

# Herrick as a Natural Historian:

## Examination of word-of-mouth traditions and relationship with Kumagusu Minakata \*

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(平成25年12月16日受理)

Various ceremonies and pastimes, which used to be widespread in England when the poet lived, are woven into Robert Herrick's (1591-1674) poems. This is not only one of his poetry's charms but also can be data for description of folkways and natural scenery. This paper examines Herrick's works from the standpoint of his concern with folklore, a fundamental characteristic of his poems, and through understanding of these characteristics, consider the grounding in which he cultivated his thinking. Reference is given to some interesting material which seems to refer to Herrick in the essay written by Kumagusu Minakata(1867-1941), a natural historian of the Meiji Era. The aim is to attempt to explore Herrick's natural historical aspects.

### 1. Introduction

The subject matter of this poet's choice is given in fourteen lines of "The Argument of his Book," the opening prologue of *Hesperides* (1648). It is "streams," "flowers of the trees," "birds," "shade," "April, May, June, July and flowers of the month" and "the carts for harvest," indicating that the poet's concern is to describe the rural scenery of England in the 17th century.

This paper considers Herrick's spiritual background, possibly the basis of his poetry, with attention given to the above mentioned characteristics of his poetry. Reference is given to "Ebi joro"<sup>1)</sup> by Minakata, a natural historian of the Meiji Era, as it gives a description of the natural historical factors found in Herrick's work.

Comparative examination of Herrick and Minakata, who had different nationalities and lived in different eras, is intentional. It is difficult to categorize Minakata because he was a learned and creative scholar who created original academic features by collecting and analyzing the natural sciences and humanities before those disciplines were subdivided as they are today. He has been called the initiator of Japanese ethnology, ranking with Kunio Yanagita and Shinobu Orikuchi. The hypothesis is that when Minakata left

for London, a window to the world, when he was 26, after studying in Tokyo and the United States, he found a 17th century English precursor. This precursor was Herrick. Examination of their work reveals agreement between Herrick and Minakata. Minakata drew together various factors to arrive at a form of social anthropology with emphasis on precise reproduction of human potential such as the family system and village organization. Precisely, this was a detailed descriptive examination of folkways through the eyes of a natural historian, the "Minakata original ethnology". It is equivalent to the type of original study Herrick created. When Herrick's poems are compared with metaphysical poems, his characteristic method of simplicity, short forms, small-scale subjects and sensitivity rather than logic, match exactly the method of natural historical description. The vivid literary style of airy rhythmical expression of minute subjects creates Herrick's own beautiful literary space, however, the virtue of Herrick's poems can not be judged simply from the standpoint of literary value. This paper includes an examination of the common points, natural historical factors, which connect Herrick and Minakata. Finally, examination of the significance of natural historical factors in Herrick's works in 17th century England is given.

## 2. Herrick and Minakata meet in *Notes and Queries*

The essay "Ebi Joro (Lady in the Lobster)" by Minakata, which contains a description of Herrick, was included in "Shuko" which was originally published in August, 1925. The title of the essay, "Ebi Joro," refers to a spiny lobster with its eyes exposed, decorated with a paper dress likened to a doll display for the Girls' Festival in Japan.<sup>2)</sup>

Though a description is found in *Yuan Jian lei han* as "in China they make cups out of lobster shells, called lobster cups, and use its spine as an ornamental hairpin (kanzashi) and in Vietnam people make canes out of it for monks," I have never come across a description of a toy made using the eyes. In Europe, I saw an "Ebi Joro (Lady in the Lobster)" but it was quite different from the Japanese doll. The eyes of European lobsters are in their stomachs. There are three calcareous protrusions like the molar teeth of humans and animals in the stomach area, which grind food. In England, people call it a "Lady in the Chair" or a "Lady in the Lobster" (Ebi Joro) because it looks like a lady is sitting on a chair. Last March, I found a question in *Notes and Queries* regarding two books which had articles about a "Lady in the Lobster" (Ebi Joro). Mr. Bensley answered that according to *Oxford English Dictionary*, the oldest reference to a "Lady in the Lobster" was in *The Battle of the Books* by J. Swift in 1704. However, in Herrick's *'The Fairie Temple,'* which was published fifty years earlier, there is a description of a "The Saint, to which the most he prays / And offers Incense Nights and dayes, / The Lady of the Lobster is" and it seems that people compare the center molar tooth of the lobster to the Holy Mother because the Roman Catholic Church calls Mary the Mother of Jesus Christ or "Our Lady". The questioner quoted *the Witty Fair One* by Shirley in 1628 as the oldest evidence. There was a picture of a "Lady in the lobster" which was offered by Herbut at the end of the 18th century in *A history of Crustacea* by Stebbing, published in 1893. I mentioned there is only old description of the real thing, so those who want to realize what it looks like should look at this picture (picture 5). But my reply was not published. . . . . (Italics mine)<sup>3)</sup>

"The Fairie Temple" in this quotation from Minakata seems to be "The Fairie Temple: or, Oberons Chappell". Following is part of the description.

The Saint, to which the most he prays  
And offers *Incense* Nights and dayes,  
The *Lady* of the *Lobster* is,  
Whose foot-pace he doth stroak & kisse;  
And, humbly, chives of Saffron brings,  
For his most cheerfull offerings.(93, 129-134)<sup>4)</sup>

According to the notes to Herrick's collection in the Martin edition, the "Lady in the Lobster" might indicate "Our Lady" because the digestive organs of the lobster resemble a lady sitting in a chair.<sup>5)</sup> Speaking concretely, it seems that the shape of the organ resembles a noble lady sitting in a chair. This part depicts the Mariolatry in Herrick's work. However, the Holy Mother Maria in King Oberon's fairy world, which Herrick imagined, overlaps with Minakata's "Ebi Joro (Lady in the Lobster)". This indicates that both the English and Japanese versions of the "Ebi Joro" have one common philosophical background despite the differences in their configurations and methods. Unfortunately, as Minakata mentioned, the example of the "Lobster" described by Herrick was not as old as *the Witty Fair One* by Shirley. However, it is apparent from these descriptions that the poems of Herrick are not only literary works but also worthy reading matter as records of folk legend and the manners and customs of those days.

Incidentally, *Notes and Queries* mentioned in Minakata's essay was an academic magazine with explanatory annotations and questions and answers regarding literature, history, anthropology, geneology and heraldry, etc. It has been published in London since 1849 as a venue for the exchange of academic information. It seemed to be in its golden age when Minakata contributed to it. At present, it is a monthly magazine (it was a weekly publication when Minakata contributed and later switched to monthly publication) published by the Oxford University Press after several changes of publisher. In this connection, Minakata's writings were published in the magazine 323 times between the years 1899 and 1933.

The magazine *Notes and Queries*, which connected these two people, had the sub-title "A Medium of Inter-Communication (Among) Literary Men, Artists, Antiquaries, Generalists, Etc.," indicating that it was intended to offer general coverage of a wide range of concerns in the humanities. As a matter of fact, *Notes and Queries* contained all sorts of miscellaneous information including the one that vaguely

matches this classification. The contents were divided into three parts: "Notes," "Queries" and "Replies". In "Replies," arguments on the subjects presented in "Notes," "Queries" could be exchanged freely. This style of publication became quite popular after the success of *Notes and Queries* and many similar magazines were published with the titles "Notes and Queries of .....".

In some sense, the focus of miscellaneous interest was a collection of folk belief under the term "folk-lore". The name "folk-lore," which was later used widely as a general term, was coined by William John Thomas (1803-1885), the founder of *Notes and Queries*.

The word "folk-lore" was modeled on the German "Volk-skunde", meaning folk knowledge, and was a coinage of "folk" with "lore," used since around 1848 with the concise meaning of popular antiquities.

In the age when Thomas lived, sub-division and specialization of learning were already in progress. Once a subject had been given the name "folk-lore," contributors were able to argue loquaciously by comparing their own experiences and reading experiences. The fountainhead of *Notes and Queries* was not only a monopoly of specialist topics but also various people's comments and lively discussions. In this meaning, *Notes and Queries* was a venue which encouraged the passing of "lore" inherited by "folk" from mouth to mouth. *Notes and Queries* was accepted among the people of England, where a lot of devotees to learning lived, due to its method of argument through reader contributions. The character of *Notes and Queries* places it in a position between amusement and examination and the comments contributed are not perfectly written and depend on mutual enlightenment through debate. Arguments are formalized through accumulated discussion. They are neither monologue nor mutual conversation. The venue is formalized as mass debate and open to everyone at all times. Sometimes, there are no responses to topics addressed and at other times there are endless discussions involving many people's opinions. The magazine is a kind of intellectual playground which stimulates mutual curiosity.

Each reader, from amateur to specialist, accumulates his knowledge with cooperation or expansion of debate through *Notes and Queries*, and in the end, a detailed documentary relating to topics presented is collectively created by the contributors. In this sense, it is possible to say that Herrick and Minakata discussed a subject of common interest over space-time in *Notes and Queries* because "Ebi Joro

(Lady in the Lobster)" by Minakata is actually an annotation of Herrick's description which is not recorded in *OED*.

### 3. Pliny: the scholar who connects Herrick and Minakata

Minakata is known as a person who had great knowledge about England as he spent his youth in London from the age of 26 to 33 when he had a strong desire for learning. Is there a line of connection between Herrick and Minakata? There is a connection between Shakespeare and Minakata, or his ideological influences, because he described buying several of his books including *Macbeth* in his journal; there is no evidence, unfortunately, about his connection with Herrick.<sup>6)</sup>

However, it can be concluded that there are points in common between Herrick's works and Minakata's through examination of writings of Minakata with inconsistent titles such as "Natural Historian" and "Ethnologist". The influences on Minakata by Herrick may be tendencies in their works or similarity of style influenced by prior works they had both read.

The Pliny's *Natural History* often appears in quotations by Minakata and Herrick must also have had been familiar with this book. Herrick is often thought of as a leftover from the Elizabethan Era, or rather to be a descendant of the Roman poet who survived in England despite living in the middle of the 17th century. He was counted as one of the "Tribe of Ben" and was a poet considerably influenced by the classical poets such as Ovid, Horace and Martial. In Herrick's poems, descriptions appear which seem to be influenced by Pliny's *Natural History*.

Hang up Hooks, and Sheers to scare  
Hence the Hag, that rides the Mare,  
Till they be all over wet,  
With the mire, and the sweat :  
This observ'd, the Manes shall be  
Of your horses, all knot-free. (284)

Wash your hands, or else the fire  
Will not teend to your desire;  
Unwasht hands, ye Maidens, know,  
Dead the Fire, though ye blow.(263)

The former deals with the superstitious belief that iron

prevents evil, which appeared earlier in book 34 (Liber XXXIV) of *Natural History* in 77 A.D., and says that infants and adults are protected from the action of poisons when an iron circle is drawn around them or when someone with an iron weapon turns around them. The latter also refers to the beneficence of water in book 31 (Liber XXXI).

It was around 3000 B.C. when iron, which often appears in the oral literary tradition in England, appeared, hence the Iron Age. The chisels, hoes and sickles of the Stone Age and Bronze Age were made of iron then. The strength, solidity and durability of iron for cooking tools, farming implements and weapons were valued and the usefulness of iron was recognized from the beginning of the Iron Age. Iron came to have special attributes such as the magical power to remove eerie air and malevolent spirits, especially when it is cold. People believed that luck would visit the man who picked up iron materials such as containers and nails on the street. Iron horseshoes were believed to be especially useful for preventing evil because it was thought that the iron nailed to horses' hooves was a spiritual sign which protected the foot from the ground. In England around the 17th century, there were many houses with horseshoes installed on the step in front of the gate and the entrance. In Scotland, sailors used them as amulets tied to the topmast for the prevention of shipwrecks in bad weather. There is also an oral tradition that an iron gate in front of the house would keep witches out because there was a superstitious belief that witches could not pass through things made of iron.

In Herrick's works, there is one piece relating to iron superstitions ('Another [Charmes]') and three relating to water ('To Perilla,' 'Another [Charmes]' and 'The New-yeeres Gift, or Circumcisions Song, sung to the King in the Presence at White-Hall'). 'The New-yeeres Gift' is included in *Noble Numbers* which appear after *Hesperides* in one bound volume. There are nearly thirty poems relating to superstition and traditional beliefs among *Hesperides*, with subject matter such as fire, rosemary, bread, roses, brides, ash, salt and wheat.

#### 4. Herrick as a natural historian

Herrick had natural historical aspects because, as mentioned above, there are many folkloric descriptions in *Hesperides* and his characteristic style of writing was to describe the beauty of the minute and the lowly in a pictur-

esque way. Natural history is a study by observation whereby the student fully appreciates natural disorder and nature's diversity. In Herrick's later years, he was attracted to the nature of Devonshire and intoxicated with its beauty. He continued to write poems whenever the desire seized him. In this sense, it is very interesting to find Herrick's name in the essay written by Minakata showing his full knowledge of natural history.

Pliny the natural historian, who probably influenced both Herrick and Minakata, was a poet who tried to generalize knowledge. In the process, he also left many records of man's changes of feeling while observing nature despite, or rather, because he tried to describe nature as it is. There are objective descriptions of the characteristics of animals, plants and minerals in their books as well as full oral traditions and images. That is why these works, although they belong to natural science, can be read as not only accumulations of folklore but also as behavioral psychology and literature. Natural history was surely an accumulation of various kinds of stories which were woven by people to try to understand nature.

The reason Minakata did not have any main outline of theory was his precaution against stereotyped thought according to his ideological theory. This is intimately connected with a healthy British style empiricism, however, it seems this point is closely related to the new style of learning which he aimed to achieve. He insisted on science while he refuted mysticism. He always maintained the 19th century belief in science but in his field of natural science (zoology and botany), he maintained the style of a naturalist in observing and collecting outdoors himself rather than as a biologist who uses a microscope, chemicals and a slide rule in the laboratory. In this sense, he was more of a poet than a theoretical scientist. He achieved, however, a world wide reputation as a collector of slime molds and, at the same time, was an inspired pioneer in the study of folklore in Japan.

Minakata called his way of learning "learning of everything". It was a creation of a new method of learning, which is neither natural science with its narrow range of substance nor the spiritualism of observation and contemplation. He called his attitude toward learning the "learning of everything" and his accumulated knowledge in the field of natural history was a suitable field for the "learning of everything". Minakata the philosopher paid attention to the potentials of natural science in all ages and countries. He always con-

templated the general descriptions of nature in books on natural history. He searched for folklore in books on natural history and natural historical methods in literature.

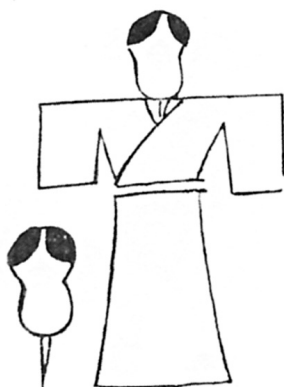
On the other hand, what was natural history for Herrick? It appears that Herrick's method was the same as Minakata's. Minakata is known for laying down the definition that learning has to be of practical use to the nation. Both natural history, with an emphasis on substance, and folklore, with stress on the mind, existed together in Minakata's original method of "learning of everything". Herrick seemed to have been just like Minakata. That is to say, Minakata was, if anything, strong in science and he knew folkloristics through natural history, while Herrick was, if anything, strong in liberal arts and he traced opposite roots while producing his works. The posture of them as trying to weave these two types of learning into two sides of the same coin is a common. I think the method always used by both Minakata and Herrick in many works could have been to trace how the diverse world of things left its tracks in the world of the human heart. The reason why Minakata met Herrick through *Notes and Queries* was that they had a common spirit which was encouraged in *Notes and Queries*.

### Notes

\* This paper is based on "Herrick's Naturalistic Elements — With Reference to Kumagusu Minakata —" (Study Notes) *Life and Culture in Seventeenth-century England*. Ed. The Japan Society of Seventeenth-century English Literature. Tokyo: Kinseido, 1997. 221-242.

1) "Ebi joro," *The Complete Works of Kumagusu Minakata*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1971) 604-09.

2) *The Complete Works of Kumagusu Minakata*, vol. 2, 604.



Picture 1: Ebi Joro made in Shinagawa

3) *The Complete Works of Kumagusu Minakata*, vol. 2, 608-09.



Picture 5: Ebi Joro in England

4) All references to Herrick's poems are to *The Poetical Works of Robert Herrick*, ed. L.C. Martin (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1956) and quoted by page number(s) and line(s) in parentheses.

5) "Lady of the Lobster. O.E.D. s.v. 'Lady'. I. 10: 'The calcareous structure in the stomach of a lobster, serving for the trituration of its food; fancifully supposed to resemble the outline of a seated female figure.' The expression occurs in Dorothy Osborne's *Letters* (ed. Moore Smith, p.42). O.E.D. has no example earlier than 1704. Herrick's context suggests 'Our Lady' and perhaps also Phil. iii. 19: 'whose God is their belly.'" L. C. Martin, 521.

6) *The Diary of Kumagusu Minakata*, 4 Vols (Yasaka Shobo, 1987-89). Especially see vol. 1, 109, 149, 232 and vol. 3, 16-18, 20, 40.

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