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The Play of Authorial Voice in Lafcadio Hearn's Japanese Ghost Stories

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The nineteenth century was critical for the development of the ghost story form as we recognize it today. As Nick Freeman has observed, it was during this century that the ghost story emerged as a 'distinct genre of short fiction', instead of its prior existence as interspersed episodes within longer works, and developed its own conventions, formulae, and investments.¹ Near the end of the nineteenth century, despite the proliferation of periodicals and publications publishing short-form supernatural fiction over the decades, the appetite for the genre was still 'ravenous'.² Significant innovations in literary forms of the fantastic also occurred at the turn of the century, with the genre of the ghost story providing a significant framework for Lafcadio Hearn's cross-cultural encounters with strange places, customs, and folk traditions during his travels and then later during his Japanese years. As Nicholas Ruddick writes, 'one of the greatest literary achievements of the *fin de siècle* was a successful break with fictional realism', a development which proved crucial for the rising popularity of fantastic literature, experiments with existing forms such as the Gothic and the ghost story, as well as an interest in 'the development of an old (oral) story-telling tradition'.³ The development of the ghost story as a narrative form at the turn of the century was therefore linked to writers' interest in revisiting folktales as well as oral narratives to create supernatural tales, leading to innovations in narrative structure that are relevant to Hearn's own literary experiments.

Like other masterful writers of the genre before him, Hearn understood intuitively – as Brittany Roberts puts it – that 'the effect of the ghost story is in its "telling" not its writing'.⁴ As this article will demonstrate, it is the complexity and sophistication of Hearn's narratorial craft that distinguishes him as a master of the ghost story genre. Hearn participates in an established tradition of the Victorian short story, developed by writers such as Charles Dickens and Sheridan Le Fanu,

in which narrative techniques such as framed narratives, digressions, and heightened narration were familiar hallmarks. The conventions of the ghost story form and its affinity with oral and folk narratives become the point of departure for Hearn's own idiosyncratic literary and cultural project: the evocation and mediation of a strange, ghostly, and eternally elusive Japan.

Hearn arrived in Japan at a significant cultural and historical moment: old, feudal Japan was being metamorphosed into a modernized state under the Meiji reign, against the backdrop of larger Western imperial expansion into the East. Significantly, in his writing, Hearn positions himself against the Western intrusion into Japan with its typical trappings of modernization, urbanization, and Christian missionary work.⁵ His stance is evident in the close attention he gives to the life and culture of old, provincial Japan in his short fiction and more extensively in his essays and travelogues. As Stefano Evangelista has noted, Hearn's writings on Japan 'opened a whole new channel of communication and literary exchange' and cemented his enduring status as an interpreter of Japan, an impression he fully endorsed as evidenced by the large number of works he produced on Japan, including folktales, travelogues, essays, sketches, and general reflections on Japanese religion and philosophy.⁶ These writings were widely disseminated in the United States and the United Kingdom for an English-speaking readership, typically as individual pieces in American newspapers before later being collected in volume form. Hearn was writing at a time when there was immense appetite for tales of the distant Orient. As Julia Briggs has suggested, '[e]xotic props and settings were used extensively in ghost stories' as a way to construct 'a drama of conflicting viewpoints' between Western rationalism and Eastern mysticism.⁷ Hearn's writings, at least ostensibly, sought to challenge the Orientalizing dynamics of this kind of cross-cultural encounter. Instead, he set himself apart from his contemporaries by 'cultivat[ing] a soft, pliable voice that was continuously modulated, enriched, and enlarged by the encounters with the unfamiliar'.⁸

As apparent since his first book on Japan, *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* (1894), to the last books he published before his death, *Kwaidan* (1904) and *Japan: An Attempt at Interpretation* (1904), Hearn was concerned with immersing himself wholly in Japanese life and culture, and it is this immersion that becomes the point of departure for his various writings on Japan, as opposed to the development of a detached and objective voice.⁹ Hearn also had an extraordinary ability to adopt a range of styles, what Yoko Makino calls the ‘eclecticism’ present in his early Japanese writing, and this tendency went back to his New Orleans days where his editorials ‘combined the style of the journalist and the literary artist’.¹⁰ His Japanese writings also showcase a similar diversity in style and tone in which the roles of artist, journalist, and translator converge in significant and seemingly contradictory ways. As noted by Evangelista, in Hearn’s works ‘the travel narrative is continuously delayed and complicated’ by authorial intrusions and digressions and a similar structure emerges in the stories under discussion.¹¹ ‘Of Women’s Hair’, a sketch originally published in *Glimpses*, anticipates his later writing on Japan, bringing together a multitude of authorial postures and a certain intent focus on the local. It also displays his increasing predilection towards recording the ‘ghostly’ in Japanese cultural life. In this wide-ranging piece, Hearn recounts the cultural practices related to women’s hairstyling in great detail, displaying the observation skill typical of an ethnographer. He then turns suddenly to his own encounter with a *kamiyui* [hairdresser], whose strangely supernatural story about a rival *kamiyui* is recorded and reproduced as a narrative interwoven with Hearn’s own musings. This ‘ghostly’ diversion then allows Hearn to turn to the ‘strange old superstitions about women’s hair’ and the various ghostly legends associated with them, and finally towards the popular visual representation of ghosts and ‘phantom women’.¹² Interspersed throughout the essay are explanations, observations, and records of myths and folklore, as well as a shifting focus and voice, resulting in a rich and engaging textual experience.

Hearn's Japanese ghost stories are deeply informed by his knowledge of Japanese customs, folktales, and religion and his interest in re-shaping and re-telling these stories for a Western readership eager for tales of the East. As Evangelista has demonstrated, Hearn shapes these narratives into trans-cultural exercises that 'provid[e] English-speaking readers with a still rare first-hand knowledge of Japan, while at the same time striving to preserve elements of exoticism, defamiliarization, and desire for the unknown'.¹³ Hearn's Japanese ghost stories are therefore exercises in cross-cultural adaptation in which Hearn translates for his Western readership 'appropriat[ed]' materials as diverse as Japanese oral and literary sources, anecdotes, folklores, and textual collections.¹⁴ In these stories, the narratorial 'I' or the Hearn-figure features prominently as narrator, cultural intermediary, and interpreter of ghostly Japan to an English-speaking readership. To this end, Hearn develops in his supernatural tales a complex narrative strategy, adopting the ghost story convention of 'reported or enacted oral narratives' to fully realize a lively narratorial voice.¹⁵ This article traces the variety of roles played by this narratorial persona (which I refer to here as Hearn's 'authorial voice'). It focuses primarily on Hearn's collections *In Ghostly Japan* (1899), *Shadowings* (1900), and *Kwaidan* and analyses in particular 'A Passional Karma', 'Furisodé', 'The Screen-Maiden', 'The Story of Aoyagi', 'Mujina', and 'Of a Mirror and a Bell'. Hearn's narrators collect, explain, transmit, and adapt Japanese legends and ghost stories for Western readers while also intervening, interrupting, commenting on, and imposing upon the narrative, exerting full control over the narration. Hearn encodes elaborate, often intertextual, systems and narratives of 'textual transmission' within his texts, situating the authorial persona as the authoritative voice within the cross-cultural contact zone that he constructs for his readers.¹⁶ While scholarship on Hearn has recognized the diversity and flexibility of his tone and style in his Japanese writings as well as his literary experimentation using Japanese sources, there has been less examination of the centrality of Hearn's authorial voice to the project of translating and re-framing Japanese tales for an Anglophone readership. This article repeatedly touches on Hearn's awareness of the audience

he was writing to and it is clear that his narrative strategy, particularly his authorial persona and voice, revolves around this fact. In doing so, it shifts the focus to textual spaces where the authorial voice emerges most prominently, namely framing narratives that accompany and envelop Hearn's ghostly tales as well as authorial intrusions and digressions which function to foreground the narratorial and mediating presence of the author. It concludes with an examination of 'Of a Mirror and a Bell' from *Kwaidan* as an example of the subtle currents of reference, positionality, and authority that inform the narrative structure and framing of his ghost stories, transforming them into complex narrative constructions evoking a strong sense of its author and audience. Hearn emerges as an original literary stylist deeply enmeshed within the narrative tradition of fin-de-siècle ghost stories and fantastic fiction while also reworking their narrative techniques to construct immersive and exotic visions of 'ghostly' Japan.

Throughout this article, I employ a narratological framework to examine the emergence of the authorial voice and its operation in certain textual spaces. Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse* and *Paratexts* inform my understanding of various narrative techniques and functions, such as the narratorial voice, narrative levels, frames, and paratextuality. Mieke Bal's understanding of framed narratives as inherently hierarchical also informs the discussion and the 'relationship between primary and embedded text' in Hearn comes under scrutiny.¹⁷ Ansgar Nünning's work on metanarration allows me to define and examine the effects and functions of metanarrative commentary in Hearn's stories, especially his proposition that digressive metanarration can strengthen the narratorial voice so that it becomes 'the dominant principle of coherence' within the text.¹⁸ In *Narratives of Transmission*, Bernard Duyfhuizen offers a theory of transmission by examining novels that 'represent narratives of transmission within texts' and constitute narrator/reader as 'encoded [textual] entities' engaged in the process of narrative transmission.¹⁹ Taking Duyfhuizen's conceptualization of narrative transmission as crucial for approaching

Hearn's trans-cultural project, this article also analyses 'the narrating act and the transmission/reception process *staged in the text*'.²⁰

Textual transmission in Hearn's tales is defined by appropriation, recontextualization, and translation of original Japanese sources for an English-speaking readership and the authorial voice, therefore, takes on various and flexible narratorial and textual functions: narration, citation, mediation, explanation, interpretation, as storyteller, as transcriber, as cultural insider, and as outsider. I am interested in how this active narratorial voice operates through its various appearances and interventions, which textual spaces it tends to dominate, and how it complicates the narrative structure of the stories by looking at the authorial paratexts, narrative digressions, metanarrative commentary, narrative levels, and the referential practice Hearn employs throughout his writings. Examining the play of the narratorial voice in Hearn's stories highlights how this authorial presence is instrumental to the success of these cross-cultural texts, forging (inter)textual links between his readers and the ghostly Japan that he recovers from Japanese texts and other sources at his disposal. To this end, Hearn frequently adopts the role of an involved storyteller, most notably in the frequent digressions, references, and clarifications that punctuate his stories in parentheses and footnotes. His stories are also characterized by their self-conscious citation of extra-textual historical, literary and cultural sources, an impulse clearly informed by Hearn's experience as a travel writer and journalist. In the stories under discussion, Hearn's different 'textually projected role[s]' converge in significant ways, creating a complex authorial persona which I analyse below.²¹

Framing Narratives

'A Passional Karma', originally published in *Ghostly Japan*, utilises a narrative structure typical of Hearn's longer stories. It consists of two distinct narrative levels: a framed narration told in eleven fragmented sections, nestled between the framing narrative in which the extradiegetic authorial narrator sets out to adapt a Japanese ghost story from a Tokyo stage play, *Peony-Lantern*. In this

story, similar to other selected texts under discussion, the narrating voice, inextricably linked to Hearn's projected authorial persona, becomes the organizing force that narrates, explicates, and transmits to his readers tales of a ghostly Japan, gleaned from Japanese sources and intermediaries and set almost exclusively in the quasi-mystical, quasi-historical past. In the frame, Hearn constructs a complex narrative of transmission, in which he himself appears and is accompanied by a Japanese friend, who 'guides [him] betimes through the mazes of Eastern philosophy'.²² Hearn refers briefly to the textual history of *Peony-Lantern*, itself an adaptation of a Japanese novel based on a Chinese story, implicitly placing his own re-telling as one in a long line of cross-cultural transformations and adaptations. It is the Japanese friend who prompts the narrator's story by asking, 'Why not give English readers the ghostly part of the story?' and offers to assist Hearn by providing translations and explanations.²³ In this story, as in several of Hearn's travel sketches, the Hearn-figure is accompanied by a Japanese friend who functions as a go-between, to 'explain some popular ideas of the supernatural which Western people know very little about [...] [and] help [Hearn] with the translation'.²⁴ Like Hearn, the Japanese friend becomes another textually inscribed intermediary who functions as a supplementary figure, granting the narrator with cultural insight and intimacy with his subject as well as providing (in Duyfhuizen's terms) 'authentication or validation of the transmitted text'.²⁵ Both of them thus set out to re-write the stage play, with a focus on the ghostly elements, and the text foregrounds the act of re-writing, of self-conscious narration, and of transforming the original story: 'Here and there we found it necessary to condense the original narrative; and we tried to keep close to the text only in the conversational passages, – some of which happen to possess a particular quality of psychological interest'.²⁶ The *Peony-Lantern* is re-titled to highlight the shift in emphasis towards the ghostly, presented in italics and followed by numbered sections: '*This is the story of the Ghosts in the Romance of the Peony-Lantern*'.²⁷

The framed tale itself spans various sections and is divided into short textual fragments interspersed throughout with footnotes that clarify Japanese terms used within the narrative and

explain socio-cultural practices, literary conventions, and certain translatory choices. Genette has noted the 'strategic importance' of notes which he describes as 'a disorder of the text'.²⁸ For him, notes are motivated by the desire to manipulate interpretation and textual experience and to introduce into the text 'the possibility of a second level of discourse', creating an impression of 'textual depth'.²⁹ Accordingly, the footnotes used throughout the story act as authorial paratexts in which Hearn directly addresses his (Western) readers, signalling the existence of a higher narrative level and an authoritative narratorial persona re-contextualizing the story for a particular audience. At a certain point in the story, a footnote alludes to a dialogue, stating: 'Perhaps this conversation may seem strange to the Western reader; but it is true to life. The whole scene is characteristically Japanese.'³⁰ This confident assertion coupled with the inclusion of Hearn's Japanese friend builds a sense of quasi-ethnographic authenticity, creating an impression of the authorial narrator's unique proximity to and penetration into '[Japan's] inscrutability'.³¹ The story that Hearn relates is a tragic romance in which even after death, the vengeful ghost of a girl and her maid haunt the girl's lover, a samurai, and despite interventions from priests and fortune-tellers, their story ends in the samurai's horrific death. Subsequently, the embedded story ends with the lovers being buried side by side. After the conclusion of the framed narrative, the extradiegetic narrative level resurfaces and the last section focuses on the interplay between Hearn and his friend as they discuss the ghost story, its characters, and its possible reception in Western and Eastern literary traditions respectively; effectively a comparative and metanarrative discourse on the craft of narrative. This interplay between the Hearn-figure and the Japanese friend is significant as, compared to stories where Hearn cites and inscribes oral and written sources, in this story it is the cross-cultural collaboration and conversational exchange between Hearn and his friend that is highlighted. The interplay also reflects Hearn's own reliance on Japanese collaborators to gather materials for his writings and assist with the process of translation, most notably his wife Koizumi Setsuko.³² The inclusion of the Japanese friend functions to transmit and mediate cultural

knowledge to Hearn and subsequently to his audience, giving credence and authority to Hearn's vision and his cross-cultural, transmedia adaptation. The central presence of the narrator in the frame casts the framed narrative as subordinate to the first-person narration in which the authorial narrator assumes a kind of control over the rich and complex referential code that it is citing. For Hearn, narrative frames thus operate as what the narratologist John Pier calls 'a presentational technique', a mediating strategy, to make the framed narrative accessible and intelligible.³³ In this matrix of narrative transmission, the Hearn-figure positions himself as the focal point in the different networks of transmission and reference that make the story communicable.

Hearn adopts a similar framing device in 'Furisode': the idle musings of the Hearn-figure on traditional robes spontaneously prompt the 'recollection [of] this legend of a similar robe said to have once caused the destruction of Yedo'.³⁴ The story simultaneously cites historical events and a story-book source to give credence to the narrative. The story about the famed robe is itself concerned with themes of transmission and transference and, after its brief and tragic history has been chronicled, the authorial voice asserts itself once again, re-inscribing its authority over the framed narration. After concluding the tale, Hearn ends the story with a comment that calls attention to his role in re-shaping the tale for artistic effect and questions the inconsistencies in the source he is consulting, stating: 'But there are many different versions of the story; and I distrust the *Kibun-Daijin* [...]'.³⁵ Similarly, in 'Mujina', Hearn employs framed narration to transmit a horrifying first-hand encounter that has been relayed to him. The story concerns the slope called Kii-no-kuni-zaka, and Hearn starts off the story by recounting his thoughts about the place, in the reflective vein of his nonfiction travel writings. After describing the state of the slope, he sets up the upcoming embedded ghost story by relating how the Kii-no-kuni-zaka 'was very lonesome after dark; and belated pedestrians would go miles out of their way rather than mount the Kii-no-kuni-zaka, alone, after sunset'.³⁶ Then, Hearn relates the story of an old merchant and his terrifying encounter with the Mujina: 'The last man who saw the Mujina was an old merchant [...] who died

about thirty years ago. This is the story, as he told it: –'.³⁷ The narrative then shifts to the old man and is subsequently written in the third-person and describes his encounter with the faceless Mujina. In this story, Hearn explicitly positions himself as a cultural insider, with access to the cultural and geographical knowledge of the place that is almost native. The enveloping of the ghost story in this frame places the Hearn-figure as central in a network of references and transmissions. Frame narratives are thus crucial to Hearn's narrative strategy and are far from being unobtrusive narrative flourishes. In 'Framing in *Wuthering Heights*', John T. Matthews defines the function of framing devices as primarily to 'enable a relation between differentiated realms'.³⁸ Here, Hearn's inclusion of the authorial narrator further solidifies the frame's mediating function. It strategically foregrounds the authorial narrator as a cross-cultural interpreter while constituting a crucial intersection in a chain of textual and cultural transmissions that make ghostly and exotic Japan accessible and explicable to his (implied) Western readers.

Authorial Intrusions and Digressions

The first section of *Shadowings* collects and adapts stories from various Japanese textual sources which Hearn cites explicitly. All of these stories contain explanatory notes, parentheses, and metanarrative commentary in different degrees and mention within the narrative the original author/narrator whose comments and narration are often quoted directly. A significant story from the collection is 'Screen-Maiden' in which Hearn creates a truly complicated narrative structure that incorporates various narratorial and actorial voices operating at different narrative levels. Hearn is apparently re-writing the narrative recorded by the Japanese author Hakubai-En Rosui containing the story of a young man bewitched by the image of a woman on a painted screen. The story explicitly encodes another voice as the narrator from the outset: 'Says the old Japanese author, Hakubai-En Rosui: –'.³⁹ Here, Hearn presents the narrative as an explicit quotation (or possible transcription) of an oral Japanese tale, making the subsequent authorial intrusions even more prominent as Hearn continually complicates the narrative situation by inserting his own

comments within the quoted text. After introducing the subject matter – the ghostly animation of pictorial representations – he then invokes again the Japanese narrator who takes on the narratorial role for most of the narrative: ‘He then proceeds to relate the following story about one of the so-called portraits: – ’.⁴⁰ The Japanese narrator’s narration also includes quoted speech from the characters. Throughout the story, Hearn’s frequent parenthetical interruptions constantly make the reader aware of his authorial presence lurking in the background, working to transmit the text through paraphrase and direct quotation, effectively enacting the task of translation.⁴¹ The parentheses provide a textual space for Hearn to interject playfully and intrude upon the narration, provide metanarrative comments, while generating suspense and ambiguity. For example, ‘(The Japanese author says “for a few seconds”).’⁴² and ‘(what name the Japanese narrator has forgotten to tell us).’⁴³ Similarly, we find this approach again at a crucial moment in the story when the painted woman comes to life and talks to the young man: ‘What answer Tokkei made to her question is not recorded: it will have to be imagined.’⁴⁴ Such authorial intrusions subvert narrative illusion by emphasizing the regulating presence of the authorial narrator who, as Genette suggests, ‘present[s] as source, guarantor, and organizer [...] as analyst and commentator, as stylist’.⁴⁵ For Genette, this transgression of narrative levels, or the disruption of the narration by the narrating voice, creates ‘an effect of strangeness’ and narrative incongruity even as it ‘evoke[s] the illusion of a personified voice, suggesting the presence of a speaker or narrator’ operating at a higher level.⁴⁶ These comments also convey a certain reflexivity and awareness regarding the ongoing act of narration and adaptation, what can best be understood as a form of ‘metanarration’.

Ansgar Nünning describes metanarration as ‘the narrator’s reflections on the discourse or the process of narration’ which may appear as ‘narratorial digressions and metanarrative interventions’.⁴⁷ Such metanarrative commentary occurs frequently in Hearn’s ghost stories in which the authorial narrator often reflects on the process of narration and adaptation, explaining narrative choices or pointing out deficiencies in the original. For instance, in ‘The Story of Aoyagi’,

the authorial voice engages in direct commentary on its source and introduces parentheses in the middle of the narration to analyse the original's narrative construction. Interrupting the lengthy story of a samurai and his romance with a tree spirit, Hearn reflects on the shortcomings of the original narrative sequence and provides explicit metanarrative commentary on the process of re-writing and re-shaping it for a Western readership. The narrative interjection also takes the form of a typographic shift as the italic text signals not just emphasis but also the existence of a self-conscious narrating presence:

*[Here, in the Japanese original, there is a queer break in the natural course of the narration, which therefore remains curiously inconsistent [...]. Evidently, the author wearied of his work at this point, and hurried the story, very carelessly, to its startling end. I am not able to supply his omissions or to repair his faults of construction, but I must venture to put in a few explanatory details without which the rest of the tale would not hold together [...]].*⁴⁸

This passage evokes self-consciousness regarding the textuality and intertextuality of the narrative, and, again, points to and exerts Hearn's control over the narrative even as it interrupts the narration. It effectively constitutes what Genette describes as an 'invasion of the story by the commentary'.⁴⁹ Significantly, such narratorial commentary, as Nünning suggests, 'evoke[s] the impression of a speaking voice or fictional orality' bringing the authorial persona and reader within the dynamics of 'a storytelling frame' in which they share the same socio-cultural and conceptual framework.⁵⁰ After this interruption by the authorial 'I', the rest of the narrative is in the third-person and there are no further authorial intrusions. However, in the footnotes, the authorial voice once again foregrounds the omissions and alterations that have been made in the process of re-telling the ghost story. After providing a certain translation for a poem, it calls attention to another possible translation in the notes but then suppresses that information: "The poem may be read in two ways; several of the phrases having a double meaning. But the art of its construction would need considerable space to explain, and could scarcely interest the Western reader."⁵¹ And later on, it playfully evokes the textual source: 'So the Japanese story-teller would have us believe'.⁵² All these interventions and commentary by the authorial voice foreground Hearn's control over the narrative presentation of his stories, even as in his notes and other paratextual spaces, he

meticulously records certain aspects that he has omitted or altered in his version of the story. Footnotes like this also allow Hearn to hint at the limits of translating a source to another cultural context, calling into question the validity of Hearn's own project of cross-cultural adaptations and re-tellings. Hearn's heavy reliance on footnotes and parentheses is thus especially significant, and they often function as the space where his voice emerges most explicitly. They alert the reader to a higher diegetic level and explicitly signal the narrative as a story that is being transcribed or translated by the authorial narrator. These interventions highlight Hearn's intermediary role even as they 'emphasize the instability of the English translated text', calling attention to the very act of translation which Evangelista considers to be critical to Hearn's translational practice and ethos.⁵³

The metanarrational impulse is present in most of Hearn's ghost stories, surfacing in various textual spaces. Oftentimes, Hearn concludes his stories with metanarrative postscripts, thereby suspending narrative closure and undermining narrative immersion even as it contributes to the development of a complicated and engaging narratorial voice by producing what Nünning calls 'the illusion of a "teller"'.⁵⁴ In 'The Corpse-Rider', for instance, Hearn concludes by complaining of the narrative inconsistencies present in the source: 'The conclusion of this story I do not think to be morally satisfying [...]. A note [by the Japanese author] appended to the recital is equally disappointing'.⁵⁵ Similarly in 'The Sympathy of Benten', he concludes the narrative by complaining about the strange omissions the original author makes regarding the psychology and fate of the characters as well as the sudden ending: 'The original story breaks off suddenly at this point, leaving several matters unexplained. The ending is rather unsatisfactory'.⁵⁶ However, at this point, he invokes 'a Japanese friend' who then serves a critical narrative function by clarifying the mystical belief underlying the original narrative and conveying the requisite information to the reader.⁵⁷ These instances transform these stories into complicated narrative formations in which the reader is made aware of the authorial narrator who is self-consciously re-writing, re-contextualizing, and adapting Japanese textual sources into another literary and cultural context.

Hearn's skill in the adaptation and transformation of Japanese folk narratives has been widely recognised by scholars. Yoko Makino, for instance, has analysed how Hearn reimagined the tree spirit folktale 'Jiu-Roku-Zakura', shifting not just narrative details but the whole thematic emphasis of the text.⁵⁸ Both Andrei Codrescu and Susan Fisher also note how Hearn created unique tales out of his repertoire of various sources.⁵⁹ Makino similarly highlights the role of Hearn as a conscious 'literary artist first and foremost', who did not simply 'collect materials as a folklorist, presenting them as they were'.⁶⁰ Rather, she identifies in his writings, both fiction and nonfiction, a growing inclination towards 'introducing his re-told versions of Japanese ghost stories' in which Hearn prioritized artistic effect, instead of accuracy or fidelity to his sources.⁶¹ Keeping this in view, the metanarrational performance present in most of Hearn's ghostly tales has to be understood not as incidental or careless but rather integral to Hearn's cross-cultural project of mediation. It serves to create narrational cohesion and rapport between the narrator and his audience, effectively strengthening the authorial and transmitting voice behind the ghostly tales.

The Play of Authorial Voice

In 'Of a Mirror and a Bell', Hearn constantly transgresses the separation between the extradiegetic and intradiegetic narrative levels through the insistent use of parenthetical interruptions. In contrast to the peripheral editorial footnotes found in other stories, Hearn's parentheses break the narrative flow in a much more direct and immediate way (by literally breaking off the text). In this story, these digressions function to disrupt key moments in the narrative. For instance, after the historical and geographical setting of the story has been defined in the first sentence, the authorial voice immediately interrupts to insert an ethnographic note describing a fading cultural practice using parenthesis: '(Even today in the courts of certain Japanese temples, you may see heaps of old bronze mirrors contributed for such a purpose. The largest collection of this kind that I saw was [...])'.⁶² In this note, Hearn cites and centres his own experience and cultural knowledge of Japan to provide explanations for the reader, while also paradoxically undermining the narrative

flow. This particular story also contains extended digressions in which Hearn breaks away from narrating the ghost story to explain cultural references and beliefs. In the middle of the narrative, the authorial voice interrupts again to provide detailed explanatory material that explains the ‘queer old Japanese beliefs’ relevant to the next narrative segment, effectively transmitting the narrative from one socio-historical context and into what Bakhtin calls an ‘alien conceptual horizon’.⁶³ Digressions like this foreground the active work of the authorial voice in inscribing cultural references and explanations into the narrative. This impulse is deeply linked to what Codrescu has called the ‘double vision’ of Hearn’s stories: despite writing from the position of an ‘outsider’, who observes, records, and makes sense of strange experiences, Hearn simultaneously claims the authority of a deep and latent cultural and historical knowledge of Japan as ‘a Japanese storyteller consciously writing in English’.⁶⁴ This dynamic also underpins Hearn’s citation of written records by monks, oral sources, and frequent references to physical and geographical points in the past or present.

‘Of a Mirror and a Bell’ begins with a narration of a woman’s supernatural connection to her family’s bronze mirror, following the disorientating fairy-tale logic typical of Hearn’s stories. After donating the prized mirror to be turned into a bell for the local temple, the woman’s deep regret and familial connection to the mirror prevents its melting. Her shame at being exposed as a hypocrite leads her to suicide and the woman announces in a suicide letter that ‘*to the person who breaks that bell by ringing it, great wealth will be given by the ghost of me*’.⁶⁵ However, despite multiple attempts, the metal of the bell proves to be unbreakable and it is subsequently discarded: ‘The swamp was deep, and swallowed [the bell] up, – and that was the end of the bell. Only its legend remains; and in that legend it is called the *Mugen-Kané*, or the Bell of Mugen.’⁶⁶ At this apparent conclusion of the tale, Hearn positions the reader in a state of (temporary) bewilderment (an ending that is typical of much of his fiction). However, in a lengthy digression that follows, he proceeds to explain the mystical and strange operation implicit in the Japanese verb *nozaraeru*,

which is translated as ‘to liken’, ‘to compare’, or ‘to imitate’ and whose ‘esoteric meaning is *to substitute, in imagination, one object or action for another, so as to bring about some magical or miraculous result*’.⁶⁷

Noting that the ‘word itself cannot be adequately rendered by any English word’, he robustly explicates the significance of this phenomenon, rooted in a supernatural framework alien to his readership, at length and with various examples, both religious and magical in character.⁶⁸ He concludes his digression with the following:

Or, let us suppose that a robber has entered your house during the night, and carried away your valuables. If you can discover the footprints of that robber in your garden, and then promptly burn a very large moxa on each of them, the soles of the feet of the robber will become inflamed, and will allow him no rest until he returns [...]. That is another kind of mimetic magic expressed by the term *nozōraëru*. And the third kind [of mimesis] is illustrated by various legends of the Mugen-Kané.⁶⁹

Here, instead of his customary allusions to his Western readership in footnotes and digressive asides, Hearn adopts a direct, familiar, and yet authoritative mode of address, presupposing a shared cultural framework and strengthening once again the rapport between narrator and audience.

This substantial narrative interruption takes on the mode of Hearn’s non-fiction writing on Japan, placed to explain and illustrate unspoken cultural practices and beliefs. Here, Sandra D. Stahl’s analysis of personal narratives in *Literary Folkloristics and the Personal Narrative* is especially insightful as it highlights the performative aspect of allusion and its significance in establishing an intimacy between storyteller and listener.⁷⁰ Hearn’s allusions function to ‘[force] an awareness of shared cultural codes’.⁷¹ Bakhtin’s discussion of the operation of the posited author within a narrative further illuminates the function of digressions within Hearn’s narratives. Such narratorial digressions place him as the voice reporting to a particular audience, who adopts a certain ‘orientation toward the listener’ to simultaneously explain and constitute a certain version of Japan.⁷² After this digressive re-framing of the original story of the mirror and bell, the ghost story narrative continues and describes how, on the principle implied in the word *nozōraëru*, people ‘would strike and break objects imaginatively substituted for the bell’.⁷³

Finally, the narrative turns towards a poor farmer hoping to emulate this distant legend, by recreating the bell out of clay and breaking it. What follows is the sudden re-emergence of the ghost of the woman with the mirror, which has been suppressed throughout the story. She hands the farmer a jar and promptly disappears. The narrative ends with:

Into the house the happy man rushed, to tell his wife the good news. He set down in front of her the covered jar, – which was heavy, – and they opened it together. And they found that it was filled, up to the very brim, with...

But no! – I really cannot tell you with what it was filled.⁷⁴

The use of ellipsis and the final appearance of the authorial voice, not to mention the previous jumps and shifts in narrative, fully illustrate the playfulness and range found in Hearn's reimagining of this oral narrative. As Stahl observes when discussing personal narratives, the inclusion of the storyteller's 'I' in a narrative enacts the 'intimacy created by storytelling' and creates a 'referential complexity' in the story.⁷⁵ The resurfacing of the authorial narrator's 'I' also reinforces the hierarchical structure of the narrative. The last line retains and re-iterates the mystery and suspense of the story, with the authorial 'I' teasing the reader into a sense of uncertainty. Even though the reader is already aware of the ghost's promised reward, and all the clues ('heavy jar', 'filled', 'to the brim') point to wealth, with a final authorial intervention, the foretold and expected conclusion is transformed into a much stranger event as the two narrative levels – the narration and the narrated tale – are brought together, resulting in what Duyfhuizen would describe as a 'transgression of the textual order'.⁷⁶ The conclusion does not simply suggest inconclusiveness about what was in the jar or the ghost's intentions. Rather, such uncertainty is inscribed into the narrative structure itself through this explicit reference to Hearn's destabilizing narrational 'I'. With a final intervention of the 'I', the authorial narrator disrupts the ending and explicitly, though playfully, excludes the reader from any access to full narrative closure (for Duyfhuizen, 'an interpretive aporia').⁷⁷ As a result of this, the reader is suddenly (and very directly) made aware of the authorial narrator who has been exerting control over the narrative structure, at first by explaining and decoding cultural practices and who now actively withholds narrative information.

The dominance and play of the authorial voice in Hearn's fiction therefore evokes the presence of an involved and idiosyncratic storyteller displaying full control over his referential material as he reshapes the original source(s) through a process that includes a selective appropriation of source materials, omissions, and transformations. This is in sharp contrast to the textually projected role of a faithful and passive transcriber that the authorial narrator occasionally takes on, who meticulously records any divergence or omission from a source and often adds detailed commentary and explanations of his textual and translatory choices in text and paratext. These multifarious and often contradictory impulses showcase the versatility of the authorial narrator in Hearn's short fiction who variously positions himself as a cultural 'outsider', reporting from Japan and transcribing and collecting for his English-speaking audience local folktales and legends, and as 'insider', the storyteller who narrates and gives concrete form to personal anecdotes, folktales, and old myths.

This article has examined the play of the authorial voice in Hearn's ghost stories by locating textual spaces and narrative elements in his texts where the authorial 'I' surfaces most explicitly. Hearn's narratorial voice is far from a unified and stable entity, rather it is multivalent, flexible, and ultimately productive in that it creates a rich textual experience and allows various textual orientations to emerge. These many variations of the authorial voice are engendered from the 'matrix of subject positions' available to a Western writer writing about and engaging intently with Japan in the late nineteenth century and were crucial to Hearn's project of cross-cultural interchange, textual adaptation, and intertextual transformation.⁷⁸ As authorial narrator, Hearn deliberately situates himself at the intersection of two different cultural and literary milieux as a mediator and interpreter of Japan, a positionality made tenable only through the larger imperial and cultural apparatus that sought out exotic tales from distant lands. Hearn's complicated and, indeed, deeply engaging narrative strategy which leads him to strategically adopt and subsequently discard, where necessary, various postures – of a storyteller, a transcriber, a reporter, or an

ethnographer, as a cultural insider and an ‘alien’ observer – also points to the ethical issues at play. Ultimately, despite Hearn’s affinity to cite and refer back to Japanese sources, he remains the final narrative authority, freely re-shaping material taken from Japanese folktales, textual sources, and collaborators for a non-Japanese audience.⁷⁹

¹ Nick Freeman, ‘The Victorian Ghost Story’, in *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 93–107 (p. 93).

² Ibid., p. 101.

³ Nicholas Ruddick, ‘The Fantastic Fiction of the Fin de Siècle’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Gail Marshall (Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 189–206 (p. 189); Michal Peprník, ‘R. L. Stevenson and the Fin de Siècle Pre-Modernist Narrative Mosaic’, in *The Fantastic of the Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Irena Grubica and Zdeněk Beran (Cambridge Scholars, 2016), pp. 73–90 (p. 74).

⁴ Brittany Roberts, ‘Ghost Stories and Sensation Fiction’, in *The Routledge Handbook to the Ghost Story*, ed. by Scott Brewster and Luke Thurston (Routledge, 2017), pp. 59–68 (p. 64).

⁵ See Paul Murray, ‘Matsue’, ‘Tokyo’, and ‘In Ghostly Japan’, in *A Fantastic Journey: The Life and Literature of Lafcadio Hearn* (Routledge, 1993). Ebook.

⁶ Stefano Evangelista, *Literary Cosmopolitanism in the English Fin de Siècle: Citizens of Nowhere* (Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 75.

⁷ Julia Briggs, *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story* (Faber, 1977), p. 99.

⁸ Evangelista, *Literary Cosmopolitanism*, p. 93.

⁹ George Hughes, ‘Hearn: Travel-Writing and Controversy’, in *Lafcadio Hearn in International Perspectives*, ed. by Sukehiro Hirakawa (Global Oriental, 2007), pp. 205–16 (p. 207).

¹⁰ Robert L. Gale, ‘Editorials’, in *A Lafcadio Hearn Companion* (Greenwood Press, 2001), p. 41.

¹¹ Evangelista, *Literary Cosmopolitanism*, p. 93.

¹² Lafcadio Hearn, ‘Of Women’s Hair’, in *Lafcadio Hearn’s Japan: An Anthology of His Writings on the Country and Its People*, ed. by Donald Richie (Tuttle, 1997), pp. 155–64 (pp. 161 and 163).

¹³ Evangelista, *Literary Cosmopolitanism*, pp. 75–76.

¹⁴ Hitomi Nabae, ‘Lafcadio Hearn’s “Ghostly” Narrative: Translation and Re-Telling in “Yuki-Onna”’, *Kobe Gaidai Ronso*, 63.2 (2013), pp. 27–44 (p. 33).

¹⁵ Simon Hay, *A History of the Modern British Ghost Story* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 18.

¹⁶ Bernard Duyfhuizen, *Narratives of Transmission* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992), p. 27.

¹⁷ Mieke Bal, ‘Notes on Narrative Embedding’, *Poetics Today*, 2.2 (1981), pp. 41–59 (p. 45), doi.org/10.2307/1772189; Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, trans. by Christine van Boheemen, 4th edn (University of Toronto Press, 2017), p. 53.

¹⁸ Ansgar Nünning, ‘On Metanarrative: Towards a Definition, a Typology and an Outline of the Functions of Metanarrative Commentary’, in *The Dynamics of Narrative Form*, ed. by John Pier (De Gruyter, 2005), pp. 11–58 (p. 28).

¹⁹ Duyfhuizen, pp. 27 and 28.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 28.

²¹ Uri Margolin, ‘Narrator’, in *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, 23 May 2012 (para. 19 of 33) <<https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/44.html>> [Accessed 21 July 2024]

²² Lafcadio Hearn, ‘A Passional Karma’, in *Of Ghosts and Goblins*, ed. by Paul Murray (Penguin, 2022), pp. 36–68 (p. 36).

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Duyfhuizen, p. 133.

²⁶ Hearn, ‘A Passional Karma’, pp. 36–37.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 37.

²⁸ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 319 and 328.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 328.

- ³⁰ Hearn, 'A Passional Karma', p. 40, n. 1.
- ³¹ Cody Poulton, 'Two Springs: Hearn's and Kyoka's Other Worlds', in *Lafcadio Hearn in International Perspectives*, (Global Oriental, 2007), pp. 159–68 (p. 164).
- ³² Sukehiro Hirakawa, 'Lafcadio's Nightmares', in *Lafcadio Hearn in International Perspectives* (Global Oriental, 2007), pp. 30–40 (p. 34).
- ³³ John Pier, 'Narrative Levels', *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, 4 August 2011 (para. 11 of 32) <<https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/32.html>> [Accessed 12 May 2022].
- ³⁴ Hearn, 'Furisodé', in *In Ghostly Japan* (Little, Brown, and Company, 1899), pp. 11–15 (p. 11).
- ³⁵ Ibid., p. 15.
- ³⁶ Hearn, 'Mujina', in *Japanese Tales*, ed. by Andrei Codrescu (Princeton University Press, 2019), pp. 145–47 (p. 145).
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ John T. Matthews, 'Framing in *Wuthering Heights*', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 27.1 (1985), pp. 25–61, qtd. in Duyfhuizen, p. 158.
- ³⁹ Hearn, 'Screen-Maiden', in *Japanese Tales*, pp. 52–56 (p. 52).
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ See Stefano Evangelista, "'Clothed with Poetry": Lafcadio Hearn's Decadent Aesthetics of Translation', *Modern Philology*, 121.1 (2023), pp. 104–23, doi.org/10.1086/725415.
- ⁴² Hearn, 'Screen-Maiden', p. 53.
- ⁴³ Ibid., p. 55.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 164.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 232; Nünning, p. 17.
- ⁴⁷ Nünning, pp. 16 and 13.
- ⁴⁸ Hearn, 'The Story of Aoyagi', in *Of Ghosts and Goblins*, pp. 170–82 (p. 177).
- ⁴⁹ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, p. 256.
- ⁵⁰ Nünning, p. 33.
- ⁵¹ Hearn, 'Aoyagi', p. 173, footnote.
- ⁵² Ibid., p. 179, footnote.
- ⁵³ Evangelista, "'Clothed with Poetry'", p. 118.
- ⁵⁴ Nünning, p. 18.
- ⁵⁵ Hearn, 'The Corpse-Rider', in *Of Ghosts and Goblins*, pp. 75–78 (p. 78).
- ⁵⁶ Hearn, 'The Sympathy of Benten', in *Japanese Tales*, pp. 60–68 (p. 68).
- ⁵⁷ Ibid.
- ⁵⁸ Yoko Makino, 'From Folklore to Literature – Hearn and Japanese Legends of Tree Spirits', in *Lafcadio Hearn in International Perspectives*, pp. 112–19 (pp. 115–18).
- ⁵⁹ Andrei Codrescu, 'Introduction', in *Japanese Tales*, pp. 1–28 (p. 20); Susan Fisher, "'Weird Beauty": Angela Carter and Lafcadio Hearn in Japan', in *Lafcadio Hearn in International Perspectives*, pp. 169–77 (p. 171).
- ⁶⁰ Fisher, "'Weird Beauty'", p. 173; Makino, 'From Folklore to Literature', p. 123.
- ⁶¹ Makino, 'From Folklore to Literature', p. 121.
- ⁶² Hearn, 'Of a Mirror and a Bell', in *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1904), pp. 53–61 (p. 53).
- ⁶³ Ibid., p. 133; Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination* (University of Texas Press, 1981), trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, p. 282, quoted in Duyfhuizen, p. 199.
- ⁶⁴ Codrescu, 'Introduction', p. 17.
- ⁶⁵ Hearn, 'Mirror', p. 56. Italics in original.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 56–57.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 57. Italics in original.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 58–59.
- ⁷⁰ Sandra D. Stahl, *Literary Folkloristics and the Personal Narrative* (Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 8.
- ⁷¹ Stahl, *Literary Folkloristics*, p. 42.
- ⁷² Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', p. 282, quoted in Duyfhuizen, p. 199.
- ⁷³ Hearn, 'Mirror', p. 59.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 61.
- ⁷⁵ Stahl, *Literary Folkloristics*, p. 22.
- ⁷⁶ Duyfhuizen, p. 195.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 148.
- ⁷⁸ Maria Tamboukou, 'A Foucauldian Approach to Narratives', in *Doing Narrative Research*, ed. by Molly Andrews, Corinne Squire, and Maria Tamboukou (SAGE, 2008), pp. 103–20 (p. 108).

⁷⁹ For a discussion of Hearn's romanticization of traditional Japanese customs and his problematic embrace of Japanese nationalism, see Nanyan Guo, 'Interpreting Japan's Interpreters: The Problem of Lafcadio Hearn', *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies*, 3.2 (2001), pp. 106–18; and Evangelista, *Literary Cosmopolitanism*, pp. 103–11.