琉球大学学術リポジトリ

『コルテスの海航海日誌』を読む ：スタインベックのネイチャーライティング的側面

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Some Aspects of Steinbeck's Nature Writing: A Reading of *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*

Kozen Nakachi

Despite the fact that John Steinbeck's writing abounds in some key concepts of nature writing and that "sense of place" suffuses most of his fiction and nonfiction writing, his name and work have not been mentioned in a brand-new area of literary criticism, so called "eco-criticism." I do not propose that his work should be discussed in light of "deep ecology" or environmental literature. I am simply suggesting that "sense of place," which is really the most important key concept of nature writing and environmental literature, plays a crucial role in Steinbeck's fiction and nonfiction writing. Therefore, in this essay, I am going to discuss Steinbeck's sense of place found here and there in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, particularly in the description of marine invertebrates in the tidepools of, and Mexican Indians on the deserted shorelines of the Sea of Cortez.

As Richard Astro points out in his critical essay, "From the Tidepool to the Star: Steinbeck's Sense of Place," Steinbeck's "sense of place" should be explored more deeply. He contends that "we have really said very little about the importance of [Steinbeck's] sense of place; certainly we have rarely moved beyond general statements about his love for the landscape and his native California"(6). This remark was made a quarter century ago. Since then, there have been many substantial essays on Steinbeck's biological and ecological perspective, but very few on his sense of place as a theme itself. By deepening our

"sense of place" and exploring of Steinbeck's sense of place, we may approach the core concept of Steinbeck's "non-teleological breakthrough." My contention is that Steinbeck's sense of place is the most significant key concept to understand his ecological perspective and "non-teleological breakthrough" position.

To begin with, what is a sense of place? How would we build a sense of place? And how would we gain a sense of place? I would like to take advantage of Gary Snyder's comparatively recent utterances on the topic from his unpublished writing, "Gary Snyder Interview: Sense of Place." In the interview, he responds as follows:

> ... To start sort of at the reverse end of it, I'd say, "We feel that a piece [of] writing has a sense of place." If it seems to us to richly invoke an atmosphere, sounds, smells, the reality of a landscape, the reality of a natural environment... all of those things that make up sensory qualities that bring a place to mind will be what we think of when we write as a sense of place. (Snyder's unpublished writing)

He continues to say that "[a] person who knows the place well will be more critical and will say, well, this is good but it doesn't go very deep." To know a place well is not satisfactory. We are required to build a sense of place in order to get rid of our shallow sense of place. Snyder's response to the second question is that "another way will be that which comes from a person who is fully acquainted and has lived in a place for many years that they just naturally speak from it without even being conscious of it." Furthermore, he points out that "[T]he third way, that is interesting to us, is how we are going to deliberately build a sense of place, deliberately deepen one's own sense

of place. And that will call for getting a clear sense of all the details"(Snyder). Snyder's definition of a sense of place deepens our own sense of place and gives us some cues for understanding Steinbeck's treatment of the marine invertebrates and the Mexican Indians in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez.*

Here we immediately recognize the similarity between Snyder's definition of "sense of place" and Steinbeck's or Ricketts's concept of "non-teleological breakthrough." In *The Log from the Sea of Cortez,* close observations are followed by non-teleological breakthrough. Many Steinbeck scholars and critics have already made similar observations on this nonfiction writing's form. As Joseph Fontenrose points out, among others, "nearly every chapter can be divided into two parts, narrative events and reflections upon them" (86). Moreover, Frederick Bracher observes in his essay, "Steinbeck and the Biological View of Man," that [i]ts form preserves the rhythm of the voyage—feverish collection and preservation of specimens, followed by periods of leisurely talk as the boat goes to a new station" (183). As for the form, we are finally persuaded completely by Betty L. Perez in her superb essay, "The Form of the Narrative Section of Sea of Cortez: A Specimen Collected from Reality." Perez argues as follows:

> No critical attention...has been directed toward the pattern of *Sea of Cortez.* Approached as a self-contained work, *Sea of Cortez* exhibits the pattern which, in this case, takes the form of a hero's quest, manifest as a journey into both physical and psychic unknowns in quest of knowledge—knowledge about marine animals, to be sure, but also about the mind and feelings of man. (39)

It is interesting to see that Perez's argument is very similar to Snyder's presentation of the core concept of nature writing. Both of them regard close observations as the first step to an understanding of nature itself. And then the observers are required to deliberately deepen their own sense of place. A microcosm-macrocosm pattern of thinking leads the observers to "a clear sense of all the details." As Perez observes, "[t]he holistic concept of interrelated units forming a whole with greater significance than the sum of its parts describes the book's form as well as the view of nature presented" (40). With these arguments in mind, let us go into *The Log from the Sea of Cortez,* realizing how Steinbeck describes marine animals and Mexican Indians in it.

As stated above, Steinbeck's holistic and ecological way of thinking takes us to the place where Actualities and the Imaginative faculty meet. We will naturally follow Steinbeck's thinking process: the "microcosm-macrocosm pattern" of thinking. Thus, "[i]t is advisable to look from the tide pool to the stars and then back to the tide pool again" (*The Log*, 179).

In "Introduction" to *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, we soon come across the book's form and pattern. Steinbeck expresses them like this: "We wanted to see everything our eyes would accommodate, to think what we could, and out of our seeing and thinking, to build some kind of structure in modeled imitation of the observed reality" (1-2). Steinbeck and Ricketts wanted to observe the marine invertebrates of the littoral closely and in light of a wider perspective at the same time. And they wanted to grasp a living reality there and "let [it] crawl" (*Cannery Row*, 7) into their book by itself. So, we are introduced to many sea animals in detail and provided with a biological, ecological, and holistic perspective. This kind of writing is, surely, called nature

writing. Let us look at Steinbeck's description of cormorants' bad manners in Cape San Lucas for instance.

> [The Cormorants] are the flies in a perfect ecological ointment. The cannery cans tuna; the entrails and cuttings of the tuna are thrown into the water from the end of the pier. This refuse brings in schools of small fish which are netted and used for bait to catch tuna. This closed and tight circle is interfered with by the cormorants, who try to get at the bait-fish. They dive and catch fish, but also they drive the schools away from the pier out of easy reach of the baitmen. Thus they are considered interlopers, radicals, subversive forces against the perfect and God-set balance on Cape San Lucas. (48)

Does Steinbeck really think that the cormorants are flies in a perfect ecological ointment? This passage sounds ironical. The cormorants are flies from a man-centered point of view, to be sure, but if you look "through another peephole" (*Cannery Row*, 6), we find that they are also desperately struggling for survival. What is the most important thing here is Steinbeck's vivid description of the scene as a whole. The ecologically-minded Steinbeck watches the scene closely and reports it in a microcosm-macrocosm pattern of thinking. This, surely, could be considered one typical example of nature writing.

Another example is found when the Western Flyer has sailed north and found anchorage on the northern end of Coronado Island. After collecting sea animals on a reef, Steinbeck reflects on the peculiar distribution of the sea animals in this area:

> There is an observable geographic differential in the fauna of the Gulf. The Cape San Lucas—La Paz area is strongly Panamic. Many warm-water mollusks and crustaceans are not known to occur in numbers north of La Paz, and some not even north of Cape San Lucas. But the region north of Santa Rosalia, and even of Puerto Escondido, is known to be inhabited by many cold-water animals.... These animals are apparently trapped in a blind alley with no members of their kind to the south of them. (146)

Here again, we are aware that Steinbeck observes the sea animals in a microcosm-macrocosm pattern of thinking, recording the living reality from an ecological and holistic perspective.

The same is true of the description of Mexican Indians in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*. Steinbeck describes them realistically and at the same time ideally. He has a double perspective in that he looks at sea animals and Mexican Indians non-teleologically on one hand and reflects on them later, breaking through to a holistic concept of the global ecosystem.

As Louis Owens observes, Steinbeck's Mexican Indians might be "purely symbols, walking shadows illustrating the kind of intuitive, nonrational state he [Steinbeck] and Ricketts celebrate in the *Log*" (58). This observation is, of course, legitimate, but if we discuss Steinbeck's way of describing the Mexican Indians' living reality, another picture will come to our mind. Steinbeck himself describes as follows:

> [Indians] seemed to live on remembered things, to be so related to the seashore and the rocky hills and the

> loneliness that they are these things. To ask about the country is like asking about themselves. "How many toes have you? "What, toes? Let's see—of course, ten. I have known them all my life, I never thought to count them. Of course it will rain tonight, I don't know why. Something in me tells I will rain tonight. Of course, I am the whole thing, now that I think about it. I ought to know when I will rain." (*The Log*, 63)

This passage is quoted and discussed by Susan Shillinglaw in her essay, "Steinbeck and Ethnicity." I mainly agree with her observation of the Mexican Indians, but my emphasis here is a little bit different from hers. I have picked up the quoted passage to illuminate Steinbeck's deliberately deepened sense of place, or "transcendent" sense of place. With an ecological and holistic perspective in mind, Steinbeck reflects the Mexican Indians' way of life. In Steinbeck's vision, the Mexican Indians know the land in detail, so they are accustomed to living "non-teleologically" and finally seem to break through to an understanding of the whole. They must recognize that they are a part of the Whole. I mean, in this case, something in them tells that "they will rain."

While Steinbeck celebrates the Mexican Indians' way of life in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, he penetrates their poverty and pain. As Shillinglaw observes, "Steinbeck is...as sensitive to the Indians' economic and social plight as he is fascinated by their spiritualism, holism, and zest" (49). In fact, Steinbeck expresses the following:

> It is said so often and in such ignorance that Mexicans are contented, happy people. "They don't want anything."

> This, of course, is not a description of the happiness of Mexicans, but of the unhappiness of the person who says it. For Americans, and probably all northern peoples, are all masses of wants growing out of inner insecurity. The great drive of our people stems from insecurity. (*The Log*, 81)

Nevertheless, Steinbeck's stance toward the Mexican Indians is basically non-teleological. He is trying to describe the Mexican Indians as they are. After a long reflection on the Mexican Indians' "transcendent" sense of place, he concludes: "[w]e do not know whether Mexicans are happier than we; it is probably that they are exactly as happy. However, we do know that the channels of their happiness or unhappiness are different from ours, just as their time sense is different. We can invade neither, but it is some gain simply to know that it is so" (*The Log*, 83). On a passage in Chapter Sixteen of *The Log* where they go into the "tremendous and desolate stone mountains" with some Mexican Indians for "borego" hunting, Steinbeck makes an acute observation of the Mexican Indians as follows:

> We have noticed many times how lightly Mexican Indians sleep. Often in the night they awaken to smoke a cigarette and talk softly together for a while, and then go to sleep again rather like restless birds, which sing a little in the dark, dreaming that it is already day. Half a dozen times a night they may awaken thus, and it is pleasant to hear them, for they talk very quietly as though they were dreaming. (134-35)

Really, "Steinbeck's book [*The Log from the Sea of Cortez*] is," as Mr. and Mrs. Gladstein in their critical essay point out, "full of expressions of admiration for the people he encountered in the small coastal village of the Sea of Cortez." Although the book is suffused with admiration for the Mexican Indians, Steinbeck tries hard "not to sentimentalize them" (168).

We, the readers, find some examples of social and economic criticism of the life style of northern Americans Steinbeck makes in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez.* We can read it as a text of nature writing. With an ecological and holistic perspective in mind, we easily recognize that Steinbeck contrasts the northern people's man-centered and destructive way of life with that of the Mexican Indians who are closely interconnected to nature around them. Let us take one example, among others, from Chapter 10 of *The Log*:

> And perhaps when that occurs — when our species progresses toward extinction or marches into the forehead of God—there will be certain degenerate groups left behind, say, the Indians of Lower California, in the shadows of the rocks or sitting motionless in the dugout canoes. They may remain to sun themselves, to eat and starve and sleep and reproduce. Now they have many legends as hazy and magical as the mirage. Perhaps then they will have another concerning a great and godlike race that flew away in four-motored bombers to the accompaniment of exploding bombs, the voice of God calling them home. (74-75)

Perhaps civilized human beings will continue to make an amazingly unbelievable progress in space technology or biotechnology in the near future, and I am afraid that the Mexican Indians will have "another legend" concerning the man-centered and godlike human race. Astro observes that Steinbeck "condemned the man-centered attitude toward the environment fostered by the Judeo-Christian ethic in which everything in nature exists solely to serve man." He continues to points out:

> He [Steinbeck] replaced it with some very simple notions about man's relationship with his place which are recognized by preliterate peoples (such as the Indians of the Sea of Cortez) and are implicit in the behabior of even the simplest forms of animal life. (8)

Now to conclude. I have discussed Steinbeck's ecological perspective in which he observes and reports Mexican Indians on the shorelines and marine animals in the tidepools of the Sea of Cortez. I have pointed out that the ecologically-minded Steinbeck depicts the life of the Mexican Indians and that of the marine animals microcosmically and non-teleologically, and that, at the same time, he is conscious of the interconnectedness of everything. What I have been trying to do in this essay is to combine Steinbeck's non-teleological thinking and breaking through concept with "a sense of place" which is the core concept of nature writing. Snyder's definition of "a sense of place" provided me with the idea of exploring *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* in light of nature writing, "a sense of place" in particular.

Thus Steinbeck and we, the readers of *The Log*, go aboard the Western Flyer, participating in living in the bio-region of the Gulf of

California and keying into "a gigantic whole," while we are reading the book. We look into a tidepool as it is, and reflect upon it with a new sense of place; that is a "transcendent" sense of place. And we break through various phenomena to a comprehension of the Whole; we are interconnected to everything around us. As Snyder points out, "we are [now] going to deliberately build a sense of place, deliberately deepen [our] own sense of place." Just as Steinbeck and Ricketts go into the Sea of Cortez with a deliberately deepened sense of place and bring back "the living reality" from there, so we also grasp "the living reality" from the book with a deliberately deepened sense of place. *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* is really such a book as to make readers evoke a new sense of place.

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『コルテスの海航海日誌』を読む：スタインベックのネイチャーライティング的側面

論文要旨

John Steinbeck の作品にはネイチャーライティング的側面があり「場所の感覚」が漲っているにもかかわらず、最新の文学批評の領域である "eco-criticism" の出版物のなかでは彼の名前や作品への言及がほとんど見られない。本稿では、Steinbeckの作品が「環境文学」の観点から論じられるべきだと主張するのではなく、ネイチャーライティングの中核概念としての「場所の感覚」が彼の作品、特に『コルテスの海航海日誌』の中で重要な役割を果たしていることに着目し、この「場所の感覚」と Steinbeck 批評で議論されている "non-teleological breaking through" 概念には類似した世界観・宇宙観があることを議論し、その認識に立脚して作品の読みを試みる。Steinbeck の研究者 Richard Astro が彼の論文 "From the Tidepool to the Star: Steinbeck's Sense of Place" の中で指摘しているように、確かに Steinbeck の「場所の感覚」についてはもっと研究を深める必要がある。そこで本稿でのわたしの主なる関心は、Steinbeck のノンフィクション作品の一つである『コルテスの海航海日誌』に漲っている「場所の感覚」に焦点を当てることにある。特に、コルテスの海（またはカリフォルニア湾）の潮間帯に生息する海洋無脊椎動物やそこの沿岸で生活するメキシカン・インディアンたちが描写されている場面を取り上げて論述する。そして最後に、Steinbeck が「場所の感覚」と詳細な観察及び描写に基づいて、すべてのものは互いに連結しているのだということへの理解、つまり "a deep thing" への "non-teleological breaking through" に到る過程をどのように『コルテスの海航海日誌』に埋め込んでいるかということについて考察する。