George Herbert and His Metaphysical Poetry

—The Reality of Love Through Private Ejaculations—

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ジョージ・ハーバートとその形而上学詩

——内なる声と愛の実相——

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要旨

ジェイクスピアの時代は、ルネサンスの華とといわれ、ヒューマニズムが高らかに讃歌された時代と、一般に考えられているが、果たして内実共にそれは実事であろうか。その後に続く形而上詩人達が、宗教的なアンティ・テーゼを提出して、神による秩序の回復、神との和解を求めていたという事実を考える時、必ずしも、それを略面通り受けとることはできない。時代はいつも錯綜している。クリストフ・マーロー (1564–1593) やウィリアム・シェイクスピア (1564–1616) が人間礼讃を叫んでいた時に、ジョ・ダン (1572–1631) やジョージ・ハーバート (1593–1633) は説教を語り、祈を捧げ、魂の救いを求めるような詩を書き始めているからである。レディス朝という時代を来し把握するためにも、我々はアンティ・テーゼの形而上詩人達の姿を理解しなければならない。ここでは、ジョ・ダンに続いて重要な位置を占めるジョージ・ハーバートを考えることによって、この目的の一助としたい。

形而上詩人ジョージ・ハーバートは、晩年の数年間の宗教的生いにおいて、幾多の詩を残したが、その代表作 The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations (聖堂：聖詩と内なる叫び) において、如実に、彼の信仰を告白している。彼の詩は、彼自身が英国名家の名義ハーバート家の出であるということ、ケンブリッジ大学の代表演説者となったこと、ジェームズ一世治下の宮廷生活を楽しんだこと、ジョ・ダンと知己を得るほどな弟娼をもたしたことを、一連の背景として認識した上で、考えられなければならない。例し、彼は 1625 年に、ジェームズ一世の逝去と共に、明確な理由もいわゆる、突然、宮廷生活を離れ、司祭となって宗教生活に入り、晩年の三年間は、「田舎司祭」として、貧しいメルトンの教区を守りつつ、その一生を終える。

彼の代表的詩集『聖堂』の中には、自伝的な詩「苦悩」を始め 160 余にわたる宗教詩があり、また、愛に関する詩が幾度となくされている。この愛の詩を中心として、彼の詩の特色を考えてみたい。

彼の詩は、いわば神と己れの魂との断絶の対話である。それは、完全に救いを得たか、悟りを開いた者の告白ではなく、むしろ、神の意志に己れの意志を捧げる前の、神と人間の魂との闘いの記録である。いわば、ルネサンスを経験した近代人の呻きである。彼はこの誤りのうちに完全な自由を見出す。彼は甲府聖書の原点に返って、「土と霊」の認識を強く持ちつつ、敬虔な思いに、単純だが力強い詩調をかなえる。時々、見る欠昇しめた詩形や韻律をとるが、それが内容と巧みな一致しており、彼が「巧みな音楽家」 (ヘンダーソン) であるのではないかと思わせる。彼の言う愛とは、エロスとしての愛ではなく、ロゴスとしての、アガベとしての愛であり、命令する者であり、食事を共にする者であり、永遠不滅の火ともなる者である。

このような主張の中に、我々は、ジェイクスピアと同じように、ルネサンスの暦を経験した十七世紀人の苦悩を、表現こそこまか、理解することができる。E. M. W. ディリアードの「エリザベス女王がポエティウス」を読むと、ローリーの探検家であると同時に神学者であったことや、説教が常じめと同じように、エリザベス時代の生活の一部をなしていた」という言葉は、我々の、このような認識が誤まりでないことを示唆している。
We previously pointed out that the Elizabethan Age should be reconsidered not only from the viewpoint of the Renaissance but from that of religion as suggested by a passage from E. M. W. Tillyard's work: "People still think of the Age of Elizabeth as a secular period between two outbreaks of Protestantism: a period in which religious enthusiasm was sufficiently dormant to allow the new humanism to shape out literature. They admit indeed that the quiet was precarious and that the Puritans were ever on the alert... They do not tell us that Queen Elizabeth translated Boethius, that Raleigh was a theologian as well as a discoverer, and that sermons were as much a part of an ordinary Elizabethan's life as bear-baiting."  

That is, in the Age of Elizabeth, which is generally thought of as the Age of the Renaissance, we have to admit that, as a historical fact of English literature, William Shakespeare (1564-1616) lived with great metaphysical poets such as John Donne (1572-1631) and George Herbert (1593-1633). We have shed some light on the major metaphysical poet, George Herbert, in order to grasp another real aspect of the Age of Elizabeth.

In the first place, it is necessary to cast a glance upon his life and social background in order to understand him well. The name of Herbert is from a distinguished English family, various branches of which held the earldoms of Pembroke and Montgomery, the earldom and marquessate of Powis, the earldom of Carnarvon, and the barony of Cherbury. It is this barony of Cherbury to which the family of our poet George Herbert belongs, and his eldest brother Edward Herbert was the first Baron Herbert of Cherbury. Edward was once in the service of the prince of Orange, and as ambassador to France (1619-1624) he made arrangements for the marriage of Charless I and Henrietta Maria. He is often called the Father of English Deism. He asserts in his principal work, De veritate (1624), the universality of natural religion. This inclination which Edward has concerning court life and religion is also held by his younger brother George.

George Herbert (1593-1633) was born the fifth son of Richard and Magdalen Herbert. His mother, who had been acquainted with John Donne, was a woman of great character, intelligence, piety and beauty, and greatly influenced George. He was educated at Westminster School and Trinity College, Cambridge. His brilliant academic honour, the office of public orator to the university (1619-1627), held promise of a notable secular career, and young Herbert was aware of his high birth and of worldly allurements. After 1621, Herbert seemed to have spent more time at the Court than at Cambridge. By the standards of his own time, he was doing what any young man of his connections and ability would do in seeking the patronage of the King. In 1625 before he had obtained the advancement he sought, King James died. Presumably he could well have gained the favour of his successor, but for reasons which are not clear he did not do so but abandoned court life. It might have long been his wish that he should take orders, so in or before 1626 he was ordained deacon of the Church of England, and in 1630 ordained priest and became a rector of Bemerton near Salisbury. There he wrote some one hundred and sixty poems which would later be collected and published as The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations.

It might be very unusual for a man of his birth and education to become a "country parson" or even to take orders at all. But once he made up his mind to become a priest in this small, poor, obscure parish, he devoted himself to his calling. Immediately people there came to love and revere him very much. He was even proud of his life as Priest to the Temple, or the Country Parson, which is also the title of his principal prose work. His ministry at Bemerton was only three years. His health faltered and he died on the 1st of March, 1633, at the age of forty, "meeting his end with serenity and with a prayer on
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his lips." His poetry is, therefore, limited only to Christian themes, the tendencies of which are clearly shown in the titles of his short lyrics in The Temple: they are "Affliction," "The Agonie," "The Altar," "To all Angels and Saints," "The Call," "Confession," "Jesu," "Jordan," "Judgement," "Justice," and many others. He also concentrates on direct conversation with God. His religious themes are not of some peculiar experience but from very familiar and common sources in everyday life.

His poetical characteristics are, moreover, expressed in rhythm as well as in structure. He uses various types of metrical forms, trying to make them correspond with each situation in the lyrics. The variety of his forms and the skill with which they are used, as Helen Gardner suggests, reminds us that Herbert was "a skilled musician." He is, as it were, a master of repetition and variation, finding his resting-place in "the C Major of this life."

For example, the following two poems represent the cases in which the rhythmical and metrical forms coincide with the substance. "Easter Wings" brings its picture with it. It remains primarily visual, but the images presented have already been explored by his thought and experience.

Easter Wings

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,
Though foolishly he lost the same,
Decaying more and more,
Till he became
Most poore:
With thee
O let me rise
As larks, harmoniously,
And sing this day thy victories:
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

My tender age in sorrow did beginne:
And still with sicknesses and shame
Thou didst so punish sinne,
That I became
Most thinne.
With thee
Let me combine
And feel this day thy victorie:
For, if I imp my wing on thine,
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

Here it may be enough to quote the famous commentary on this poem by Joan Bennett: "The diminuendo and crescendo that bring the shape of the wings about are expressive both of the rise and fall of the lark's song and flight (Herbert's image) and also of the fall of man and his resurrection in Christ (the subject that the image represents.)"

Another case is "The Altar."

The Altar

A Broken Altar, Lord, thy servant reares,
Made of a heart, and cemented with teares:
Whose parts are as thy hand did frame;
No workmans tool hath touch'd the same.
A Heart alone
Is such a stone,
As nothing but
Thy pow'r doth cut.
Wherefore each part
Of my hard heart
Meets in this frame,
To praise thy Name:
That, if I chance to hold my peace,
The stones to praise thee may not cease.
O let thy blessed SACRIFICE be mine,
And sanctifie this ALTAR to be thine.

This kind of correspondence is quite simple and easy. This simplicity shows, in a sense, certain childlike qualities of his mind. Leaving this brief commentary of the general characteristics of his poetry, we now wish to consider his poems through the theme of love, which will form the major portion of this paper.
II

What is the essence of love in the poetry of George Herbert? What does he consider love to be? What does he pursue and reflect on through “Love” poetry? We will consider the theme of love mainly through his three poems:

“Love” (I) Immortall Love,
“Love” (II) Immortall Heat,
“Love” (III) Love made me welcome.

The last one is thought to be his masterpiece. These three poems are included in his principal work, The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations. We will try to elucidate some aspects of Herbert’s poetry by considering chiefly his three “Love” poems, among which we will start with his longest and deepest one. In “Love” (III), which is the last poem in The Temple, he sings:

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
Guilt of dust and sinne.
But quick-ey’d Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
If I lack’d any thing.

A guest, I answer’d, worthy to be here:
Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkinde, ungratefull? Ah my deare,
I cannot look on thee.
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marr’d them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, sayes Love, who bore the blame?
My deare, then I will serve.
You must sit down, sayes Love, and taste my meat:
So I did sit and eat.

This poem consists of three stanzas in which the poet holds a conversation between “I” and “Love.” The conversation style is one of the characteristics seen in the greater part of his poetry. Here the poet allegorically sings about the relationship between “Love” signifying God, and “I” signifying the soul, the internal existence of the human being. The relationship of the poet to God is that of a guest to his host. The whole poem is founded on this metaphor. So this poem is thought to be “a sort of dramatized parable.”

Here, “Love” is always gazing at him and generous enough to welcome him at any time. But his soul does not easily respond to accept His love and order. Why so? His soul draws back, feeling guilty of dust and sin, against the demand of Love God which is not a simple calling but a compulsory order. Drawing back from the demand to meditate on his own inner existence, he realizes that he is not worthy of accepting the calling of “Love”, for he has been filled with a lot of guilty consciousness of dust and sin.

In the Bible dust is made by God and we human beings are also made of dust....this kind of idea must have filled the humble heart of the poet. That is, he believed in the Bible which says, “The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” Man is such an existence as is represented by the expressions that “His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth,” and “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was.” Man is made from the dust, so that he shall return to his original existence of the dust. There is a deep, absolute abyss, which can not be overstepped eternally between the Creator and the created being. The poet held this faith to the Absolute Being in the depth of his heart and always wrote his own religious experience during all his life. Man is a created being and sinner, so that he can not proceed to His presence in his original figure. The poet had a great hesitation and awe to God, feeling his own deep sin of dust. Here we no longer need to turn to the phrase, “Truth Lord,” in the third stanza to find out that the Creator has the nature of truth as
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well as of love. Love he mentions here is not of eros but of logos and agape shown in the New Testament. God is, as it were, living and conversing with us, showing anger, jealousy, forgiveness and love.

God, who is quick-eyed enough to acknowledge me hesitating, knows that I have declined in every respect of mind and heart ever since I came to the right entrance to God’s throne. God invites me and I can clearly see the hands of God calling me, but my own hands could not and would not respond to it. Just when I am in deep agony and affliction, God himself comes down to me to ask, “if I lack’d anything. God would not cross-examine me who desire to obey Him but can not do so. Instead, the Lord, pursuing to find fault with Himself rather than with me, reflects on His own responsibility. I, sinner, can barely find the chance to answer him; you do not have any “guest worthy to be here.” Nevertheless, Almighty God responds to me with for inconceivably awful words: “You shall be he” who is “a guest worthy to be here.” This is a great surprise and awe. I can not find any proper word for it. I am such an unworthy and improper being for it that I can not hold any seat as a guest, nor be qualified to hold it, nor look up into the face of God Love. The more profoundly I devote myself to holy meditation in front of the Holy Spirit, the more severely I feel my own deadly sin. God comes closer to me to lay His hands on mine and speaks smiling, “Who made the eyes but I?” God is the creator of the world and universe including such a little existence as my eyes. “There shall not an hair of your head perish.” Here in the poet’s mind, famous words must be echoed: “The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them.” The creature is forced to look up to the Creator, but the creature can not afford to see the Creator because of his eyes wondering in his own self-consciousness. The dialogue between the Creator and the creature will become extinct in the situation of what they are.

Considering his own surprise, joy, awe and despair, and feeling his own smallness compared with great Love, the poet suddenly cries out in the third stanza: “Truth Lord, but I have marr’d them.” We feel the strong agony of Herbert between the second and the third stanzas. Herbert agrees with God that He is truth and love. Though he has been presented with the holy eyes to see the Holy One, “I have marr’d them.” Therefore he feels such a great shame that he urges to show him the place where it deserves. This is exactly the same cry as Jeremiah’s when he said to his people “which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not.” The poet laments his own foolishness and is penitent for his own sin, being anxious to “set in sackcloth and ashes” throwing himself to the valley of mourn. It is then that the poet can catch the calling of God: “Know you not who bore the blame?...You must sit down and taste my meat.” He can not resist against this almighty calling and find any way against this great love and at last accepts the calling of Love, saying, “My deare, then I will serve” as your guest. Here he can finally find where he should sit; “So I did sit and eat.” The moment he obeys Love’s order of “sit down and taste my meat,” his eyes are opened and earnestly gaze at Love. In this moment we are reminded of such old Hebrew joyful confessions as “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee,” and “Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord.”

The last order of God in the third stanza is a concrete expression for “Love bade me welcome” in the first stanza, and “I did sit and eat” is its conclusive response. This poem consists of the tension between these two expressions; the calling from God and the response of man. The tremble in the poet’s heart is vividly described with simple but serene words and imagination in the conversation between the Creator and the creature. We can not find any overwhelming lines such as those shown in William Wordsworth’s
poetry, but find a simple but adhesive stream of line which will never finish until a satisfactory conclusion is discovered in the conversation. For him poetry should be dedicated to God, therefore his poetic reputation, as A. Alvarez writes, depended more on his piety than on his originality. He dedicated his poetical genius not to Venus or Muse but to God and his glory. He wrote poetry in such a dialectical way as shown in this poem, having a conversation with God and his soul. His piety is the essence of his poetry, and the essence of this poem is also the pious attitude of the poet including "a kind of understood tenderness." His final purpose is the acceptance of the love of God. He keenly realizes on the last stage of his life of forty what he thinks and what he feels about the spiritual problems of love, immortality, calling, heaven, paradise, etc. The substance of each poem is pious, spiritual and sometimes emotional but it is deeply rooted in his thought.

III

In the poem "Love" (I) the poet speaks about God not as a temporary existence but as everlasting Love. The treasure for the poet who lived in the village of Bemerton near Salisbury as country parson was his church and sheep, where he usually kept divine service twice a day. Therefore, as a matter of course, his meditation was about his Creator God. The Creator fills with eternal love, nay, He is eternal, immortal love itself. He sings in this poem "Love" (I):

IMMORTALL Love, author of this great frame,
Sprung from that beautie which can never fade;
How hath man parcel'd out thy glorious name,
And thrown it on that dust which thou hast made,
While mortall love doth all the title gain!
Which siding with invention, they together
Bear all the sway, possessing heart and brain,
(Thy workmanship) and give thee share in neither.
Wit fancies beautie, beautie raiseth wit:
The world is theirs; they two play out the game,
Thou standing by: and though thy glorious name
Wrought our deliverance from th' infernall pit,
Who sings thy praise? onely a scarff or glove
Doth warm our hands, and make them write of love.

This immortal Love springs from everlasting beauty. Love and beauty—the combination of these images guides us into a more serene world of the poet. What a simple and serene universe it is! On the contrary, mortal love which we have in this secular world makes us strive to seek for a great flame and glory. Human beings are poor and foolish enough to ask for it in vain, and at last they throw it down on the dust the Creator has made, dividing the glorious name into pieces. The poet must have remembered his young, arrogant days in the court of James I, competing with other nobility for demanding earthly glorious names. Unfortunately King James I passed away in 1625 when Herbert was thirty two years old, and after that he must have felt some emptiness in court life to leave there without mentioning any reason for it. At the end of the year he decided to take holy orders, and spent a saintly life as a country parson from that time on. The state of his mind is reflected in this poem. It is in such a moment that human beings who have thrown themselves down on the dust are also made from the dust themselves.

The poem is a confession of continuous struggles between Love God and man. According to Izaak Walton, Helen Gardner suggests, Herbert on his death-bed sent The Temple including this "Love" poem to his friend Nicholas Ferrar of Little Gidding, with a message telling him that he would find in it
"a picture of the many spiritual Conflicts that have past betwixt God and my Soul, before I could subject mine to the will of Jesus my Master: in whose service I have now found perfect freedom." And he added: "if he can think it may turn to the advantage of any deserted poor Soul, let it be made publick: if not, let him burn it: for I and it are less than the least of God's mercies." He suggests that man, depending on his own haughtiness, has rejected the glorious name of God, and that man should adore and worship Him, dedicating his own existence to Him.

Mortal love on the earth is covered with feeling and reason along with "invention" which means "doing," showing their functions in every direction. But these are all products of God. Mortal love would not proceed to immortal Love in any respect. The grand contrast of man to God!

Wit remembers beauty and beauty does win. The relationship of wit to beauty is so tight that now the world is under their reign. They continue to play the game of life to the end, while "God is standing by." Who will sing and praise His glorious name in such a state, even if we are delivered by God from the mouth of hell? It is not God but "only a scarf or glove" that makes our hands warm to write about love. Irony of "a scarf or glove" and "warm" is the reflection of the poet's mind.

Herbert seems to suggest the fusion of his solitude not with immortal images but with a solitary figure of God. But he must be unable to endure such a contradictory relationship of man to God, but he is obliged to describe the contradiction and discordance as a matter of reality. Man is a creature that turns his back on the Creator who is calling him, and always says "No" in reply. What a miserable heart he must have when he must say "only a scarf or glove / Doth warm our hands, and make them write of love"! Herbert shows in this poem his past pride, haughtiness and ability. He was, A. Alvarez writes, far from being a simple country parson, however saintlike his later years may have been. As mentioned above, he came from a talented and distinguished family and became a public orator of Cambridge in 1619 when he was twenty-six and held the post for eight years, and because of his great abilities he was very high in the King's favour, and not meanly valued and loved by the most eminent and most powerful of the Court Nobilities. The words of "name, title, invention, game" in this poem once belonged to his mind in his younger days. His imagery works through the mind rather than the senses, the structure of his poetry is logical, and its tone is rather lyrical and pious.

IV

Love is, in a sense, immortal Heat for the poet. Heat is not a small secular fire of desire to take and give, but a "greater flame" which burns and gives light on every thing. The poet sings in "Love" (II):

 **IMMORTAL Heat, O let thy greater flame**
Attract the lesser to it: let those fires,
Which shall consume the world, first make it tame;
And kindle in out hearts such true desires,
As may consume our lusts, and make thee way.
Then shall our hearts pant thee; then shall our brain
All her invention on thine Altar lay,
And there in hymnes send back thy fire again:
Our eies shall see thee, which before saw dust;
Dust blown by wit, till that they both were blinde:
Thou shalt recover all thy goods in kinde,
Who wart disseized by usurping lust:
All knees shall bow to thee; all wits shall rise,
And praise him who did make and mend our eies.

A fire burning within a human body in this world seems for the poet to be a lesser one compared with the greater. So his longing is
that this lesser fire be attracted and absorbed in the greater. The fire of selfishness, honour, property, position and other desires is burning in his heart. He heartily longs for it to be burnt out by the greater, immortal Heat to which he aspires to get access. At this moment he remembers the familiar passage, "the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth."22 The Psalmist here sings that the wicked, covetous people are proud of their own thoughts and utter curses against the Lord to cut off their relationship to Him. Sometimes such a wicked thought overruns the mind, when the poet longs for being shown what the true, sacred reality is. Once he has obtained the truth, his heart begins to pant for God as the Psalmist does. His soul and reason devote all the fruits they have brought in to the Lord and the Altar. There singing of hymns, he will send back the lesser fire to the greater to whom it originally and substantially belonged. His eyes which have been desiring to see the wicked, sinful dust, shall see Him clearly. Such a past dust shall be blown by the wit God gives us, and the eyes shall be opened and see everything in the world, not to mention the Lord Himself.

Thus the soul, which once disconnected the relationship to God and rejected His calling because of being absorbed with strong, usurping desires and lusts, shall return to Him to recover what has been lost. That the Lord recovers the absolute property of his soul signifies that he himself recovers the absolute property of God at last. Consequently all the knees shall make bows to Him, and all the wits shall rise to praise Him who is a creator and healer of the eyes.

The most important and substantial longing for George Herbert is that all the human souls along with his own should be burnt by the greater, immortal Heat so that they will be absorbed by Him and will accept Him. As those who were once exiled from the Paradise due to the internal and external factor of sin regain the Paradise, so we who once rejected the Lord return to the original place where we should be. At that moment the Lord will become for the poet the God of forgiveness as shown in "mend our eyes."

In these three "Love" poems, the poet pays special consideration to the words of "dust" and "eyes." The tendency of this usage is seen in his other poems in The Temple. Through "dust" He carves in relief the relationship of himself to God and his created soul is anxious to be accepted by the Creator, for "the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground."23 It is the eyes that recognize this relationship. The eyes recognize that the Lord is the Creator who mends the eyes with which he knows who the healer of the eyes is. Thus Herbert sings of his own faith and religious experience with simple but pious lines, gazing at his inner existence and trying to find out his recovery and reconciliation with God in contradiction and competence between God and him through the mirror of comparison. As Helen Gardner says, "The source of the struggles in The Temple does not lie in conflict between the world and a call to serve God at his altar; but in the difficulty of learning to say truly in any calling 'Thy will be done.'"24 The continuous spiritual conflicts between God and his soul, and the confession of the agonizing soul trying to recover his relationship to God cover all of his poetry.

Notes


5) ibid. p. 140.

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8) Jack Dalglish, op. cit. p. 147.
9) *The Authorize Version; Genesis, 2:7*, Hereafter this version will be used for the Bible reference without mentioning.
10) *Psalms, 146:4.*
11) *Ecclesiastes, 12:7.*
13) *Proverbs, 20:12.*
14) *Jeremiah, 5:21.*
16) *Job, 42:5.*
17) *Psalms, 25:15.*
19) ibid. pp. 80-81.
21) A. Alvarez, op. cit. p. 74.
22) *Psalms, 10:3.*
23) *Genesis, 2:7.*

References

Thomas, R.S. ed. *A Choice of George Herbert's Verse.* Faber and Faber, 1941.