

NOTES FROM TAIPEI
讀書雜誌
002

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ABOUT THIS PROJECT...

I've always had a passion for the written word, and this pamphlet gives me an opportunity to contribute some of my own to the world without limitations. I'm writing about topics that interest me based on media I consume, people I meet, and ideas that hang out in the back of my head. This is a place for me to be experimental, both in my writing and in elements of design, and have fun with topics I wouldn't otherwise examine.



Author: Andreas Zai (在風安)

Note: I gave myself this family name in Mandarin because my surname is pronounced the same in both languages. I also am fond of the wind and of bees, which sound similar in Mandarin, but ultimately I chose the character for wind as my pseudonym. A friend here has dubbed me 小安, because 安 sounds like Andreas, so that became the final character.

DOUBLE-PLAY 雙殺

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Nothing gets my adrenaline going like a double-play. The crack of the bat sends a ball towards the infield, the short-stop or third baseman moves to scoop up the bouncing ball, then in an instant it's flipped to a teammate in-motion across second base and with a jump, a leap, or a hop its flung over a sliding baserunner towards first, where an outstretched defender snags the ball before the charging batter can reach safely. It's exciting, it's a little dangerous, and it looks way easier than it is. For the viewer, it's a thrilling experience. For the defenders, it's a brilliant effort from the infield team.

But what about the pitcher? For a double play to work, a batter must put the ball on the ground in the direction of the third baseman, shortstop, or occasionally

the second baseman. Can the pitcher create that opportunity, or is it just the mistake / misfortune of the batter? Because I am a new fan of baseball that never played the game, I've been trying to understand what causes double plays. I've often wondered if it's possible for a pitcher to create this type of outcome. To research this, I've selected three questions:

- (i) Is there a pitch classification that tends to create more double-plays?
- (ii) What type of break on a pitch creates the most double plays?
- (iii) Which pitchers are the best at creating the most double plays?

Let's take each in turn:

- (i) Is there a pitch classification that tends to create more double-plays?

To answer this question I've downloaded game data from the 2015-2023 seasons, filtered for batted balls that resulted in a double play, and then calculated the percentage of total double-plays as a result of the pitch type thrown that resulted in the double play, and then compared that to the league average. See the table below.

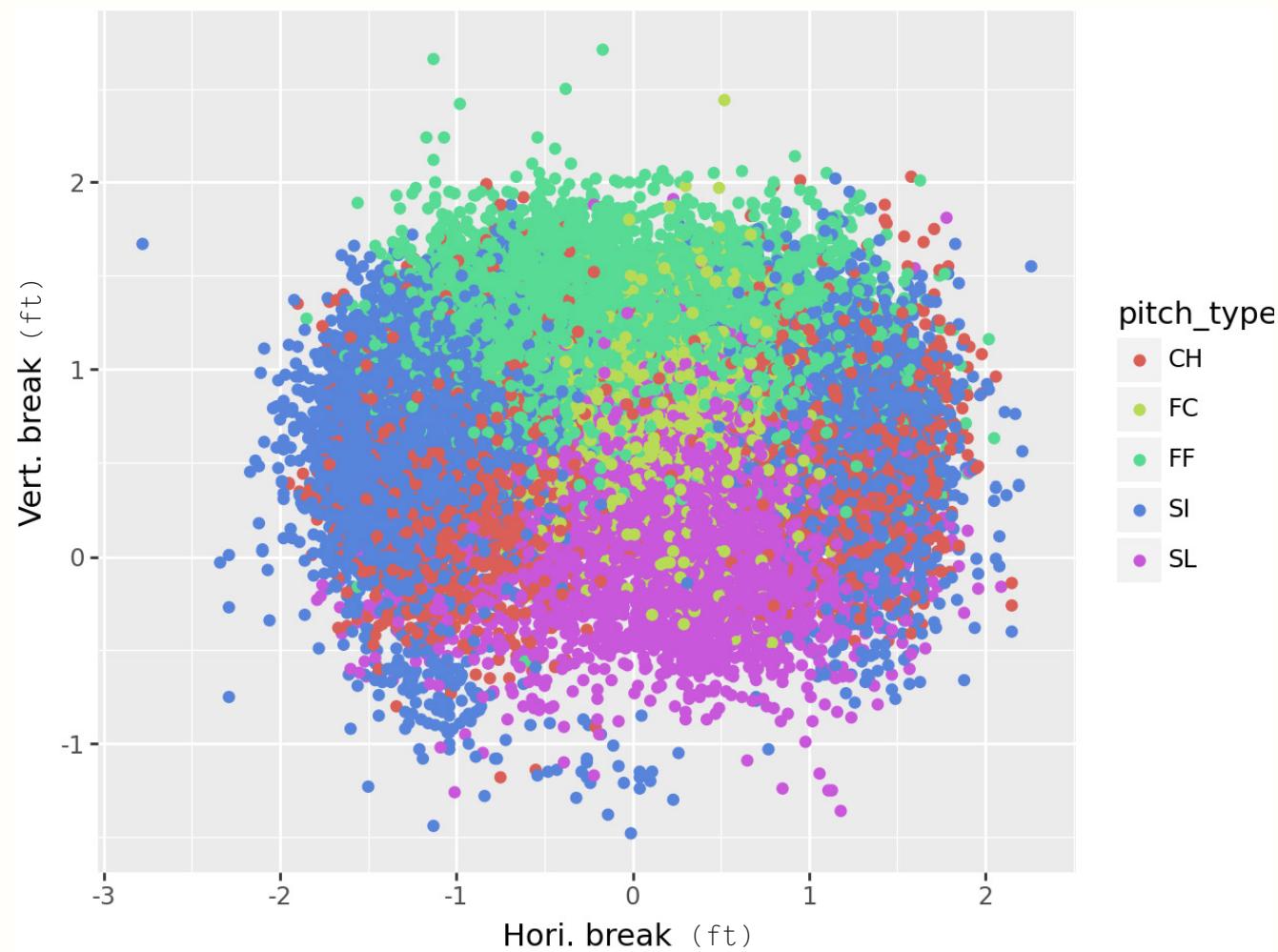
Pitch type	% resulting in double play	% thrown during 2015-2023	Δ
FF	25%	34%	-9%
SI	29%	18%	+11%
SL	14%	16%	-2%
CH	12%	11%	+2%
CU	5%	8%	-2%
FC	7%	6%	+1%
All others	8%	7%	0%

The results here are clear. If a pitcher is trying to get you to hit into a double-play, he's more likely to throw you a sinker (% thrown +11% vs. league average) and not a four-seam fastball (-9%). For the neophytes (like myself), a sinker is a type of fastball that will tend to have more downward break than a four-seam fastball. But this analysis doesn't imply batters can expect a sinker every time. The four-seamer, slider, and changeup are still coming down the pike combined a little more than 50% of the time. So let's eschew the classifications of pitches and just look at pitch movement.

- (ii) What type of break on a pitch creates the most double plays?

Based on the above answer, I would expect that most double-play balls have some downward break on them, because that's typically what sinkers do. Using the same data as in the previous question, I was able to determine that the vertical movement on a pitch that results in a double-play averages +7.3 inches. For reference, the league average for vertical movement on a pitch over the 2015-2023 seasons is approximately +8.0 inches. The data for double-play balls is visualized below.

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DOUBLE-PLAY BALLS BY HORI. & VERT. INDUCED BREAK¹

There's still a lot of pitches that have positive vertical break in this dataset, mainly the four-seam fastballs (FF). Sinkers (SI) make up the outside of this chart in violet, and sliders (SL) fill in the bottom in a deep fuchsia. While sinkers and sliders definitely have lower vertical break and bring down the average, this information doesn't empirically indicate that pitching with negative vertical break will induce a double play. I would suggest that this analysis is inconclusive in determining if a pitcher has a specific toolset to induce that result. However, some pitchers still appear to be doing this with regular success.

(iii) Which pitchers are the best at creating the most double plays?

Using a new data set (from FanGraphs) over the same time horizon (2015-2023), I generated a new statistic called DP / 9 (an implied number of double plays generated by each pitcher as a result of their actual double plays and total innings pitched). Below I've output the Top 10, sorted by DP / 9.

First	Last	WAR	ERA	IP	DPs	DP / 9
T.J.	McFarland	-0.40	4.36	340.2	66	1.75
Jared	Hughes	0.90	2.96	358.1	66	1.66
Mike	Pelfrey	1.90	4.99	403.2	74	1.65
Dakota	Hudson	3.10	3.84	470.2	83	1.59
Jeremy	Jeffress	3.50	2.96	343.1	60	1.57
Brandon	Kintzler	2.10	3.64	304.1	52	1.54
Richard	Bleier	3.70	3.27	330.1	55	1.50
Luis	Perdomo	2.80	5.12	468.0	77	1.48
Clayton	Richard	3.40	4.79	511.1	83	1.46
Tyler	Chatwood	3.80	4.51	536.2	87	1.46

Again, since I'm new to baseball I don't know who these people are. I spent some time doing desk research on the top three to reveal the following: McFarland holds a record for the number of double-plays after the All-Star break¹, Hughes was a prolific ground-ball generator² (a must-have for any double-play), and Pelfrey was a pitcher who leaned heavily on his sinker³ (greater than 50% usage, which we know is more likely to lead to a double-play). That's pretty indicative of a group of players who had some knack for generating double-plays, so they were clearly doing something right.

While our pitch analysis doesn't prove that there is one answer to getting a double-play, there are certainly some players who are better at creating this outcome, as evidenced by the above list. Additionally, I can resolve that the sinker, or any pitch with some downward break, is more likely to create a double-play than any other type of pitch / break although its no guarantee. Of course, a quick internet search could have told me the same thing, but proving it to myself with this data was a far more engaging way to interact with a game I'm learning to love.

¹ This note is a bit in the weeds. The stat tracked by MLB Statcast is called pfx_z, which is "the vertical movement, in inches, of the pitch between the release point and home plate, as compared to a theoretical pitch thrown at the same speed with no spin-induced movement." So, we're really looking at the movement on the ball induced by spin.

² <https://t.ly/hwn5J>
³ <https://t.ly/l1kLJ>
⁴ <https://t.ly/IrIR7>

From my perspective, the Taiwanese have a strange relationship with trash. For starters, my roommate puts his waste in the freezer. Also, when he was away in Japan for two weeks, he asked me to take out the trash every day to the local collection point. He's also corrected me on how to dispose of paper and plastic on multiple occasions. I've now noticed that the bins on the street in Taipei are far and few between. I've also noticed it's not uncommon to find a grainy picture from a CCTV camera taped to a wall or fence showing a criminal unloading trash in someone's private dumpster with a label akin to "we will catch you!"

Why are the Taiwanese so weird about trash? Because Trash Island. That was the name given to Taiwan in the 1960s. It

was a fitting name, given the quantity of trash on the streets that was swirling in the ceaseless Taipei wind. In the post WWII era when Japan returned governance of Taiwan to the Republic of China, the country began to industrialize, which was quickly followed by the "Asian Tiger" era of the 80s and 90s. That booming economic success, coupled with a lack of cultural awareness and poor government policies, created a byproduct of excessive waste.

Now, the Taiwanese have tried to lose that nasty nickname by developing this unusual relationship with trash. In the late 80s, Taiwan made a push to improve trash collection (which was allowing 30% of waste into the environment)¹, increase recycling relates, and reduce pollution. This included purchasing

garbage trucks from Japan², building trash incinerators, and modifying a number of government policies to reduce trash build-up (including forcing companies to pay for the waste that they generated).

One aspect of this effort that's hard to miss is the gentle chimes of *Für Elise* or *Maiden's Prayer* which emanate, ghost-like, around corners and from underneath overpasses. While I first mistook them for ice cream trucks (by sound, certainly not by sight) these are actually trash collection vehicles. The trucks play these songs over loudspeakers to announce their arrival at collection points.

Interestingly enough, the song of choice was not always classical music; Taiwan has experimented with different songs but residents are so accustomed to those timeless melodies, any new song would cause people to miss collection days.³

Trucks now roam the streets daily (except for Sundays and some Wednesdays) and stop at thousands of collection points, where you might see a group of locals holding separate bags for trash, recycling, and food waste while they wait for the trucks to come to a rest. Although dropping off your trash every day may seem like a pain, it's generated



A photo I snapped in Hawaii near Honolulu. The text here means "trash island."

¹ <https://t.ly/skrYi>
² <https://t.ly/ogLqH>
³ <https://t.ly/5NLv5>

results: Taiwan's recycling rate is now almost 55%, and nearly all food waste is fed to farm animals like cows and pigs.

Another great outcome of the trash clean-up effort was the construction of the Beitou Refuse Incineration plant and dozens of similar facilities. Not only does this plant generate energy by burning 1,800 tons of trash a day⁴, it disposes of all the byproducts, and there is a restaurant installed on the smoke stack which has a lovely view of the surrounding area. You can see a visual of how the plant works on the adjoining page.

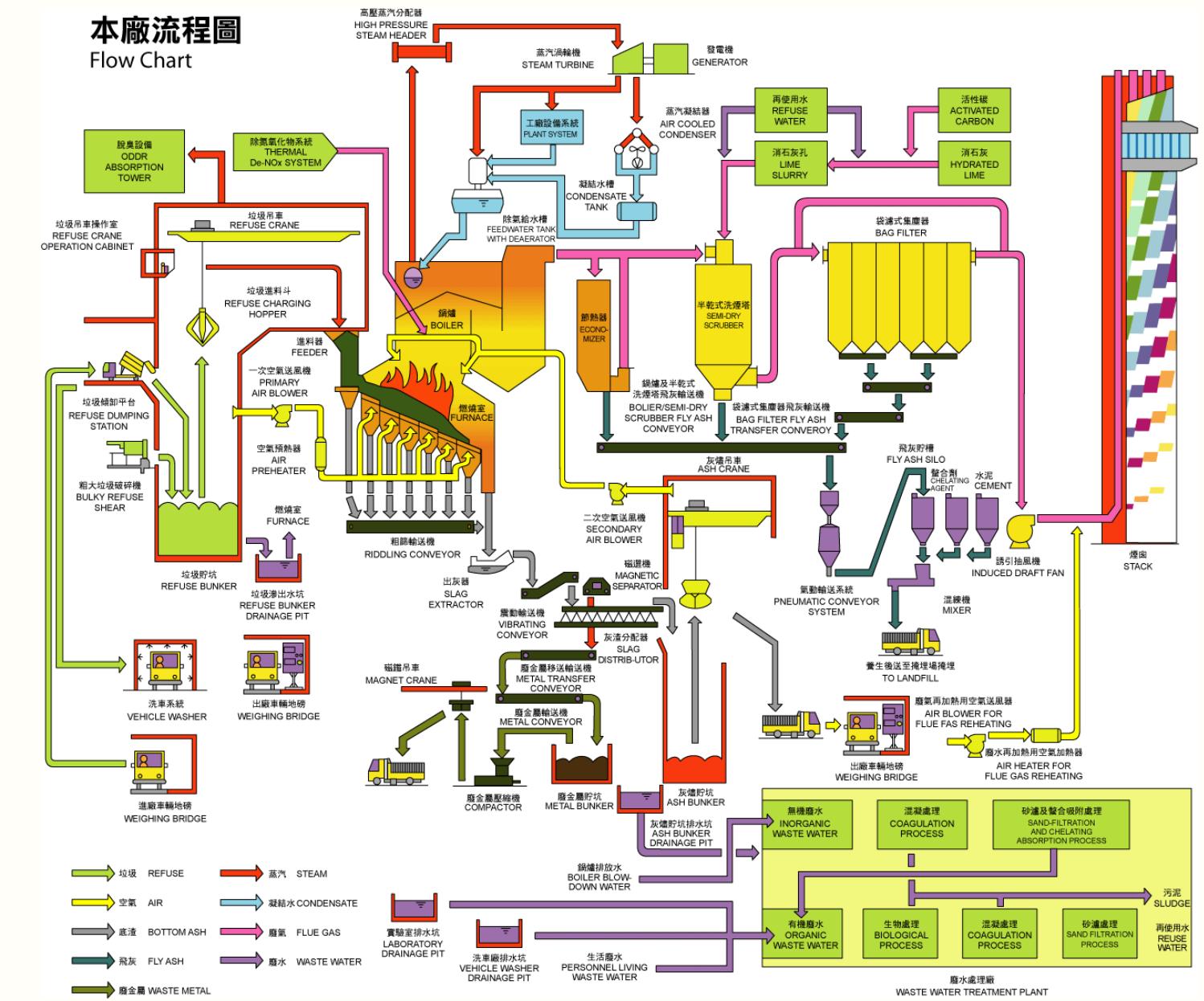
In comparison to Taiwan, America's relationship with trash stands in stark contrast. By the numbers, the average American generates 2.2kg of waste a day while a Taiwanese generates less than 0.5kg per person per day.⁵ Based on my personal experience, New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco are littered with plastic bottles, newspapers, and chicken bones, or trash is stacked high on the sidewalks. Landfills dot the nation. But in Taiwan, where it feels like you're always within a 10 meter radius of another person, there just isn't enough space to be burying trash in a landfill and it is rarely seen on the sidewalks. The responsibility of trash disposal lies with people until the point of trash collection by the government, and that makes sense. Trash can only be collected in specially marked bags, sold at supermarkets and convenience stores, which helps fund the government agency for collection and also incentivizes people to be more

thoughtful about their trash generation.

There's a lot to learn from the strange relationship Taiwan has with its own waste. While some of these practices may seem cumbersome or unusual, they make the living space cleaner and healthier. I would encourage Americans to reexamine their own relationship with trash, and then maybe we can start freezing our waste too.

本廠流程圖

Flow Chart

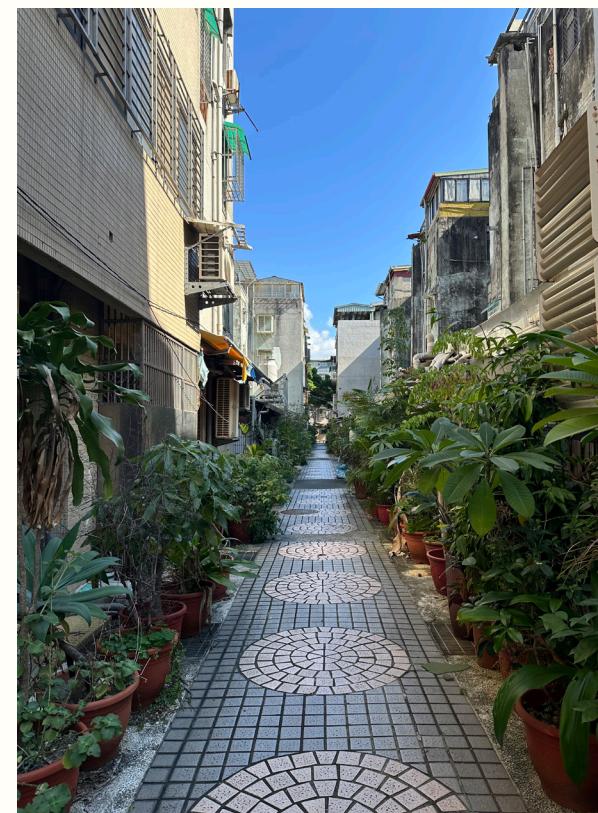
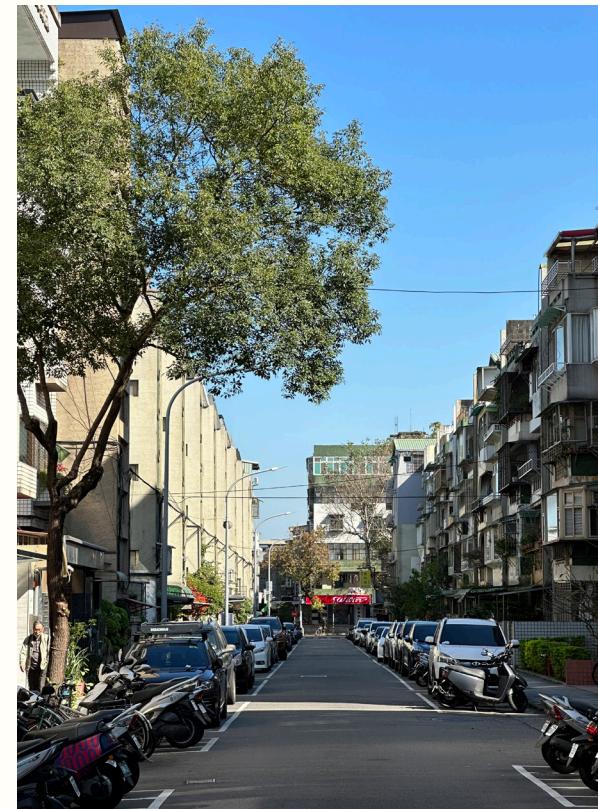


4 <https://t.ly/jG8cR>

5 https://t.ly/q_qZS

PARALLEL LINES

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Most folks, including the locals, tell me they think Taipei is ugly. Many of the buildings are older, with bars over the windows and caged balconies where most people hang their laundry. Most rooftops have additions, called 頂樓加蓋, with questionable legality. Some areas are ripe, and certainly none smell pleasant; cockroaches abound.

But for me, all this adds to the character of the city. The buildings are old and ramshackle because that's what people needed when they were built. The alleyways are narrow and dirty but heavily trafficked all the same. These are the elements of a city that exploded with economic growth, but much of the architecture didn't receive a face lift. The city is simultaneously crude and elegant, antiquated and cutting-edge.

This isn't a swan song for the unpolished aesthetic of Taipei, because it's not perfect, and the title of Postmodernist Capital probably belongs to Hong Kong anyways. My point is I can't imagine Taipei looking any other way, so I have no complaints.

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SUICIDE AND BUNNY RABBITS

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At the beginning of Qiu Miaojin's (邱妙津) final work, she describes the death and burial of a white rabbit, aptly named Bunny. In the midst of Osamu Dazai's (太宰治) final work, the protagonist flees his home after discovering one of his lovers has purchased a white rabbit for him. It is no coincidence that both these authors wrote about a white rabbit, and the circumstances of each appearance is closely tied to the reason both authors committed suicide upon finishing their novels.

But before I spoil my conclusion, let me step back and set some context. Dazai published his novel, *No Longer Human*, in 1948, and the English translation was released approximately 10 years later. That original publication date places the novel in the post-war period, although

the events are set in the pre-war period. Miaojin followed suit with her novel, *Last Words From Montmartre*, in 1996, and the English translation was released 8 years later. Miaojin's publication followed the end of martial law in Taiwan (1987).

The period of these publications is significant because both authors are writing in the ashes of charred countries. They are writing in a time when serious turmoil has just subsided and emotions are still simmering. Although those circumstances facilitate the dismal and despondent themes in both works, they are not the only cause. It is also evident that both authors were experiencing internal conflicts regarding their relationships with human nature. There are two primary conflicts to review.

First, both authors have discovered that the people in their lives are of a duplicitous nature (it should be noted that both authors are using their protagonists as thinly veiled versions of themselves).

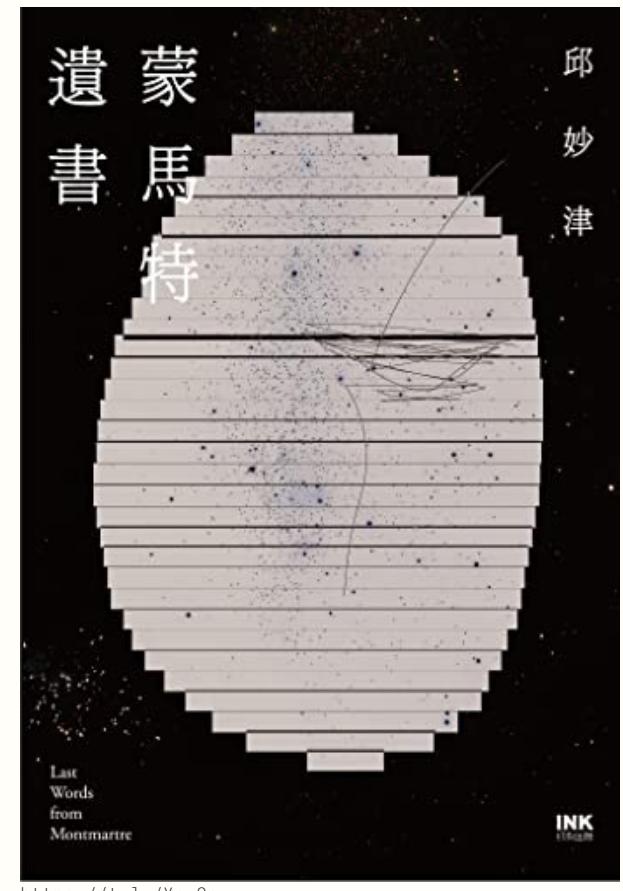


From Miaojin, discussing the departure of her lover:

Your reasons for abandoning me and your judgment about our relationship didn't take in the full picture. You've only cut one small branch from a tree, so it still looks whole. You still don't know that you love me, but in fact you love me deeply. For three years you haven't really tried to "recognize" its features. One day, perhaps upon your death or mine, you will recognize it. By "recognize" I mean that you'll finally accept my all-encompassing love for you as for my own life, and take on this responsibility without it being a burden.

And from Dazai:

I am convinced that human life is filled with many pure, happy, serene examples of insincerity, truly splendid of their kind-of people deceiving one another



without (strangely enough) any wounds being inflicted, of people who seem unaware even that they are deceiving one another... I find it difficult to understand the kind of human being who lives, or who is sure he can live, purely, happily, serenely while engaged in deceit.

The realization that humans are two-faced leaves both authors confused about their relationships (Qiu with her lover, Dazai with society). They cannot trust the other party, and they cannot understand the other party's reasons for being untrue. This lack of understanding leads to the second internal conflict. The protagonists of both books begin to careen down a path of broken relationships, heavy drinking, and ultimately physical or mental self-destruction.

From Miaojin:

I drank a lot in order to pass out, but those intermittent periods of unconsciousness were hardly restful, plunging me into elliptical nightmares from which I woke up screaming and crying. The combined spiritual and physical pain was too much. I vomited anything I tried to eat. I lost all energy in my traumatic state and my liver and other organs felt brutally decimated after ten days of drinking, locked in my room. I only wished to staunch the waves of stupefying agony erupting from my brain... this time, I was sure I would die. Shivering in my bed, throat dry and head throbbing as if a bomb had gone off inside. Nobody knew that since March 13 I had been slamming my temples against the wall in fits and now dried blood covered my

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left ear and turned into clumps in my hair.

And from Dazai:

I drew with extremely, excessively depressed emotions, deliberately penning each line, only to earn money for drink... I hadn't the courage to question her; writhing in my usual doubts and fears, I drank gin... Towards the end of that year I came home late one night blind drunk...

So the external tumult present in both author's countries in combination with some serious internal conflict / confusion led to debilitating self-destruction, which eventually culminated in the suicide of both authors. But what about the rabbits? Although the rabbits are key to understanding their author's final act, they have slightly different implications.

Miaojin's protagonist describes her relationship with Bunny as obsessive, such as her interactions with the pet's corpse: "I haven't buried the body yet. It's still in the tiny coffin here, keeping me company in my room." Or, the burial in a public park in Paris: "The body was still in good condition. It even seemed softer than two days ago. I covered it in a blue blanket, put some of Bunny's food pellets on top, then pushed all the dirt back into the hole and tamped it tightly with my foot." It's also no coincidence that the rabbit died 72 hours after the protagonist's lover, Xu, has left her in Paris. This irrational attitude towards the corpse of a dead rabbit in combination with the timing of its death make the rabbit an obvious symbol for the writer's love for Xu. When the rabbit

dies, so ends the physical and emotional relationship between the two characters.

However, I would venture a step further. The death of this rabbit is an allusion to the future death of Miaojin. It establishes her fate, in the first sentences of the novel, by suggesting that their lives are tied together: "I've made up my mind not to let Bunny die in vain. I want Bunny's death to mean something. Otherwise I won't survive it, I won't be able to handle it, I won't be able to go on living." And so, when this rabbit, which represents the love the protagonist has for Xu, dies, the protagonist is forced to die as well.

And Dozai:

I opened the door a crack and looked in. I saw a small white rabbit bounding around the room. The two of them were chasing it. (They were happy, the two of them. I'd been a fool to come between them. I might destroy them both if I were not careful. A humble happiness. A good mother and child...) I felt like getting down on my knees to pray then and there. I shut the door softly, went to the Ginza, and did not return to the apartment.

The rabbit here is juxtaposed with the warm, welcoming atmosphere of the lover and daughter. But Dazai believes he "might destroy them," and so he turns this love to unrequited passion, leaving the home to never return. There are countless other places in his novel where Dazai turns away the love or warmth of those around him because he believes he doesn't deserve it. This is his sick, self-

destructive tendency on full display.

After revealing the rabbits, both author's then write that their protagonists (again, thinly veiled versions of themselves) will commit suicide. Miaojin writes that her character will kill herself with the same mentality as Antinous: for the sake of immortalizing her love for another person. Such an act would encapsulate the meaning of her life into one final act, it would define her purpose as the ultimate show of love. Miaojin accepts the fate given to her by Bunny's death by shaping her suicide into an everlasting symbol of love.

Dozai's reason for his protagonist's (attempted) suicide is more straightforward. He cannot find a reason to live. He sees nothing valuable in himself and has rejected all love and compassion shown to him. So he rejects society altogether.

So, where Miaojin chose to celebrate her love, Dazai chose to reject it, to walk away and never return. And in short, these are the same reasons the authors killed themselves. Where Dazai chooses to forgo love and humanity through death, Miaojin chooses to make her love eternal by dying. Where Dazai found a reason to reject humanity, a reason not to live, Miaojin found a reason to die.