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There was famous writer in Meiji period in Japan, whose name was Ogai Mori. Mori's the literary master who represents Japan along with Soseki Natsume etc. I read his work, "Maihime (Dancing girl)," and became interested in him very much. So, I decided to read "Gan (Goose)," which is as famous as "Maimihe." "Gan" was written later in his life. "Gan" was serialized in the magazine "Subaru" since 1911. "Gan" is especially great in the late trilogy and is said to be the most novelistic novel of his works. It has the feeling and nature of story. The biggest attraction of this work is Mori's criticism on modernization of Japan through describing original attitude of Japanese. I read "Gan" and felt homesick.

The Origin of the Title, "Gan"

First, I will write about why the title is "Gan." It's very interesting that the reader can't understand the meaning of title until he reads to the end. In the scene that the main character Okada throws a stone to a goose in the Sinobazunoike, the reader finally comes to know the meaning. In this scene, though I will refer to it later, Okada doesn't intend to kill the goose but to set that free and throws a stone. But a goose has been dead. But here, we have to bring out the reason why Mori named this work

“Gan.” There is Mori’s mourning for one age. Goose is the migrant coming flying to Japan from autumn to winter. Sung in poem in both of Manyosyu and Kokinwakasyu, Goose is the bird loved by Japanese. Also in Meiji Period, a lot of goose would fly above Tokyo and was the thing autumn of Tokyo. But, from Taisyo period to Syowa period goose disappeared from the sky of Tokyo. That is, goose is the symbol of the thing old Japanese till Meiji period.

There is the reason why Mori named this novel “Gan” in this background. While “Gan” was written in 1911, the stage of the novel is in 1880. This is no less than 30 years before. This gap shows Mori’s nostalgia for good old days. Meiji is the period that new things and thoughts from the West flowed into Japan and Japan changed suddenly. Mori is one person who had doubt about the modernization which had to be said only the making Japan the Western. In these sudden streams, Mori must have chosen goose as representation with nostalgia for old Japan.

The Background of “Gan”

Next, I will refer to the background. Mori made “Gan” public in the beginning of Taisyo period when women conflicted for self liberation. But the stage of “Gan,” Meiji period is the age women couldn’t live freely. There is necessity to think the reason why

Mori chose Meiji period. He stated, “The beginning of Meiji period is the age when civilization matured” (Kobori, 1979, p.332). In that age, though people weren’t free or rich, they live in the reserve and well-ordered life. But for women, it’s natural to chose Taisyo period. Here is also Mori’s ideal. For Mori, Making women free isn’t very important. Even if women weren’t free, Mori preferred the old women who were reserve. But, it isn’t appropriate to think Mori was male chauvinism because he was descent from the samurai. To see his early works such as “Maihime,” it’s obvious that sexual equality was in his mind. That is, women’s liberation forwarded by Taisyo period wasn’t real liberation for him. That seemed to be just copy of overseas for him. Therefore he was tired of the gap between his ideal and reality of Japan, and probably by resignation to reality he turned his eyes to the past.

Mori turned the literary style to historical novel after having finished writing the late trilogy which contains “Gan.” It is said the trigger was Nogi general’s martyrdom. For Mori who had samurai spirit, martyrdom was special. Martyrdom was the extreme means to live for ideal for samurai. It also can be said that is the Japanese way to exist since ancient times. He stated, “Mori found the key to know Japanese there. Mori criticized the seeming modernization by drawing the original figure of Japanese. The person who is often compared to Mori is Natume. In contrast to Mori, Natume criticized

modernization by using the contemporary person. That is the difference between two literary masters" (Nakamura, 1954, p.179). To return to the subject, "Gan" was written by the new means of criticism.

About the Heroine, Otama

Now, I will refer to the content of the novel. First, I will pick up the heroine Otama. She is tragic woman who was broken her love and real way to live by something. The something is the destiny, which the power of human can't approach. This novel's theme is the vague grudge against vanity of the destiny. In "Gan," a very important factor is the chance. Destiny is born from lap of many chances. Otama is at the mercy of trick of chance. The first chance is Otama's encounter with Okada. The student Okada pass by mistress house by chance and he find Otama. And the second chance is "red sparrow" which Suezo bought for Otama. Suezo is master of Otama. This became agency which made Otama and Okada approach each other. Okada helped a sparrow almost gulped by a sneak. By this accident, Okada and Otama have been more close relation. As opposed to "red sparrow" having made them close, the chance which breaks their relation will come in the end of the story. This is called "a piece of nail." One day Suezo will go out one night. It's chance for Otama to approach to Okada. But Otama's

dream was broken. In that night, Okada didn't appear alone but with "I." That's because the dinner of dormitory was the mackerel cooked in miso, which "I" particularly dislike. "I" is the narrator in this novel and Okada's best friend. So "I" got out the dormitory to eat dinner outside with Okada. Otama was very surprised and she couldn't speak to Okada. That's the end of her love. As opposed to the chance of "red sparrow" was good fortune, the chance of "a piece of nail" was ill luck for Otama.

Otama was deceived into being the mistress of Suezo. But she seems not to have the grudge against that fact. Her feeling of chagrin isn't toward people but toward her own destiny. Like this, the most important point is Otama's awareness of destiny. There is a similarity between the thought of Otama and Mori's himself resignation to reality. Mori's resignation is not toward people but toward inside himself. So this has the same character as Otama's feeling of destiny. It can be said that Mori used Otama as other self and embodied of his ideal. But Mori didn't embody completely. In the story, Otama said like this, "I'm never going to be deceived by people." It's the proof that she has the anger and complaint against Suezo. It contradicts above explanation, but Otama is also ordinary woman.

Now, I will arrange the character of Otama. It's obvious that Otama has two faces. One is the other self of Mori which he embodies his ideal, the other is ordinary

woman who have very ordinary thought. The latter is the very Japanese woman itself who has the most appropriate attitude and character, who is the symbol of old good Japan Mori tried to represent. In brief, Mori left Otama both of the resignation to reality and the intention to seize the truth from old Japan. It is said the figure of Japan woman Mori lived continued to be drawn in his work after “Gan.”

Comparing the character, “I” and Okada

Next, I will compare “I” and Okada. In the story, “I” stated Okada’s feeling about woman. For him, woman is just beautiful and lovable thing, and even if she is in whatever situation, woman should keep her beauty and sweetness.

Sasabuti (1984) found the following:

This feeling about woman is originally Mori’s feeling. But he has not only this aesthetic side but realistic side. In the two elements, He idealized aesthetic element to Okada and realistic element to “I.” Then Mori used them as character in novel. That is, “I” always watches event between Otama and Okada calmly and objectively. The reason “Gan” was successful in literature is mainly the plot.

(p.64)

Lastly, here is the biggest question. In the end of story, the person who was

asked to throw a stone to a goose was not “I” but regular Okada. First, the goose which was killed by Okada is the symbol of destiny of Otama. If so, the person prevented Okada and Otama from achieving in love should have been “I,” who was realistic element. But actually Okada did, who was aesthetic element. That is to say, the element which looked for beauty dismissed by itself. It shows the deep resignation of Mori and his strict view of the old Japanese woman. To live freely and meaningfully is getting married Okada for Otama. But Mori brought up the recognition of the difficulty to live freely and meaningfully through the living in real society. Then he reached the conclusion that living so is impossible and drew the death of goose as an answer of himself. And as for his strict view of the old Japanese woman, Mori didn’t think inconvenience of old Japanese woman as unhappiness. He probably thought women’s liberation in Taisyo period as imitation and he didn’t need that liberation. Though they were in strict law, which is class system, Japanese women was reserve and internally beautiful. Mori loved such women so much and desired strongly this way to exist, so he drew such a tragic ending.

But Okada didn’t throw a stone willingly, but threw to set a goose free. But a goose was dead. This show Mori’s desire for woman to live freely and he himself not a little wanted to live freely and meaningfully. That is, though Mori had matured he had

still hope which he had had in his mind since youth. But regrettably, resignation exceeded the hope to live freely. So it seems that Mori dared have chosen such an end.

“Gan” is the very work of Mori who tried to get the answer to how we live now from the old Japanese figure and continued to write novel, whose message is “Truth is here Japan.”

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