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I

It was in 1975 that Kojin Karatani first met Paul de Man at Yale University. Following this meeting, the signs of their dialogues explicitly manifest themselves, an example of which is *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature* (1980). At the same time, it is highly interesting to consider that we can find a set of crucial and potential resemblances between their criticisms, even before they actually met. What they thus shared before their encounter was a radical critique of modern literature, as an aesthetic evasion or repression of the "real" origins of modernity. In order to argue in favour of their shared intervention in modern literature in this sense, I would like to draw attention to two of their texts in particular: de Man's *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism* (1993)—chiefly based on his 'Gauss Seminar' in 1967—and Karatani's *Men in Awe* (1977). This book is a collection of his articles written from 1968 to 1971.

II

The first point to stress here is that de Man reads William Wordsworth as being symptomatic of a traumatic confrontation with a certain origin of modernity. Of significance in this context is what de Man delineates as the historical and literary progression from scenic descriptions 'firmly controlled by an inherited typology' to 'the romantic condition of landscape naturalism' (99). As the word 'typology' suggests, this is a historical event, wherein the pre-modern Christian epistemological conceptions of landscape underwent a radical transformation or disintegration, while exposing a human subject—in this case William Wordsworth—to something semantically non-sensical as a

place:

> As one watches the progress of a poet like Wordsworth, however, the significance of the locale tends to broaden into an area of meaning that is no longer literally bound to a particular place. The significance of the landscape is frequently made problematic by a succession of spatial ambiguities, to such an extent that one ends up no longer with a specific locale but with *a mere name*, of which the geographical existence has been voided of significance. (emphasis added, 99)

We can construe this kind of romantic predicament as an existential and traumatic exposure to a landscape deprived of the significance of Christian typology, or a signifier without any pre-modern Christian signified—hence 'a mere name.' This is reminiscent of what Karatani terms a 'pure landscape,' liberated or severed from Christian figuration, wherein 'for the first time the human was presented as alienated from the landscape, and vice versa' in *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature* (62).

It is thus suggested that Wordsworth is a privileged witness of this traumatic encounter with a 'pure landscape' or a 'mere name.' Foregrounding this kind of existential crisis, de Man's point is that contemporary criticism of romantic language (typically that of Geoffrey Hartman), or by extension modern literature at large, is characterised by symptomatic reactions to, or avoidance of, such a semantic nakedness: 'In all these cases, the critics seem to have gone to the right kind of evidence but to have shrunk from back before the full impact of their findings' (97). This means that critics of romantic texts indeed re-experience the Wordsworthian confrontation with a landscape "voided of significance" while simultaneously repressing this sort of traumatising, modern existential loss of pre-modern Christian semantic and epistemological stability.

De Man attributes 'this recurrent pattern' to 'the feeling of crisis that comes over all thought when it comes into close contact with its own source.' Here, de Man's crucial implication is that this type of modern criticism or literature—

thus seen as an avoidance of 'its own source'—serves as the evasion of the 'real' origins of modernity. In other words, the origins of modern criticism and literature are nothing but their traumatic repression of their own 'real' origins. An important and typical example of this is 'an empirical psychologism' (97), which works in the following manner:

> Put in more programmatic historical terms, it seems as if the critics in question were hampered from reaching their conclusions by certain postromantic assumptions, reached in the course of the nineteenth century, from which they are not entirely able to free themselves—although they have come quite a way in doing so. It might be that between the later eighteenth century and ourselves stands a long period that is regressive, in terms of self-insight, in relation to romanticism, and that we have to overcome this obstacle before we can *reestablish contact with the real source*. (emphasis added; 98)

This historical and genealogical critique of 'an empirical psychologism' as consisting of 'certain postromantic assumptions' or the postromantic evasion of 'the real source' is reminiscent of Karatani's foregrounding of the psychological and epistemological confrontation between the human consciousness as 'the inside' and the landscape as 'the outside' in *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*. Such a 'postromantic assumption' of the psychological inside and the epistemological outside is symptomatic of representational and existential crises for some modern Japanese novelists or poets. For them, 'for the first time the human was presented as alienated from the landscape, and vice versa.' It is worth recalling that de Man's deconstruction is an exposure of the rhetorical functions of metaphors as an aesthetic and psychological invention of the inside/outside tropes, whose differences are resolved as the ultimate reunion or reconciliation, or rather the final organic unity of those two subjective spaces. There is no doubt that this kind of 'empirical psychologism' functions as a kind of evasion of 'the full impact of their findings.' This prevents or protects some Japanese authors—most representatively Doppo

Kunikida—from 'reestablish[ing] contact with the real source.'

III

Karatani's 'The Consciousness and Nature'—the first chapter of *Men in Awe*—is a brilliant problematisation of these existential crises and their attempted resolutions, with especial focus on Soseki Natsume. Karatani—referring to T. S. Eliot's reading of *Hamlet*—pays careful attentions to the ways in which Soseki's language is thematically divided between the 'existential register' and the 'ethical register' (35). This textual dividedness is suggestive of how this novelist—just like Shakespeare—tries to 'tackle a problem which proved too much for him' as Eliot himself puts it (146). It naturally follows that Soseki's work is uniquely structured by the absence, or lack of, what Eliot famously terms 'objective correlative,' thereby forcing Karatani to ask the same rhetorical question as Eliot's: 'under compulsion of what experience he attempted to express the inexpressibly horrible?' (146).

As the title of this chapter 'The Consciousness and Nature' indicates, the dissociation of the 'existential register' and the 'ethical register' reveals itself as the dissociation of the 'existential' and 'consciousness' (22) in Soseki's language. Intriguingly enough, Karatani acts in exactly the same way as de Man when criticizing his contemporary literary criticisms of Soseki; in order to do so, he argues for the necessity of making a clear distinction between what Soseki calls the 'visceral fear' and the 'intellectual fear':

> Soseki, however, cannot express it appropriately since it is something 'inexpressibly horrible.' This impossibility forces him to write as if it were the problem of 'the self-consciousness in the twentieth century.' Evidently, this psychological theme is merely concerned with the 'intellectual fear'; therefore, no matter when Soseki attempts to represent the 'visceral fear,' his language is obliged to produce some sort of out-of-context and incomprehensible scenes. It is clear that we cannot regard this simply as a technical failure. Rather, what we need

> to try is to reconsider Soseki's oeuvre—so far interpreted from the viewpoint of self-consciousness or ethical conflicts—in the totally different context of existential crises. (26-27)

This is the fundamental paradox that Soseki encounters: his endeavour to 'solve the ethical problems in an existential way and the existential ones in an ethical manner' (36). As we have already seen, the ethical register of his texts is a psychologisation of something existential and ontological, or a reduction of existential crises to the stereotypically literary theme of 'self-consciousness.' Karatani stresses the radical impossibility of resolving the "visceral fear"—something that is by definition uncannily unidentifiable—in the context of the characters' sense of self-conscious guilt.

Here again, Karatani's interest lies in the way in which 'the human was presented as alienated from the landscape, and vice versa.' As he argues in *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, what de Man would call a 'postromantic assumption'—such as the psychological or epistemological correspondence between 'the inside/psychological' and 'the outside/landscape'—fails to work in Soseki's paradigm as well. What is disruptive and excessive of this modern psychological assumption is 'a cruel exposure of Soseki's sense of existence itself' (35), or "a certain sort of reality beyond any psychology or consciousness." This is not the kind of reality that "can be objectifiable scientifically or knowable as a psychological object.' Hence, Karatani's conclusion that Soseki is 'a man in awe of something invisible' (44). When the 'inside' of the human subject cannot be represented as something psychological, its 'outside' in turn cannot emerge as a recognisable and identifiable 'landscape.' Rather, it uncannily materialises itself as a *thing* itself, or something 'uncanny, weird, ugly, and limp' (57). Almost scandalously, Soseki's sense of existence is thus exposed as a horrified experience of the human consciousness being absorbed into this kind of *thing*, while also being reminiscent of Sartre's "nausea." What is experienced here is an uncanny reversibility of something metaphysical and physical (or vice versa), a traumatic disruption of what de Man terms the postromantic assumption of

'empirical psychologism.'

IV

We can thus compare de Man's Wordsworth and Karatani's Soseki as privileged but traumatised witnesses of the radical impossibility of modern literature or psychology. Their languages are equally symptomatic of the epistemological and existential paradigm shifts of modernity, where Wordsworth experiences the loss of Christian typological conceptions of landscape, and Soseki suffers from the sense of non-reality as an aftermath of the rapid modernisation of pre-war Japan. Their textual disruption, or an exposure of some uncanny literalness, is in each case a linguistic event or materialisation of the impossibility of modern psychologised literature as the repression of the real origins of modernity, thus defined.

In conclusion, I would like to respond to this conference's thematic interest: "The End of Modern Literature." Taking a cue from Paul de Man and Kojin Karatani, my conclusion is that what is generally called "modern literature" had already ended even before it started. Or rather, it has not yet been born as long as it serves as a repression of the existential crisis of modernity, as I have argued above. Given this historical perspective, what we now need to do is to avoid a-historical fetishisation of something often called 'post-modernity.' Instead, we should pursue a genealogical critique of the psychologised institutionalisation of modern literary language, in an effort to 'reestablish contact with the real source' of our modernity.

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