversion through which the socialist authors had to officially renounce their ideals, after which the only works they were allowed to write were the ones which were not harmful to the post-war regime.

Nonetheless, many future notable authors, such as Ōe Kenzaburō (大江健三郎) were but children during the Second World War and were, therefore, more affected by changes in society itself. After the war ended, a significant shift of mentality happened in Japan, which caused many people to go through an existential crisis, due to different teachings of the new democratic Japan and militaristic and ultra-nationalistic Japan to which they were used. Such shift seeped through many areas of society as soon as Japan was under occupation from the United States, namely by the *sōshireibu* (総司令部), i.e. “General Headquarters” under General Douglas MacArthur,<sup>5</sup> who oversaw reforming and further westernising of Japan. There were two Educational Missions of the United States in 1946 and 1950, which drastically changed the direction in which education of the Japanese youth was heading. One of the essential points of these reforms was the abolition of the Imperial Rescript on education, which included educational guiding principles; and the decision not to express educational principles again in the words of the Emperor.<sup>6</sup> These changes were followed by democratisation and decentralisation of Japanese educational administration, which meant that Japanese Ministry of Education no longer had absolute power over propaganda and censorship in teaching materials and could no longer dictate what children were taught, as well as eradicating propaganda from

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<sup>4</sup> Sakurai, "Kenzaburō Ōe: The Early Years," 370.

<sup>5</sup> General Douglas MacArthur was the supreme leader of Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, which is also known as SCAP.

<sup>6</sup> Morito, "Educational Reform and Its Problems in Post-War Japan," 343.

textbooks and teaching curriculum. Combined with the establishment of a new educational structure, this included compulsory education which is nine years long. Needless to say that with the rising education and the growing reading public, many new literary styles were imported to Japan.

Another major reform is the new constitution, the form of which was inspired by the main points of the United States Constitution. However, before it was formed as such, the Japanese government planned to use one which strongly resembled The Meiji Constitution,<sup>7</sup> which was over fifty years old at the time. This draft of the constitution was rejected, as it would not mean a change in the government, while the need for a change was the sole reason for forming a new constitution.<sup>8</sup> The new form of constitution brought many changes, such as women's rights to vote, as well as guaranteed fundamental human rights which now included the freedom of speech allowing the authors to publish their literary works without repercussions from the government. Now they could publish their works and freely describe the horrors caused by the nuclear bombings in Nagasaki and Hiroshima and reminiscence on the way the radiation and radiation sickness changed the lives of many.

All of these changes would most likely become a tremendous influence on post-war authors, who would have their core values crushed and remoulded under the American occupation. This time of changes would then be projected into their writing as it would become one of the leading influences on their future lives.

## 1.2 Naturalism as a Literary Style

Naturalism is an artistic style, which had originated in the period from the 1860s to 1880s in France as a reaction to romanticism. From there, it had spread to all of now European countries and even to America, where the main areas of art which Naturalism affected were fine arts and literature.<sup>9</sup> The characteristic feature of Naturalism is the aim for descriptions and observations to be as accurate as possible, i.e. it promotes presenting objects precisely as they are as a norm, while completely disregarding any subjective experiences, the stylisation of reproduction of the said object.<sup>10</sup>

When talking about Naturalism, Realism often comes to mind; Realism, which also aims to describe society and man in their living conditions, is a philosophical attitude as

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<sup>7</sup> The Meiji constitution was used from the time of Meiji restoration in 1868.

<sup>8</sup> The main problem with the Meiji constitution resembling draft was the fact that it would be counterproductive to change, as it was likely formed by a wish for as little change as possible.

<sup>9</sup> Kovářová, "Naturalismus," 243.

<sup>10</sup> Nünning, "Naturalismus, Literární Teorie," 541-543.

well as an artistic style. The two do not exclude each other; on the other hand, Naturalism often implements a realistic approach as one of its features.<sup>11</sup> Naturalism mainly focuses on an almost photographic observation, which causes the observations to be rather shallow. However, this stops it from realistic typification.<sup>12</sup>

The shift from Realism to Naturalism represents the change in society, which started favouring the scientific approach to idealism and traditionalism. Its concept is based on the elimination of chance by the principle of causality, where every natural phenomenon has a place in a long chain of preceding conditions, which had to happen for it to happen and which will, in turn, be condition or cause of the next.<sup>13</sup> However, an essential difference between Realism and Naturalism is the scientific approach to description, which Naturalism implements. There is a definite effort for impersonality and impassibility of descriptions while focusing on every little detail, withholding nothing and demanding nothing but accuracy and absolute honesty in the descriptions of observed, even the most repulsive, facts.<sup>14</sup>

This way of thinking also translates directly to the type of the main character, which is often displayed; the characters are usually flawed and often of low social standing. A naturalistic man is accepted to be a part of the natural world where he is determined not only hereditably but also by his surroundings. The language characters use suits precisely to their position, education, and social conditions.

### 1.2.1 French Naturalism

In France, Naturalism as an artistic style was already implied as early as with the proposals of Gustave Flaubert who demanded scientific objectivity from writers. However, the first author to develop the naturalistic theory is Emile Zola who first used the term “naturalistic authors” for writers of this style in the preface in the second print of his novel *Thérèse Raquin*,<sup>15</sup> and therefore is considered to be the originator of French naturalism.

In his theories, Zola continued in the tradition of French positivism and humanist scientism and was namely inspired by the evolutionist theory of H. Spenser and by the sociologist theory of H. Taine according to whom both the author and his work are determined by three factors which are race, which is the hereditary biological element,

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<sup>11</sup> Hauser, "The Second Empire," 60.

<sup>12</sup> Kovářová, "Naturalismus," 243.

<sup>13</sup> Hauser, "The Second Empire," 60.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>15</sup> Kovářová, "Naturalismus," 245.

surroundings, and time. This theory also translates to Zola's theory that these factors also significantly influence literature; he elaborated more on this matter as he conceived the method of experiment and observation. This method was designed to resemble the ones which are implemented in scientific research.<sup>16</sup> The method described here coincides with Zola's desire to be regarded as a research worker whose miniscule observations could have a scientific value.<sup>17</sup> Zola demanded a scientific approach to the description of social reality in literature, which leaves little to the author's imagination.

### 1.2.2 Japanese Naturalism

Japanese naturalism *shizenshugi* (自然主義) on the other hand flourished for a brief period after the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) and further in the post-war period, which was approximately between the years 1906–1910, then temporarily became the leading literary style of that time until the 1920s. The reason for its tremendous success was the state of society, which was affected by the war since many men did not return home from their service, the society was going through depression which was mirrored in literary works of that time. The authors of this style did not necessarily continue writing such works for a long time, many of them went through a naturalistic phase, and after a few years, they moved on to other styles. Some of these authors were active almost to the end of the Second World War as the serialisation of Tokuda Shūsei's work was suspended for violating prescribed rules of *jōhōkyoku*.<sup>18</sup> However, the readership of authors belonging to *shizenshugi* schools continued, and their work influenced many generations of Japanese authors to come.

Singular examples of Japanese naturalism is Shimazaki Tōson with his novel *Hakai* (破壊), i.e. "Destruction." Tōson's literary style changed over time as he lived through multiple eras and his literary style evolved around them.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, he began his literary career as a romantic poet, he later established himself as one of the biggest names of the *shizenshugi* movement as he explored themes such as minorities, taboos, extramarital affairs, and divorce.

The most significant difference between Japanese and French naturalism is the fact that there is no mention of organic hereditary elements or rigid social causes in the course

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<sup>16</sup> Kovářová, "Naturalismus," 245.

<sup>17</sup> Hauser, "The Second Empire," 80.

<sup>18</sup> Sibley, "Naturalism in Japanese Literature," 157.

<sup>19</sup>Tōson was active in the Meiji, Taishō and early Shōwa periods.

of human life. Therefore, works of Japanese naturalists are less likely to apply the same kind of scientific approach as Zola did in his novels. What *shizenshugi* is in the context of post-restoration literature, is a definite shift from romantic escapism to a realistic portrayal of an individual and his immediate surroundings.<sup>20</sup> This kind of portrayal sometimes resulted in the disassociation of the detachment of the author from his character and instead in the author's identification with a character to a point when his work became autobiographical. Such tendency resulted in developing of the new literary form of *shishōsetsu* (私小説), i.e. "I novel," which is a type of confessional prose told in the first-person narrative.<sup>21</sup> Japanese naturalists often used this type of form and while using it, many of them resorted to writing novels where the author is in the role of the central character.<sup>22</sup>

When considering the themes which Japanese naturalists implemented, it is possible to divide naturalistic plots into three main groups. The first theme which is going to be discussed deals with the constrictions which are placed upon an individual and their freedom based on traditional family ties.<sup>23, 24</sup>

The second reoccurring theme deals with the position of women in Japanese society. This theme is not as common since most of the Japanese naturalistic writers were men; however, this theme is observable in novels by Tokuda Shūsei with his novel *Kabi* (蠶), i.e. "Mold" and Masamune Hakuchō with his novel *Doro ningyō* (泥人形), i.e. "The Clay Doll" where the central character is a woman.<sup>25</sup> First feminist ideologies begin to appear at the turn of the 19th and 20th century, although they did not have to make it through as much yet.<sup>26</sup>

The last theme, which can be discerned in literature, deals with the isolation of an individual in prefectures. This theme can be observed mainly in works of Tōson, Katai,

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<sup>20</sup> Sibley, "Naturalism in Japanese Literature," 158.

<sup>21</sup> The main difference between the *shishōsetsu* and an autobiographical novel is that the *shishōsetsu* is usually written in a style alike to a confession which provides greater depth, personal closeness and a sense of sincerity, while an autobiographical novel provides broader point of view and focuses on providing a comprehensive narrative of author's life.

<sup>22</sup> Sibley, "Naturalism in Japanese Literature," 160.

<sup>23</sup> These restrictions are represented in Tōson's *Hakai* for example, where the plot follows a young man who is forbidden by his father to reveal his family background because it would ruin his prospects.

<sup>24</sup> Sibley, "Naturalism in Japanese Literature," 160.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>26</sup> One of the first forerunner of feminism in Japan was the poet Yosano Akiko.

and Hakuchō, who were all born and raised in the countryside and they often return to the scenery of their childhood in their literary works.<sup>27</sup>

Naturalism as a literary genre may have had a short duration, however, what proves that it was an essential genre in the evolution of literary style in Japan is the fact that elements of Naturalism can be found in literary works of post-war and contemporary authors. These authors could have used the same methods as naturalists did to find solace from traumatic events or to underline parts of the plot which they wished to portray.

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<sup>27</sup> It is important to note that there was a process of industrialisation beginning from the Meiji period, which included migration of citizens from rural villages to towns in search of work opportunities.

## 2 Ōe Kenzaburō and His Literary Style

Ōe Kenzaburō was born in 1935 which means that when the Second World War ended he was but a 10-year-old boy who had spent his childhood in the small mountain village in the Ehime prefecture, western Japan on the island of Shikoku, as a third son of prominent, but large, samurai family. He grew up in a loving community with an abundance of folklore and eccentricity, that would greatly nurture his imagination and literary style in the future. Since his early years, Ōe used to listen to all kinds of folklore stories because his grandmother was the village storyteller, who particularly enjoyed the local myths and tales.

The war left Ōe scarred as both his father and his grandmother died before the war ended.<sup>28</sup> Not only did Ōe lose his close family members, but he also had to go through an enormous shock on 15th August 1945, when Emperor Shōwa, who was generally understood to be a living god, announced Japan's defeat and was later forced to denounce his godhood. The surprise was even greater because of the censorship enforced in the war period. Thanks to the radio broadcast and many other forms of propaganda such as news or cinema, many people were convinced that the Japanese army was winning. Ōe describes his emotions of that period in his memoir *Genshuku na Tsunawatari*, i.e. "Solemnly Walking the Tightrope" as following:

*"The strange disappointing fact was that the Emperor spoke in a human voice like any ordinary human. Though we couldn't understand the speech, we heard his voice. One of my friends could even imitate it clearly. We surrounded him, a boy in soiled shorts who spoke in the Emperor's voice, and laughed.*

*Our laughter echoed in the summer morning stillness and disappeared into clear, high sky. An instant later, anxiety tumbled heavens and seized us impious children. We stared at one another in silence."*<sup>29</sup>

It is possible to say that what may have brought Ōe to writing fiction was the feeling of utter defeat and the shame and guilt which the Japanese must have collectively felt for years to come. Incidentally, Ōe enrolled in high school only twenty months after the war

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<sup>28</sup> Winkelhöferová, *Slovník japonské literatury*, 229.

<sup>29</sup> Ōe Kenzaburō, "Genshuku na Tsunawatari," quoted in Sakurai Emiko, *Kenzaburō Ōe: The Early Years* (World Literature Today: Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma, 1984), 370.



had ended and is the only major Japanese writer who had got his secondary education under the occupation of the United States. This Education had proven itself to be vital as he was being taught under new curriculums which no longer focused on teaching students morals and traditional values. Instead, students were encouraged to study books on democracy and subjects were taught by teachers, who had just recently returned from war.<sup>30</sup> The stark contrast which education can make can also be seen for example in the work of Mishima Yukio, who was born ten years earlier than Ōe and therefore got his secondary education at the height of Japanese militarism.<sup>31</sup>

During his high school education, Ōe had proved himself to be a very bright child as he constructed a very clever mice trap, that could continually trap potentially all the mice at the island of Shikoku,<sup>32</sup> and presented it at a Scientific Invention Fair. At first, Ōe did not aspire to become a fiction writer. Instead, he dreamed of becoming a scientist. He thoroughly enjoyed solving geometrical puzzles, and he also learned astronomy by reading on his own. His teachers, however, did not support him in his aspirations and instead mocked him for even thinking in such a way. After this, Ōe had in his despair and humiliation turned into a lonely, irritable child who had problems getting along with others. It was at this point that Ōe turned to literature.<sup>33</sup>

After graduating from high school in Matsuyama, on the island of Shikoku, he went on to the Tokyo University where he studied French literature, while he read American literature as a hobby, graduating with a senior thesis on Jean-Paul Sartre's fictional imagery. During his student years, Ōe was greatly influenced by Albert Camus, one could assume, that it was his work, by which Ōe was influenced in his later literary career as even as a student Ōe worked with professional literary journals such as *Shinchō* (新潮), i.e. "New Tide" or *Bungakkai* (文学界),<sup>34</sup> i.e. "Literary World". In that time, he also frequently wrote poetry, short stories, plays, featuring nature with folklore motifs in an attempt to describe and explain the culture in which he grew up.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Sakurai, "Kenzaburō Ōe: The Early Years," 370.

<sup>31</sup> In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Mishima often glorified militarism and masculinity, both of which are common themes in his work such as in his short story and later a movie *Yūkoku* (憂國) i.e. "Patriotism" where Mishima himself plays the role of an officer.

<sup>32</sup> Sakurai, "Kenzaburō Ōe: The Early Years," 371.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 371.

<sup>34</sup> Winkelhöferová, *Slovník japonské literatury*, 229.

<sup>35</sup> Ōe et al., "An Interview with Kenzaburo Ōe: The Myth of My Own Village." 135.

Thanks to his rough literary style at the start of his literary career, Ōe was called “The Students’ Author” as he expressed ideas which correlated with the way of thinking of the leftist students.<sup>36</sup> The students of that time were most likely going through an existential crisis as their whole world was upturned, and the values they were taught to uphold were destroyed as the occupational army remodelled them.

The literary style of Ōe Kenzaburō has been influenced not only by his childhood during the Second World War but also by the literary works written by authors such as T. S. Eliot, E. A. Poe or W. H. Auden, or Masaoka Shiki all of whom he later quoted in his fiction. During his boyhood, Ōe had been virtually devouring poetry by thousands of poems a year.<sup>37</sup>

In his early years as an author, his writing style was fierce and provocative as he created a dialogue with his readers through constant confrontation with morale, human values, and decency. This writing style can be observed even in one of his earliest, but one of the most notable, short stories called *Shiiku* (飼育), i.e. *Prize Stock* or *The Catch* for which he was awarded the Akutagawa Prize<sup>38</sup> in 1958. This particular short story is centred around a small village in the mountains where the inhabitants are in charge of imprisoning an American soldier, despite none of them having seen a person of such visage before. Since the children are in charge of getting him food, they are treating him as if they were keeping a strange pet. The children do not think that this “strange creature” could have the same level of intellect as them.<sup>39</sup> As it is mentioned<sup>40</sup> the motif of a small village in the mountains is a recurring one as can, for example, be seen in his short story *Shiiku* or in his first-ever novel named *Memushiri kouchi* (芽むしり仔撃ち), i.e. *Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids*.

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<sup>36</sup> Ōe et al., "An Interview with Kenzaburo Ōe: The Myth of My Own Village," 135.

<sup>37</sup> Sakurai, "Kenzaburō Ōe: The Early Years," 371.

<sup>38</sup> Akutagawa Prize is awarded to best new authors.

<sup>39</sup> Ōe, "Chov," 32.

<sup>40</sup> Wilson and Niikuni, "Kenzaburo Ōe: An Imaginative Anarchist with a Heart," 344.

### 3 Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids

*Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids* was written in 1958 as Ōe's first novel ever and what makes it unique is the point of view in which the author chose to portray the living situation in a small mountain village in Japan at the end of the Second World War. The location of the village is not specified, but based on the description of the village, it is possible to assume that the fictional village was modelled to resemble the mountain village on the island of Shikoku, where Ōe spent most of his childhood.

#### 3.1 Plot overview

The author presents a story of a boy and his younger brother at the end of the Second World War, who is along with a group of young boys of various backgrounds being evacuated from reformatory to a remote mountain village to seek shelter and work. Upon their arrival, the villagers are in a state of distress as they and the military police are searching the forest nearby for an escapee army cadet. The boys are overall mistreated and used as an unpaid workforce, which is mainly tasked with burying decaying dead animals found in and around the village.

The children continue with their daily tasks with little to no defiance, yet whenever they raise a question as to what is killing the animals, they are either faced with silence or insults accompanied by threats of physical punishment. After a relentless questioning, the Blacksmith, who is the primary supervisor of the boys while in the village, let a piece of information about what the villagers usually do when an epidemic breaks out in the village, slip. He says that whenever such a thing happens, the villagers flee to one of the neighbouring villages which will take care of them until the outbreak dies out, as their village would, in turn, do the same.

In a few days one of the boys, who has been sick for a long time dies, and upon his death, the boys are locked with him in a shrine. As they try to get out while calling the villagers, they hear them escaping the village with as many valuables and as much of food as they could possibly carry. At one point, the Blacksmith comes to scold the children for their shouting, and as he is leaving, he forgets to lock the door. Two boys try to give a chase but ultimately fail as they know that if the villagers wanted to take them along with them, they would not have locked them in that shrine in the first place.

From that point on the children live in the mountain village alone, and the first thing they do is plundering the villagers' homes for food. Unfortunately, the villagers take all

livestock along with them in the night of their escape, and all they leave are the non-perishable, canned and dried food, rice, and scraps. Still, those scraps are more than the children have been fed in days.

While they are settling in, some children find a young girl in one of the buildings, hiding with the corpse of her deceased mother, who presumably dies of the epidemic. The girl is distrustful towards the other children at first, but as the main character continues visiting her and bringing her food, she slowly warms up and eventually, her mother is buried with the help of a Korean boy named Li from a neighbouring Korean village. Li is the sole resident of the otherwise abandoned village whose people leave with the other villagers in fear of the epidemic. Li stays behind because, just like the girl, his parent dies, and he needs time to mourn his loss. Li gradually becomes closer with the rest and eventually introduces them to the escapee soldier who has been hiding in the Korean village.

The children continue living in the village without any specific goal, other than to survive, while the main character tries to keep everybody calm and silence any talk about the epidemic. They spend their time playing games, singing, fighting, and the younger brother of the main character even gets himself a pet dog, who would later prove to be deadly. The small dog, who the narrator's younger brother is so fond of, bites the young girl, who then grows sick and has to endure days of suffering before she ultimately passes. After the girl's death, panic breaks out as this is, according to the children, a clear sign of the epidemic. Children are screaming that the dog must be sick with rabies and so has to be killed, and so one of the boys smashes the dog's head. The dog's death is too much for the younger brother, and he runs away from the rest, crying and mourning the death of his pet.

The villagers return the next morning, and as they see what has become of their homes, they round up the remaining children and start threatening them with violence and even death. Their arguments being logical fallacies which they think the children would be too young to understand, which provokes some of the boys to defiance. Nevertheless, their resistance is soon squashed with even more death threats and aggression. Further intensifying the situation by mauling of the escapee soldier whom the children see walking with his abdomen ripped and his guts dangling as he walks accompanied by villagers with bamboo spears. The only one who keeps fighting is the narrator, and so he is given a choice to leave the village immediately with a promise that the villagers will

not harm him. However, as the narrator runs away through the forest, it is evident that he is being hunted just as the escapee soldier is at the beginning of the novel. The story ends with the narrator running away in the dark forest with the sounds of villagers chasing after him in the distance.

What this novel conveys is the shift of the mental state in a young child who has been continuously betrayed by the people who are supposed to shield him and others from the horrors of the war, but instead they treat him worse than animal and abandon him. The boy comes to the village a bit rough around the edges but is by no means hateful towards the adults. Despite that, he slowly changes not because they mistreat him, but because he has to watch silently as the people, who are supposed to protect them, leave them all to die.

### 3.2 Literary style

The novel *Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids* is segmented into ten chapters, the titles of which indicate the main plot of each one. The novel is not perceived as a naturalistic work as such; however, it may contain naturalistic elements, which will be further analysed.

#### 3.2.1 Themes

One of the major themes implemented in the novel *Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids* is the theme of isolation, which also plays an essential part of the plot along with the themes such as the disappointment in the adult villagers and the plague. The children are abandoned by the adult villagers in the plague-stricken village, and in their isolation, the children begin to form their society with the narrator becoming their unproclaimed leader.

Disappointment in adults is perhaps the most important theme in the novel as it seeps through the whole story and affects all the children, not only the ones from the reformatory. The first observable instance of such disappointment is when the narrator had been left by his father in the reformatory, opposite to many other children who had been picked up by their parents because of the evacuation. When the narrator's father appears with his younger brother, the narrator hopes that it is to take him away to safety. The narrator's father has instead decided to use the reformatory's mass evacuation to make sure his younger son is safely evacuated into a mountain village. "*I was bitterly disappointed.*"<sup>41</sup> is what the narrator thought when he had found out that it did not matter to his father, but the disappointment did not include his younger brother, whom he hugged right away.

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<sup>41</sup> Ōe, "Arival," 27.

The children are let down by the villagers on numerous occasions. As they arrive at the village, they are being locked up, used for work with potentially deadly corpses, abandoned, refused and beaten. All from the hands of somebody who is supposed to give them protection and care at the time of war.

Another major theme introduced is the village, which is cut off from the rest of the world and with that becomes its microcosmic map of society at the end of the Second World War. The atmosphere in the village could represent the state of Japan and its citizens who are frustrated, afraid for their life and willing to do whatever it takes to protect themselves.

The villagers treat the reformatory children as something filthy, not worthy of any care or compassion, and they proceed to threaten the children with violence at any given opportunity. The Koreans are not treated with much more respect than the children; they are treated as low-class citizens and as a cheap workforce. The results of such treatment can be observed in the state of said villages as the Japanese village may be impoverished, but when the narrator describes the Korean village for the first time, he says that the houses are “(...) *like sheds, even poorer and with lower eaves than the village houses.*”<sup>42</sup> The difference in wealth and treatment the Korean citizens receive from the Japanese correlates with the class differences between the Japanese and the citizens of other nations.

The theme of criminality is a significant component in the story since it is used as a means to divide the villagers and the reformatory boys even further. The criminal status of the boys makes the villagers prejudiced towards them and does not let the reformatory children change their minds about what kind of people they are. The theme also introduces a plethora of flawed characters who among others include a child prostitute and a stabber.

Plague is the central theme presented in the novel as it serves as a tool to incite fear into the hearts of everybody and is the sole reason for the villagers' abandonment of the children. The fear of the plague is further strengthened by the fact that while the source of the plague is not known, the animals keep dying and it is only a matter of time until people start dying too. The descriptions of the dead animals are a constant reminder of death spreading through the village.

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<sup>42</sup> Ōe, "Solidarity of the Abandoned," 105.

*“Dogs, cats, fieldmice, goats, even foals; scores of animal carcasses were piled up forming a small hill, quietly and patiently decomposing. The beast’s teeth were clenched, their pupils melting and their legs stiff. (...)”*<sup>43</sup>

The excerpt above describes a pile of dead bodies with the burial with which the boys are tasked in the second chapter of the novel. It also shows the analytic and systematic style of description which the author chooses since it first starts with the description of the pile as a whole and then proceeds to the description of individual animals and their body parts. It is important to note that the theme of the plague and the death and decay associated with it are some of the most commonly known themes of naturalism as a literary style.

Lust, or the lack thereof, plays a significant role as a theme in the novel since it can be observed many times in the actions and dialogues of the narrator and his friend Minami on separate occasions. Minami is first to show such desires in the first chapter as he lusts after army cadets they meet on the way to the village. For Minami, the lust does not stand alone but is accompanied by the possibility of gaining something from the intercourse, whether it may be money, favour or food. Lust in the case of the narrator is shown mainly towards a girl who has been left behind in the village, and it manifests itself mainly in the form of failed intercourse attempts with the girl. The theme of lust mostly functions as a joyful distraction from the brutality of the group’s situation or the indirect product of it.

The theme of nudity is treated as indecent and obscene; however, it is not scowled upon by the narrator as he mostly describes it with a hint of joy as it is frequently accompanied by arousal.

*“(...) Their penises, bathed in the sunshine, slowly grew erect, slowly grew limp, then grew erect again. The autonomous motion of their genitals, without the rude vigour of desire or the calm of fulfilment, went on for a long time under everyone’s eyes. (...)”*<sup>44</sup>

The excerpt above shows the narrator's stance towards the obscene playtime of the rest of the boys as he clearly describes the state of their genitalia, but he only deems it not interesting.

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<sup>43</sup> Ōe, "The First Little Task," 52.

<sup>44</sup> Ōe, "Solidarity of the Abandoned," 91.

Another theme in the novel is the hunt, which is introduced in the first chapter and is observed through the eyes of the narrator. The position, from which the narrator describes the hunt changes three times, from the position of an outsider to the position of the hunter and lastly to the position of the prey. The hunt from the position of an outsider feels distant, yet the narrator sympathises with the villagers who have been forced to hunt the escapee cadet for three days and deems the hunt to be an unpleasant business.<sup>45</sup> The narrator's feelings regarding the hunt shifted with his role regarding it, as a hunter, the hunt is no longer grim; it is a means of celebration, a symbol of freedom. During the hunt, the narrator bonds with his little brother over the brother's catching and killing a pheasant which marks one of the few happy and carefree moments the two share in the novel. The happy feelings towards the hunt then change in the last chapter as the narrator changes from the hunter to the prey as he runs through the woods from the villagers who seek to catch him and kill him.

While considering the themes represented in the novel *Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids* only the theme of isolation could be defined as a part of Japanese naturalism for the reason being that it belongs into one of the three thematic groups of Japanese naturalism. However, if the novel were to be considered from the point of the general naturalism, the themes included such as lust, nudity, plague and criminality would indicate that the novel could be a naturalistic one.

### 3.2.2 Language

The novel *Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids* is written from the point of view of a teenage boy from an all-boys reformatory, and thus the language reflects his situation and life experience.<sup>46</sup> The dialogue related by the narrator usually consists of two to three participants, including the narrator and concerns the characters standing closest to the narrator. Therefore, the novel covers only a small portion of all possible dialogues and thus relates only highly subjective narrative. The omission of information is also present in the dialogues of characters included in the narrative. The narrator omits how many people there are in the group of boys from the reformatory and does not mention anyone's real names as well as altogether omitting all the boys from the reformatory excluding himself, his younger brother and Minami.

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<sup>45</sup> Ōe, "Arival," 37.

<sup>46</sup> In this chapter I will be describing the language solely of the English translation.



The English translation of the novel utilises a relatively low level of language which is used to indicate eighth-grade education level of the characters as well as their social standing. This fact can be observed in the boys' dialogues as they often use contracted forms of verbs such as "They're" or "They'll." However, vulgarisms such as "They're really fucking about."<sup>47</sup> are seldom used, and if so, they are used in the time of great mental frustration and distress. It is essential to mention the derogatory names the adults use while referring to the reformatory children as the villagers call them "vermin"<sup>48</sup> on numerous occasions and the escapee soldier calls them "scum"<sup>49</sup> when he disagrees with their opinion. Such derogatory words are mainly used to indicate that the reformatory boys are of lower social standing than the rest or indicate that according to the speaker they have no morals, or in the case of the villagers that they are something less than animals.

Another specific use of language can be observed when the narrator describes the decaying animal carcasses piled into heaps which he and his companions are forced to bury.

*"Dogs, cats, fieldmice, goats, even foals; scores of animals carcasses were piled up forming a small hill, quietly and patiently decomposing. The beast's teeth were clenched their pupils melting, their legs stiff. Their dead flesh and blood had turned into thick mucus making the yellow withered grass and mud around sticky, and — strangely full of life and holding out against the fierce onslaught of decay — there were countless ears."*<sup>50</sup>

In the excerpt above, it is possible to discern the analytical approach to the description of decay which goes from the large parts (animals) to the miniscule details such as the carcasses' pupils melting. Such details would not be possible to see unless the narrator got close enough to be almost face to face with the dead animal in question. Such descriptions are abundant in the novel and for the most part are concerned with the same theme as is used in the excerpt above, decay.

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<sup>47</sup> Öe, "Return of the Villagers, Slaughter of the Soldier," 167.

<sup>48</sup> Öe, "The First Little Task," 45.

<sup>49</sup> Öe, "The Hunt and the Festival in the Snow," 145.

<sup>50</sup> Öe, "The First Little Task," 52.

A figure of speech which is abundant in the novel is the simile such as “*We were shivering like dogs.*”<sup>51</sup> or “*They treat us like rats.*”<sup>52</sup> or “*She bowed silently, nervous as a bird.*”<sup>53</sup> The predominant trait in all of the examples is that humans are compared to animals, which is precisely how the villagers treat the children. This treatment is then translated to how the children view themselves.

The use of language, as well as the narrative style, fits the definition of *shishōsetsu* as it implements a relatively low level of language, which is based on a style of speech that a young person who is not highly educated would use, and because of the narrative style concerns only a small number of characters. Even though Japanese naturalists have used the literary form of *shishōsetsu*, it had also been used by many contemporary authors who cover a plethora of other genres. Therefore, it is impossible to conclude that *Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids* is a naturalistic novel based on its use of language. However, the analytical approach to descriptions of decaying animal carcasses can be considered to be a naturalistic element.

### 3.2.3 Characters

When reading the novel *Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids* one is introduced to the group of social misfits, who are to be this novel’s protagonists. The main assembly of antiheroic characters include among others a criminal, an outsider, a scapegoat, and a freak; also all except one remain nameless and for the most part, defined by how the outside world views them. Besides the children from the reformatory, the author also introduces their warden, a Blacksmith, a doctor, a girl whose mother dies from the epidemy, Korean boy named Li, a runaway soldier and a mayor of the village.

#### 3.2.3.1 Main Character the Criminal

The narrator, who is also the protagonist of the story remains nameless, and the reader does not know much about how he got to the reformatory, aside from the fact that it is his father who informs the police on him, until the very end of the story when it is revealed that this is not the first time he is sent to the reformatory. When he is sent there for the first time, it is because of a stabbing incident with an older student. However, he manages to run away and lives for a short while with a girl in a toy factory; after a while, the police catches him and brings him back home. The reason for his second sentencing

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<sup>51</sup> Ōe, "Arrival," 34.

<sup>52</sup> Ōe, "Arrival," 24.

<sup>53</sup> Ōe, "Solidarity of the Abandoned," 92.

is not mentioned; nevertheless, he may have been sent there to continue his previous sentence.

The narrator may have been sentenced as a criminal and sent to the reformatory, but he also shows his more affectionate and caring side on an occasion as he kept bringing the young girl food as she mourns her dead mother, even though the mother is contaminated and he risked getting infected.

*“‘Hey, you, eat this; hey.’*

*She bowed silently, nervous as a bird. I spoke again, angry at the slow stupid tone of my voice.*

*‘Your mother’s dead, isn’t she? Come on, eat.’*<sup>54</sup>

This excerpt shows that even though the narrator has been sentenced as a child criminal, he is still able to show compassion to somebody he barely knows. Another time when the narrator shows his love is on a similar occasion as he offers to bring back his brother’s coat from the corpse of their dead friend as his brother is too afraid to do so even though he is freezing in the cold winter night. The narrator has to face the judgement from the rest of their group since he has to manhandle the body of their friend who has died from an unknown illness and has been vomiting profusely for some time before his passing.

*“‘I will get it for you’ I said and stood up. And he followed me promptly, as if afraid to be left behind.*

*To get my brother’s green coat, I had to push and move the dead boy’s heavy body quite roughly. As I pulled the coat off the dead boy, who swayed unsteadily and turned over, I felt my comrades’ eyes in the darkness all over me. But there was nothing else I could do.’*<sup>55</sup>

The passage also shows that the narrator is numb to the idea of death as he treats his friend’s body without mercy as he pulls his body enough for it to turn over. The dead boy might have been a sickly starving child; nonetheless, the force required to move a dead body is still significant.

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<sup>54</sup> Öe, "Solidarity of the Abandoned," 92.

<sup>55</sup> Öe, "The Plague’s Onslaught and the Villager’s Exodus," 66.

The narrator also shows his violent side via threats of force which he follows through with only a few times and which he says only to keep the other children from panicking and spreading rumours about the epidemic in the village. “‘*You don’t ever mention the plague again,*’ I said to Minami in a hoarse voice. ‘*If they start bawling because of you, I’ll make you regret it.*’”<sup>56</sup>

When considering everything there is to know about the narrator it is possible to conclude that he is but a child who has been pushed to the limits and forced to go through traumatic events no child should go through. The main character is violent at times, but he also takes responsibility as one of the unproclaimed leaders of the group and tries his best to keep everybody safe. He has done acts of great violence in the past, but he is not entirely evil, he is just a broken, angry child who is mad at the world. The anger is not entirely unfounded as he has to deal with contempt of others for a long time. The narrator might be a sentenced criminal, but it is he who stands up and resists the villagers for the sake of the reformatory children even though he is most likely aware that his efforts will be in vain, which they ultimately are.

### 3.2.3.2 *Younger Brother the Outsider*

As little as there is to know about the narrator, the information about his little brother is even more scarce. There is no mention of his name, moreover only the information about how he got to the reformatory. He is brought there by their father since the father thought the group evacuation to be the safest option for his younger son. Based on his dialogue and action; he seems to be an innocent young boy who loves his older brother, adores animals of any kind and does not understand the situation which is painfully evident to the other children.

In chapter four, when the villagers run away from the plagued village, it is the younger brother who cries and does not understand that they have been abandoned. In this scene, the younger brother is used by the author as a trigger which helps to escalate the situation even further by stressing the other children and aggravating Minami, who retaliates.

“‘*Why? Why will they shoot?*’ asked my brother, his eyes full of tears.  
*His voice quavering childishly. ‘Pick us off...?’*  
*‘We aren’t even enemies,’ said another of the group tearfully, prompted*  
*by my brother’s agitation. ‘We’re not enemies.’*”

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<sup>56</sup> Ōe, "Closure," 80.

*'To cut us off,' Minami shouted. 'Stop whining. They want to cut us off. Understand?''*<sup>57</sup>

The excerpt above displays the younger brother's childish lack of understanding for their situation as well as a lack of mental strength. It also indicates that he is not used to being treated with contempt by adults since he does not understand why they would leave them behind.

The younger brother is also highly susceptible to the influence of anybody he admires or who is older than him. This tendency can be seen, among other cases, when he ponders on a name for his new dog whose name changes twice in the novel. The younger brother decides to name his dog whatever the people he admires choose. The abandoned girl chooses the first name, but once the escapee soldier suggests another one, the younger brother decides to change it without a second thought.

The childish nature of the narrator's brother proves itself to be lethal as he deliberately hides the fact that his pet dog is most likely sick with the plague. He puts all his friends in danger and ultimately kills his brother's lover with his negligence. After the dog's sickness has been revealed and the dog is killed, he runs away and presumably dies in the woods as his backpack is found floating in the river by the villagers when they are searching the woods for the runaway soldier.

When considering the behaviour of the narrator's little brother, it is apparent that he is a very young child who is not mature enough to mentally withstand the brutality and stress of the group's situation. His character serves mainly as a reminder of childhood innocence which has already been lost in the voice of the narrator and Minami.

### 3.2.3.3 *Minami the Freak*

The real name of this teenage delinquent is unknown; nevertheless, when he is introduced in the very first chapter of the book, he is referred to as Minami<sup>58</sup> because of his constant longing for the south where he plans to run away on his numerous escape attempts. Although his infatuation with the southern countries earned him Minami as a cruel nickname, and the other children laughed at him for it, *"I was going to get away to the port through the wood during the night. I was going to board a ship and go south."*<sup>59</sup> Minami embraces his nickname, and his confidence has earned him respect from the rest

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<sup>57</sup> Ōe, "Closure," 79.

<sup>58</sup> Minami means "south" in Japanese.

<sup>59</sup> Ōe, "Arrival," 23.

of the group. Minami even confidently displays his sexual promiscuity as whenever he sees somebody he finds attractive he promptly points out his desire to sleep with them and by doing so, gaining something from it, whether it is food or a favour. In the first chapter, for instance, they meet a group of soldiers who are looking for an escapee while the rest of the delinquents watches with admiration, Minami is aroused by them.

*“If they wanted, I’d sleep with them any time for a handful of hard tack. Even if my piles and I got all swollen and bunged up.’*

*He heaved a sigh, saliva collecting at the corners of his pouting lips, and gazed with shining glazed-over eyes at the cadets’ strongly rounded, slightly splayed buttocks.”*<sup>60</sup>

The excerpt above shows that Minami is willing to go through a large amount of pain if it means him satisfying his sexual urges and maybe gaining something by doing so. His sexuality is probably also the reason for his sentence as he mentions that he has been in the middle of sexual intercourse with a cadet when the police catch him and ultimately sentence him.<sup>61</sup> As mentioned above, his relations with men have left Minami with piles which he often scratches through his clothes and in one scene he has a younger boy put an ointment on them. In the fourth chapter, there is also a mention of Minami getting sexually aroused whenever he commits a crime. In the scene where the group plunders the village houses for supplies, the narrator mentions that “*he (Minami) was usually proud of the tremendous erection he got whenever he committed a crime.*”<sup>62</sup>

When the villagers abandon their homes and leave the children behind, it is Minami who, along with the narrator, follows them, and he is the one who continually curses the villagers behind their backs as he is too afraid to do it openly. The mistreatment he has already endured makes him numb to much of the physical punishments, which in turn makes him bolder in voicing his anger.

Nonetheless, when Minami curses at the adults, he makes sure that only children are around when he does so. This tendency sometimes leads to Minami misdirecting his frustration and anger towards the narrator’s younger brother. Minami is also the one who kills the puppy that the younger brother of the narrator keeps. He does not take the puppy

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<sup>60</sup> Ōe, "Arival," 31.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>62</sup> Ōe, "Closure," 83.

away to spare the younger brother some pain; he does it right in front of him. When the narrator's brother sees it, he runs away and ultimately dies.

*“‘Liar,’ voices rebuked him. ‘Everyone’ll die because of your dog.’*

*Minami ran out of the circle of accusation and pulled up the green oak branch that the cooking pot was hanging from. Everyone was taken aback, and the circle widened.*

*‘Stop it,’ my brother shouted in terror. ‘If you hit my Leo. I’ll never forgive you.’*

*But Minami advanced implacably, and whistled sharply. Slipping through my brother’s hands as he hastily bent down, the dog came forward, lured by the whistle. (...) The oak branch came down, and the dog collapsed on the snow with a thud.”<sup>63</sup>*

Minami continues to voice his dismay towards the villagers, and he is the one who stays with the narrator the longest when the group is forced to choose between beating accompanied by starvation or keeping their silence about the villagers abandoning them. However, he too caves in in the end, and by doing so, he betrays his friend.

When considering the character of Minami, it is impossible to say whether he is entirely immoral, he is a conflicted teenage boy who plays alongside the other children on the one hand, but also finds pleasure in the thrill of crime on the other. Minami tries to stand for what he considered right, with the twisted view of what is good and what is evil he has but is struck down by the authority just as he has always been. The character of Minami mainly serves as a dynamic opposite to the character of the narrator's younger brother to escalate stressful situations, as is shown in the text excerpt above.

#### 3.2.3.4 *The Blacksmith*

The first time the reader is introduced to the character of the village Blacksmith is when the children meet with the military police and when they are then offered a ride directly to the village on their truck. The Blacksmith is already in the back of the truck sitting on this oldfashioned big-boned bicycle and is described as a short, middle-aged man with bloodshot eyes. The Blacksmith acts as if he does not see the group of young boys, but now and then he looks their way and based on the narrator's account, he is

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<sup>63</sup> Ōe, "Sudden Outbreak of Disease and Panic," 152.

judging them.<sup>64</sup> Based on this information, it can be deduced that the Blacksmith knows who the children are and where they are headed. This assumption is further supported by the fact that on the day of the group's arrival, the mayor tells the warden that they have been ready for them for three days already. At first, the Blacksmith treats them with kindness; he laughs alongside them when they are building a campfire and tells the narrator's brother about his work and about how he built his bicycle.

*"You saw my bicycle? I rebuilt the pedals, made them stronger."*

(...)

*'I didn't know Blacksmiths made bicycles,' said my brother.*

*'Of course you didn't,' said the Blacksmith, as he laid his bicycle down on the black earth (...) 'No one knows that,' he added.'*<sup>65</sup>

However, the Blacksmith's behaviour undergoes a striking change when the warden departs to get another group of children. Once the children arrive at the village and stand before the temple in which they will be staying, the major makes it very clear as to how the children will be treated and the villagers proceed to lock them in the temple from outside so that they will not be able to escape. The next day the Blacksmith, who had been friendly to the children before, arrives with a gun and makes sure that when he supervises the group, they walk in front of him so that they are not able to attack him from behind.

In the scene where the group is tasked with burying a pile of dead animal bodies, the Blacksmith shows the reformatory children just how disposable they are when he sees a village child holding a dead infected rat.

*"You fool. Don't touch it! Remember?" shouted the Blacksmith, the veins standing out on his throat. 'Go home and wash your hands.'*

*Trembling the boy flicked away the baby rat away and ran up to the village. Bewildered, we watched the Blacksmith follow the village child with his eyes, his face burning with righteous anger.*

*'Go and pick that up,' he said stifling with anger.'*<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Öe, "Arrival," 33.

<sup>65</sup> Öe, "Arrival," 36.

<sup>66</sup> Öe, "The First Little Task," 53-54.



The author here makes it clear that the Blacksmith does not think that the reformatory children are as valuable as the village ones are. It is all right for them to touch the infected animals or die because they are criminals. The Blacksmith does not care about the children as individuals or their crimes; he treats them as scum solely because they come from the reformatory. The character of the Blacksmith is one among others who are used to define the group as criminals because it is their behaviour towards the children, which serves as a constant reminder of their otherness.

### 3.2.3.5 *The Mayor*

The character of the mayor is used twice in the same way; he makes two speeches in both of which he threatens the group of children. The first time the mayor makes this kind of speech is in the second chapter when the children arrive at the village.

*“Anyone caught stealing, starting fires or making a row will be beaten to death by the villagers. Don’t forget that you’re vermin here. Even so, we’ll shelter and feed you. Always remember that in this village you’re only useless vermin.”*<sup>67</sup>

In this speech, he makes it clear that the children from the reformatory will not be treated as human beings, quite the opposite; the children will be treated worse than animals, which does not quite correspond with what he says to the children’s warden. The mayor tells the warden that they will treat the children according to their actions; however, here he already regards them with contempt without giving them a chance to prove themselves to him and other villagers.

The mayor’s second speech which is directed towards the children is in the last chapter of the novel after the villagers return to the village as they think that the epidemy has cleared up and the village is safe once again. The speech follows a series of slurs and accusations of the boys and is accompanied by threats of death for the crimes the children have committed in the villagers’ absence.

*“Do you realize, we’ve been thinking about your punishment for a long time. You brats. Do you realise what we’re going to do with you, you lot that never come straight out with anything.”*<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Öe, "The First Little Task," 45.

<sup>68</sup> Öe, "Trial and Banishment," 178.

This part of the speech functions to set up the stage and to frighten the children enough to make them compliant to the villagers' demands. It is followed by a sudden change of tone, which is supposed to make the villagers come out of the situation as a forgiving kindhearted people. Although it is so that the villagers will not get into trouble with the authorities.

*“Tomorrow morning, the warden from your reformatory will arrive bringing the rest of the boys; then your evacuation period will begin officially,” (...)* *“We won’t report your crimes to the warden. Instead of that, we’ve something to tell you as well. We’ll say you’ve been leading normal lives since you arrived in the village. There was no plague in this village. The villagers didn’t take flight. (...)”*<sup>69</sup>

In this excerpt, the author shows how little the villagers think of the children because the time they choose to return indicates that they only return to silence the children before they tell everybody what has happened. The tone which the mayor, or the headman as he is referred to in this chapter, chooses also indicates that the headman knows he has no case against the boys and if the children tell anybody, they will most likely not get into any trouble at all.

From the examples above, it is possible to conclude that the character of the mayor serves the sole purpose of defining the disapproving view which the outside world holds towards the reformatory children. The view that is not completely unfounded, as the children got into the reformatory for a reason, however, they use this view as an excuse to vent their frustration from the ongoing war on the children who have do not try to harm the villagers in any way.

#### 3.2.3.6 *The Girl*

The character of the young mourning village girl is introduced in the fourth chapter of the story; however, she appears only seldom, and her character is not fully fleshed out since she hardly ever speaks and thus is mostly defined by her relationship with the narrator to whom she plays a role of a would-be lover.

Nonetheless, the character of the young mourning girl is the only one who, in the narrator's eyes, goes through observable physical changes. She slowly changes from a

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<sup>69</sup> Ōe, "Trial and Banishment," 180.

dirty girl with no apparent emotion in her face “(...) *filthy and hardly beautiful*”<sup>70</sup> to a fragile and bird-like appearance “*The nape of her neck, rounded and pliant as a pigeon's back*”<sup>71</sup> and then becomes a grotesque mixture of the two as she grows sick “*The girl's smooth dry sex, like a summer flower, her arse soiled with excrement, her face, small and red from the fever (...)*”<sup>72</sup>

One character-defining scene for the girl is when she makes the narrator go and try to bring the villagers back as she begs him to do so while sobbing hysterically. “*Bring back the villagers,*”<sup>73</sup> She begs him over and over as the narrator tells her that he will most likely get killed by the villagers if he goes to them. The girl's behaviour here indicates not only childishness but also a certain degree of selfishness as the girl is not willing to get in danger and get the villagers herself. Instead, she sends a boy who is attracted to her and who is willing to suffer in her stead.

On the whole, the character of the young girl is most likely used as a temporary distraction in the form of a love interest, who is instrumental in the exploration of the narrator's sexual urges. As well as being instrumental in the disassociation of the narrator and his younger brother as the narrator chooses to spend more and more time with his newfound love instead of his young brother.

### 3.2.3.7 *Li the Korean Boy*

The character of a Korean boy named Li is the only one who is defined by his lineage as all Koreans are regarded as second-class citizens by the villagers. The character of Li is first introduced in the fourth chapter where he is referred to as the Korean boy, and he and the narrator have a brawl over a sack of rice from the boys' plundering of the village houses. Li is described as having a strong body odour, heavy with a round childish face, thick fleshy lips and narrow gentle eyes,<sup>74</sup> just a few moments after the brawl ends which sets his character up to be a friendly giant of sorts who fights only to survive as he has also been abandoned and left with no resources.

Li and the group of the reformatory boys bond as they see Li burying his father alone and offer him some help and are in turn inspired by him to bury their dead. Throughout their stay in isolation, the relationship between Li and the group grows stronger, and Li even serves as a bridge of sorts that helps the group get along with the

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<sup>70</sup> Ōe, "Closure," 86.

<sup>71</sup> Ōe, "Love," 121.

<sup>72</sup> Ōe, "The Return of the Villagers and the Slaughter of the Soldier," 159.

<sup>73</sup> Ōe, "Love," 114.

<sup>74</sup> Ōe, "Closure," 84.

girl, who is likewise left behind by the villagers. Nonetheless, when the villagers return, he is forced to obey them, and by doing that to betray his newfound friends as the rest of the Koreans will face heavy consequences if he does not.

#### 3.2.3.8 *The Warden*

The character of the warden appears only in the first chapter of the novel, and when the narrator describes his actions; he speaks of the warden with high regard. The warden treats the group extremely strictly, but he does not mistreat them needlessly nor call them names as the rest of the adults they meet do. When the warden handles the two escapees, he gives them a “lenient sentence”<sup>75</sup> of one strike each and one-day fast as the narrator called it.

*“(...) since the way he hit them was not like a warden, or was more like what we regarded as a fine manly trait, we treated him as part of our group’s integrity.”*<sup>76</sup>

The excerpt above shows that the narrator does not regard a slap on the face as something loathsome, but as something necessary to keep the morale. The warden in the narrator’s testimony serves as an example of what he and the rest of the group regard as an adult worth respecting as they obey his orders without protest and who in turn respected them to some degree as he does not excessively degrade them.

#### 3.2.3.9 *The Escapee Cadet*

The existence of an escapee cadet is revealed in the first chapter of the novel, as in the time the group reaches the village, the villagers and the army police are in the middle of a hunt for the said escapee cadet. However, the first time he is introduced in person is by Li in the fifth chapter since he has been hiding in the Korean village the whole time but has been left behind when the villagers flee from the plague. The children are filled with expectations upon meeting the soldier; although the state in which they find him causes them a great disappointment.

*“The warm knot of expectations in my breast melted and bitter disappointment soaked through my body. The man had none of the sparkle, the lustre on an army cadet. He didn’t have the small tight bum in uniform*

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<sup>75</sup> Ōe, "Arival," 24.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 24.

*which excited desire, the brawny neck and bluish clean-shaven chin. Instead, he was glumly silent, showing a dark tired expression on a miserable shrivelled face of uncertain age. And instead of the sensual, totally obscene costume of war, he was wearing a work jacket.*"<sup>77</sup>

The cadet's demeanour in this passage is used as a direct opposite to the visage of the attractive and honourable cadets seen in the first chapter whom the group venerated. He is not brave nor handsome, and he has not chosen to join the army. "*I didn't want to go to war.*" (...) "*I didn't want to kill people.*"<sup>78</sup> However, the soldier is still disgruntled by the narrator's impassivity when the conversation between him and the narrator in the eighth chapter reaches the topic of the war's outcome.

*"Well? You're silent, but don't you feel disgraced by defeat?"*

*'It's something they're doing, that the guys outside carrying guns who cut us off are doing,' I said calmly. 'What's it got to do with us?'*

*'You're scum, being so indifferent to your defeat' the soldier said insistently.*

*'You're the one who ran away 'cos you were afraid of dying,' I said 'And we're the scum?''<sup>79</sup>*

This passage shows not only the remainder of the soldier's patriotism but also his hypocrisy as he reprimands the boys for not caring if Japan wins or loses, but at the same time, he does not care enough to fight himself. With this, it is possible to conclude that the character of the escapee cadet in this novel serves as a stand-in for Japan's broken ideals and pride.

### 3.2.3.10 *The Doctor*

The character of the doctor appears only twice in the novel, once in the second chapter and the second time in the sixth chapter. The first time the doctor appears is when one of the boys is gravely sick, and the doctor is called to examine him. The doctor then draws a simple map for the narrator to come the next day to pick up medicine for his sick friend to the neighbouring village. This appearance does not say anything at all about the doctor's character; however, some elements of the doctor's character are discernible in

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<sup>77</sup> Ōe, "Solidarity of the Abandoned," 105-106.

<sup>78</sup> Ōe, "Love," 112.

<sup>79</sup> Ōe, "The Sudden Outbreak of Disease and Panic," 145.

chapter eight as the narrator comes to him to beg for the villagers to take back the girl they have left behind.

*“You, what did you come here for? If you get violent, I’ll call someone’*  
(...)

*‘How many of you have contracted the disease? How many of you are left alive?’ he asked. (...)*

*‘We’re not ill; the girl is fine too. There’s no plague.’ (...)*

*‘Don’t speak so loud,’ said the doctor. ‘Who said I’d take a look at you.’*  
(...)

*‘Don’t be impudent,’ he said, suddenly showing anger. ‘Go back; don’t come over to this side again.’ (...)*

*‘Go back!’ he said. ‘If the villagers find out, you’ll pay for it. You’ll get me into trouble. Go back!’”<sup>80</sup>*

The doctor is saying all that while the narrator begs him over and over and tries to convince him that there is no plague in the village and everybody is still healthy, which is true. From his behaviour, it is possible to deduce that he does not believe the children, and even if he does, he does not care if they are healthy or not as long as it does not affect him. He disregards his duty as a doctor and instead opts for hostile behaviour towards the children, and by doing so, he becomes one more character whose behaviour defines how the children are viewed by others.

#### 3.2.4 Use of space

The point of view of a child who does not fully comprehend the full extent of the situation the child is in is typical for Ōe’s early literary works and is essential for this story as it intensifies the sense of confusion and makes the reader even more inclined to sympathise with the narrator and his friends. However, this type of narrative includes a problem in the form of the unreliable narrator who might not relate all events truthfully or might omit details or events. This type of narrative is highly subjective, and thus it is unlikely that the narrator can relate all the information which is also apparent in the way the narrator describes the village.

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<sup>80</sup> Ōe, "Love," 118-119.

*“(...) The houses were crowded together, shut in gloomily next to each other like trees in the black valley. The huddled together in silence like night beasts. (...) we saw, on the even darker rise that was the beginning of the slope leading up to the mountain directly opposite, a short squat iron-framed tower that merged into the forest like a tree, then we looked down to its right at the one-storey building larger than the village houses in the bottom of the valley (...)”<sup>81</sup>*

The excerpt shows that while the narrator describes the village, he bases his description mostly on feelings and does not go into detail as to how the houses look. This could be because the narrator is used to the architecture of a traditional Japanese village and therefore does not consider details such as the shape of the roofs and materials used necessary.

On the other hand, when the narrator describes the piles of decaying corpses, he goes into great detail as he describes everything from the type of animal to the state of decay in which the animal is. This type of descriptive approach can mainly be seen whenever the narrator describes a dead being no matter if it is an animal or a human. In the ninth chapter, as the villagers return and gather all the children to punish them and frighten them, the narrator describes the visage of the escapee soldier as he walks with his abdomen cut open.

*“(...) we saw that the dirt on his small pinched face had dried to the colour of clay; that the brown cloth which covered his belly, reproducing an unnaturally elastic motion above the unsteady support of his hips, was torn; that the tear was stained dark brown; and that a soft, fresh watery thing, a thing that caught the dim light and made slippery, vividly coloured pulsations, was dangling from it. Each time it wobbled with his step it gleamed in the dim golden light.”<sup>82</sup>*

The excerpt above describes the state of the soldier's bloody cut-open abdomen in detail without a single hint of disgust in the tone of the narration. The narrator treats it just as if it is another interesting fact to observe.

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<sup>81</sup> Ōe, "The First Little Task," 43.

<sup>82</sup> Ōe, "The Return of the Villagers and the Slaughter of the Soldier," 169.

The vagueness with which the narrator describes his surroundings almost gives off the same feeling like a background theatre screen would, and it may serve the same purpose. The vague background which emits details which the narrator deems unnecessary and leaves a lot to the readers' imagination serves as a tool which makes the precise details stand out all that more. Because of this type of narration, it is clear what affected the narrator and what interested him, and what did not. The gap between the two opposite types of description is in line with the treatment of narrative, which is implemented in *shishōsetsu*, which was, as mentioned above, commonly used by Japanese naturalists.



## 4 Prize Stock

*Prize Stock* was written in 1957 as one of Ōe's first short stories ever and what makes it exceptional is the point of view in which the author chooses to portray the culture shock a little mountain village experiences as the villagers see a person of colour for the first time in their lives. It is safe to assume that the village described in the short story *Prize Stock* had been modelled to resemble the village from Ōe's in *Shikoku*, even if the village's location is not specified.

### 4.1 Plot overview

The main plot of the short story by the name *Prize stock* or *Shiiku* centres around a small village in rural Japan around the end of the Second World War, which manages to capture a black American pilot, whose plane crashes into the nearby forest. From the very beginning, the story is being told from the point of view of a young boy who lives with his father and his younger brother in the village and helps his father around the house as his father hunts in the forest for small animals for their hide. The village has been cut-off from the slightly more modern neighbouring city because of flooding caused by the rain season. The rain leads to the collapse of a bridge which has been their only connection to the rest of civilisation. The disconnection from the outside world means that there is no other way to get to the city, other than taking a half-day journey across forest paths. Because of this situation, the villagers are instructed to keep the prisoner until further instructions as to what to do with him arrive.

The narrator and his younger brother, who are tasked with taking care of the prisoner, are afraid of him but also fascinated by the unknown creature at first. As time goes by, they slowly grow used to the prisoner and start treating him as a strange pet of sorts. They keep bringing him food and empty the bucket into which the prisoner relieves himself while he stays chained in the cellar of his captors' house. As time goes by the pilot gains more freedom even to the extent of being let out of his chains and being able to go out under supervision. The children grow more and more fond of their new "pet," and the daily task of taking care of him gradually becomes an activity in which every child in the village wants to take part.

It is because of this that the main character does not see the transformation of his "pet" into the enemy coming when an order comes to take the war prisoner to the city so he could be sentenced. The boy tries to warn the prisoner and make him flee into the woods, but as the prisoner is not able to understand Japanese, decides to hide in the cellar

and use the boy as his prisoner and a shield from guns, as the villagers surely would not try to shoot him while he shields himself with the body of one of their children. They stay in the cellar overnight under the watchful eye of the villagers, waiting for an opportunity to kill the pilot. After some time, the villagers finally break into the cellar and kill the prisoner, but as they try to get to him, they also shatter the boy's hand. All of these traumatic experiences ultimately destroy the young boy's trust in adults and fuel his feelings of disgust and betrayal in which the short story ends.

Öe once again introduces the reader to a story of a young boy who is forced by the circumstances to taste betrayal not only from the hands of somebody he considers a friend but also from the hands of his family and the people he is supposed to trust as they are his elders. Not only does somebody he loves and trusts use him as a meat shield, but his elders also may have given him wounds that will last a lifetime to kill the enemy standing behind him.

## 4.2 Literary style

The short story *Prize Stock* is not perceived as a naturalistic work as such; however, it may contain naturalistic elements, which will be further analysed.

### 4.2.1 Themes

One of the first themes introduced in the short story *Prize Stock* is the language barrier between the villagers and their captive. The American pilot does not speak Japanese, and since the villages do not understand him either, they gradually start being less cautious of him. The children start treating him as an exotic pet devoid of humanity, and not as an intelligent sentient being. That point of view somewhat changes when the pilot repairs the clerk's artificial leg and a boar trap, establishing a certain level of intelligence in the villagers' minds.

Another exceedingly important theme for the story is the dehumanising effects of war on human behaviour which can be observed throughout the whole story. If it were not for the war, the villagers would not usually imprison a stranger and then degrade him to the state of an animal, keep him as a somewhat dangerous pet and make him useful for the village. This concerns the pilot's behaviour as well because unless he is justifiably concerned for his life, he would not betray his friendship to the children and use the narrator as a human shield from the villager's attack.

Cultural and sexual stereotypes are another theme which is prominent throughout the short story and can be found even in the scene where the children first see the pilot.

The narrator is aware of the pilot's status as an enemy; however, one boy who is nicknamed Mitsukuchi voices his disbelief based on the sole fact that the pilot is a person of colour.

*“‘An enemy? You say that is an enemy?’ retaliated Mitsukuchi in a hoarse voice, he caught me and spit all over me in agitation. ‘But it’s a Negro;<sup>83</sup> you say that is an enemy?’”<sup>84</sup>*

In the excerpt above Mitsukuchi voices his disbelief on the possibility of a person of colour being able to be an enemy which indicates that he does not think of people of colour as being intelligent enough as to be considered human or an enemy. This way of thinking is further enforced by Mitsukuchi’s line: *“He looks like a human.”<sup>85</sup>* Mitsukuchi says this as he and the narrator watch the prisoner as he rummages in a box of tools to fix a boar trap.

Another instance when the theme of cultural and sexual stereotypes can be observed is when the children, along with the captured pilot play in a river and the children, notice the pilot’s large genitalia.

*“Then we suddenly noticed just how big and beautiful has the Negro genitalia. We pressed close to him with our naked sides, and when we grabbed him by his genitalia, the Negro started to yell (...)”<sup>86</sup>*

The children think it is fine to freely grab the prisoner's genitalia because they do not think of him as human. Otherwise, it would be unthinkable for them to do the same to their elders.

Disappointment in adults is the last major theme introduced in the story and is rooted in the betrayal of trust the narrator goes through. The narrator is held hostage by the pilot whom he previously thought to be his loveable pet animal and then has his hand crushed by his father.

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<sup>83</sup> The term “Negro” was chosen based on the phonetic similarity with the Japanese word ニガー which has the same meaning and will be used in the rest of the thesis in order to enhance the speaker’s racism towards the American pilot.

<sup>84</sup> Óe, "Chov," 17.

<sup>85</sup> Óe, "Chov," 36.

<sup>86</sup> Óe, "Chov," 40.

*“I was hungry, but when my father pushed a flagon of goat’s milk to my lips, I felt disgusted and tightly closed my lips.”*<sup>87</sup>

The excerpt above shows that the narrator feels betrayed and disgusted enough to refuse food after being in and out of a coma for more than a day. It is essential to mention that the feelings mentioned above are directed solely at the adults whom he previously admires and not towards his friends. “(...) *the adults changed into completely different beings.*”<sup>88</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Language

The short story *Prize Stock* is written in the first-person narrative from the point of view of a young teenage boy living in a rural village, and thus the level of language he uses reflects the degree of his education as well as his living situation. The story is told as a combination of undefined inner thoughts combined by descriptions of events and dialogues, which include the narrator and one more participant. Thus the narrative style used makes the short story have a strong personal feel to it which makes the narrator’s thoughts all the more compelling, enough to make the reader identify with the feelings the narrator conveys at the end of the story.

The dominant figure of speech used in the story is a simile which serves to describe the character’s demeanour or the way the characters move. The simile used further enforces the narrator’s childish style of relating events “*He (Mitsukuchi) had legs swift as a stag (...)*”<sup>89</sup> or “*The naked Negro drenched in sunshine shined as a black horse (...)*”<sup>90</sup> are just two of the many instances this figure of speech is used.

The use of language, as well as the narrative style, fits the definition of *shishōsetsu* as it implements an ordinary level of language based on a style of speech of a young person who is not highly educated and because of the narrative style concerns only a small number of characters. However, as the elements of the literary form of *shishōsetsu* have been used by many post-war and contemporary authors, it is impossible to conclude that *Prize Stock* is a short story which implements naturalistic elements novel based on its use of language.

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<sup>87</sup> Óe, "Chov," 46.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 39.

### 4.2.3 Characters

When reading the short story *Prize Stock*, the reader is introduced to an assortment of nameless characters, including imprudent children who think of the war prisoner as of their pet, and a few adult villagers.

#### 4.2.3.1 Narrator

The narrator, who is also the protagonist of the short story *Prize Stock*, remains a nameless child living in a secluded village with his younger brother and father. The narrator and his family live a simple life as the narrator and his younger brother tend to the small room which was previously used for raising thornbill, but now serves as their living quarters, while their father is out in the forest hunting for small animals whose skins he would then sell in the neighbouring town. When the narrator, along with his father goes to the town, the narrator suddenly realises how poor his family is and is ashamed as a beautiful girl walks by, and he sees how filthy he is. *“I realised how pitiful and poor I was.”*<sup>91</sup> The room the family of three live in is a small nod to better times when the silk trade was still abundant and before all the young men in the village have been taken to the war.

*“(…) far away on the sea horizon, which was drafted by a thin stream of light, in the city, there behind heavy curved mountains raged a war. Just as a long traded legend, the war grew into huge unthinkable proportions, and we felt the stative atmosphere it emitted.”*<sup>92</sup>

The excerpt above shows the general atmosphere of the village which is according to the description situated far away from battleground and is to some extent helpful in explaining the villagers’ behaviour when they bring the “catch.”

The narrator is cautious and aware of the pilot’s status as an enemy soldier at first when the villagers bring the captive to the village. *“But it’s an enemy.”*<sup>93</sup> The narrator is disgusted and scared of the captive at first. *“I had to overcome the disgust, which inspired sudden horror in me.”*<sup>94</sup> However, his feelings towards the pilot gradually change, urged by Mitsukuchi, who is infatuated with the pilot from the beginning.

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<sup>91</sup> Óe, "Chov," 25.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 27.

At first, it is just the narrator who is tasked with taking care of the war prisoner, yet as time goes by his younger brother and Mitsukuchi take part in the daily tasks as well, establishing a degree of hierarchy between the village children. The hierarchy manifests itself in the form of the captive becoming a sort of attraction for the village children who compete for the privilege of even looking at him through a crack in the wooden floor. *“I would continue the task solely for the pleasure of feeling the jealous stares of Mitsukuchi and the rest of the children.”*<sup>95</sup> The narrator feels sneering pride in the fact that he and his family hold a monopoly over something everybody else wanted to at least see.

*“As I looked at the Negro, hunched with his chin above the pot, with his strong head slightly trembling and veins stretched, he suddenly looked familiar like a loveable animal.”*<sup>96</sup>

The excerpt above marks the first time the narrator thought of the captive as of an animal which also shows the narrator’s imprudence as he completely disregards the captive’s human nature solely on their different skin colours, and the fact that they do not speak a common language.

This imprudence and childish stupidity combined with naivety ultimately cause the shock and disillusionment which the narrator suffers at the end of the story as the pilot holds the narrator captive. *“It was hard to believe that the man who was now in the dark grinding his teeth from time to time was the stupid Negro with a large penis.”*<sup>97</sup> The narrator’s feelings are then further trampled over as he is left in the captivity overnight while his father, along with the rest of the adults decide their next steps. *“I still felt disgusted towards them; I still felt fear.”*<sup>98</sup>

The character of the narrator is a perfect example of a child who knows nothing about the outside world except for the small neighbouring city where he feels inadequate as he is forced to face his poverty. The narrator then has his feelings crushed again as the person he disregarded as an animal turns on him, and the narrator is forced to realise how powerless he is. On the whole, the character of the narrator serves as a representation of a child living in a war-stricken country who desperately needs to have control over something only to be reminded of his powerlessness and foolishness once again.

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<sup>95</sup> Óe, "Chov," 33.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 47.

#### 4.2.3.2 Mitsukuchi

The character of a young boy named Mitsukuchi is introduced to the reader at the beginning of the story when the narrator explains that the name Mitsukuchi is not his real name, but a mean nickname based on the rabbitlike appearance of his face.<sup>99</sup> Mitsukuchi is described as a reckless teenage friend of the narrator and his younger brother, who is willing to risk his life in a wild dog den only to get a puppy while its mother is away. This is shown in the scene where he explains his small adventure to the narrator, whom he left behind even though they are supposed to go together.

*“‘You’ve been bitten all over’ I said and touched the dog, who had angry eyes as a wolf and moved his snout, lightly with my finger ‘Did you go to the den?’*

*‘I wore a leather belt so that they wouldn’t get to my neck’”*<sup>100</sup>

The excerpt above shows that Mitsukuchi is willing to go through great pain and even to risk his life to get something valuable so that he could show off to other village children. This recklessness also translates to his exaggerated excitement when the villagers bring the enemy pilot into the village. *“‘It’s a Negro, I could tell right away.’ He said in a voice trembling with excitement ‘A real Negro.’”*<sup>101</sup> No matter how novel the idea of a person of a different skin colour is, the pilot is still an enemy; however Mitsukuchi does not show any sign of fear, on the contrary, he thinks of the enemy soldier as of an exotic animal. Mitsukuchi even reprimands the narrator for thinking of the captive as of an enemy.

*“‘An enemy? You say that is an enemy?’ retaliated Mitsukuchi in a hoarse voice, he caught me and spit all over me in agitation. ‘But it’s a Negro; you say that is an enemy?’”*<sup>102</sup>

From the excerpt above, it is possible to deduce that Mitsukuchi does not regard the enemy pilot human enough to be considered an enemy. This way of thinking is apparent

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<sup>99</sup> Mitsukuchi (兎口) can be translated as a harelip to English.

<sup>100</sup> Óe, "Chov," 9.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 17.

on numerous occasions and is a crucial element in his character. “‘*They won’t kill him, right?*’ yelled Mitsukuchi victoriously. ‘*After all the negro is no enemy to us.*’”<sup>103</sup>

After considering Mitsukuchi’s actions, it is possible to say that his character mainly serves as a driving force, which makes the narrator less apprehensive towards the pilot with his pestering. Mitsukuchi even enforces the narrator’s notion of the pilot being something valuable as he is the one who pushes children away for a better view of the captive.

#### 4.2.3.3 *The Pilot*

The character of the pilot is the only one in the short story which is defined by his lineage as a person of colour, and even though the enemy pilot is one of the instrumental characters, there is almost no information about his character other than how he looked and on occasion what he did. All information regarding the pilot is related by the narrator who thinks of him as of a pet and therefore is most likely biased. Nonetheless, it is possible to see a transformation of the pilot’s status changing through the story from a captive to a friendly pet and into a captor.

The figure of the pilot is introduced as the village men bring him shackled into the village after his plane crashed into a nearby forest. The pilot is then imprisoned in a warehouse cellar where he is chained up and given a bucket to relieve himself and is tended to by the narrator under the supervision of armed narrator’s father.

After a while, because of the pilot’s good behaviour, the narrator’s father stops coming along to supervise, and the narrator brings the pilot food. That is also the time when the narrator starts to think of the pilot as a pet. “‘*(...) he suddenly looked familiar like a loveable animal.*’”<sup>104</sup> The pilot steadily gains more freedom and is even let out of the cellar.

The pilot’s situation changes from pet to captor when he takes the narrator hostage after the narrator tried to warn him about the order to take the pilot to the neighbouring town and tried to help him escape. The pilot uses the narrator as a meat-shield despite their previous seemingly mutual friendship. This instant is also when it becomes apparent how the war dehumanises people enough to betray each other and even forces some to take children captive to save their own life.

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<sup>103</sup> Óe, "Chov," 31.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 32.



After considering the pilot's actions, it is possible to reason that the pilot is just a man captured in an enemy territory where he is reduced to the state of an animal and treated with little to no respect to his human rights seeing how he is chained and how the children treat him as a spectacle whatever he did. It is therefore reasonable that he tries to save his life when the order for his trial, which would most likely end with further imprisonment or death, comes. However, the means he used to save himself also shows how dehumanised he is by the war as he does not hesitate to use an innocent child as a shield. Overall the character of the pilot serves as a way of showing how war changes and ruins people no matter how righteous they were in the beginning.

#### 4.2.3.4 *Brother*

The character of the narrator's younger brother is a rather simple one as he rarely ever says anything and mainly serves as a duo to his older brother, whom he admires. The majority of the younger brother's lines consist of single-line statements, which serve as a tool to elaborate on the maturity gap between the two brothers. His lack of maturity and shallow degree of understanding of the village's situation can be seen in the scene where his brothers' father comes home late at night and tells them what is going to happen with the enemy pilot.

*“Is there any more rice?” father asked me as he looked up at me. His voice trembled, and it was evident that he was in a sour mood.*

*‘No.’ I replied quietly.*

*‘And flour?’ Father almost groaned.*

*‘There’s absolutely nothing in here.’ I said in an agitated voice.*

*‘What happened with the plane?’ My brother asked timidly.*

*‘It went up in flames. It set the forest aflame.’*

*‘The whole thing, completely?’ Sighed brother.*

*‘Only its tail is left.’*

*‘Tail...’ Said my brother in awe.”<sup>105</sup>*

The excerpt above shows the disregard which the narrator's younger brother shows towards the fact that the fallen enemy plane set the nearby forest ablaze which could be

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<sup>105</sup> Óe, "Chov," 19.

detrimental to the whole village and more precisely, their family, whose sole source of income is the small amount their father gets for selling marten hide he hunts in said forest.

Instead, he is interested in a novelty item, which is the fallen enemy plane, and consequently to the pilot and everything related to him. "(...) '*With a parachute....*' Said my brother more and more in a daze. (...) '*I would like to go and take a look at him.*' Said brother and glanced at our father."<sup>106</sup> The younger brother expresses a childish interest in the newcomer in their village while not realising the gravity of the situation and whether it is appropriate to ask his father, who has possibly lost his livelihood and has spent most of the night looking for the enemy pilot if he could go and take a look. However, when the chance to go and look at the pilot to the basement comes, he is afraid to come and decides to stay at the entrance. "*Brother and Mitsukuchi settled with staying at the entrance to the basement.*"<sup>107</sup> It is days before he feels safe enough to go there together with the narrator and Mitsukuchi.<sup>108</sup>

His unawareness to the possible danger can be seen even earlier when he and the narrator first heard the news about the fallen plane from Mitsukuchi. "*I wonder how an enemy soldier looks like.*"<sup>109</sup> "*I hope they don't die.*' Said my brother in a daze. '*It would be better if they caught them and brought them back here.*'"<sup>110</sup>

The younger brother almost always goes where his older brother does but has fewer responsibilities as he is too young to handle them. Based on this information, it is possible to conclude that the character of the younger brother whose actions towards the narrator stay relatively unaffected even though he is as fascinated by the pilot as everybody else serves mainly as a representation of the uncomplicated days before the pilot came.

#### 4.2.3.5 *Father*

The figure of the father is somewhat ambiguous as he is absent for most of the story and his relationship with his sons is a somewhat distant one. The father interacts with his sons only on a few occasions, and when doing so, he shows little to no interest in his children. However, it is impossible to say that he does not care about his children at all, after all, he is the sole provider for them, cooks for them, provides shelter, however inadequate it may be, and tries to protect them from danger.

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<sup>106</sup> Óe, "Chov," 19.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 14.

The narrator distances himself from the figure of his father by not including a description of the father's appearance. There are a few times when the narrator includes something alike to a description of his father; however, he likens his father to an animal. *"I saw my father sitting hunched on a blanket spread out on the floor and staring like a lurking animal hidden in a night forest ready to pounce on its prey."*<sup>111</sup>

*"'Is there any more rice?' father asked me as he looked up at me. His voice trembled, and it was evident that he was in a sour mood.*

*'No.' I replied quietly.*

*'And flour?' Father almost groaned.*

*'There's absolutely nothing in here.' I said in an agitated voice.*

*'What happened with the plane?' My brother asked timidly.*

*'It went up in flames. It set the forest aflame.'*

*'The whole thing, completely?' Sighed brother.*

*'Only its tail is left.'*

*'Tail...' Said my brother in awe."*<sup>112</sup>

The narrator further paints his father as being irritable and tired from a long day of work and pursuing the enemy pilot in the woods. The father mostly speaks in short sentences, devoid of any sincere interest in his children. Nevertheless, he stays patient enough to at the very least reply to their questions and not get angry at them. Nevertheless, the narrator also respects his father as he never disobeys him, even when the father makes him do something that terrifies him. One such occasion is at the beginning of the story when he orders the narrator to accompany him to the basement to give the pilot something to eat.

*"The saleswoman kept repeating that she can't possibly go to the basement to the Negro and give him something to eat. She said: I, as a woman, can't, but your son could. (...)*

*'Come down here.' Called my father. (...)*

*My father was holding a rifle in his hands, and he pointer at the basket of food, that the saleswoman brought with its barrel. I nodded, and instead of*

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<sup>111</sup> Óe, "Chov," 12.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 19.

*answering, I picked up the basket of food. Silent, we left the warehouse and passed through cold air filled with fog. Stones on the ground were still hot from the sun's glare. There wasn't anybody standing guard next to the basement. I suddenly felt fatigue spreading through my body when I saw a weak light glimmering through an opening. My teeth started chattering from excitement at the thought that I finally have a chance to see the Negro up close. (...) I felt an innumerable number of eyes watching how my knees are shaking.*"<sup>113</sup>

The excerpt above is one instance when the father makes the narrator do something, what somebody else does not want to do as they themselves are probably too scared to do so. The narrator is somewhat excited to do as his father asked of him at first, however as the task came closer and he had to approach the enemy pilot, the narrator grows scared. *"I had to overcome the disgust, which inspired sudden horror in me."*<sup>114</sup> *"I was pale; my lips were without blood in them; my breath was haggard, my cheeks were trembling; I felt like little Japanese boy, who is not worth anything."*<sup>115</sup>

The father does not leave the narrator unprotected, and he stays with him for the whole time of his first visit to the basement. However, as the times goes by and they grow less wary of the prisoner and even start to trust him a little bit, the father starts to leave his rifle at home and in time, he lets his sons and their friend tend to the prisoner by themselves. This fact could be seen as neglect or underestimation of the situation as even if the prisoner is outnumbered, he is still an adult male, who is several times bigger than the children who are tending to him. It is this underestimation of the prisoner, whose thoughts they do not know and deem him to be nothing more than a stupid animal, that leads to the situation where the narrator is being held hostage by the imprisoned pilot in the basement.

It is the father who plants the idea of the pilot being nothing more than an animal into the narrator's mind and causing him to underestimate an enemy, who would later try to detain him and use him as a meat shield.

*"(...) We will kennel him here for now."*

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<sup>113</sup> Óe, "Chov," 26.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 28.

*'Kennel,' I said, surprised, 'like an animal?'*

*'after all, he is a complete animal,' said father in a heavy voice. 'His whole body smells like a cow.'*"<sup>116</sup>

The excerpt above shows the beginning of a misunderstanding, which would most likely cripple the narrator for life. Then again, it is the father who breaks his son's arm after he left him fearing for his life overnight as he tried to get past him to kill the enemy pilot and is therefore instrumental in the narrator's loss of faith in adults. The father does try to look after the narrator following his injury, and he wakes up from what is most likely more than a day of unconsciousness caused by fever. However, there is no mention of the father trying to approach his sick son after the first day of him waking up. Either he did not approach his son since being rejected "*I couldn't stand my father or any other adult. (...) I yelled until every adult left the room.*"<sup>117</sup> or he is forcefully emitted by the narrator.

The figure of the narrator's father stays ambiguous until the very end, as the reader sees him through the eyes of his son with whom he does not interact, except a few instances. At first, the narrator respects his single father and obeys his every word, however as the father does not relay his thoughts and keeps to himself, the trust has been broken, and the narrator himself does not trust that his father cares about him anymore, or that he ever cared about him. The result is to be expected as the one person who protected him and took care of him attacked him and mauled him is none other than his father.

#### 4.2.3.6 Clerk

The figure of the clerk appears only a few times in the story, and every time he does, he is very friendly with the narrator and calls him by a pet name 'Froggy,' which he uses for all the children in the village. "*You came to visit us, Froggy?*"<sup>118</sup> He is described as a one-legged man who is rather good-natured, even to the extent of offering a cigarette to the captive after he fixed his artificial leg as a token of gratitude, instead of making a fuss about the captive being out of his cell. However, it is the clerk, who comes with the orders to move the captive into the neighbouring town, which causes the narrator to run and try to save the pilot. The clerk tries to comfort the narrator at the end of the story when they

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<sup>116</sup> Óe, "Chov," 19.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 23.

are sitting outside and watching other children playing with sledge made of a piece of the pilot's ruined plane. *"This kind of war is horrendous when it touches a child's hands."*<sup>119</sup> In an ironic turn of events, the clerk dies when he tries to have a ride on the sledge; he crashes into a large black boulder.

After considering all the information provided on the character of the clerk, it is possible to conclude that he may have served as a symbol of the futile efforts of the Japanese at the end of the war as he is killed by an American soldier via a proxy, which is a piece of the crashed plane.

#### 4.2.4 Use of space

As mentioned above the point of view of a child who does not fully comprehend the full extent of the situation, it is in, which was characteristic for Ōe's early literary work and is essential for this story as it intensifies the sense of confusion and makes the reader even more inclined to sympathise with the narrator. However, this type of narrative also represents a problem, because the narrator is likely not going to be able to relate to all the information accurately, or will be biased at some point of his story, which is going to influence the narrative.

The narrator provides almost no information as to what the village looks like, and the only place in the village he describes in greater detail is the room he lives in with his family in the village storehouse.

*"We lived on the first floor of the village storehouse in the middle of the village in a small room, which was previously used for the cultivation of thornbill. We placed rugs with woollen covers on; father slept farther on the floor made of strong decaying wooden planks. (...)"*<sup>120</sup>

The excerpt above shows the description of a room, which is previously used for raising silk-producing bugs, however now it is the home of the narrator and his family. It serves as a tool to show the reader the level of the family's poverty as they occupy a small room without any furniture, save a haphazardly made bed, which is used only by the narrator and his brother as their father sleeps on the floor.

The narrator's description of space stays vague throughout the story; however, when he and his father travel to the nearby city to sell marten hide, he describes their

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<sup>119</sup> Ōe, "Chov," 49.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 11.

journey and scenery in much greater detail. The narrator describes the painful and uncomfortable parts of their journey.

*“The forest was covered in a thick fog which condensed into large rain droplets that tasted like iron. It was hard to breathe in the fog; my hear was drenched; the white, shining droplets were sticking to my shirt that had collar blackened with dirt. The small path was covered with soft, rotting leaves, and under which was trickling water that soaked through canvas shoes and froze the toes.”*<sup>121</sup>

The excerpt above shows how the narrator interest continually shifts from the general observation to smaller details while focusing on those details, that do or potentially could cause him discomfort. He also focuses on the dirt on his collar, which is a reminder of his poverty and a sign of the narrator’s inferiority complex. *“I came to understand just how filthy and poor I was.”*<sup>122</sup> The tendency of describing only the narrator’s immediate surroundings details and the people he is interested in it is apparent even in the omission of the majority of the citizens of the village.

*“When we reached a plane, the sun was shining again. The ground on both sides of the road was crumpled and bared the red earth beneath, which made it look as if the ground was bleeding, and as the sun was shining on it, the ground shone.”*<sup>123</sup>

The excerpt above shows one instance when the narrator introduces a detailed description of something that catches his interest, and he lets his imagination run free. The gap between the vague and detailed descriptions of space serves to establish further that the short story *Prize Stock* is written from the perspective of a child who does not fully understand the gravity of the situation and so, elaborates on the details which directly concern him, or that pique his interest. The duality of descriptions is also a reflection of the treatment that Japanese authors implemented while writing *shishōsetsu*, which was, as stated above, often used by Japanese naturalists. That, however, does not necessarily mean that the short story *Prize Stock* is a strictly naturalistic one as the form of *shishōsetsu* was and is commonly used by post-war and contemporary authors.

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<sup>121</sup> Óe, "Chov," 21.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 22.

## Conclusion

The literary works *Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids* and *Prize Stock* cannot be considered purely naturalistic, as they differ from the genre in many aspects. However, it is possible to say that they bear signs of both Japanese and French naturalism. These signs can be observed in the themes implemented, the treatment of descriptions, the types of characters introduced and the narrative style which was chosen for the story.

The theme of isolation is prevalent in both works, and it is an essential element in the whole plot of the story as well as being defined as one of the three major themes which were often expressed in Japanese naturalism. However, since the theme of isolation is accompanied by a plethora of other themes which are not necessarily naturalistic and often play a more significant role in the plot development, it cannot be considered purely naturalistic.

The detached, vague yet at the same detailed approach implemented while describing death, sickness, bodily functions and sexual urges through the narrator's eyes is identical to the one which was often used in the works of French naturalists. Then again, the detailed style of descriptions in these literary works is combined with somewhat lacklustre descriptions of village buildings and characters' appearance, which is undesirable in the works of French naturalists. Consequently, the style of descriptions found in *Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids* and *Prize Stock* cannot be considered wholly naturalistic, although it is possible to say that it is inspired by French and Japanese naturalism.

The characters introduced throughout both stories fit the definition of naturalism for the most part as all of them are flawed, often with low social standing. The characters in *Prize Stock* fit the bracket of French naturalistic style perfectly as they fit all the criteria introduced including the genetic predetermination; this can be seen for example in the main character and Mitsukuchi who deliberately dehumanise the American pilot solely for the fact that he looks and talks differently from them. However, in *Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids* the only defined by his lineage is Li while the rest of the characters is defined more so by the social group, they come from; nor can be *Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids* considered to be an autobiographical novel as the character is only inspired by parts of Ōe's childhood and does not represent Ōe as an individual and thus they do not entirely fit into the definition of French naturalism nor Japanese naturalism.



Both works are narrated in style close to the one of *shishōsetsu* as the creation of the character of the narrator is inspired by Ōe's early childhood, but Ōe is not the main character himself. Style of narration implemented in *shishōsetsu* has been commonly used by Japanese naturalists. However, it was also used by authors of many other genres, and consequently, it cannot be considered to be a narrative style unique to Japanese naturalism.

Because of the presence of the naturalistic elements mentioned above, it is possible to conclude that both literary works were inspired by French and Japanese naturalism to some degree in their creation. However, they are not naturalistic as such, as the naturalistic elements are drastically outnumbered by elements which cannot be considered naturalistic as they do not fit the criteria set for French nor Japanese naturalism.

## Resumé

This thesis analyses selected literary works of Kenzaburō Ōe regarding Japanese and French naturalism. Characteristic elements of Japanese and French naturalism have been established for academic relevancy of the thesis. The thesis has been divided into four chapters, the literary and historical context of both literary works has been defined in the first chapter, Ōe's life and literary style have been described in the second chapter, the novel "Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids" has been analyzed in the third chapter and the short story "Prize Stock" has been analyzed in the fourth chapter.

Keywords: naturalism, Kenzaburō Ōe, novel, short story.

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