

A Critical Study of Shiga Naoya, and a Translation

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This paper is divided into three sections. Part one is a critical study of the author Shiga Naoya. The aim of this section is to critique the author's work within the context of his life, with particular reference to the short story; 清兵衛と瓢箪. The aim of part two, is to effectively translate the short story 清兵衛と瓢箪, for a native English audience. The appendix contains the original Japanese version of 清兵衛と瓢箪.

Part 1:

A Critical Study of Shiga Naoya

From time to time in the literary sphere of a country there appears a writer whose achievements are held in high esteem in his own country, but who is less well known abroad than some of his contemporaries. Sometimes it is because the writer's works are so very different both culturally and in style that they do not lend themselves to translation. Moreover, at other times it is because the writer's thoughts and perspectives are so narrowly focused on his or her native audience that they do not speak to other peoples. The reasons for these phenomena are varied, but in any case, Shiga Naoya is one such writer.

Shiga achieved great literary prominence in a career that spanned both the Taisho, and the early part of the Showa period. He was extravagantly admired by no less a writer than Akutagawa

Ryūnosuke who referred to him as the “God of fiction” . Shiga was also encouraged by Natsume Sōseki. But why then are Akutagawa and Sōseki practically household names in the world of literary products in the West, having been widely translated and studied, yet Shiga remains virtually unknown? Indeed, it was not until 1970 that any substantial translation and criticism of his work was undertaken in English, and also not until 1987 until a book-length collection of his stories was published in English.

It is not that Shiga’s works contain comparatively complex syntax and obscure vocabulary, indeed, simplicity is one of their virtues and his stories are widely anthologized in Japan for readers of all ages. In general, Shiga’s whole corpus of work deals with relationships between individuals, and between man and nature, and surely these are universal concerns of humanity common to both East and West.

Possibly, one reason for Shiga’s popularity within Japan is the craftsmanship and evocative power of his words, not just in their meaning, but in their suggestiveness, and implication. His careful use of the Japanese language exploits all nuances and shades of meaning available to him. It is for this reason that his style of writing is so distinctively Japanese that make it difficult to effectively translate.

In the Edo period, the Confucian society of the day prescribed a strict system of values which Japan began to adopt from China in approximately 603 A.D¹. As a result of this influx of culture from the influential Chinese Wei dynasty, a rigid social structure began to take hold within Japan. Each person was trained to carry out their role and the most rigid penalties were enforced for

those who tried to break out of their assigned position. Saikaku and Chikamatsu clearly depicted the failings of this far from ideal system.

After the Meiji Restoration in 1868 this rigid and traditional social structure began to collapse, caused from an influx of Western concepts of individualism that influenced personal values, and created a moral ambiguity². It is likely that Japanese people of the time felt the need to reestablish social values, yet were uncertain which values would be important or viable in this newly formed society. As a result two models evolved; one was the study and wholesale importation of philosophical systems from the West that remained virtually intact, and the other, in reaction to that, was to remake traditional Confucian ethics or to delve further back to reignite indigenous ethics.

In the world of prose, some writers maintained an old-fashioned and traditional approach to writing while raising fundamental questions about the society in which they lived. At the same time, other writers were trying to develop a new and modern style of writing, by devoting themselves to whole philosophies of literature imported from the West, such as Romanticism and Naturalism. This group included writers such as Futabatei Shimei, Kunikida Doppo, and Shimazaki Tōson³.

Natsume Sōseki's early education was in English, yet his primary interest was in classical Chinese, and he also became involved in the haiku movement of Masaoka Shiki who sought to recreate the indigenous Japanese values of poetry. Sōseki felt compelled to resolve these three disparate elements in his life, and took the position that he had to be familiar with his own cultural

heritage. He also sought to establish his own artistic and ethical values on the basis of his own education and experience⁴.

From this literary milieu Shiga Naoya made the decision to become a writer in response to problems he developed in approach to his writing style. His realistic style derives from the theories of Tsubouchi Shōyō and the writing style of Futabatei Shimei whose works he greatly admired.

Shiga's style is largely autobiographical, although there has been fierce debate as to what extent his work is confessional. Western and Japanese critics have argued that Shiga's work lacked what they regarded as the usual attributes of fiction. The events covered in Shiga's work seem to be chosen at random from the author's life, and there is little in the way of conventional plot-structure. The author's fiction persona is almost invariably the protagonist, and there is little or no development of a range of 'well-rounded' characters.

Edward Seidensticker expressed the negative Western view of Shiga Naoya by commenting that his work is 'unformed reminiscence'⁵. Mishima Yukio stating in a less belittling light; 'The 'I-novel' is a complex creation of mixed ancestry, bred from the French naturalist novel, the self-worship of European romanticism, and the occasional essay style (revealing one's thoughts) of the Middle Ages.'⁶

In 1975, Francis Mathy's critique was rather narrow and unsympathetic. William Sibley, in 1979, took a more sympathetic approach, but equally distorting; he chose to make a comparison with Freud, that in Shiga's work, 'less is more.'⁷ In 1976, Ueda Makoto, began the process of placing Shiga's 'I-novel' within the

context of its own culture. A counter-argument was voiced by Tomi Suzuki, in 1996, stressing the undeniable Western literary and philosophical influences.⁸ In 1998, Roy Starrs interprets Shiga's work with what he terms a 'Zen aesthetic'; the spiritual culture of Zen Buddhism that underlies Shiga's most acclaimed work, 'A Dark Night's Passing'.⁹ It is an 'eye-catching' theory that exerts an attraction to Western hearts, if not slightly misplaced, since Shiga often reacted against ideologies that had nothing to do with 'the Orient', and everything to do with Western currents of the day. As is clear, one could counter-argue that Shiga Naoya has received an enormous amount of attention from the Western critical establishment, and clearly, the debate is far from over.

In 1910, he joined a group of young writers and contributed to a literary magazine called 白樺 (White Birch), a well-known literary movement of the time. The *Shirakaba* movement emphasized the importance of the individual and was a reaction against pessimism, rigidity, and state control. The *Shirakaba* writers considered themselves humanists, and for them the purpose of existence was the expression of one's inner-life. He was heavily influenced by Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky and the message of universal love, triumphing over the sordidness and regimentation of the time. Although associated with the Naturalist movement, Shiga Naoya rejected the pessimism and derogatory concept of man as was the prevailing trend, and yet nominally associated with the *Shirakaba* group, he took a position of aloofness similar to that of Sōseki. Like Sōseki he established his own values and standards of behavior which resulted inevitably in a sense of isolation.¹⁰

Born on February 20th, 1883, Shiga Naoya was the second son of Shiga Naoharu and O-Gin. His father Naoharu was an employee of a branch of the Dai-Ichi Bank in the harbor town of Ishinomaki in Miyagi prefecture at the time of Shiga's birth. Shiga's mother died in August, 1895; his father remarrying in the autumn of the same year.

When Shiga Naoya was born in the small village of Ishinomaki on the Northeast coast of Japan, Tokyo had already become the center of a cultural maelstrom. His father had received his education at the new Keiō University, and he was also a member of a samurai family who had served the Sōma family for eight generations. Naoharu was energetic and ambitious. Not wanting to spend his life in a small branch of a bank in a small town, he moved the family to Tokyo, to the home of Shiga's grandfather, Naomichi. He became remarkably successful in business, becoming director of both the Sobu Railway Company and the Imperial Life Insurance Company. However, to young Naoya his father was vulgar, grasping and insensitive.¹¹

In stark contrast, Shiga's grandfather, Naomichi was a Samurai retainer possessing a rigid sense of virtue and a strong sense of social responsibility. He was instrumental too in the revival of the Sōma Family, making a number of shrewd investments in mining and industry that turned out to be successful. Shiga's mother held a subordinate position in the family, and the family revolved around Shiga's grandfather and grandmother. Therefore, in a real sense Shiga was raised as their child, and he was especially close to his grandmother Rume.

In 1889, Shiga entered the Peer's school which was set aside

for the progeny of prominent families whose children would be suitable companions for the children of the Imperial Household. This was a reflection of how the family continued to prosper. However, while Shiga was still in elementary school, the head of the Sōma Family, Lord Seika Sōma died in suspicious circumstances, and Naomichi was indicted on suspicion that he had poisoned the man. After several months in jail, he was eventually released after conclusive proof that the deed had been done by another retainer, Nishigori. This incident had a great effect on Shiga by showing him the importance of having a close family for support in times of crisis. The next family crisis came during the summer of 1895, when his mother died of complications during pregnancy. For Shiga this was a devastating situation made worse by his father's attitudes and reactions. Shiga observed his father's insensitivity when he did not even weep over his dead wife, but married a few months later before the official period of mourning was completed. It was also difficult for thirteen year old Shiga to come to terms with his new mother, Takahashi Ko, who was only twenty-four years old. The contempt Shiga felt for his father's insensitivity set the stage for their later antagonism.

At school he became much more interested in sport than in school work, and although he was involved in writing, it was more of a recreation than a serious artistic or intellectual endeavor. However, he failed to enter the fourth year of middle school and had to repeat the third year.

In December of 1913, Shiga Naoya wrote one of his best and most popular short stories, 清兵衛と瓢箪 which is a simple story about a boy who collects gourds and treasures them even though

no one else sees their beauty. Finally Seibei's father and teacher force him to stop collecting gourds, but the boy realizes that their wrath is no real argument against beauty. Seibei maintains his aesthetic values in the face of philistine attacks. Shiga is thought to have heard the story on a boat crossing from Onomichi to Shikoku. His motivation for the story came from his unhappiness with his father who felt writing stories was unsatisfactory. Before he travelled to Onomichi his father asked him, "What kind of person do you expect to become if you are going to spend your time writing stories?"¹²

In the story Shiga mentions a Bakin gourd. The reason he chose Bakin, he explains, is to do with his father. In answer to his father's cynicism to Shiga's writing, he exclaims, "Even Bakin was a writer! But he was a low class writer." Shiga knew that his father liked Bakin and that he had often read 八犬伝. 八犬伝 is a 106 volume epic novel, set in the tumultuous Sengoku period, written over a period of nearly thirty years and published from 1814 to 1842. It tells the story of eight samurai brothers and their adventures, with themes of loyalty and family honor, as well as Confucianism, Bushido and Buddhist philosophy. Kumoemon, the Meiji era naniwa-bushi recitalist (浪花節浪曲), is symbolic of the division between Meiji conservatism, inhibiting artistic creativity, and Taisho emancipation, encouraging more liberal and creative expression.

The story of Seibei and the Gourds presents, in a barely masked form, Shiga's conflict with his father over the matter of his devotion to art. Shiga also expresses his awareness of the ironies of life, and in the story the boy can laugh gently at the

world because he knows that his own values are sound and that they cannot be taken from him as the gourds were.¹³

Shiga is thought to have made a small collection of gourds during his stay at Onomachi. The significance of the gourd in Shiga's work, which has appeared time and again, is likely to stand for all that is full and simple in art, nature, and human life alike. It is also important to note that gourds have been frequently used in Japanese literature to represent a rustic but aesthetic perfection. This can clearly be seen in the Tale of Genji in the person of Lady Yūgao, and the complex web of images that surround her. It can also be observed in Bashō's 奥の細道 where he praises the rustic perfection of a house covered with gourd vines. Shiga's use of gourds here sends echoes down a thousand years of literary history.

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Part 2: An English Translation of a Short Story by Shiga Naoya

Seibei and His Gourds

Translated by David Flenner

This is a tale of a boy called Seibei and his gourds. Since the incident, Seibei had nothing more to do with gourds, but he soon found a replacement. This was drawing pictures. Yet, just as he had once been feverishly engrossed in gourds, he was now feverishly engrossed in drawing pictures.

Seibei's parents both knew he bought gourds now and then. He must have brought home as many as ten, even with the skin still attached, that ranged from three, four and upwards to about fifteen sen in price. All by himself, he skillfully cut an opening, and removed the seeds. He also made his own stopper. First, taking away the smell with tea dregs, and then with his father's leftover rice wine which he had saved, he polished the gourds incessantly.

Seibei's eagerness was the thoroughly insatiable kind. One day, he was walking along the shore road, and unsurprisingly he was thinking, and thinking about gourds, when suddenly something caught his eye. He was taken aback, because from one of a row of stalls that lined the edge of the road, backing on to the seashore, he saw the bald head of an old man who had just dashed out. Seibei thought of the man's head as a gourd. "What a magnificent gourd!" he thought. He went on thinking like this without realizing for quite some time. When he noticed his error he was of course surprised. The old man, his finely colored bald head bobbing along, entered a side street across the way. Seibei suddenly became

amused, and let out a solitary laugh in a huge voice. He must have run half the length of the town, laughing uncontrollably as he went. Even then, he still couldn't stop laughing.

Such was his eagerness that, when walking in town, he would always stop to gaze at any shop with gourds hung from the eaves, be it an curio shop, a greengrocers, a sweet shop, or a house that specialized in selling gourds.

Twelve year old Seibei was still in primary school. Instead of playing with other children after coming home from school, he would often go to town on a solitary search for gourds. At night he would sit cross legged in a corner of the living room, grooming a gourd. When he had finished, he would pour in the rice wine, wrap the gourd in a towel, store it in a tin can, place the whole thing under the kotatsu table, and then, he would go to bed. The next morning, as soon as he got up, he would open the tin can. The skin of the gourd would be completely covered in sweat. He would gaze at it in insatiable wonder. Then he would careful attach a thread around the middle, hang the gourd from an eave that faced the sun, and finally he would set off for school.

Seibei lived in a town with a commercial district and a port, and although it had been officially classed a city, it was a relatively small area of land, so if one walked for twenty minutes through this long, and narrow municipality, one could just about pass right through the lengthy part. Consequently, there were quite a large number of establishments selling gourds, nonetheless, Seibei would walk around searching for them almost daily and it was very likely he had cast his eye over every single gourd there was to see.

He did not much care for traditional gourds¹. He had a penchant for the sort that had not yet been cut open, and still had their skin attached. Moreover, the gourds in his collection were all comparatively commonplace in appearance, and were probably so-called typically gourd-shaped.

“When it comes to gourds, this lad of yours only seems to like the plain looking ones”, commented an acquaintance who came to visit Seibei’s father who was toiling away at his carpentry work. The guest had been looking over at Seibei, observing him assiduously polishing an ordinary looking gourd.

“Fancy a boy wasting his time, fooling about with a gourd like that” , responded his father with a look of bitter displeasure, reflecting on what the visitor had said.

“Look here, Sei my lad. It won’t do just collecting countless ordinary ones, you know. What you want to do, is buy the really unusual ones”, urged the guest.

“I prefer them like this,” retorted Seibei resolutely.

The conversation of the guest and Seibei’s father had now turned to the general subject of gourds.

“Remember that splendid gourd that belonged to Bakin on display at last year’s spring fair?” Seibei’s father asserted.

“A real big beauty, extraordinary wasn’t it?”

“Stout and rather long too.”

Listening to such talk, Seibei cynically smiled within.

“Bakin’s gourd” was renowned at the time as an acclaimed object. Nevertheless, Seibei took one peak at it, without realizing who the so-called great Bakin was, found it to be a rather insignificant object, and walked out of the place.

“Well I didn’t care for it much. It was just a big, bulky clumsy looking thing,” Seibei chimed in.

Hearing this, his father’s eyes bulged wide in anger.

“What’s that?,” his father barked. “When you don’t know what you’re talking about, keep quiet!”

Seibei fell silent.

One day, while walking along a back street, Seibei came to a place he’d never seen before. In front of the lattice sliding doors of a residential shop, an old woman was setting up a stand of dried persimmons and tangerines. Seibei discovered that about twenty gourds had been placed hanging, attached to the sliding lattice doors, behind the fruit stand.

“Please let me take a quick look?,” demanded Seibei impatiently, and in an instant, he began inspecting the gourds one by one.

Among them was one about five inches around, although at first sight it appeared quite commonplace, to Seibei there was something special about it, that made him tremble with anticipation.

His heart pounding, “How much for this one?” , he inquired.

“For you my lad, I’ll knock it down to ten sen” , replied the old lady.

“If that’s so, please don’t sell it to anyone else. I promise I’ll come back with the money straight away.”, pleaded Seibei, feverishly gasping for breath. And with that utterance, he dashed off at a sprint for home.

In no time at all, faced flushed crimson and panting, Seibei was back. Seizing his gourd, he once again dashed off for home.

From then on, he would not be separated from his gourd. He even began taking it to school, until finally, he even began polishing it under his desk during class time.

It was not long before the form master caught sight of Seibei and his gourd, and became all the more enraged as the incident had taken place in ethics class.

The schoolmaster, who came from another part of Japan, found the indulgence of people from this locality, in things such as gourds, to be entirely distasteful.

The schoolmaster was the sort of fellow who would love to eulogize the virtues of the classical code of samurai ethics and behavior. When Kumoemon, the famous naniwa-bushi recitalist, toured the town, chronicling brave samurai deeds of ancient times in an easy tone accompanied by the music of the shamisen, the schoolmaster would attend almost all performances of the four-day engagement. The spectacle was held at a small theatre in the disreputable pleasure district, which ordinarily the schoolmaster would be afraid even to pass through. Although the schoolmaster would not become so indignant when he heard children in the playground raucously singing naniwa-bashi ballads, however, his voice now shook with rage when he discovered Seibei silently polishing his gourd during ethics class.

“There isn’t the remotest possibility of a boy like you having any future whatsoever!” scolded the schoolmaster excessively, instantly confiscating Seibei’s beloved gourd on the spot, which he had devoted many long hours grooming and polishing. Seibei could not so much as cry.

Ashen faced Seibei, returned home and sat down with his feet

under the kotatsu table, looking vacantly into space.

After some time, the schoolmaster, clutching a bundle of books, came to visit Seibei's father. His father had not yet arrived home from the carpentry shop where he worked, so the teacher directed his ire at Seibei's mother.

"I must point out that this sort of behavior warrants stringent discipline, and that should be the first priority of the family," berated the schoolmaster disapprovingly. They were the sort of words that were bitinglly embarrassing to Seibei's mother, who could merely mutter an apology while cowering in shame.

Suddenly fearful of the unforgiving, and vindictive schoolmaster, his lips quivering, Seibei shrank into the corner of the room, trying to become inconspicuous.

A whole row of fully prepared gourds were hanging on a beam directly behind the schoolmaster. Seibei was in a cold sweat, terrified at the thought of the schoolmaster catching sight of them. After the schoolmaster exhausted his rhetoric directed at Seibei's mother, the man at last stomped angrily away, without noticing the gourds. Seibei heaved a sigh of relief. Seibei's mother burst into tears, and began to querulously drone on, berating him for his misbehavior.

In the midst of this, Seibei's father returned home from a hard day's toil at the carpentry shop. As soon as he heard what had happened, he swiftly grabbed his son, and gave him a merciless beating.

"There's absolutely no future for a disobedient little delinquent like you!" his father bawled, echoing the schoolmaster's chastisement. "I should throw you out, you little bastard," his

father threatened further. Just then, his father caught sight of the gourds hanging from the beam, and went over with a hammer and smashed them one by one. Seibeï simply turned pale, staring in silence.

Meanwhile, the following day, the schoolmaster got rid of the gourd he had confiscated from Seibeï, as if it was an unrefined sordid object, by passing it on to the aging school caretaker. The aging caretaker took it home, and hung it from a beam in his small soot-stained dingy room.

About two months later, the caretaker, hard up for money, resolved to sell the gourd for whatever it would fetch, and took it to the local curio shop in his neighborhood.

The curio dealer looked at it with careful scrutiny, and abruptly handed it back with an air of cool indifference. "I'll take it of your hands for five yen," said the curio dealer slyly.

The caretaker was astonished, but he too was a shrewd old man.

"I couldn't possibly part with it for so little" replied the caretaker calmly, his expression inscrutable.

The curio dealer immediately raised his offer to ten yen, but the caretaker didn't accept, holding out for a better deal. Finally, the dealer just barely managed to acquire the gourd for fifty yen. The caretaker was secretly delighted at his good fortune, at having obtained something from the schoolmaster for free worth four times the teacher's monthly salary, equivalent to what the caretaker would make in a year. Nevertheless, the caretaker maintained his inscrutable expression, and said nothing, so that neither Seibeï, nor the schoolmaster ever heard of what became of

the gourd.

Yet, the caretaker was certainly shrewd all right, but little did he imagine that the same gourd would fetch six hundred yen, because the crafty curio dealer had sold it on to a wealthy collector in the district.

...Seibei is now feverishly engrossed in drawing pictures. He no longer feels bitter resentment towards the schoolmaster, or towards his father who smashed his precious collection of gourds with a hammer, one by one.

Yet, it won't be long before his father once again begins to berate him for drawing pictures.

1. Gourds that were old, gnarled and peculiarly shaped were fashionable at the time, and this was the style favored by the connoisseur of the day. In contrast, gourds that were even and symmetrical were considered ordinary, and were scornfully unpopular.

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Acknowledgments in Translation

Thank you to Mrs. Masako Fukuda for invaluable help in deciphering the subtle nuanced prose of Shiga Naoya.

Appendix:

清兵衛と瓢箪

志賀直哉

これは清兵衛という子どもと瓢箪との話である。この出来事以来清兵衛と瓢箪とは縁が断れてしまったが、間もなく清兵衛には瓢箪に代わる物ができた。それは絵を描くことで、彼はかつて瓢箪に熱中したように今はそれに熱中している…

清兵衛が時々瓢箪を買ってくることは両親も知っていた。三、四銭から十五銭位までの皮つきの瓢箪を十ほども持っていたろう。彼はその口を切ることも種を出すことも独りで上手にやった。栓も自分で作った。最初茶渋で臭味を抜くと、それから父の飲みあました酒を貯えておいて、それで頻りに磨いていた。

全く清兵衛の凝りようは烈しかった。ある日彼はやはり瓢箪のことを考え考え浜通りを歩いていると、ふと、眼に入った物がある。彼ははっとした。それは路端に浜を背にしてズラリと並んだ屋台店の一つから飛び出してきた爺さんのはげ頭であった。清兵衛はそれを瓢箪だと思ったのである。「りっぱな瓢じゃ。」こう思いながら彼は暫く気がつかずにいた。気がついて、さすがに自分で驚いた。その爺さんはいい色をしたはげ頭を振り立てて彼方の横町へ入って行った。清兵衛は急におかしくなって一人大きな声を出して笑った。堪らなくなって笑いながら彼は半町ほど駆けた。それでもまだ笑いは止まらなかった。

これほどの凝りようだったから、彼は町を歩いていれば骨董屋でも八百屋でも荒物屋でも駄菓子屋でもまた専門にそれを売る家でも、およそ瓢箪を下げた店といえれば必ずその前に立ってじっと見た。

清兵衛は十二歳でまだ小学校に通っている。彼は学校から帰って来るとほかの子どもとも遊ばずに、一人よく町へ瓢箪を見に出かけた。そして、

夜は茶の間の隅に胡坐をかいて瓢箪の手入れをしていた。手入れが済むと酒を入れて、手拭で巻いて、罐にしまって、それごと炬燵へ入れて、そして寝た。翌朝は起きるとすぐ彼は罐を開けてみる。瓢箪の肌はすっかり汗をかいている。彼は厭わずそれを眺めた。それから丁寧に糸をかけて陽のあたる軒へ下げ、そして学校へ出かけて行った。

清兵衛のいる町は商業地で船着き場で、市にはなっていたが、割に小さな土地で二十分歩けば細長い市のその長い方が通りぬけられる位であった。だからたとえ瓢箪を売る家はかなり多くあったにしろ、殆ど毎日それらを見歩いている清兵衛には、恐らく総ての瓢箪は眼を通されていたろう。

彼は古瓢には余り興味を持たなかった。まだ口も切っていないような皮つきに興味を持っていた。しかも彼の持っているのは、大方いわゆる瓢箪形の、わりに平凡な格好をした物ばかりであった。

「子どもじゃけえ、瓢いうたら、こういうんでなかにゃあ気に入らんもんと見えるけのう。」大工をしている彼の父を訪ねて来た客が、傍で清兵衛が熱心にそれを磨いているのを見ながら、こう言った。彼の父は、

「子どものくせに瓢いじりなぞをしおって……。」とにがにがしそうに、そのほうを顧みた。「清公。そんなおもしろくないのばかり、えっと持つとつてもあかんぜ。もちっと奇抜なんを買わんかいな。」と客がいった。

清兵衛は、

「こういうがええんじゃ。」と答えて済ましていた。清兵衛の父と客との話は瓢箪のことになって行った。「この春の品評会に参考品で出ちよった馬琴の瓢箪というやつはすばらしいもんじゃったのう。」と清兵衛の父がいった。

「えらい大けえ瓢じゃったけのう。」

「大けえし、大分長かった。」

こんな話を聞きながら清兵衛は心で笑っていた。馬琴の瓢というはその時の評判な物ではあったが、彼はちょっと見ると、||馬琴という人間

も何者だか知らなかったし | | すぐ下らない物だと思ってその場を去ってしまった。

「あの瓢はわたしにはおもしろうなかった。かさばっとるだけじゃ。」彼はこう口を入れた。

それを聴くと彼の父は眼を丸くして怒った。「何じゃ。わかりもせんくせして、黙っとれ！」

清兵衛は黙ってしまった。

ある日清兵衛が裏通りを歩いていて、いつも見なれない場所に、仕舞屋の格子先に婆さんが干し柿や蜜柑の店を出して、その背後の格子に二十ばかりの瓢箪を下げて置くのを発見した。

彼はすぐ、

「ちょっと、見せてつかあせえな。」と寄って一つ一つ見た。

中に一つ五寸ばかりで一見極普通な形をしたので、彼には震いつきたいほどにいいのがあった。

ありそうではないようです

彼は胸をどきどきさせて、「これ何ぼかいな。」と訊いてみた。婆さんは、

「ぼうさんじゃけえ、十銭にまけときやんしょう。」と答えた。

彼は息をはずませながら、「そしたら、きっとだれにも売らんといて、つかあせえのう。すぐ銭持って来やんすけえ。」くどく、これをいって走って帰って行った。

間もなく、赤い顔をしてハアハア言いながら還って来ると、それを受け取ってまた走って帰って行った。

彼はそれから、その瓢が離せなくなった。

学校へも持って行くようになった。

しまいには時間中でも机の下でそれを磨いていることがあった。

それを受け持ちの教員が見つけた。修身の時間ただだけに教員は一層怒った。

他所から来ている教員にはこの土地の人間が瓢箪などに興味を持つことが全体気に食わなかったのである。

この教員は武士道を言うことの好きな男で、雲右衛門が来れば、いつもは通り抜けるさえ恐れている新地の芝居小屋に四日の興行を三日聴きに行くくらいだから、生徒が運動場でそれを唄うことにはそれほど怒らなかったが、清兵衛の瓢箪では声を震わして怒ったのである。

「到底将来見込みのある人間ではない。」こんなことまで言った。

そしてその丹精を凝らした瓢箪はその場で取り上げられてしまった。清兵衛は泣けもしなかった。

彼は青い顔をして家へ帰ると炬燵に入っただだぼんやりとしていた。

そこに本包みを抱えた教員が彼の父を訪ねてやって来た。清兵衛の父は仕事へ出て留守だった。

「こういうことは全体家庭で取り締まっただけで……。」教員はこんなことを言って清兵衛の母に食ってかかった。母はただただ恐縮していた。清兵衛はその教員の執念深さが急に恐ろしくなって、唇を震わしながら部屋の隅で小さくなっていた。

教員のすぐ後ろの柱には手入れのできた瓢箪がたくさん下げてあった。今気がつくか今気がつくかと清兵衛はヒヤヒヤしていた。 散々叱言を並べたあと、教員はとうとうその瓢箪には気がつかずに帰って行った。清兵衛はほっと息をついた。清兵衛の母は泣き出した。そしてダラダラと愚痴っぽい叱言を言い出した。

まもなく清兵衛の父は仕事場から帰ってきた。で、その話を聞くと、急に側にいた清兵衛を捕まえて散々になぐりつけた。清兵衛はここでも「将

来ととも見込みのない奴だ。」と言われた。「もう貴様のようなやつは出ていけ。」と言われた。

清兵衛の父はふと柱の瓢箪に気がつくと、玄能を持って来てそれを一つ一つ割ってしまった。清兵衛はただ青くなって黙っていた。さて、教員は清兵衛から取り上げた瓢箪を穢れた物でもあるかのように、捨てるように、年寄った学校の小使いにやってしまった。小使いはそれを持って帰って、くすぶった小さな自分の部屋の柱へ下げておいた。

二か月ほどして小使いはわずかの金に困ったときにふとその瓢箪をいくらでもいいから売ってやろうと思いついて、近所の骨董屋へ持って行って見せた。

骨董屋はためつ、すがめつ、それを見ていたが、急に冷淡な顔をして小使いの前へ押しやると、「五円やったらもろうところ。」と言った。

小使いは驚いた。が、賢い男だった。何食わぬ顔をして、

「五円じゃとても離し得やしえんのう。」と答えた。骨董屋は急に十円に上げた。小使いはそれでも承知しなかった。

結局五十円で漸く骨董屋はそれを手に入れた。|| 小使いは教員からその人の四か月分の月給をただもらったような幸福を心ひそかに喜んだ。が、彼はそのことは教員にはもちろん、清兵衛にもしまいまで全く知らん顔をしていた。だからその瓢箪の行方に就いてはだれも知る者がなかったのである。

しかしその賢い小使いも骨董屋がその瓢箪を地方の豪家に六百円で売りつけたことまでは想像もできなかった。

……清兵衛は今、絵を描くことに熱中している。これが出来た時に彼にはもう教員を怨む心も、十あまりの愛瓢を玄能で割ってしまった父を怨む

心もなくなっていた。しかし彼の父はもうそろそろ彼の絵を描くことにも叱言を言い出してきた。