*Lorenzo Marinucci*

# Poetry and Decadence: Reading Nietzsche with Karaki Junzō

## 1. Nietzsche and the Japanese

For a thinker so fiercely focused on criticizing the intellectual heritage and the present state of Europe, Nietzsche's introduction in Japan was quick and enthusiastic. The first introductions of Nietzsche's work and personality to Japanese audiences came just a few years after his death in 1900[1]. In 1901 the poet and literary critic Takayama Chōgyū published in the magazine *Taiyō* some excerpts of the *Zarathustra* and of Nietzsche's aphorisms, exalting Nietzsche's proud individualism as something that the newfound Japanese modernity was in dire need of. One year later, in 1902, the Germanist Tobari Chikufū published the collection of essays *Niche to ni shijin*. A work on Nietzsche is the philosophical debut of Watsuji Tetsurō (*Niche*, 1913). The first Japanese translation of a *Nietzsche's collected works* began in 1917, thanks to Ikuta Chōkō. Between the 1910s and the 1920s Nietzsche's work became influential also for several Japanese novelists. Natsume Sōseki, while not always enthusiastic in his reading of Nietzsche, wrote on the margins of his copy of *Zarathustra*: "This is Oriental. Strange to find such an idea in the writings of a European"[2].

In this essay we will focus on the particular reading of Nietzsche in the 1952 book *Shi to dekadansu* 詩とデカダンス (hence SD) by Karaki Junzō 唐木順三 (1904-1980). It belongs to a second wave of Japanese writings on Nietzsche, appearing shortly after the war, often in connection with Heidegger's philosophy, its preoccupation with Being and the history of Western metaphysics, and the more general problem of postwar nihilism. Karaki's idiosyncratic work, though largely forgotten, is particularly appropriate for the cross-cultural reflection of Nietzsche and "decadence" that we will attempt in this essay, focusing especially on its atmospheric and somatic elements.

[1] Tezuka T. (ed.), *Niche*, Chūōkōronsha, Tokyo 1978, p. 53-54, offers a concise but complete reconstruction of the two main waves of Nietzsche's reception in Japan.
[2] G. Parkes, *Early Reception of Nietzsche's Philosophy in Japan*, in *Nietzsche and Asian Thought*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1991, p. 191.

## 2. Karaki Junzō and *Shi to dekadansu*

Karaki was a Kyoto University graduate, who studied under Nishida and Tanabe. He wrote about Japanese modern and medieval literature, on the themes of voluntary death (*Jisatsu ni tsuite*, 1950) and on the aesthetic and philosophical appreciation of impermanence in Japan (*Mujō*, 1960), among many other topics. He worked as a teacher in several higher schools and then as a professor of literature at Meiji University in Tokyo. He also was an active literary critic, and together with Furuta Akira and Usui Yoshimi was one of the founders of Chikuma Shobō, a major Japanese publisher still active today.

A first interesting element of *Shi to dekadansu* is that it does not squarely belong to either "philosophy" or "literature", but lets the two mix and struggle with the other: this is an overarching feature of Karaki's work. The second peculiar feature of the text is the attempt of grasping Nietzsche's work within an arc of Western "decadence": it is a key insight that despite its solidity has not been discussed often even by European literature[3]. The third innovative element in the text is Karaki's attempt to show how analogous problems and insights can be found in premodern Japanese sources such as Bashō or Ikkyū, poet-philosophers that in this way are pushed into a posthumous dialogue with these European sources[4].

On its own, however, *Shi to dekadansu* is a somewhat rough text, wedged between Karaki's earlier work on modernity and his later, more rigorous study of middle age literature. Important observations are left as little more than passing comments and its structure is piecemeal, prone to digressions and repetitions. There are not many scholarly studies referencing it, even in Japanese. And yet at its core it offers us an innovative grasp of decadence as a cross-cultural philosophical problem. Here we will therefore read Nietzsche with Karaki, developing his insights through a dialogue with other European and Japanese authors where necessary.

[3] With the striking, early exception of Max Nordau: M. Nordau, *Degeneration*, Appleton, New York 1895, p. 416-7, and in more recent studies such as J. Scott, *Nietzsche and Decadence: The Revaluation of Morality,* in "Continental Philosophy Review" 31, 59-78 (1998) and A. Gogrof-Voorhees, *Defining Modernism: Baudelaire and Nietzsche on Romanticism, Modernity, Decadence and Wagner*, Peter Lang, New York 2004.

[4] This article concentrates on Karaki's reading of Bashō. However, Karaki's reading of Ikkyū's work, a caustic mixture of Zen spiritual commitment and sexual profanity, is highly original and would deserve a study of its own. See Iijima T., *Karaki Junzō no Ikkyū ni okeru 'dentō' to 'kindai'*, "Kindai to Shinran", 35 (2017), p. 34-78.

## 3. Poetry and Decadence

In *Shi to dekadansu*, Karaki addresses a theme that, despite its constant resurfacing into personal and social consciousness has received scarce attention from a philosophical perspective. What is "decadence", and who is a "decadent"? At the beginning of the book, he clearly explains what the stakes of this reflection are:

> The topic of this book is a critique of modernity: it asks how we should face that nihilism that stands as its conclusion. Western modernity dominates the modernity of the whole world, and the problem of Japan's modernization is already the problem of its westernization. From here, therefore, it obviously arises the problem of tradition and modernity. Moreover, if the outcome of modernity is nihilism, one can hardly be optimistic about modernization. On the contrary, the problem of modernity would become how to escape nihilism, how to overcome it. I took upon myself this very problem. Thus, I tried to reflect once again about Japanese medieval religion and literature, that is tradition, delving into it. Paths aiming at an escape from nihilism have been attempted in many ways in Europe, in the New World, and in Asia too, ending with a string of failures, sacrifice, victimizations. I have come to think instead that to overcome nihilism there is no other way than to exhaust it, to make *nihil* out of *nihil*, to nullify nothingness, empty emptiness. (SD: 3)

Karaki wants to approach the topic of nihilism – a philosophical, existential, even political conundrum in post-war Japan. But the gateway to discuss nihilism in Karaki's work are "poetry" and "decadence", taken not as two juxtaposed phenomena, but as a double stem arising from a common seed of nothingness. On one hand, for Karaki "decadence" is a universal phenomenon, especially bound to our experience of time. Each place, age and generation have moments, spaces and personal narratives in which the set of hegemonic values holding together society seem to erode and become meaningless. On the other, "Western modernity dominates the modernity of the world", and it is true that "Decadentism" as a label is unavoidably connected with late European 19th century, a symptom of and a reaction to the rise of the industrialization, mass society, metropolitan life. This is, therefore, the starting point of the book.

### 3.1 Decadence as "between"

Who is the decadent, according to this first stage of Karaki's analysis? The decadent is an oppositional figure, somebody occupying a middle space. This is true both historically and at an existential level. Karaki argues that "in a narrow sense, decadence is the middle space,

the in-between of dandyism and nihilism." (SD: 6). The decadent and the dandy refuse the morality of the bourgeoisie – conformism, utilitarianism, sexual continence, physical and psychological health, its stress on stability and positive facts – by willingly embracing their opposites: irony, uselessness, wandering, a constant trespassing of boundaries that expresses itself as transformation, creation, as sexual transgression, fantasy, chemical escape in alcohol or other "artificial paradises". They reach for something at the same time higher and lower than the equilibrium of "philistine" society: they are ready to soar in a state of spiritual euphoria, of unbound imagination that makes them often feel more-than-human. But they are at the same time ready to fall and embrace animality – physical and moral pollution, a contaminating contact with the basest elements of society and existence. Decadence entails a vertical momentum: by refusing to go forward, it is pulled up and down at the same time.

The most powerful example of dandyism according to Karaki is Baudelaire; and the "first consummate nihilist" is Nietzsche[5]. European decadence must therefore be first of all understood between the two poles represented by these two figures.

> Decadence is first of all something *medial*, something *between* (*aida no mono* 間のもの) It is so both in a strict and in a larger sense. In the strict sense decadence is something between, in the middle of dandyism and nihilism. Of course, there is an exchange between each other, an interpenetration: but for instance, here I am thinking of Baudelaire the dandy (1821-67), Verlaine the decadent (1844-96) and Nietzsche the nihilist (1844-1900). In a wider sense they are all decadents. But in Baudelaire we see its beginning, and in Nietzsche the overcoming of it. (SD: 6)

The decadent stages its opposition to the values of bourgeois society not simply in individual or political terms, like socialists and anarchists started doing in the same century. This opposition has not only an aesthetic, but also an ontological sense: the decadent is able to recognize in his or her "state of betweenness" a harsh but authentic value, a "being *between* time".

[5] In doing so, Karaki is following a "continental" genealogy that does not acknowledge not only how the word "dandy" itself originated in the United Kingdom, but also how this parallel tradition has equally precious contributions to the cross-cultural understanding of decadence he is attempting. See, for instance, Wilde's review of *Zhuangzi*, itself a short masterpiece of humor, immediately identified the common traits between dandyism and the ironic detachment of Daoism. On this matter, see T. Botz-Bornstein, "Daoism, Dandyism, and Political Correctness", draft available at: https://www.botzbornstein.org/daoism (07/2021).

> Decadence is something medial, in-between, in transition. It is something between bourgeoisie and aristocracy, between the old gods and those who must come. Those taken on one side by the attraction for what is old, on the other side by the hate for the new thought of progress, were the decadent poets. However, by their making clear the mediality, the transient quality of the age, they exposed the structure of time, the discontinuity of the moment as an urgent matter; they recognized in their perception (*kankakuteki ni* 感覚的に) the emptiness *between* time and time. Spleen, remorse, apathy, melancholia, bitterness – they were all sung from this deeper source. By exposing their own embodied existence (*mi o sarasu* 身をさらす) to the emptiness within the age in transition, they recognized, within the transient quality of time itself, the abyss opened between instants, and worked this perceptual self-awareness (*kankakutekina jikaku* 感覚的な自覚) into poetry. (SD: 11)

There are three key insights in this passage that I would like to highlight. They will return throughout the text, and I consider them the most interesting paradigms offered by Karaki's approach.

– First, the fact that the metaphysical-existential discovery of decadence is that of an "abyss between instants", bearing that is a particular connection to temporality. This is not a surprise, if one considers how strong Heidegger's influence was on this second generation of Japanese philosophers; but this stress is also warranted by the primary sources chosen by Karaki, as we will see.

– Secondly, decadence is an act of dangerous availability. The Japanese *mi o sarasu* 身をさらす usually means exposing one's "living body" (*mi* 身) to wind and rain, danger, or the eyes of others[6]. This is a stance not often embraced by philosophers, who would often rather minimize the personal stakes of their endeavor. We must recognize how all the primary literary-philosophical figures referred to by Karaki – Baudelaire, Nietzsche, Bashō and Ikkyū – show an intense, painful attunement to their body, which becomes the site of powerful and contrasting atmospheric forces.

– This brings us to the third key element of Karaki's account: decadence is grasped and expressed as "perceptual self-consciousness", *kankakutekina jikaku* 感覚的な自覚. This expression itself is a curious neologism. The term *jikaku,* "self-awareness", has a central role in Nishida Kitarō's philosophy, as "a self-reflective mechanism that grounds the

[6] The word *mi*, 身 refers to the body in a way similar to the sense of the German *Leib* in a phenomenological context: not the body as a somatic, three-dimensional object, but rather as a focus of first-person experiences and feelings. The *mi* is not a physical reality, but rather embodiment as a living atmosphere, something that cannot be detached from the world disclosed through it. For a phenomenology of *mi*, see T. Ogawa, *Kankyō to mi no genshōgaku*, Kōyōshobō, Kyoto 2004.

system of consciousness". But here self-consciousness is *kankakuteki*, "sensual" or "perceptual", and is "made into poetry". For Karaki poetic language – a contradictory, non-synthetic clash of feeling and theory, *logos* and *mythos* – is the mode of consciousness that is best able to grasp and express contradiction as such, accepting the mediality of decadence without trying to resolve or erase it.

It is not by chance that the quadriptych of "decadents" presented in the book – Baudelaire and Nietzsche on the European side, Bashō and Ikkyū on the Japanese one – are all celebrated poets and deep, complex thinkers at the same time, none of them easily graspable in just one of these two dimensions of their textual production. In this essay I will focus on Nietzsche and Bashō, hoping to offer a full picture of these four philosophical portraits another time.

## 4. Nietzsche: a decadent and a beginning

Is Karaki's choice of identifying Nietzsche as a decadent an arbitrary one? Not at all. Nietzsche himself clearly indicated a paradoxical relation with time and world as the origin of his "greatest preoccupation" and of his own status as a "decadent". Discovering Baudelaire in his readings from 1884-5, he immediately identified in him the perfect image of the European "decadent", a French equivalent of Wagner: "Baudelaire, as a matter of fact already German, if one does not count a certain hyper-erotic morbidity that bears the scent of Paris"[7]. This first stance was one of rejection, a disgust mixed with begrudging admiration: "Who was the first *intelligent* follower of Wagner? Charles Baudelaire […] he might also have been the last"[8]. But from 1888 he began feeling something closer to his own thought in the scent of the French decadent: As Le Rider asks, "isn't the dandy some kind of anticipation of the *Ubermensch*?"[9]. This reevaluation occurs as Nietzsche realizes that the overcoming of decadence must be part of decadence itself. It is on this note that Nietzsche opens *Der Fall Wagner*:

[7] Quoted in J. Le Rider, *Nietzsche et Baudelaire,* "Litérature, n. 86 (1992), p. 87. In German: "Baudelaire, ganz deutsch bereits, eine gewisse hyper-erotische Ankränkelung abgerechnet, welche nach Paris riecht". KSA 11, NF 1885, 34 [21], p. 381. We will discuss later about the fundamental relationship between scent and decadence in Nietzsche.

[8] F. Nietzsche, *Nietzsche: The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols And Other Writings*, A. Ridley–J. Norman (ed. by), transl. by J. Norman, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2005, p. 93. KSA 6, *Ecce Homo* § 5, p. 289: "Wer war der erste *intelligente* Anhänger Wagner's überhaupt? Charles Baudelaire […] er war vielleicht auch der letzte…"

[9] See Le Rider, *Nietzsche et Baudelaire*, cit., p. 89.

> What does a philosopher demand of himself, first and last? To overcome his age, to become "timeless". So what gives him the greatest challenge? Whatever marks him as a child of his age. Well then! I am just as much a child of my age as Wagner, which is to say a *decadent*: it is just that I understood this, I have resisted it. The philosopher in me has resisted it. In fact the thing I have most deeply occupied with is the problem of decadence, – I have had my reasons for this.[10]

Here is the fundamental paradox of "decadence" in the medial sense explored by Karaki. Is it simply the age decadent? Or individuals? Neither: the fact of recognizing the decadence in our surroundings, exploring what can we do to transcend or move away from our time and space (to become "untimely", and thus free), discloses an even more urgent sense of personal decadence. Nietzsche was probably the first European thinker who did not shy away from, but rather embraced fully this process, violently dropping the Christian faith that still anchored this contradiction in Baudelaire. A clear statement of this reversal, through which the individual fights with the decadence of society not by opposing to it an ideal of purity, but with *more* decadence and of a different kind, can be found in *The Twilight of Idols:* "Philosophers and moralists are lying to themselves when they think that they are going to extricate themselves from decadence by waging war on it"[11].

For Karaki, the middle status of decadence implies that is neither the single individual nor the society at large to be "decadent"; it is in the dialectic between time and timelessness, between the blind assumption of the reality our values and beliefs (*jitsu* 実), and the intuitive, poetic remembrance of our standing on nothingness (*kyo* 虚), that this abyss first opens. To further develop his point, Karaki quotes the beginning of *Ecce homo*, in which Nietzsche describes this contradiction as something that internally shapes himself, too, a particular "double thread" of *health* and *illness*, *elevation* and *decadence*.

> This double birth, from the highest and lowest rungs on the ladder of life, as it were, simultaneously decadent and *beginning* – this, if anything, explains that neutrality, that freedom from partisanship in relation to overall problems

[10] *Nietzsche: The Anti-Christ….*, p. 233. KSA 6, *Der Fall Wagner*, p. 11: "Was verlangt ein Philosoph am ersten und letzten von sich? Seine Zeit in sich zu überwinden, „zeitlos" zu werden. Womit also hat er seinen härtesten Strauss zu bestehn? Mit dem, worin gerade er das Kind seiner Zeit ist. Wohlan! Ich bin so gut wie Wagner das Kind dieser Zeit, will sagen ein *décadent*: nur dass ich das begriff, nur dass ich mich dagegen wehrte. Der Philosoph in mir wehrte sich dagegen".

[11] *Nietzsche: The Anti-Christ….,* p. 166. KSA 6, *Götzen-Dämmerung,* p. 72: "Es ist ein Selbstbetrug seitens der Philosophen und Moralisten, damit schon aus der décadence herauszutreten, dass sie gegen dieselbe Krieg machen".

> of life, that is, perhaps my distinction. I have a subtler sense of smell for the signs of ascent and decline than anyone has ever had, I am their teacher *par excellence* – I know both of them, I am both of them.[12]

Nietzsche then summarizes this stance adding: "Granting that I am a decadent, I am the opposite as well"[13]. This state of contradiction must be our starting point to understand why the notion of "decadence" is Nietzsche's "greatest preoccupation", without fear of overstatement. Karaki warns against any interpretation of Nietzsche erasing this ambivalence, and portraying only his proud opposition to Christianity, to Wagner, the death of God, Dionysus – his active nihilism. To be oppositional, "decadent" in the real sense of the word, one must constantly return to – fall into – the "negative nihilism" discovered in weakness, dejection, nervousness: here "both Dionysus and Christ, both God and the Übermensch, both Nietzsche and Wagner eternally return." (SD: 38).

Nietzsche's observations on physical health at the beginning of *Ecce homo* are an important proof of this double movement; pain and illness, the almost unbearable state of weakness that plagued Nietzsche for long periods of his life, were never meant to be erased by the "sound", heroic disposition that despite all evidence he attributed himself. We stated in 2.1 how decadence is a "thought of the body"; Stefan Zweig, in the philosophical-literary portrait of Nietzsche that concludes his *The Struggle with the Demon,* analyzes the pattern of physical stress that shaped Nietzsche's "decadence". Just like Karaki, Zweig realizes how that of Nietzsche must be a "twofold portrait":

> Our sculptors and painters delight in portraying him, a Germanic superman, a Prometheus bound … But genuine tragedy is never theatrical, and the true portrait of Nietzsche is far less picturesque than busts and paintings of him would let us believe.[14]

[12] *Nietzsche: The Anti-Christ….,* p. 75. KSA 6, *Ecce Homo*, p. 264: "Diese doppelte Herkunft, gleichsam aus der obersten und der untersten Sprosse an der Leiter des Lebens, décadent zugleich und Anfang – dies, wenn irgend Etwas, erklärt jene Neutralität, jene Freiheit von Partei im Verhältniss zum Gesammtprobleme des Lebens, die mich vielleicht auszeichnet. Ich habe für die Zeichen von Aufgang und Niedergang eine feinere Witterung als je ein Mensch gehabt hat, ich bin der Lehrer par excellence hierfür, – ich kenne Beides, ich bin Beides." Here *Witterung*, "sense of smell", also has another significant meaning, "atmospheric weather". We will address later the relevance of this atmospheric sensitivity in Nietzsche.

[13] *Ibid*., p. 76, KSA 6, *Ecce homo* p. 266: "Abgerechnet nämlich, dass ich ein *décadent* bin, bin ich auch dessen Gegensatz".

[14] S. Zweig, *The Fight with the Demon*: *Hölderlin, Kleist and Nietzsche*, transl. by C. Paul and E. Paul, Penguin Random House 2012 (ebook, "Twofold Portrait").

Nietzsche's life was one of immense solitude, marked by the impossibility of finding true interlocutors: a melancholic monologue like Baudelaire's, that convinced him of his "untimeliness". A constant sense of uneasiness also forced him to be almost constantly on the move. Exhaustion and pain were paired by insomnia, which led him to a heavy use of narcotics: Zweig notes that "in two months Nietzsche consumed as many ounces of chloral hydrate"[15]. The portrait of Nietzsche made by Zweig is that of an almost constant state of bereavement:

> Headaches so ferocious that all he could do was to collapse onto a couch and groan in agony, stomach troubles culminating in cramps when he would vomit blood, migrainous conditions of every sort, fevers, loss of appetite, exhaustion, haemorrhoids, intestinal stasis, rigors, night sweats – a gruesome enumeration, indeed. Added to these was the fact that he was nearly blind, that after the smallest strain his eyes would swell and water so that he should not have imposed on them more than one and a half hours of work a day.[16]

Nietzsche obviously ignored this last piece of medical advice, incurring in more pains and nauseas. The mention of this extremely poor eyesight could have some curious implications. Nietzsche was, in Zweig's blunt diagnosis "six-sevenths blind". And yet the same half-blind man, "groping his way when entering a room", the "man who dwelt among the shadows", was not only blessed with an uncanny musical sensitivity, but could brag about having a "subtler sense of smell for the signs of ascent and decline than anyone has ever had." A passion for scents and perfumes seems actually a recurring trait in decadents; Baudelaire, too, had been a prime example of this attunement to formless atmospheric presences, sensual and yet transcendent, able to summon the ghost of a lover or an indefinite past[17]. It is therefore worth asking what are we to make of Nietzsche's nose, and whether decadence must been, indeed, "something sniffed".

## 5. Nietzsche's nose: sniffing out decadence

As we dwell on this parallelism, we must ask: does scent bear some specific affinity to decadence? Sight is the Apollonian sense of light, clear detachment, rational analysis and forms – by far the favorite one in the intellectual heritage originating in Greek philosophy. Olfaction would

[15] *Ibid*.
[16] *Ibid*.
[17] For a philosophical analysis of this role of olfaction in Baudelaire, see J.-P. Sartre, *Baudelaire*, transl. by M. Turnell, New Directions, New York 1972, p. 22, 28, 173-4.

thus be its dark mirror, a sense of Dionysian indistinction that mixes internal and external, characteristic of animal desire, mystical elation, but also decadent, effete artificiality and corruption. Some commentators[18] have already pointed out the uncommon attention for olfaction in Nietzsche's work, who praises it first of all in his all-out polemic against professional "philosophers":

> Take the nose, for instance – no philosopher has ever mentioned the nose with admiration and gratitude, even though it is the most delicate instrument we have at our disposal: noses can detect tiny differences in motion that even spectroscopes do not notice. We have science these days precisely to the extent that we have learned to sharpen them, arm them, and think them through the end. Everything else is deformity and pre-science: I mean metaphysics, theology, psychology, epistemology […] they do not have anything to do with reality, not even as a problem.[19]

This stress on scent, on its undeniable reality and highest resistance to abstraction, is symptomatic of Nietzsche's affirmation of the corporeal, of the vital and animal element in man. In Zarathustra we see a poetic gathering by means of olfaction, in which human, snake and bird appreciate together the scent of pure air:

> As Zarathustra made these speeches he stood close to the entrance of his cave; with the last words, however, he slipped away from his guests and fled for a short while into the open. "Oh clean fragrance around me," he cried out, "oh blissful stillness around me! But where are my animals? Come here, come here my eagle and my snake! Tell me, my animals: these higher men all together – do they perhaps not smell good? Oh clean fragrances around me! Only now do I know and feel how I love you, my animals." […] In such a manner the three of them together sniffled and sipped the good air. For the air here outside was better than among the higher men.[20]

[18] See A. Le Guerer, *Le pouvoirs de l'odeur*, Odile Jakob, Paris 1998, p. 191 f., and A. Westra, *Nietzsche's Nose*, "Scents / Sense" n. 3 (2016), p. 14-17. Neither, however, stresses its relationship with decadence and actual experiences of somatic thinking.

[19] *Nietzsche: Anti-Christ….* p. 166. KSA 6, *Götzen-Dämmerung* p. 75-6: "Diese Nase zum Beispiel, von der noch kein Philosoph mit Verehrung und Dankbarkeit gesprochen hat, ist sogar einstweilen das delikateste Instrument, das uns zu Gebote steht: es vermag noch Minimaldifferenzen der Bewegung zu constatiren, die selbst das Spektroskop nicht constatirt. Wir besitzen heute genau so weit Wissenschaft, als wir uns entschlossen haben, das Zeugniss der Sinne anzunehmen, – als wir sie noch schärfen, bewaffnen, zu Ende denken lernten. Der Rest ist Missgeburt und Noch-nicht-Wissenschaft: will sagen Metaphysik, Theologie, Psychologie, Erkenntnisstheorie. [….] In ihnen kommt die Wirklichkeit gar nicht vor, nicht einmal als Problem."

[20] F. Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, A. del Caro – R. Pippin (ed. by), Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge, p. 240-1. KSA 4, p. 369: "Als Zarathustra diese Reden sprach, stand er nahe dem Eingange seiner Höhle; mit den letzten Worten aber entschlüpfte er seinen Gästen

But olfaction for Nietzsche goes well beyond instinct and sensuality: the nose is also a diagnostic tool, something that unfailingly reveals *decadence*. As we have seen in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche brags about having "a subtler sense of smell for the signs of ascent and decline than anyone has ever had". This self-aggrandizing claim is later repeated in an even more iconic form: "I was the first to *discover* the truth because I was the first to discover (*empfand*) – to *smell* – lies for what they are … My genius is in my nostrils"[21].

The investigation of *The Genealogy of Morality,* is, for instance, conceived as a breakthrough beyond something so pervasive and rooted to have become hidden in plain sight. Vision, observes Westra, "lacks depth", is only capable of recognizing what shows itself in the light, what is *present*, and is thus easily fooled. "By contrast, odors linger, and Nietzsche, like a bloodhound, tracks the historical scent-trail far back in time"[22]. It is thanks to this olfactory, decadent sensitivity for something that is not simply an already occurred event, but rather a temporally ambiguous trace, past and yet not passing, that Nietzsche can announce how "this world has really never quite lost a certain odour of blood and torture"[23]. The death of God, too, is something that will be never revealed to the eye (hence the fool ironically holding a lantern in full daylight), but its disturbing reality is felt as an atmospheric decay: "Do we still smell nothing of the divine decomposition? – Gods, too, decompose! God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him!"[24].

As a matter of fact, scents of decay far outnumber the whiffs of perfume in Nietzsche's work. The perception of something foul, invisible to the eye

und floh für eine kurze Weile in's Freie. „Oh reine Gerüche um mich, rief er aus, oh selige Stille um mich! Aber wo sind meine Thiere? Heran, heran, mein Adler und meine Schlange! Sagt mir doch, meine Thiere: diese höheren Menschen insgesammt – riechen sie vielleicht nicht gut? Oh reine Gerüche um mich! Jetzo weiss und fühle ich erst, wie ich euch, meine Thiere, liebe."[…. ] Solchergestalt waren sie zu drei still beisammen und schnüffelten und schlürften mit einander die gute Luft. Denn die Luft war hier draussen besser als bei den höheren Menschen".

[21] *Nietzsche: Anti-Christ….*, p. 144. Comparing it to the German, one can see the stress on olfaction: the verb here is not "discover", but "sense": KSA 6, *Ecce Homo*, p. 366: "Ich erst habe die Wahrheit entdeckt, dadurch dass ich zuerst die Lüge als Lüge empfand – roch… Mein Genie ist in meinen Nüstern…"

[22] Westra, *Nietzsche's Nose*, cit., p. 16.

[23] F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality and Other Writings*, K. Ansell–Pearson and C. Diethe (ed. by), Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge 1997, p. 41. KSA 5, p. 300: "Jene Welt im Grunde einen gewissen Geruch von Blut und Folter niemals wieder ganz eingebüsst habe".

[24] F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* B. Williams (ed. by), transl. by J. Nauckhoff–A. Del Caro, Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge 2001, p. 120. KSA 3, p. 481: "Riechen wir noch Nichts von der göttlichen Verwesung? – auch Götter verwesen! Gott ist todt! Gott bleibt todt! Und wir haben ihn getödtet!".

but revealing unfailingly internal and external corruption is a very consistent pattern in his works. The world of the "last men" is enveloped by a ghastly stench: "Their idol smells foul to me, the cold monster: together they all smell foul to me, these idol worshipers. My brothers, do you want to choke in the reek of their snouts and cravings"[25]; or again "They intended to live as corpses, they decked out their corpse in black; from their speeches I still smell the rotten spice of death chambers"[26]; "Just read any Christian agitator, Saint Augustine, for example, and you will realize, you will *smell* the sort of unclean people this brought to the top"[27]; "The thing that separates two people the most is a difference in their sense and degree of cleanliness. [….] What matters, in the end, is that they 'can't stand the smell of each other!'"[28]. The list could be much longer.

This stench behaves like an actual odor: while revealing something hidden and intimate about its origin, it also seeps into other things, becoming one with those who inhale it. Talking of *The Birth of Tragedy,* for instance, Nietzsche admitted how several influences still lingered in it like an unwholesome aura: "it smells offensively of Hegel; only in one or two formulæ is it infected with the bitter odour of corpses which is peculiar to Schopenhauer"[29]. Like Baudelaire before him, Nietzsche, too, was engulfed in a cloud of morbid perfume, that was the very medium of his thought. Scent, like decadence, is never something purely outside or inside: it is itself a "nothing" and a "between", occupying temporally and physically a gap between what is positively given.

This concentration of mentions of scent and foul odors in Nietzsche seems too high to be a merely rhetoric device. We should ask, therefore, whether it might constitute an actual element of his experience and patterns of thought: a characteristic of his "sensual self-consciousness". Westra and Le Guérer praised Nietzsche's "breathtakingly original use of olfactory metaphors", his inviting us "to reimagine concepts as if they were smells",

[25] *Zarathustra*, p. 36; KSA 4, p. 63. "Übel riecht mir ihr Götze, das kalte Unthier: übel riechen sie mir alle zusammen, diese Götzendiener. Meine Brüder, wollt ihr denn ersticken im Dunste ihrer Mäuler und Begierden!".

[26] *Zarathustra,* p. 70; KSA 4, p. 118. "Als Leichname gedachten sie zu leben, schwarz schlugen sie ihren Leichnam aus; auch aus ihren Reden rieche ich noch die üble Würze von Todtenkammern".

[27] *Nietzsche: Anti-Christ….,* p. 63; KSA 6, p. 248: "Man lese nur irgend einen christlichen Agitator, den heiligen Augustin zum Beispiel, um zu begreifen, um zu riechen, was für unsaubere Gesellen damit obenauf gekommen sind".

[28] F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, R-P. Horstmann–J. Norman (ed. by), Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge 2002, p. 167. KSA 5, p. 226: "Was am tiefsten zwei Menschen trennt, das ist ein verschiedener Sinn und Grad der Reinlichkeit. [….] zuletzt bleibt es dabei – sie „können sich nicht riechen!".

[29] *Nietzsche: Anti-Christ….*, p. 108; KSA 6, p. 310: "Sie riecht anstössig Hegelisch, sie ist nur in einigen Formeln mit dem Leichenbitter-parfum Schopenhauer's behaftet".

in a "radical revaluation of olfaction"[30]. But we also ought to recognize in this process an olfactory *hyper*-sensitivity, a distinctive sign of decadence. Olfactory hypersensitivity and olfactory hallucinations are, in fact, a typical and highly revealing early symptom of schizophrenia[31]. The German physician Max Nordau, in the most unsympathetic portrait of Nietzsche as a degenerate and a dangerous madman presented in his infamous book *Entartung*, was probably the first one to understand the non-cosmetic importance of this olfactory "sensual self-consciousness" in Nietzsche, even if for all the wrong reasons[32]. In Zweig's biographical portrait, too, we can see Nietzsche's atmospheric hypersensitivity portrayed in all its neurotic violence, as a constant state of uneasiness connecting body and psyche, inside and outside. Unlike Nordau, Zweig recognizes all the tragic potential of Nietzsche's neurodiversity, in an "Apology for Illness":

> I doubt if there ever has been a man so sensitive as Nietzsche to atmospheric alterations, one who so minutely responded to meteorological tensions and oscillations. His whole body was like quicksilver, like a barometer. An intimate relationship existed between his pulse and the atmospheric pressure, between his nerves and the degree of humidity in the air; an electric current seemed to flow from him outward, and from the universe back to him. […] In this most vital of thinkers, body and mind were so intimately wedded to atmospheric phenomena that for him interior and exterior happenings were identical. "I am neither mind nor body, but a tertium quid. I suffer everywhere and for everything".[33]

Scent and decadence are therefore united by this collapse of inside and outside. "Sensual self-awareness" is a state in which "interior and exterior" are not separated anymore, and while this condition obviously borders on madness, the strength of this perspective can also shatter conventional view of values, time and reality[34]. This olfactory pattern plays a decisive role also in what Karaki considers Nietzsche's deepest affinity with Asian decadence: his view of eternal return.

[30] *Nietzsche's Nose*, cit., p. 17; A. Le Guérer, *Les pouvoirs de l'odeur*, Jacob, Paris 2002 p. 191.
[31] H. Tellenbach, *Geschmack und Atmosphäre. Medien menschlichen Elementarkontakt,* Otto Müller Verlag, Salzburg 1968; B. Turetsky, C. Hahn et al., *Scents and Nonsense: Olfactory Dysfunction in Schizophrenia*. "Schizophr. Bull.", 35-6 (2009), pp. 1117-31. Baudelaire's clinical history, too, can probably fit into the same pattern.
[32] M. Nordau, *Degeneration,* Appleton and Company, New York 1895, p. 460f.
[33] *The Struggle with the Demon*, "Apology for Illness".
[34] It is worth asking whether philosophy itself would likely not be possible, at its root, without this embodied experience of transcendence. All the Greek stress on visual contemplation and stable intelligible forms could in this sense be described as an (always imperfect, and at best provisional) domestication of this primary state.

## 6. Eternal return and atmosphere

According to Karaki's analysis, there is no other element of Nietzsche's thought that enshrines "decadence" as much as that of "eternal return". A non-decadent view of the world, observes Karaki, is rooted in the "creation of values and formation of an order" (*kachika junjoka*, 価値化順序化, SD: 31). The three fundamental categories of this process of value formation are "purposiveness, unity and truth" (SD: 32). Nietzsche's nihilism does not simply mean to reject them, reveling in aimlessness, disintegration, and unrealities: it its aim is rather to feel beyond them something that is "raw existence, a meaningless transmigration (*muigina sei sei ruten* 無意義な生生流転)" (SD: 33). From the "middle condition" of decadence, in which all values are negated, Nietzsche develops an "extreme form" of it, in which "the same senselessness and aimlessness becomes the real face of existence, and in affirming them actively, they acquire a new aspect. Meaninglessness and valueslessness become, from psychological-ethical things, something metaphysical, psychological-existential" (SD: 34).

Nietzsche's idea of eternal return was both puzzling and fascinating for his Japanese readers. It is easy to see how the idea of returning time (albeit common to archaic Greece as well) was conceivable as an "Asian" element of his thought, defined by Nietzsche himself a "European form of Buddhism", both as a "*décadence* religion" and "*beyond* good and evil". What is eternal return, and why is it so important to understand the full sense of "decadence" in Nietzsche?

In the second book of his lectures on Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger admits how eternal return, as presented by Nietzsche, smacks us as an "impossible eccentricity"[35]. Are we really supposed to take it literally, as the arbitrary metaphysical belief in the perfect repetition of everything on a super-human scale of time? It seems like a pointless idea; and yet this very meaninglessness – not a *lack*, but a particular *erasure* of meaning – constitutes its full force. In *Ecce homo* Nietzsche explains how the thought of eternal return suddenly came to him in 1881, as an almost violent "weight" (*Schwergewicht*), during a noon walk in the mountains in Silvaplana, near Sils-Maria. He was transported "6000 feet beyond man and time", and the unbearable intensity of the experience and its accompanying metaphysical insight made him promise to himself to keep silent about it for "ten years"[36]. It is a vow that he broke only in part. The doctrine of the eternal recurrence of the same is abruptly introduced in

[35] M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, transl. by D. F. K., Harper One, San Francisco 1991, vol. 2 p. 5.
[36] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

the second-last paragraph of *Gay Science* (§ 341) and then mentioned again only in few passages of *Zarathustra*, who begins its *Untergang* – descent, but also "fall" – after spending exactly ten years on a mountain. In other words, Nietzsche created a prophetic figure in order to express this insight, since it remained something unspeakable for himself.

> *The heaviest weight*. – What if some day or night a demon were to steal into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: "This life as you now live it and have lived it you will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life must return to you, all in the same succession and sequence – even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!" Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: "You are a god, and never have I heard anything more divine".[37]

The first point worth noting that even this passage is not a description or a statement, but an invitation in the second person. The scene of the "loneliest loneliness", suggests Heidegger, is somewhere "prior and beyond every distinction between I and Thou", in which the human being stands "in the midst of being as a whole"[38]. There was no way to express the insight of Sils-Maria as a simple statement; it had to be conveyed by a language that includes a shift into imagination, a projection onto unreality.

This connects to the second key point of this insight: its announcement fits with the model of "sensual self-consciousness", of a thought that "thinks itself" outside of a singular subject, and seems to push on the subject from the outside, as an atmosphere. The eerie stillness and the spider in the moonlight are equally essential to this insight – possibly more – than the sense of being a subject at its center. The "demon" or

[37] *The Gay Science,* p. 194. KSA 3, p. 570: "Das grösste Schwergewicht. – Wie, wenn dir eines Tages oder Nachts, ein Dämon in deine einsamste Einsamkeit nachschliche und dir sagte: „Dieses Leben, wie du es jetzt lebst und gelebt hast, wirst du noch einmal und noch unzählige Male leben müssen; und es wird nichts Neues daran sein, sondern jeder Schmerz und jede Lust und jeder Gedanke und Seufzer und alles unsäglich Kleine und Grosse deines Lebens muss dir wiederkommen, und Alles in der selben Reihe und Folge – und ebenso diese Spinne und dieses Mondlicht zwischen den Bäumen, und ebenso dieser Augenblick und ich selber. Die ewige Sanduhr des Daseins wird immer wieder umgedreht – und du mit ihr, Stäubchen vom Staube!" – Würdest du dich nicht niederwerfen und mit den Zähnen knirschen und den Dämon verfluchen, der so redete? Oder hast du einmal einen ungeheuren Augenblick erlebt, wo du ihm antworten würdest: „du bist ein Gott und nie hörte ich Göttlicheres!"

[38] M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, cit., vol. 2 p. 32.

god is the borrowed voice of this atmosphere. In *Zarathustra* we meet again such talking atmosphere, declined in a feminine form, mockingly daring Zarathustra to speak the truth of eternal return[39].

The atmospheric "demon" in paragraph § 341 is not framed in the diabolic terms of Christianity, as in Baudelaire. Like Socrates', Nietzsche's demon is a voice that negates with a supernatural force: in his case what is erased is the sense of reality based on linear progress[40]. Zweig's portrait stresses the universal value of this experience, resurfacing in the dangerously unstable biographies of great thinkers-poets for two thousand years of (not only) Western history:

> I term "daemonic" the unrest that is in us all, driving each of us out of himself into the elemental. It seems as if nature had implanted into every mind an inalienable part of the primordial chaos, and as if this part were interminably striving – with tense passion – to rejoin the superhuman, suprasensual medium whence it derives […] Whatever strives to transcend the narrower boundaries of self, o'erleaping immediate personal interests to seek adventures in the dangerous realm of enquiry, is the outcome of the daemonic constituent of our being. But the daemon is not a friendly and helpful power […] The daemonic bodes danger, carries with it an atmosphere of tragedy, breathes doom.[41]

The essential affinity between "decadence" and "demonic" motifs, already highlighted by Nordau[42], should not therefore be seen within a solely Christian perspective. Zweig, a good friend of Freud, probably thought of this dark dimension also in psychoanalytic terms. But while a psychoanalytic reading would force this demonic element *inside*, grounding it into a personal psyche or even organic dysfunctions, a fundamental character of Nietzsche's eternal return is its adventitious quality, its being discovered and thought as part of a sensual, encompassing *atmosphere,* the true field of this repetition[43].

The third point is connected to the first two (the *imaginary-poetic* quality of *Wiederkehr* and its *demonic-atmospheric* character) and is the last key to understand why eternal return is so deeply connected to decadence, and to Nietzsche's olfactory hypersensitivity. The structure of *Wiederkehr* is not circular but *vertical*, at the same time abyss and elevation.

[39] *Zarathusra,* p. 115. KSA 4, p. 187.
[40] The mention of a "demon" (*Dämon*) in § 341 might be connected to a reference to Socrates in the precedent paragraph, § 340; for an analysis of this motif, see P. S. Loeb, *The Death of Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge 2010, p. 35-38.
[41] *The Struggle with the Demon* ("Introduction").
[42] *Degeneration,* p. 275f.
[43] For that which concerns atmospheres, in this text we use this word in the sense of Hermann Schmitz's New Phenomenology, with its radically externalist view of feelings.

## 6.1 An aroma of eternity

The middle stance of decadence in Nietzsche's case is in fact characterized by an extreme embodied tension with a descent-ascensional character. In no locus of his thought this is stressed more vehemently than in *Zarathustra*, especially in relation to eternal return. The mountain, a place of elevation, in which Nietzsche and his alter-ego Zarathustra have "breathed doom" but also the purest air, must be left in an *Untergang*, a "descent" that is both that of man and that of sunset: end of the day and of one's life, self-annihilation and decadence. The thought of eternal return is in turn an oppressive *weight*, something that has to be stoically born, but, observes Heidegger, "can also drag down, can humiliate a man"[44]. In *Zarathustra* this heaviness is also personified as another demonic figure, the "spirit of gravity", that counters the superhuman quest for elevation and flight with an equally oppressive push downwards:

> He sat atop me, half dwarf, half mole, lame, paralyzing, dripping lead into my ear, lead-drop thoughts into my brain. "Oh Zarathustra," he murmured scornfully, syllable by syllable. "You stone of wisdom! You hurled yourself high, but every hurled stone must – fall! […] indeed you hurled the stone – but it will fall back down upon you"![45]

In the flight of a stone, two movements are reciprocal, essentially the same: what is thrown up must come down; but in turn it is this very sense of weight that allows Nietzsche and everyone else to stand into an endlessly oppositional stance towards it, to discover infinite force and joy within the moment in which "abyss and peak are joined". Such double movement, both elated elevation and doomed burden, was already illustrated with the same pattern in Baudelaire's poetic Sisyphus, who deals with his own stone and his own vertical recurrence before transforming into an ominous scent: "On must have courage as strong/ As Sisyphus, lifting this weight …. And many a flower waves / And wastes its sweet perfumes / in desert solitudes" (*Ill Fortune*)[46].

[44] M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche,* vol. 2 p. 23.
[45] *Zarathustra*, p. 124. KSA 4, p. 198: "Obwohl er auf mir sass, halb Zwerg, halb Maulwurf; lahm; lähmend; Blei durch mein Ohr, Bleitropfen-Gedanken in mein Hirn träufelnd. „Oh Zarathustra, raunte er höhnisch Silb um Silbe, du Stein der Weisheit! Du warfst dich hoch, aber jeder geworfene Stein muss – fallen! [….] oh Zarathustra, weit warfst du ja den Stein, – aber auf dich wird er zurückfallen!".
[46] C. Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil,* Oxford Univ. Press, Oxford, p. 29. The anticipation of Nietzsche's idea of a repeating temporality in Baudelaire's work was pointed out also by Walter Benjamin, who stressed the continuity between Blanqui's *L'eternité par les astres*, Baudelaire's and Nietzsche's work as part of a "transhistorical configuration of past and present" (T. Miller, *Eternity no more: Walter Benjamin on the Eternal Return*, in

If we follow this double momentum, we can understand why, just as for Sisyphus, Nietzsche's *Wiederkehr* is *not* a circular movement. Nietzsche himself took care to mark as simplistic and misguided this understanding: when the dwarf observes how "All truth is curved; time itself is a circle", Zarathustra warns him: "don't make things too easy for yourself!"[47]. Heidegger concurred: this common, circular interpretation of the *Wiederkehr* "has not really grasped the riddle", as it has "made the solution too easy"[48].

Why not a circle? Answering from the perspective of the embodied, "sensual self-consciousness" suggested by Karaki, the circle is still a shape seen *from the outside*, already an abstraction from the vertiginous repetition that Nietzsche felt through his living body (*leiblich*), as a vertical elation-abyss opening within a single instant. This is the actual sense of the "abyss opened between instants" described by Karaki, and such embodied verticality should be taken in account to explain the very sense of *decadence, Untergang,* flight, fall and sublimation as core experiences of Nietzsche's or Baudelaire's intellectual biography. This endlessly repeated fall and ascent must happen without stepping out of the single moment. As Nishitani observes in his *The Self-overcoming of Nihilism*, for the "godless" Nietzsche:

> Not even the eternal present can be based on something that transcends time […] to transcend time, for Nietzsche, would mean getting caught in another illusion. Instead, one needs a standpoint from which living time in a truly temporal way, within time, becomes a liberation from the bonds of time. This eternity is not an eternity posited outside of time […].[49]

The last crucial element is that the *Wiederkehr* is that it is a *return*: it bears, that is, a special relationship to the *past*. An *eternally* recurring instant will obviously return in the future as well, but recurrence is first of all an erasure of novelty, a form of what "has always already been". In the vision of the gate called moment Zarathustra opposes this retrograde movement to the dwarf's idea of a simple circularity:

*In Given World and Time: Temporalities in Context,* CEU Press 2008, p. 281). Benjamin wrote: "Baudelaire's poetry reveals the new in the ever-selfsame, and the ever-selfsame in the new […] the idea of eternal recurrence emerged at about the same time in the worlds of Baudelaire, Blanqui, and Nietzsche. In Baudelaire, the accent is on the new, which is wrested with heroic effort from the 'ever-selfsame'; in Nietzsche, it is on the 'ever-selfsame' which the human being faces with heroic composure". W. Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life,* Harvard University Press, London 2006, p. 151.

[47] *Zarathustra,* p. 126; KSA 4, p. 200: "Du Geist der Schwere! sprach ich zürnend, mache dir es nicht zu leicht!"

[48] M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche,* vol. 2 p. 9.

[49] K. Nishitani., *The Self-overcoming of Nihilism*, SUNY Press, New York 1990, pp. 58-9.

> "See this moment!" I continued. "From this gateway Moment a long eternal lane stretches backward: behind us lies an eternity. Must not whatever can already have passed this way before? Must not whatever can happen, already have happened, been done, passed by before? […] And this slow spider that creeps in the moonlight, and this moonlight itself, and I and you in the gateway whispering together, whispering of eternal things – must not all of us have been here before?"[50]

But given this bodily entrenchment, its deep *emotive attunement*, its *vertical quality*, and its sense of *repetition*, it is fair to ask whether the *Wiederkehr* might not also be described as a *resurfacing*: an eternalized moment that disrupts a linear reality not simply as a personal reminiscence, but as a specimen of a different kind of time, suddenly arising from its abyss. Freud, too, reluctantly recognized the affinity between Nietzsche's eternal return and his idea of *Wiederholungszwang*: while the Ego can experience time in a linear fashion, the pulsional elements of life endlessly, blindly repeat themselves, hidden but active in a timeless and dark bodily dimension.

If we approach the eternal return from this "decadent" angle, we can recognize the underlying affinity between Nietzsche and another author that rediscovered time through a sensual repetition of the same just a few years later: Proust. The sudden bliss of involuntary repetition of the *madeleine* episode is apparently distant from the tragic tone of Zarathustra, and yet the mixture of unspeakable joy and loss, together with the idea of a discontinuous temporality holding some demonic secret of existence, has not only common sources, but also a structural affinity with Baudelaire's and Nietzsche's work. We have stressed how Baudelaire's idea of a lingering, sensuous temporality coincides with images of scent, and Proust's most famous page is also linked to the "oral sensorium". But can we find in Nietzsche's text, too, an explicit connection between the "heaviest burden" of the eternal return and an olfactory mark? There is at least another passage of *Zarathustra* confirming this, hypothesis, beginning from the 6th section of *The Sleepwaker song*:

> You higher men, do you not smell it? A fragrance wells up mysteriously, – a fragrance and aroma of eternity, a rosy blissful, brown golden wine aroma of

[50] *Zarathustra,* p. 126. KSA 4, p. 200: "Siehe, sprach ich weiter, diesen Augenblick! Von diesem Thor-wege Augenblick läuft eine lange ewige Gasse rückwärts: hinter uns liegt eine Ewigkeit. Muss nicht, was laufen kann von allen Dingen, schon ein-mal diese Gasse gelaufen sein? Muss nicht, was geschehn kann von allen Dingen, schon einmal geschehn, gethan, vorüber-gelaufen sein? […] Und diese langsame Spinne, die im Mondscheine kriecht, und dieser Mondschein selber, und ich und du im Thorwege, zusam-men flüsternd, von ewigen Dingen flüsternd – müssen wir nicht Alle schon dagewesen sein? " The textual presentation of the scene is itself a "once again", with the spider and the moonlight of *The Gay Science* paragraph making their second apparition at the end of the following book.

> ancient happiness, – of drunken, midnight, dying happiness, which sings: the world is deep and deeper than the grasp of day! […]
>
> A drop of dew? A haze and fragrance of eternity? Do you not hear it? Do you not smell it? Just now my world became perfect, midnight is also noon – Pain is also a joy, a curse is also a blessing, night is also a sun […]
>
> All things are enchained, entwined, enamored – if you ever wanted one time two times, if you ever said "I like you, happiness! Whoosh! Moment!" then you wanted everything back! – Everything anew, everything eternal, everything enchained, entwined, enamored, oh thus you loved the world – you eternal ones, love it eternally and for all time; and say to pain also: refrain, but come back! For all joy wants – eternity![51]

The "aroma of eternity" is something able to return by "welling up", suddenly reappearing vertically out of an atmosphere ("a drop of dew") but is also infinitely deep, bringing with it an intense emotive response. We remarked how often the olfactory perceptions in Nietzsche's prose coincide with pain and disgust, possibly fueled by an organically disturbed hypersensitivity. But here "pain is also joy", the unbearable presence of this timelessness within time is also blossoming into ecstasy. Olfaction is the sense most connected with time, and yet it is not really available to voluntary memory: a scent can however repeat itself, returning to the present as *again the selfsame.* Olfaction is the sense of whoever "ever wanted one time two times", that of "decadence" in the sense of Karaki's vertical "abyss between the moments": embodied-atmospheric consciousness, in which reality and nothingness intersect.

The great novelty of decadence is firstly a *spatial* extension of the subject, a disintegration of the self that, just like a decomposing carcass or a blooming flower, suddenly feels its own body as part of a self-conscious atmospheric field. But the decadence described by Karaki is also the discovery of a new and disturbing *discontinuous time*. Both states are a form of heightened consciousness, bringing with them extreme pleasure but also a risky exposure to nihility.

[51] *Zarathustra,* p. 261. KSA 4, p. 400: " Ihr höheren Menschen, riecht ihr's nicht? Es quillt heimlich ein Geruch herauf, – ein Duft und Geruch der Ewigkeit, ein rosenseliger brauner Gold-Wein-Geruch von altem Glücke, – von trunkenem Mitternachts-Sterbeglücke, welches singt: die Welt ist tief und tiefer als der Tag gedacht! [….] Ein Tropfen Thau's? Ein Dunst und Duft der Ewigkeit? Hört ihr's nicht? Riecht ihr's nicht? Eben ward meine Welt vollkommen, Mitternacht ist auch Mittag, – Schmerz ist auch eine Lust, Fluch ist auch ein Segen, Nacht ist auch eine Sonne [….] Alle Dinge sind verkettet, verfädelt, verliebt, – wolltet ihr jemals Ein Mal Zwei Mal, spracht ihr jemals „du gefällst mir, Glück! Husch! Augenblick!" so wolltet ihr Alles zurück! – Alles von neuem, Alles ewig, Alles verkettet, verfädelt, verliebt, oh so liebtet ihr die Welt, – ihr Ewigen, liebt sie ewig und allezeit: und auch zum Weh sprecht ihr: vergeh, aber komm zurück! Denn alle Lust will – Ewigkeit!"

Karaki's work does not only suggest us this double structure of "embodied self-consciousness", however, but stresses how it is not at all a prerogative of European culture. While European culture has dealt most intensely with these patterns of experience in its own *fin-de-siècle*, they have a long and nuanced history also in East Asia, where the atmospheric embodiment and discontinuous temporality of "decadence" have played an important role in artistic and religious tradition.

## 7. Matsuo Bashō, a Japanese decadent

Japanese readers like Karaki must therefore have had the impression, right or wrong, that within their own national histories some figures were already "decadents" in this crucial, metaphysical sense: that Japan had already had its own Baudelaires and Nietzsches. Such operations could be dismissed as a kind of modernist projection, meant to appease the anxiety of the first Japanese cosmopolitans before the insularity of their cultural history. But if we look at the work and lives of Bashō or Ikkyū in this perspective, we do find several structural affinities.

Matsuo Bashō (松尾芭蕉, 1644-1694) is the undisputed master and innovator of Japanese *haikai*: humorous, collectively composed chains of poetry that became popular in the Edo period, and from which individually composed *haiku* emerged in early Meiji. Bashō became famous as a wanderer poet, as he kept moving throughout Japan in the last decade of its life. Despite the straightforward association between *haiku* and "Zen" prevalent in the West, partly encouraged by influential popularizers like Suzuki Daisetz[52], Bashō often expressed a more complex attitude towards his poetry. He was a "man in the middle" in a cultural and spatial sense, spiritually close to the Daoist ideals of aimlessness and freedom, to canonical Chinese poets like Li Bai, Du Fu or Bai Ju Yi, but also determined to "go down" to the murky reality of common people in contemporary Japan. While Bashō never showed himself ready to drunken excesses or sexual adventures – on the contrary, his most famous poetry is almost completely sexless, a trait distinguishing it from a lot of earlier and contemporary *haikai*[53] – he shares

[52] For instance D. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture,* Princeton Univ. Press, Princeton, pp. 215-68.

[53] Some biographers have argued that Bashō might have been primarily homosexual, a practitioner of *shūdō* (the formalized relationship between an adult and adolescent typical of Edo Japan). There are a few passages of his work that do allow this hypothesis. But beside biographical reconstructions, it is significant how Bashō's work is almost never relying on sensual or sexual overtones. His body is central to his poetry, but as something hollow, weak, old (beyond his actual years), and the overarching mood of Bashō's poetry

other typical traits of *décadents*: a life spent in aimless wandering, his fundamental melancholia and an almost unbearable sense of restlessness, a vague sensation of demonic haunting.

All these elements shape an aspect of Bashō's work greatly stressed by Karaki: his relationship with the double ideal of *fūryū* 風流 / *fūkyō* 風狂[54]. Respectively "wind-flow" and "wind-madness", these twin, life ideals describe poetry and refinement as something that, like wind, conjoins total freedom but also an eternally oppositional stance, arising from negativity and impermanence. While the range of meaning of *fūryū* is wider and even self-contradictory, including "noble elegance" but also "erotic desire", an ironic and sophisticated love of poetry and a fusion with nature, fūkyō represents the wilder, destructive aspect of this wind flow, aimed not only at conventional societal values, but also at oneself. According to Karaki, that of *fūryū-fūkyō* "can be considered as "genus concept (*ruigainen*, 類概念) of decadence":

> Both *fūryū* and *fūkyō* are concepts opposed to the common world. They are stepping away from this common world. If one considers the common sense of such world as "health", then such "wind-madness" is just madness, something weird; and "wind-flow", ignoring all the needs and aims of the common world, is just as useless as "a fan in winter and a stove in summer". Stepping outside of society, becoming a solitary hermit, is connected to them both. They necessarily have an anti-social, anti-worldly quality. They break away from the rule, the standard, the common values. In this sense they are a kind of degeneration, of decadence. In those who are *fūryū* drunkenness, spiritual detachment and a certain *ennui* all go together. That is something common to Western decadence as well. (SD: 43)

What differentiates *fūryū* and *fūkyō* from European decadence is their relationship with nature: there is no need of artificial paradises for Bashō, since one can be a dandy even in the fields. But this does not imply a form of primitivism, the immediate relationship with nature that some modern Japanese intellectuals were all too eager to define as an "essentially Japanese" trait, followed by many charmed Westerners. On the contrary, in the case of Bashō landscape itself is a cultural texture, a place where the self is found and built not only out of embodied experiences, but also

is a refined solitude. If Ikkyū's transcendent decadence was conveyed by a manic, hypersexual strength, in Bashō this happens through his withering, scattering, an aesthetic enjoyment of nature in which personal drives are slowly erased.

[54] Bashō sometimes also uses the word 風雅 *fūga*, "wind-grace", especially when he means natural and artistic beauty at large, without limiting himself to haikai. There is no clear definition or distinction between the three terms in his work, however: organizing them is a hermeneutical work that has kept interpreters busy until now, with widely varying results.

through a reworking of literary sources[55], the locus of a meeting with what Karaki, borrowing Eliot's expression, calls "temporal cooperative body" (*jikanteki kyōdōtai* 時間的協同体, SD: 57). As a Japanese man living in the 17th century, Bashō does not even have a real idea of "nature" as an external, objective reality. In his poetic proses and travelogues he uses instead the term *zōka* 造化 "Creative Becoming", referring to something mobile and productive, active both in the outer world and within artistic experience, connecting not only individual and world, but also individuals of different ages and paths of life, gathered in the same wind flow.

> Saigyō's *waka*, Sōgi's *renga*, Sesshū's painting, Rikyū's tea ceremony – one thread runs through the artistic Ways. And this aesthetic spirit is to follow *zōka*, to be a companion to the turning of the four seasons.[56]

This integration of subjectivity and world is in fact a *traditional* aspect of East Asian aesthetics. Hattori Dohō, one of Bashō's followers, reported his words on the matter:

> When it comes to the pine, learn it within the pine; for that which concerns the bamboo, learn it within the bamboo: the Master used to say that the right thing to do is to stay far from ideas that are just one's own (*shi'i* 私意) […] To "learn" means here to enter into the thing, to be filled with emotion at the first and faintest stir of its unique reality (*bi* 微).[57]

But this "Asian" atmospheric thinking is, as we have seen, also typical of Nietzsche and Baudelaire, authors describing with equal clarity their thinking *with* and *within* things, not about them, ready to abandon the individualized though (*shi'i* 私意) that for Bashō's school was the death of poetry:

> A small veil shimmering on the horizon, and, in its smallness and its isolation, imitating my irremediable existence, the monotonous melodies of the waves – all these things think through me, or I through them (for, in the grandeur of reverie, the "me" is quickly lost); they think, I say, but musically, pictorially, without arguments, syllogisms, deductions.[58]

[55] See H. Shirane, *Traces of Dreams: Landscape, Cultural Memory, and the Poetry of Basho*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1998, for a great reconstruction of this dynamic.
[56] D. L. Barnhill, *Bashō's Journey*, SUNY Press, New York 2005, p. 29, transl. mod.
[57] *Kōhon Bashō zenshū* VII, T. Komiya et al. (ed. by), Kadokawa shoten, Tokyo 1969, p. 175. For a partial English translation of Dohō's *Red Booklet*, one of the major sources on Bashō's aesthetic philosophy, see T. Izutsu and T. Izutsu, *The Theory of Beauty in the Classical Aesthetics of Japan*, Springer Science, The Hague 1981, p. 159-165 (despite the sometimes perplexing translation choices).
[58] C. Baudelaire, *Paris Spleen*, transl. by Raymond McKenzie, Hackett Publishing, Indianapolis 2008, p. 7.

Beside this atmospheric, sensual self-consciousness, in Bashō we also find the discontinuous notion of time that constitutes the other axis of Karaki's take on "decadence".

## 8. Bashō's time: ever-flowing and eternal

A second key aspect of Bashō's experience of *fūryū* and of his poetic philosophy is a paradoxical conception of temporality. *Haikai* was at the same time individual poetry and product of a "collective body": different authors composed different *ku* (stanzas of 17 and 14 *morae* alternatingly), carefully attuning themselves to the mood of the poetic session but avoiding too much closeness with the preceding verse. This meant that *haikai* was neither an individual nor a strictly collective endeavor, and that the progress of a poetic sequence was never linear, but rather a suddenly shifting, discontinuous continuity of instants held together by a common *Stimmung*, described by Bashō as a "scent". Haruo Shirane, in his seminal article on "scent-connections" (*nioizuke* 匂い付け) in Bashō, argues how this mode of juxtaposition made the sequence united not through the *horizontal* axis of syntagmatic connection, but through a *vertical* axis of paradigmatic, metaphorical blurring[59].

But Bashō discovered a particular temporal paradox also in the single verse. The extreme brevity of the 17-syllable poem meant not only that the single verse was able to capture an instant, but also that once its fleeting moment was worked into poetry it would become also timeless, a fragment of a more-than-personal consciousness transcending linear time and reality.

> As stillness is the immutable aspect of things, it is motion that represents the aspect of their phenomenal evolvement. The flow of evolvement would never halt even for a moment unless we ourselves bring it to a halt. Its being brought to a halt means here nothing other than its being caught instantaneously in the very act of our perception, seeing and hearing. Falling petals, leaves scattered by the wind-even the most vivacious of the things will eventually subside to disappear into nothingness without leaving any trace behind, unless we, in the midst of their actuality, arrest them with our cognitive act of seeing and hearing.[60]

[59] H. Shirane, *Matsuo Bashō and the Poetics of Scent*, "Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies" 52-1 (1992), p. 77-110.
[60] *Kōhon Bashō zenshū* VII, p. 177-8; T. Izutsu, *The Theory of Beauty,* cit., p. 163.

Bashō therefore described *haikai* as a paradoxical union of flow (*ryūkō* 流行) and eternity (*fueki* 不易), both considered as expression of "the truth of wind-grace" (*fūga no makoto* 風雅の誠). These two conjoined opposites, *fuekiryūkō*, refer first of all to the single poem, a still snapshot of an eternal flowing reality. But *fuekiryūkō* also manifests itself as the task of art and artist, constantly changing, rejecting the old in a Nietzschean transvaluation of oneself and of all precedent aesthetic values, and yet keeping itself active across centuries, even millennia. Both these aspects reveal *fuekiryūkō* as the poetic metaphysics of *zōka*: nature itself, in its creative-aesthetic aspect, is *ontologically* a conjunction of a perfect, atemporal stillness and of a state of constant change. The time of nature, reflecting itslef in *haikai*, is not linear: every single event is connected to those before and after it in a discontinuous manner, like the links in the poetic chain, but also bears within itself an infinite depth. "Petals and leaves scattered by the wind" are in the air for just a moment, but this moment repeats itself infinitely, as part of the ongoing flow of seasons and consciousnesses. Even the exasperatingly famous *hokku* about the jump of the frog, the masterpiece of Bashō's *sabi* style, derives its beauty from the metaphysical *depth* of this jump into the old pond.

古い池や蛙とびこむ水の音
*Furu ike ya / kawazu tobikomu / mizu no oto*
Old pond: / a frog diving in / the sound of water

The frog, caught in the fleeting instant of its movement, is indefinitely suspended mid-air by poetic consciousness. This fall is endlessly repeated as something happening "just now", disappearing in the infinite quiet of the pond. The pond appears as "old" in a human-linear notion of time, but through the stillness of age also offer a glimpse into a different, metaphysical kind of timelessness[61].

## 9. The demon in the wind

The last important insight of Karaki's portrait of Bashō is that of highlighting the "demonic" aspect of Bashō's work, often erased in irenic, "Zen" readings of his figure. Far from being a pacified communion with nature, or a direct expression of "Zen enlightenment" (as if Zen were about peace of mind: the case of Ikkyū tells us quite the opposite),

[61] Further reflections on the temporally anomalous quality of *haikai* are offered by Ōnishi Yoshinori, a Tokyo University phenomenologist and translator of Kant, in his 1930 *Fūgaron: sabi no kenkyū,* Iwanami shoten, Tokyo 1930, p. 230-4.

Bashō's poetry is constantly being born out of negativity, out of the "middle position" that makes the poet "at once a decadent and a beginning". If we read Zweig's identikit of those enthralled by the "demon", we can see how well it fits Bashō, too, despite the huge cultural distance.

> The first thing that is obvious […] is their detachment from the world. The daemon plucks away from realities those whom he holds in his grip. Not one of the three had wife or children […] they had neither fixed home nor permanent possessions, neither settled occupation nor secure footing in the world. They were nomads, vagrants, eccentrics […] Not one of them ever had a bed to call his own; they sat in hired chairs, wrote at hired desks and wandered from one lodging house to another. Nowhere did they take root; not even Eros could establish binding ties for those whom the jealous daemon had espoused. Their friendships were transitory, their appointments fugitive, their work unremunerative; they stood ever in vacant spaces and created in the void.[62]

In Europe, the "demonic" is constantly experienced as a negative element. In the classic account of Socrates, the atmospheric voice of the *daimonion* only says what *not* to do, inspiring his ironic stance. In Christianity, the demon is a sensual or prideful rejection of ethical values. In Goethe's synthesis of classical and modern themes, it is "the spirit that eternally says *no*" (*der Geist, der stets verneint*, *Faust* v. 1338), perfect expression of nihilism, but also something indefinite that "manifesting itself only in contradictions"[63], reveals the creative element of its negativity.

In Japan this demonic, naysaying "spirit" is instead directly grasped in the atmospheric experience of wind – now seductive, now violent, appearing and disappearing without warning, always *other* from what it animates or flows through. As we have seen in 5.1, Bashō and other Japanese authors described the ideal of an anti-conformist "decadence into nature" with a series of compounds including 風 "wind": "wind-flow" (風流 *fūryū*), "wind-madness" (風狂 *fūkyō*), wind-grace (風雅 *fūga*). Karaki refers to Nishitani's works on Bashō from the '40s, which first stressed this element, but also argues how close these notions are to the appearance of "breath" in Rilke's poetry or the notion of *Offen* in Heidegger:

> We already talked about wind in *fūryū* and *fūkyō*. We also have *fūga* and *fuzei*, however: why does the character "wind" appear so much in the field of Japanese art? […] In his essay on Bashō, Nishitani Keiji has already used the expression "existence like wind", also quoting the pass from the Bible: "the spirit (pneuma) blows where it wants…". The *Hauch* of Heidegger's poet is

[62] *The Struggle with the Demon* ("Introduction").
[63] J. W. Goethe, *Poetry and Truth*, Bell, London 1908, p. 300.

> something also very close to this wind. The Japanese have felt that the true character of a poet is in an existence that like wind comes and goes, that like wind touches things and produces music […] (SD: 59)

But if one looks more closely to Bashō's relationship with wind as an embodied aesthetic principle, there is a more disquieting, semi-personal "demonic" aspect also in his experience of it. Just before the celebrated passage on the flow of *fūga* in different artists' lives opening *Oi no kobumi*, Bashō explains how this spiritual élan is something that is forced on him, as a disquieting "it", a figure unraveling into the air his own selfhood:

> Among these hundred bones [百骸九竅] and nine holes there is something. For now [かりに] let us call it 風羅坊 Fūrabō, "wind-gauze-clump". Surely, we can say it is thin, torn easily by a breeze. It grew fond of mad poetry long ago and eventually this became its life work. At times, it has wearied of the venture and thought of quitting; at times it has pressed forward, boasting of victories. Battling thus back and forth in my breast, it never lets me rest. For a while it yearned for worldly success, but poetry thwarted that; for a while it thought of enlightening its foolishness, but poetry broke that off. Finally, without talent or skill, it simply follows along this one line.[64]

Bashō's most creative years, those decisive for his poetics, were in fact almost constantly spent on the road. Karaki described this tendency to errancy, to uprootedness, as a common characteristic of the decadent: somebody who is not anchored to anything, that lives in a constant opposition to the values and habits of normal society. "Like a fan in winter and a stove in summer", says Bashō in his words of farewell to the disciple Kyoriku (*Saimon no ji*): poetry has no use to anyone sane. At best, this demonic wind is restlessness, at worst an actual risk of going mad: "For a human being with a solid body, neither wind nor a cloud, to thrust himself into wind and clouds is really nothing else than perpetually negating, abandoning himself" (SD: 49). Bashō celebrates this form of self-destruction at the beginning of his first great travelogue, *Travel Diary of a Bleached Skeleton*:

> 野ざらしを心に風のしむみかな
> *Nozarashi o / kokoro ni kaze no shimu mi kana*
> Bleached bones: / in my heart the wind / in which my body dissolves

It is a "decadent" poem: despite all the natural pathos, here Bashō is imagining with a certain gusto his own decomposition. The traveler has

[64] *Bashō's Journey*, cit., p. 29, transl. mod.

already in his mind/heart (*kokoro*) the wind that would dissolve his body if he were going to die during the trip. In a certain sense, once this wind is welcomed inside, the poet is already a living skeleton, a spiritual but also macabre pilgrim to whom the difference between real and unreal, internal and external, death and life are getting thinner. The spiritual élan and the acceptance of impermanence are one side of a coin, that however bears the marks of maddening, restlessness and even a certain decadent posing on the other.

The absolute, negative freedom of wind is what makes such transcendence possible, as literal "inspiration", but also as what creates "the risk of being taken by that very *fūryū/fūkyō*, of becoming its prisoner" (SD: 60). In another *haibun*, *Discourse Leaving my Lodging* (*Seikyo no ben*, 栖去の弁), Bashō is even more explicit in recognizing this element of *fūryū* as something demonic:

> After having floated around, here and there I spent my winter retreat in a place called Tachibanachō. The first month of new year passed, the second came. Enough with *fūga*, I said myself, I will hence shout my mouth: but then must have come upon me the demonic feeling of the spirit of poetry (*fūga no mashin*, 風雅の魔心), who invited winds of feeling (*fuzei*, 風情) inside my chest and made things flicker all around me. And once again I must go, leave home with a hundred coins on my back, trusting my life on one bowl and a staff, wearing the straw of the beggar for these feelings in the wind.[65]

Total freedom coincides with a kind of oppression: Bashō is unable to stop this "demonic heart" – but *mashin* can also read as 魔神 "demon-god", observes Karaki (SD: 63) – inviting in his chest "wind-feelings" (*fuzei* 風情), that is all the beauty and power of the flow of natural reality. Its activity is that of a seducer, of something that like wind exerts a concrete pressure on bodies but keeps itself invisible. Moved by this demonic wind, things "flicker", "become restless" (*chirameku*). Rather than being stable objects, they begin that is to manifest themselves as something with a certain independent activity and power, a "radiance" or "transparency" from which their forgotten daemonic character erupts.

What is the textual origin of this poetic demon? It is very likely that Bashō, an enthusiast of Chinese poetry, in his definition of *mashin* was thinking of the expression *shima*, 詩魔, "poetry-demon", in a well-known poem of Tang author Bai Juyi (白居易 772–846) titled *Idly Singing* 閑吟:

[65] My translation; but see also *Bashō's Journey*, cit., p. 134.

| | |
|---|---|
| 自從苦學空門法 | Now that I have arduously studied the law of Emptiness, |
| 銷盡平生種種心 | I've annulled the variety of all my life's intentions. |
| 唯有詩魔降未得 | There remains unbeaten now only the demon of poetry |
| ・逢風月一閑吟 | And as wind blows and moon shines I must idly sing |

The difference between Bai Juyi and Bashō, however, is that for the former the Buddhist ideal of transcendence stands in a simple opposition to a "decadence" into the leisurely world of natural beauty. Even in medieval Buddhist poet-wanderers like Saigyō and Sōgi this aesthetic tension was given as something almost sinful. In Bashō, instead, the daemonic spirit (*mashin*) is a harbinger of the atmospheric-aesthetic state of *fūga*: a synonym of poetry at large, of the specific tradition of *haikai*, and of two other two entwined cultural modes of facing (without neutralizing) this daemonic *Ichfremdes*: *fūryū* and *fūkyō*. An eternal movement without any positive end, never turning into anything stable, but giving itself as eternal opposition and transcendence, this wind "blows where it wants", observes Karaki (SD: 59) with an expression reminiscent of John's Gospel but also of Nietzsche's *Will zur Macht*. Wind is absolute, eternal movement, but also nothing at all, aimless and only oppositional. Karaki recognized how Bashō welcomed the destructive effects of this wind on his body and his mind already with the choice of his poetic moniker: the plantain (*Musa basjō*) is a fruitless tree whose big leaves get constantly torn by the wind (SD: 62).

Like Nietzsche, and many other decadents before and after them, Bashō kept traveling up to the very end, often lamenting the impossibility of "shutting his mouth", abandoning the negative, transcendent movement of wind-poetry for a more stable mode of existence. His last, feverish *hokku* is another "decadent" composition, showing with merciless precision the state of atmospheric expansion of "sensual self-consciousness" so common of decadents and his "blind attachment" (妄執 *mōjū*) to it, the very opposite of the inner peace suggested by Buddhism:

> 旅に病んで夢は枯野をかけめぐる
> *Tabi ni yande / yume ha kareno o kakemeguru*
> Ill on a jorney /my dreams wander / over withered fields

## 10. Conclusion

While taking Karaki's text as primary interlocutor, borrowing his reading of Nietzsche centered on the notion of decadence, we have tried to show how its potential goes well beyond the imperfect form in which it

was published. It offers us a new approach to Nietzsche and decadence, thanks to the (admittedly underdeveloped) notion of "sensual self-consciousness", but also highlights the structural features of decadence as a cross-cultural, existential phenomenon. Its content opens up a wider study of decadence as a philosophical problem – an aesthetic take on nihilism, particularly hard to grasp theoretically because of its inner contradictions – and develops it in a non-Eurocentric point of view. We hope to expand this inquiry in further research, eventually including authors like Ikkyū and Baudelaire in this framework.

Nietzsche was a deeply European thinker, who, however, also ferociously fought with the limitations of his own intellectual and existential heritage, up to the point of conjuring an "Asian" hero like Zarathustra to give a different meaning to his experience of weakness and *Untergang*. In a note from 1884 Nietzsche wrote: "I must learn to think more orientally [*orientalischer*] about philosophy and knowledge. An Oriental [*Morgenländischer*] overview of Europe"[66]. But his work does not really live up to this aspiration: he was more Orientalist than Oriental in his concrete approach to cultural otherness.

The converse vow is no less inspiring, however: Nietzsche's work can and should be observed through the eyes of non-European thinkers as well. Born as a shattering mirror of fin-de-siècle Europe, it acquires a deeper sense when one realizes that it touched themes and images that were by no means new or unexplored in other cultural contexts. Karaki decided to approach Nietzsche through the frame of the tradition of *fūryū-fūkyō* embodied by Bashō, Ikkyū and many other East Asian decadents. He explained once again his reason to do so in his postface to the book:

> What is natural and what is man-made; the ultimate, empty character of things (*kū* 空) and their colorful appearance (*shiki* 色), the question of reality and of illusion: when we think in depth of *fūryū* and *fūkyō* all these problems appear to us as something we must face. East Asian poets have concretely perceived the philosophy of nature, of emptiness, of authenticity, as the self-abiding (*jizai* 自在) wind, blowing over us and disappearing away as it pleases. It is by taking within themselves this spirit of wind, that *fūkyō* and *fūryū* have become such for the first time. (SD: 196)

We do not know how Nietzsche, a man constantly striving to go beyond his age, his place and himself – aiming at transcendence, sure, but also trying to escape from his weakness, his *karma* – would have reacted

[66] KSA 11, NF 1884, 26 [317], p. 206: "Ich muß *orientalischer* denken lernen über Philosophie und Erkenntniß. *Morgenländischer* Überblick über Europa."

to this embodied philosophy. Despite some grandiose claims, his curiosity before cultural difference remained superficial, more dream of a distance and physical restlessness than an actual discovery of otherness, as in the complicated case of his Japanese interpreters. And yet, at least as Zarathustra, he would dream, like Bashō and other men of *fūryū*, of an infinite movement to a distant land, of becoming one with wind.

> Have you never seen a sail go over the sea, rounded and billowed and trembling with the vehemence of the wind? Like the sail, trembling with the vehemence of the spirit, my wisdom goes over the sea – my wild wisdom![67]

[67] *Zarathustra*, p. 81. KSA 4, p. 135: "Saht ihr nie ein Segel über das Meer gehn, gerundet und ge-bläht und zitternd vor dem Ungestüm des Windes? Dem Segel gleich, zitternd vor dem Ungestüm des Geistes, geht meine Weisheit über das Meer – meine wilde Weisheit!"

## Poetry and Decadence: Reading Nietzsche with Karaki Junzō

This essay explores the original, cross-cultural interpretation of Nietzsche's work and of the philosophical problem of "decadence" through a still little discussed text, Karaki Junzō's *Poetry and Decadence* (*Shi to dekasansu*, 詩とデカダンス, 1952). Following Karaki's insights on "perceptual self-consciousness", and the complex relationship between decadence on one side, and temporality and nothingness on the other, we will first attempt a reading of Nietzsche as a "decadent", which stresses the atmospheric, and even olfactory quality of his thought. I will suggest how this perspective offers a new way of understanding the idea of eternal return, in particular. In the last sections of the essay, we will instead observe how Karaki retraced a similar pattern of thought-poetry also in premodern Japanese culture: here I have focused on Karaki's reading of Matsuo Bashō's work.

KEYWORDS: Karaki Junzō, Friedrich Nietzsche, Decadence, Scent, Matsuo Bashō.