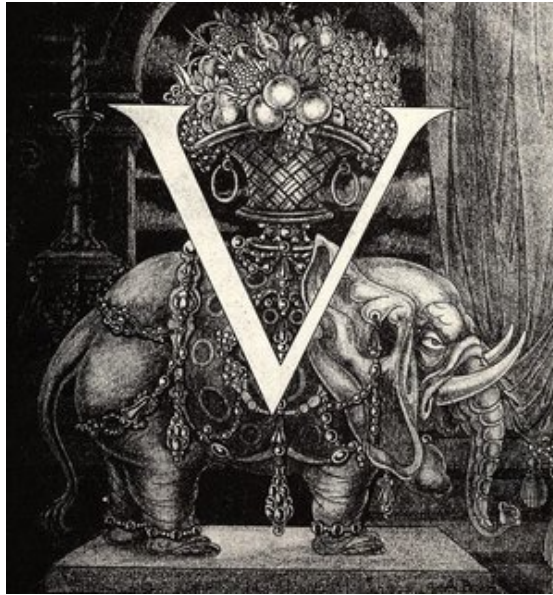


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INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF DECADENCE STUDIES

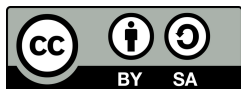


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Volume 8, Issue 1, Autumn 2025

Lafcadio Hearn

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Preface

‘Littérature de décadence! – Paroles vides de sens que nous entendons souvent tomber, avec la sonorité d’un baillement emphatique’ (Charles Baudelaire, *Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe*, 1857).

This Halloween issue of *Volupté*, devoted to the writings of journalist, translator, and writer Lafcadio Hearn and guest-edited by Fraser Riddell, is a useful reminder of the limitations of labelling, an issue that has dogged decadence scholarship since the mid 1950s, when John Reed’s book *Decadent Style* (1954) sparked new interest in the field and the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* published two articles on the meaning of decadence: Clyde de L. Ryals, ‘Towards a Definition of Decadent as Applied to British Literature in the Nineteenth Century’ (September 1958), pp. 85-92, and Robert L. Peters, ‘Towards a “Un-Definition” of Decadent as Applied to British Literature in the Nineteenth Century’ (December 1959), pp. 258-264. Peters’s response to Ryals’s article set the tone for discussions about defining decadence for the next seventy years or so.

For Ryals, decadence was ‘a subphase’, ‘a logical outgrowth of romanticism’ (pp. 86, 91) that resulted in an imperfect ‘blending of strangeness and the desire for beauty’ (p. 92). ‘[W]hereas romanticism expressed itself by maintaining an equilibrium between the natural and the grotesque,’ Ryals argued, ‘decadence found expression in distorting this balance and placing value on the grotesque at the expense of the natural’ (p. 87). Peters objected to Ryals’s simplistic ‘tabloid, undiscerning approach’, and he prescribed instead a full, critical understanding of the ‘multiplicity of artistic modes, energies, and directions, both *decadent* and not, present in the eighteen-eighties and eighteen-nineties’ (p. 258). ‘Decadence,’ he went on, ‘with its several manifestations at the close of the century, is much too many-faceted a creature to submit thus calmly to Mr. Ryals’s slimsy lasso’ (p. 263). Today, the conceptual complexity and category-defying ‘polyvalence’ of decadence, as we tend to call it, continue to be the focus of lively debate, and we range widely beyond the confines of the British fin de siècle. This issue of *Volupté* takes us to the US South, the Caribbean, Europe, and Japan.

The extent to which we can identify cosmopolitan Hearn and his writings as ‘decadent’ is intriguing to ponder, for like many writers and artists discussed in the pages of *Volupté*, and notably those who straddle decadence, the Weird, and the supernatural (Arthur Machen and Vernon Lee come immediately to mind), Hearn was angrily resistant to being pigeonholed. He eschewed the label of ‘decadent’. ‘Never read a line of Verlaine in my life’, he insisted, ‘and only know enough of the decadent school to convince me that the principle is scientifically wrong, and that to study the stuff is mere waste of time.’ Not that Verlaine was enamoured either by the epithet ‘decadent’. In his introduction to ‘The Decadent Movement in Literature’ in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* (November 1893), Arthur Symons, himself of course no stranger to changing tack, reports a trio of complaints: ‘Verlaine objects to being called a Decadent, Maeterlinck to being called a Symbolist, Huysmans to being called an Impressionist’ (pp. 858-867: p. 858).

So, let us fling aside ‘Mr. Ryals’s slimsy lasso’, and with decadent capaciousness in mind celebrate the unkind critic in the *New Statesman* who in 1925 described Hearn’s writing as inhabiting ‘a kind of No Man’s Land’, for No Man’s Land with its ‘amphibian or mongrel or half-caste’ literature is truly the unstable home of decadence, a literary tradition best defined by a big emphatic Baudelairean yawn about labels and labelling.

Jane Desmarais
Editor-in-Chief
31 October 2025

Lafcadio Hearn: Guest Editor's Introduction

Fraser Riddell

University of Durham

In a review of Lafcadio Hearn's *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* in 1894, an anonymous critic in the *New York Daily Tribune* praised the collection's 'wealth of wondrously artistic prose', noting that 'the influence of the French decadents is apparent' in the 'vivid word-coloring' of Gautier and the 'impressionism of Verlaine'.¹ Hearn's writing, he suggested, 'seeks to make words minister to all the senses', so that the 'printed page must convey color, sound, odor, and glimpses of more ethereal things'.² When the review reached Hearn – then 7,000 miles away in Kōbe, Japan – he was not impressed. In a letter to his friend Ellwood Hendrick, he complained that he was 'vexed' by the 'curious' suggestion that his style bore the traces of 'the *decadents*'. 'Never read a line of Verlaine in my life', he insisted, 'and only know enough of the decadent school to convince me that the principle is scientifically wrong, and that to study the stuff is mere waste of time'.³

Twelve years later – on the posthumous publication of his *Life and Letters* in 1906 – Hearn's complaint elicited an equally frosty response in the review pages of the *New York Daily Tribune*. The newspaper's critic insisted on the 'essential soundness' of his colleague's observations.⁴ Any reader who doubts that Hearn's 'literary tastes were very much those of the decadent school', he suggested, need only observe in his correspondence 'the outcropping, in a dozen places, of a strain of feeling which would have immediately placed him in harmony with Verlaine'.⁵ The anonymous author supported this contention with a sketch of the personality revealed in Hearn's letters that aligned him with the recognizable tropes of decadent authorship, familiar from the foundational manifestos of Walter Pater and Arthur Symonds: 'an imaginative, dreamy individual, intensely sensitive, intensely curious, hungering always to concentrate himself about some work of a purely literary character'.⁶ This tension between Hearn's disavowal of 'the decadents' and the prominent place that discourses of decadence have played in his reception is the starting point for this special

issue. The contributors show how productive this disidentification was for Hearn's work and how valuable it continues to be for scholars engaging with Hearn's writing, generating new transnational and intersectional approaches to the study of decadence and fin de siècle writing more broadly.

Hearn's life of intense sensitivity and curiosity began on the Greek island of Lefkada, where he was born Patricio Lafcadio Tessima Carlos Hearn in 1850, the son of Charles Bush Hearn, an Anglo-Irish Army surgeon, and a local Greek woman, Rosa Antonio Cassimati. After an itinerant childhood spent in Dublin, County Durham and London, Hearn emigrated to the United States in 1869, arriving penniless in Cincinnati, Ohio. He began his literary career with sensationalist journalism for the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, specializing in tales of violence and the macabre, often redolent of the gothic grotesque of Edgar Allan Poe.

His early work was closely concerned with the lives of socially ostracized groups, often living on the levees of the Ohio River, such as African American and mixed-race stevedores and roustabouts, sex workers, criminals and the city's itinerant immigrant labourers. This fascination with those at the margins of urban modernity signalled his nascent attraction to a recognizable Baudelairean decadent tradition. In 1874, Hearn married Alethea 'Mattie' Foley, an African American woman who had been born into slavery in Kentucky. Such a union was illegal under Ohio's anti-miscegenation laws. Their relationship was short-lived, though was to have a considerable impact on Hearn's posthumous reputation when it came to light in the years following his death. In October 1877, Hearn moved to New Orleans, initially on assignment to cover the fallout from the contested presidential election of 1876. In the Crescent City – a nexus of French, Spanish, Caribbean, and Southern influences – he found a vibrant milieu that resonated with his preoccupation with cultural creolization and miscegenation.⁷ He worked as a journalist, editor, and translator for a number of local papers, including the New Orleans *Item* and the *Times-Democrat*. Here he produced ethnographic sketches and short essays he referred to as 'Fantastics': 'impressions of the strange life of New Orleans [...] dreams of a tropical city'.⁸ In a letter to the American author William D. O'Connor in 1884, he explicitly articulated his aesthetic mission as a

dedicated search for unconventional beauty, proclaiming: 'I have pledged me to the worship of the Odd, the Queer, the Strange, the Exotic, the Monstrous. It quite suits my temperament.'⁹ In doing so, he aligned himself with the transgressive commitment to perverse sensuality and stylistic ornamentation prominent in the decadent works of Théophile Gautier and Gustave Flaubert.

While in New Orleans, Hearn published two idiosyncratic studies of Creole culture, initially timed to coincide with the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition, 1884–1885: *Gombo Zhèbes: A Little Dictionary of Creole Proverbs* (1885) and *La Cuisine Créole* (1885), one of the earliest Creole cookery books. This phase culminated in his departure for Martinique in 1887, resulting in the ethnographic travelogue *Two Years in the French West Indies* (1890) and the novella *Youma: The Story of a West-Indian Slave* (1890). This was followed by the novel *Chita: A Memory of Last Island* (1889), concerning the environmental destruction wrought by a hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico in 1856.

In 1890, seeking refuge from the perceived destruction of traditional Creole culture by modernization, Hearn journeyed to Japan, initially as a correspondent for *Harper's Magazine*. Over the years that followed, he established himself as one of the most pre-eminent Western writers on Japanese art, culture and spirituality, publishing over a dozen volumes based on his experiences in Japan. In 1891, he married Koizumi Setsu, a Japanese woman descended from an aristocratic samurai family, and later took the name 'Koizumi Yakumo' on his naturalization as a Japanese citizen in 1896. His collections such as *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* (1894), *Kokoro* (1896), and *Kwaidan* (1904) brought together essays, short stories, art writing, and philosophical reflections in a hybrid style that infused familiar Western genres with elements of Japanese aesthetics. Such writing was shaped by his pedagogical work as a teacher and lecturer, ultimately as Professor of English Language and Literature at the Imperial University of Tokyo from 1896–1903. His lectures introduced his students to a wide range of nineteenth-century literature, including the Pre-Raphaelites, Algernon Charles Swinburne, Walter Pater, and W. B. Yeats, often in terms that related their style to elements of Japanese artistic tradition.¹⁰ His works were motivated by an

impetus to preserve Japanese folklore and traditional culture against the pressures of Meiji-era modernization, securing for him a celebrity status in Japan that endures to this day. Indeed, in September 2025, the national Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) began screening a new daytime television drama (*asadora*) which focuses on the relationship between Hearn and his wife Setsu, *BakeBake*.¹¹

Decadent Style and the Transnational

Despite Hearn's disidentification with the 'decadent school' of the 1890s, his works were nevertheless shaped by his participation in a transnational network of writers whose works now underpin our scholarly understandings of decadence and aestheticism. From the 1870s onwards, he was deeply immersed – as both a reader and translator – in the work of French decadent writers, including Gautier, Flaubert, Charles Baudelaire, and Pierre Loti. Indeed, as Bernadette Lemoine has observed, following his arrival in New Orleans, Hearn became 'one of the first and best-respected translators of nineteenth-century French literature in the United States'.¹² His translations of short stories and extracts by a wide range of contemporary French writers were printed in a succession of New Orleans newspapers from the late 1870s to the mid-1890s. Such work introduced the hyperaesthetic style of these unfamiliar European writers to many readers in the American South for the first time.

Hearn's sustained engagement with literary translation was likewise crucial to his own stylistic development. Translating Flaubert's *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* (1874) provided him with what Stefano Evangelista has called 'a schooling in how to become a decadent writer'.¹³ His friend and early biographer Elizabeth Bisland characterized this work as 'full of intricate assonances, of a texture close woven and iridescent', which emerged through his 'passionate search for equivalents of the subtle nuances of [Flaubert's] phrases'.¹⁴ Hearn's impressionistic focus on colour, sound and sensory description led his less sympathetic critics, such as the physician George M. Gould, to label him a 'chameleon' marked by a 'a chromatic voice, a multicolored echo'.¹⁵ For such readers,

Hearn's tendency to privilege the immediacy of sensation over sustained rational reflection signal a lack of moral seriousness in his work. At the same time, his chameleon-like ability to take on the 'colour' of his surrounding environment signals the manner in which his decadent style was associated – often in condemnatory terms – with racial hybridity and cultural creolization.

As a journalist in New Orleans, Hearn's close engagement with French literary periodicals meant that he was exceptionally well placed to introduce his readership to the most recent aesthetic developments in European literature. In 'Decadence as a Fine Art' (1886) he offers his own summary of recent articles by Léon Barracand and Georges de Peyrebrune in the *Revue politique et littéraire* on the emergence of 'a new school of writers [...] who seem to call themselves decadents'.¹⁶ Hearn figures the work of these authors as a product of what Dennis Denisoff calls a 'decadent ecology'.¹⁷ Their work is compared to material that emerges from biological processes of 'deca[y]', 'decomposition', 'ferment' and 'rott[ing]'.¹⁸ The 'brilliant sparkle' of this new style represents a 'jewel' in the steamy, slimy 'dung-hill' of literary naturalism.¹⁹ Of the literary 'grubs' and 'larvae' who occupy this seething pile of 'rubbish', only a small minority, Hearn suggests, will 'enjoy [...] metamorphosis' into 'many colored' decadent butterflies.²⁰ The dominant impulse of such writing is towards a quasi-mystical synaesthetic condensation, in which 'all impressions of form, of color, of music, of perfume' might be 'compressed into one word'.²¹ Hearn's account of such claims – punctuated by exclamation marks, rhetorical repetitions and his characteristic dashes – functions primarily to ironize the self-seriousness of the new movement. It is, he concludes, 'to say the least, sublimely amusing'.²²

Elsewhere, Hearn's journalism turns to tropes of decadence in similarly caustic terms to characterize the emergent dynamics of nineteenth-century print cultures. In 'Latterday Reviews' – an article in the *Times-Democrat* on 13 November 1883 – he offers 'a few remarks on the decadence of the Art of Criticism'.²³ His representative example of this decline is the French monthly periodical *Le Livre, revue du monde littéraire* (1880–1889), edited by the journalist and bibliophile Octave Uzanne. The decadence of the journal's approach is evident, he suggests, not only in its

reviewers' 'absolute lack of scholarship' and their tendency to afford undue attention to 'worthless novel[s]', but also in the disjunction between its 'magnificent' material form and the quality of its contents.²⁴ While 'no cost has been spared' on its 'quaintly beautiful [...] typography' and its 'very attractive [...] engravings', Hearn nevertheless concludes that '[i]t is certainly to be hoped that so beautiful a publication [...] will reform its critical departments'.²⁵ In 'The Omnivorous Newspaper' – in the *Times-Democrat* 29 August 1886 – Hearn similarly laments that the 'book-era is in its decadence' on account of the effect of newsprint on the attention spans of European and American readers.²⁶ The dominance of the newspaper, he suggests, is 'destined to ultimately strangle not merely all public interest in serious reading but likewise all capacity for it'.²⁷ Journalism's short, episodic sketches – and its insistent focus on 'excit[ing] violent interest' – has eroded readers' cognitive abilities to 'maintain the mind in one line of thought for any great length of time'.²⁸ In such a 'condition of mental savagery', a long philosophical novel, such as George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876), 'could scarcely hope for many readers were it to appear today'.²⁹ The literary marketplace, he suggests, is one in which there is simply nothing new to catch readers' hyperactive attention: 'the capacities of plot' have been 'exhausted' and in poetry 'all the artifices of construction' have already been 'essayed'.³⁰ This state of distraction, sustained by the rhythms of newsprint, reflects a broader fragmentation and specialization of human knowledge, in which the accumulation of 'many millions of classes of facts [...] has outgrown all individual capacity'.³¹ In place of an Enlightenment vision of the progressive pursuit of truth, Hearn substitutes an epistemology of decadent modernity. Here, 'we will only be able to judge by occasional encounter with facts, and then, perhaps only vaguely'.³² This mode of knowing he compares to 'an ant [...] judg[ing] the nature of what it touches for the first time with its antennae'.³³ The image anticipates Hearn's subsequent writings on insects in Japan, where entomology provides a framework for exploring both the aesthetics of scale and the sensory worlds of non-human animals.³⁴

As the 1890s progressed, Hearn became more closely acquainted with recent developments in French decadent literature, particularly through his engagement with the English Japanologist

Osman Edwards, who introduced him to the works of Verlaine and to those of the Belgian symbolist Émile Verhaeren. He nevertheless remained ‘hopelessly insensible to [...] the decadent movement’: ‘The new poetry’, he noted, ‘is simply rotten! – morally and otherwise’.³⁵ At a formal level, he suggested, such writing demonstrated none of the ‘lucidity, sharpness, firm, hard outline’ which Hearn valued most highly. At a thematic level, Hearn found that there was ‘a splendid something entirely absent from the new poetry – the joy of life’. Poetry, he conceded, need not confine itself solely to the ‘joyous’ – ‘there is beauty in pain and sorrow’. Yet this writing, he complained, is fixated solely on ‘ugliness or pain, without beauty’.³⁶ Hearn nevertheless represents a perceptive – if unsympathetic – critic of the formal effects of fragmentation and distortion that such works were striving to achieve. He compares the ‘startl[ing] incongruities’ of Verhaeren’s ‘La Dame en Noir’, for instance, to ‘a structure in which Gothic, Byzantine, Arabian, Indian, Greek, and Chinese architectures are mingled into one composition’.³⁷ Elsewhere, he registers the ‘shock’ of the poem’s disorientating succession of similes in which ‘one fine image [is] suddenly shattered by another and another, in kaleidoscopic succession’.³⁸ Hearn’s response to such writing resonates with critics’ responses to the visual dimension of his own work, a fact that suggests a knowing play with decadent forms and a self-conscious eye to his own reception.

Hearn only rarely used the epithet ‘decadent’ when discussing literature in English, whether in his many journalistic book reviews or in his lectures in Japan. His voluminous book collection – now held at the University of Toyama in Japan – includes a small number of important English works on Aestheticism and decadence, such as Walter Pater’s *Appreciations with an Essay on Style* (1890) and Arthur Symonds’s *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899). In other respects, though, his collection demonstrates little engagement with the English literature of the ‘Yellow ’90s’, favouring instead more stolidly respectable writers such as Austin Dobson, Edmund Gosse, and W. E. Henley. Of English literature published in the closing decade of the century, his greatest enthusiasm was undoubtedly for the works of Rudyard Kipling, who he praised for his ‘astonishing use [...] of the language of the people’.³⁹ For Hearn, Kipling’s writing represents ‘the only prose

of the nineteenth century which offers [...] all the qualities of concentration and strength that characterize the best French writers'.⁴⁰ That Hearn had earlier posited the 'art of condensation, of concentration' as the defining stylistic tenet of literary decadence – strikingly at odds with Kipling's demotic prose – is a reminder of the flexibility and capaciousness of late nineteenth-century aesthetic categories.⁴¹

Hearn's idiosyncratic sense of decadent style in English is most strikingly reflected in the comparison that he draws between 'some French writers of the decadence' and the poetry of John Addington Symonds.⁴² Specifically, Hearn refers to the 'Stella Maris' sonnet cycle in *Vagabunduli Libellus* (1884), which Symonds addressed to his lover, the gondolier Angelo Fusato. In a lecture on 'Pessimists and their Kindred' – delivered to students of English literature at Tokyo Imperial University – Hearn identifies as characteristically decadent Symonds's preoccupation with the 'pain which he felt at his inability to obtain' the 'inner as well as [the] outer self' of the cycle's addressee.⁴³ It remains unclear whether Hearn was alert to the queer subtext of what he called Symonds's 'morbid fancies'.⁴⁴ If he was, he nevertheless diplomatically refers to the poem's addressee using female pronouns. However, it is striking that he presents the cycle's concern with the uncomprehensible 'mystery of another human life' in terms that mirror what Eve Sedgwick influentially called the 'epistemology of the closet': queer sexuality framed as a concealed or hidden essence.⁴⁵

While Hearn was thus generally dismissive of the decadent literature of the 1890s, he nevertheless maintained a greater degree of sympathy for symbolist writing. He understood such work as sharing distinctive formal affinities with Japanese literature, specifically a generative imprecision that 'leave[s] [...] something not said, but suggested'.⁴⁶ In a lecture on 'Some Symbolic Poetry' – likely delivered in Tokyo around 1900 – he provided for his students an exposition of English poems that 'gain by being left in a kind of nebulous condition – so that the thoughts expressed appear only very faintly, as an object looming through some beautiful colored mist'.⁴⁷ His eclectic range of examples place W. B. Yeats ('Aedh Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven', 1899)

alongside Alice Meynell ('The Modern Poet', 1885), while also including works by Christina and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Richard Garnett and Roden Noel. The 'best examples' of such poetry, he suggests, demonstrate 'a real inner relation to the best Japanese poetry'.⁴⁸ Indeed, Hearn draws upon his students' familiarity with East Asian languages to suggest how the imagery of these poems generate meaning. The poems succeed, he argues, by

combining together images so incongruous in themselves, that you stare in surprise at the juxtaposition; and while you are staring, there comes to you in a sudden flash the sense of a meaning which the images are intended to represent, only as the Chinese ideograph represents a sound.⁴⁹

Here Hearn suggests that the poet's images are to the meaning of the poem what the strokes of a Chinese ideograph (or, in Japan, a *kanji*) are to the sound it represents – not a literal transcription, but a suggestive visual pattern that indirectly evokes an underlying mystical reality. The tension that runs throughout Hearn's works between an empirical commitment to the material world of the senses and a fascination with evanescent spiritual experiences is one that preoccupies many late-Victorian writers as they grapple with the competing claims of aestheticism, decadence and symbolism.⁵⁰ Hearn's ultimate insistence that the ethos of decadence is 'scientifically wrong' reflects his own deep commitment to the synthetic philosophy of Herbert Spencer, which held that the universe is propelled forward by cosmic laws of progressive evolution.⁵¹ In this respect, he was deeply suspicious of aesthetic innovations that claimed to be the byproducts of cultural decline. At a thematic and formal level, though, Hearn's commitment to Spencerian thought often manifested itself in a manner that is hard to distinguish from the dominant currents of literary decadence. A reviewer in 1896 notes, for instance, that Hearn follows 'his master's teaching' in evoking the 'utter incomprehensibleness' of a universe in which 'all [...] man's investigations eventually bring him face to face with an insoluble enigma'.⁵² The 'vivid word-coloring' and 'impressionism' that struck the *New York Daily Tribune* as so obviously decadent might equally be seen as articulating Hearn's idiosyncratic Spencerian mysticism.

Lafcadio Hearn and Decadence Studies

It is precisely this refusal of clear affiliation that allows Hearn's works to speak so powerfully to the recent turn in decadence studies towards transnational dynamics of cosmopolitanism, colonization and race. In particular, Hearn has emerged as an important figure in the reassessment of 'critical cosmopolitanism'.⁵³ As Evangelista has shown, his writing inhabits geographical spaces of cross-cultural exchange that extend beyond those international metropolitan networks that are most familiar in accounts of late nineteenth-century cosmopolitanism.⁵⁴ His work's fascination with the productive nature of cultural and linguistic hybridity often exists in tension with a recognizably Herderian urge to preserve distinct national traditions. Indeed, his late writings in Japan endorse modes of resistance to the encroachment of Western modernity that are often strikingly nationalistic, even xenophobic.⁵⁵ For his earliest Japanese critics, such as his fellow cosmopolitan writer Yone Noguchi, Hearn's principal achievement lay precisely in his antiquarian 'attemp[t] to revive the old Japan'.⁵⁶ For Noguchi, Hearn's retellings of 'strange tales' in *Kwaidan* (1904), for instance, represent 'nothing but a sure protest against our destruction of the peculiarity of thought and dream of the seventeenth century'.⁵⁷ In this respect, Hearn's cosmopolitan imaginary aligns him with what Alex Murray has recently identified as a prominent tradition of 'Decadent conservatism'.⁵⁸

Hearn's writings have also proved a valuable resource for resituating discourses of decadence within the historical and geographical pressures of nineteenth-century colonization. For Robert Stilling and Jacqueline Couti, Hearn's writings on the West Indies reflect an aesthetic of decadence which emerged in the Caribbean in response to a crisis in white identity following emancipation, focusing in particular on themes of racial decline and biological degeneration.⁵⁹ Peter Bailey has similarly observed how Hearn's travel writings on Martinique specifically attribute colonial environmental degradation to mismanagement by Black and Indigenous Martinicans.⁶⁰ Such writings are often underpinned by implicitly social Darwinist fears of evolutionary race replacement, in which (as Hearn puts it) the 'future tendency must be to universal blackness [...]

— perhaps to universal savagery’.⁶¹ By emphasizing Hearn’s racializing and eugenic thinking alongside his interest in hybridity, scholars have shown how these concepts were not just compatible with, but foundational to decadent writing when viewed through a transnational lens.

The impressionistic aestheticization that characterizes Hearn’s depictions of Black and mixed-race people in his Martinique writings is inextricable from processes of racist objectification and fetishization, which often reinscribe the biological categories of nineteenth-century race science. This aspect of Hearn’s writing was clearly evident to his earliest readers, some of whom satirized his obsessive preoccupation with describing what he called, in ‘West Indian Society of Many Colorings’ (1890), ‘infinitesimal differences of tint’.⁶² Charles Battell Loomis’ 1891 parody of Hearn, ‘Nueva York: A Study in Color’, for instance, ridicules his racializing gaze by reorienting its focus onto the bodies of white European immigrants, freshly arrived at Manhattan’s Battery Park. Loomis’ Hearn-narrator rhapsodizes:

Here can we revel in tints. The hash-brown of the Tuscan, the radish-heart pink of the Saxon, the Excelsior stuffing yellow of the Dane, the catsup-hued Muscovite, the beetpink Swede, the tomato-colored English [...] [T]hese and many more colors so blend with the rich foliage and grasses of the Park that we forget them all in a dreamy reverie...⁶³

Loomis’ parody exposes the instability of Hearn’s racial taxonomies by applying his colourist rhetoric to white European bodies, revealing the arbitrary nature of his aesthetic distinctions. By mirroring Hearn’s descriptive style, Loomis not only lampoons his fetishization of difference but also underscores how the racializing aspects of Hearn’s works are sustained by his descriptive styles of impressionistic visual excess and wilful exoticism.

While Hearn’s fascination with the aesthetics of skin colour is ripe for parody, such nineteenth-century categories of race were nevertheless central to his own sense of self. He attributed his sense of displacement to his ‘meridional’ Greek heritage, writing playfully that he ‘cannot be happy in an English moral community’ as ‘a fraud – a vile Latin – a vicious, French-hearted scalawag’.⁶⁴ He believed that ‘[w]hatever is good in [him]’ arose from the ‘dark race-soul’ of his mother, including his ‘language power’ and his ‘sensitiveness to artistic things’.⁶⁵ Against the

backdrop of the racial segregation of the Jim Crow era, Hearn's early reception in the United States was radically transformed by the posthumous scandal surrounding his first marriage to Mattie Foley. His relationship with Foley was often framed as symptomatic of a broader pathologized 'sexual craving' for women of colour, manifest in his nocturnal 'carnal expeditions' to the brothels of New Orleans.⁶⁶ The intensity of this opprobrium is reflected in a remarkable review of Edward Laroque Tinker's *Lafcadio Hearn's American Days* – published in *The New York Times* in 1924 – which concludes that 'his life was strangely parallel morally to [Oscar] Wilde's'.⁶⁷ Here, the controversy about the interracial intimacy of 'queer Lafcadio Hearn' is aligned with the scandal of male same-sex desire that arose in the aftermath of Wilde's notorious 1895 trials for 'gross indecency'.⁶⁸ Other early critics similarly framed Hearn's behaviour as sexually deviant. Richard Le Gallienne, a noted chronicler of British decadent literature, castigated Hearn's 'perverted taste for miscegenation'.⁶⁹

George Gould – the author of one of the most scurrilous early biographies, *Concerning Lafcadio Hearn* (1908) – went so far as to write to the sexologist Havelock Ellis in an attempt to elicit a diagnosis of Hearn's notional sexual abnormality. To his credit, Ellis offered a sympathetic defence of 'men of Hearn's type' who 'reach the spiritual world through their absorption in beauty and nature and art': '[T]here are not many people of this type, and there is little danger of the rest of the world following in their steps, while their work seems to affect a wholesome "catharsis" in the emotional life of more ordinary and mild people'.⁷⁰

Ellis's interest in Hearn's distinctive style of 'absorption' links to another prominent trend in recent scholarship, which has turned to his work to think about the relationship between decadence, embodiment, and the senses. Hearn's awareness of processes of perception was sharpened by his own visual impairment; he was blinded in one eye during a schoolyard accident as a teenager and was severely myopic in his other eye. As Catherine Maxwell has noted, his impaired sight apparently invigorated his alertness to other sensory channels, particularly the pleasures of smell. Hearn's works carefully craft his persona as a 'cosmopolitan *flaireur*', alert to the exotic scents of distant lands and beautiful women.⁷¹ Kathryn Webb-Destefano has likewise drawn

attention to the ways in which blindness is thematized in Hearn's works as facilitating a heightened alertness to mystical and spiritual experiences.⁷² My own work places Hearn's reflections on literary impressionism and the vibrant materiality of language in dialogue with recent scholarship on neurodiversity and sensory processing. In doing so, it asks us to reevaluate the significance of 'sensory difference' as an identity category around which decadent sub-communities were formed.⁷³

An Overview

The work collected in this special issue responds to these recent trends in decadence studies, while also broadening our understanding of Hearn's work. Aman Erfan demonstrates Hearn's mastery of the short-form ghost story, whose sophistication is evident in the carefully handled 'play of authorial voice' in collections such as *In Ghostly Japan* (1899), *Shadowings* (1900), and *Kwaidan* (1904). Hearn's work participates in a late nineteenth-century literary marketplace characterized by significant public appetite for supernatural and fantastic literature. As Erfan demonstrates, Hearn intuitively grasped that the effectiveness of the genre resided in the narrative craft of its 'telling'. In doing so, he participated in the well-established nineteenth-century tradition of employing techniques such as heightened narration, digressions, and frame narratives. Hearn utilizes these conventions as a point of departure in his idiosyncratic cultural project: the evocation and mediation of a 'strange, ghostly, and eternally elusive Japan' (p. 2) for an English-speaking readership. His authorial intrusions, footnotes, parentheses, and metanarrative commentary interrupt the narrative flow to foreground his narrator's mediating presence. As Erfan demonstrates, this self-conscious act of rewriting transforms the stories into complex co-constructions between author and audience.

Hearn's engagement with the spectral and the liminal – a distinctive presence in his 'weird tales' – is likewise the focus of John Antony Goedhals's article on cosmological interconnectedness in Hearn's earlier Caribbean writings. Goedhals draws out attention to Hearn's 'proto-Buddhist'

and ‘oceanic’ vision in works such as *Two Years in the French West Indies* (1890), arguing that these writings anticipate the spiritual meditations that would define his Japanese period. Hearn’s writings are distinctive in their sustained imaginative engagement with Buddhism, synthesizing Eastern spirituality with contemporary Western evolutionary science (particularly the work of Herbert Spencer). Hearn’s own idiosyncratic understanding of Spencer’s ‘persistence of force’ underpins his fascination with reincarnation and karma, allowing for a reconceptualization of the relationship between the animate and the inanimate. Goedhals also reframes Hearn’s early American ‘rag-picker journalism’ – which often focused on the derelict and decayed – not as mere morbid sensationalism but rather as productively decadent meditations on impermanence and metempsychosis. The article also allows us to rethink the stakes of Hearn’s distinctive impressionistic style. For Goedhals, Hearn’s synaesthetic ‘word pictures’, (p. 22) vividly alert to the effects of light and colour, embody his sense of existential realities grounded in the continual flux of consciousness.

Damian Walsh extends this focus on processes of perception by demonstrating how Hearn integrated such spiritual and evolutionary thinking with Western aesthetic debates – particularly as related to the Arts and Crafts movement – through his focus on Japanese craft. In readings of essays from *Gleanings in Buddha-Fields* (1897), Walsh demonstrates how Hearn turns to Japanese handicraft to complicate prominent nineteenth-century distinctions between ‘fine art’ and ‘decorative art’. In doing so, the article draws upon recent theorizations of the philosophy of mind which emphasize the distributed dynamics of cognition. Hearn’s detailed descriptions of virtuosic craft, such as a fast-working doll-maker, suggest that the artistic activity of thinking might be ‘outsourced from the brain to the hands themselves’, (p. 39) implicating both the body and its external tools in the act of thought. Like Goedhals, Walsh is also alert to the central place of ‘inherited memory’ in Hearn’s aestheticism. Hearn’s craftspeople channel the skill of previous generations, transforming craft objects, such as the handprint of a young calligrapher, into a materialization of spectral influence. For Walsh, Hearn frames aesthetic experience itself as grounded in embodied gestures that are simultaneously individual and collective, combining the

labour of ‘tens of thousands of hands and brains’ in the production of communal acts of celebration and decoration.

Walsh’s discussion of the significance of the sensory and the embodied in Hearn’s aestheticism finds parallels in Cheyenne Symonette’s analysis of the racialized and gendered notions of beauty in his works. In *Two Years in the French West Indies*, Hearn employs the figure of the ‘femme de couleur’ to articulate a distinctly decadent aesthetic, framing her as a type that embodies ‘exotic decay’ and ‘colonial collapse’ (p. 63) in post-emancipation Martinique. As Symonette notes, Hearn’s portrayal adheres to a recognizable decadent fixation on transgressive women, while carrying the specifically localized historical weight of slavery and emancipation. This comes into sharpest focus in Hearn’s nostalgic portrayal of the figure of the ‘belle affranchie’, a mixed-race woman whose beauty and strategic social positioning gave her agency and influence over white men during the slavery era. For Hearn, this figure is an ‘artificial product’ cultivated solely under the rigid and unnatural conditions of the plantation system. The post-emancipation ‘fille de couleur’ are marked, he suggests, by a ‘degraded beauty’, becoming ‘less comely as well as less helpless’ (p. 75). For Symonette, this aesthetic mourning allows Hearn to condemn slavery while simultaneously romanticizing the aesthetic ideals it produced, positioning the beauty of these women as an ephemeral product of colonial decadence.

Symonette’s analysis of Hearn’s preoccupation with the decaying beauty of the mixed-race *femme fatale* is complemented by Daichi Ishikawa’s exploration of Hearn’s broader ‘medical imagination’, arguing that his cosmopolitan ‘curiosity’ often worked to synthesize aesthetic and scientific discourses. Many of Hearn’s works draw upon his fascination with anatomy, illness, and the empirical observation of the body, as well as his close friendships with physicians such as Rudolph Matas and George M. Gould. Hearn’s collaborative relationship with Matas led to ethnographical studies, such as ‘The Creole Doctor’ (1886), in which Hearn sought to preserve vanishing collective knowledge of Creole medicine by tracing its transnational origins. As Ishikawa

suggests, such works demonstrate Hearn's commitment to a cosmopolitanism concerned not only with cultural hybridity, but also with the traditional underpinnings of modern scientific knowledge.

Paul Murray's discussion of Hearn's American biographers traces a long-running struggle to reconcile Hearn's transnational identity with a desire to situate him in relation to distinctive national literary or intellectual traditions. It also alerts us to the central significance of the scandal around his marriage to Mattie Foley in early reception of Hearn's writing. As Murray demonstrates, many biographers chose to minimize or dismiss Hearn's sustained engagement with African American and Creole cultures. Mary Gallagher's review of the exhibition *Kwaidan: Encounters with Lafcadio Hearn* (2025) endorses Murray's sense of Hearn as a writer who resists rigid national classification. As Gallagher shows us, Hearn's 'protean' oeuvre is fundamentally 'translational' and 'creolized' (p. 130). It is driven by a pervasive 'hauntological' impetus central to decadent aesthetics, which combines a concern with 'otherworldliness' and a fascination with the culturally exogenous (p. 132). Gallagher also draws attention to Hearn's experimentation with genres and styles that articulate his creolizing impulse, such as his commitment to what he called 'poetical prose'.

Decadence, Genre and Hearn's 'No Man's Land'

As Gallagher shows us, Hearn is a vital figure for re-examining how decadent writers experimented with genre, positioning their works within an expanding global literary marketplace that stimulated new modes of writing. A number of articles in the issue draw attention to the savviness with which Hearn worked across different genres. Erfan's piece, for instance, demonstrates how Hearn's supernatural short stories playfully combine the conventions of the Victorian ghost story with those of nineteenth-century ethnographical and anthropological writings. Ishikawa likewise reminds us that Hearn's confidence with moving between genres has its origins in his early work as a journalist in Cincinnati, where his writing draws its energies from the remarkable range of styles that coexist within what Mark Turner has called the 'miscellaneity' of nineteenth-century print cultures.⁷⁴

As a writer whose career was formed by the pressures of newspaper publication, Hearn was adept at articulating to his editors and publishers what he considered to be most distinctive about his works. Shortly before his departure for Japan, Hearn wrote to William Patten – then art editor of *Harper's Magazine* – that he ‘would attempt nothing really in the shape of essays’, ‘carefully exclud[ing] [...] anything bordering upon commonplace narrative’. In contrast to the well-known ethnographic travel writing of Isabella Bird, for instance, Hearn will instead frame his recollections impressionistically, recounting ‘solely [...] the personal experiences bearing upon it’. His aim, he suggests, is to ‘create in the mind of the reader a vivid impression of living in Japan [...] as one taking part in the daily existence of the common people, and thinking with their thoughts’.⁷⁵ In doing so, he argues for the novelty of a prose genre that reorients the expectations of travel writing by combining it with elements of the short story, the impressionistic sketch and the aesthetic essay.

Many of Hearn's most perceptive early critics recognized the ingenuity with which his volumes on Japan, such as *Kokoro* and *Gleanings in Buddha-Fields*, drew together a surprising array of disparate genres. The Austrian writer Hugo von Hofmannsthal's 1904 obituary notice for Hearn – included in this issue in a new translation from the German by Tom Smith – reflects on the challenge of ‘adequately describ[ing] the artistic form’ of these books. Their constituent chapters, he observes, range from ‘anecdote’ to ‘novella’ to ‘philosophy’ in a manner that often proves impossible to pin down. Hearn's unique output, he suggests, represents ‘journalism beyond any newspaper’, philosophy that avoids the ‘barren wastes of terminology’, and science that remains ‘full of life’. Elsewhere, Hofmannsthal presents Hearn as a representative example of what he calls the ‘New Journalism’, alongside the surprisingly eclectic company of H. G. Wells, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson and Maurice Barrès.⁷⁶ Such writing, he suggests, ‘takes hold of you easily and lets you go easily’ and is ‘cooked so well with such pure ingredients’ that it avoids any risk of readerly indigestion.⁷⁷

For some critics, though, the generic expansiveness of Hearn's books, whilst marking his decadent literary sophistication, ultimately undermined the wider popularity of his works. The

French journalist, critic and translator Thérèse Bentzon (Marie-Thérèse Blanc) – a prominent figure in the reception of English and American literature in Europe – observed in a 1904 article in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* that Hearn’s popularity was undermined by the challenging generic hybridity of his works.⁷⁸ In comparison with the ‘universal’ recognition of other contemporary writers ‘nourished [...] by exoticism’, such as Rudyard Kipling and Robert Louis Stevenson, Hearn is admired, she suggests, only by a coterie readership of sensitive literary connoisseurs (‘un groupe de délicats’).⁷⁹ His ‘disdain for popularity’ is reflected in the manner in which he gathers ‘as if by chance’ in the same volume ‘short stories, essays, personal anecdotes, travel impressions, psychology, and fantastic tales’.⁸⁰ The general reading public, she observes, has little patience with such ‘mixtures’ (‘mélanges’), which they typically find ‘puzzling’. Hearn’s writings, she notes in passing, also lack the qualities that French readers have come to expect from notionally ‘English’ writers, notably ‘lots of humour’ and a ‘disdain for those races that are not Anglo-Saxon’.⁸¹

Like many of Hearn’s early critics, Bentzon also draws a comparison between the generic and formal hybridity of the ‘admirable scattered fragments which compose his works’ and his indeterminate geographical, national and racial identity: she presents Hearn as a ‘frail little hybrid plant’, which ‘flower[ed] on the rock of Lefkada’, before being ‘uprooted, transplanted, tortured by a system of northern repression uncongenial to its nature’.⁸² An anonymous critic in the *New Statesman* in 1925 similarly cites his writing as inhabiting ‘a kind of No Man’s Land’, in which his ‘poetical prose [...] blends indistinguishably with the poets who write *vers libres*’.⁸³ Such literature, he suggests, ‘may be called amphibian or mongrel or half-caste or *fin de siècle* but [...] it cannot be ignored’.⁸⁴ In this spirit, the critic arranges a number of sentences from ‘Torn Letters’ (1884) on the page as lines of free verse, anticipating W. B. Yeats’s famous treatment of Walter Pater’s ‘Mona Lisa’ in his *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* in 1936. Hearn’s ‘No Man’s Land’ accounts, perhaps, for his difficulty in finding a secure home in literary studies in the twenty-first century – his ‘worship of the Odd, the Queer, the Strange’, combined with his astounding itinerancy, means that his works have often fallen between the rigid disciplinary divisions of nation, language, genre, and

period that characterize much contemporary scholarship. Certainly, his persistently abrasive relationship with the concept of ‘decadence’ requires us to remain alert to the polyvalent resonances of the term across and between historical moments. Perhaps, as Hearn insisted, ‘[t]o study the stuff is mere waste of time’.⁸⁵

¹ ‘A Dreamer in Japan: Mr Hearn’s Arcadia in the Orient’, *New York Daily Tribune* (28 October 1894), p. 14.

² Ibid.

³ Lafcadio Hearn, Letter to Ellwood Hendrick (December 1894), in *The Life and Letters of Lafcadio Hearn*, ed. by Elizabeth Bisland, 2 vols (Houghton, Mifflin, 1906), II, pp. 187–88.

⁴ ‘The Late Lafcadio Hearn as Revealed in His Letters’, *New York Daily Tribune*, 5 December 1906, p. 7.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ See S. Frederick Starr, ‘Illusion and Disillusion: The Making of Lafcadio Hearn’, in *New Orleans: A Literary History* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 96–112.

⁸ Hearn, Letter to H. E. Krehbiel ([n.d.], 1880), in *Life and Letters*, I, pp. 219–22 (p. 220).

⁹ Hearn, Letter to William D. O’Connor (29 June 1884), in *Life and Letters*, I, pp. 328–29.

¹⁰ See Hearn, *A History of English Literature in a Series of Lectures*, 2 vols (Hokuseido Press, 1927); Hearn, *Pre-Raphaelite and Other Poets: Lectures by Lafcadio Hearn*, ed. by John Erskine (Dodd, Mead, 1922); Hearn, *On Poetry*, ed. by Ryūji Tanabé, Tesaburo Ochiai and Ichiro Nishizaki (Hokuseido Press, 1934).

¹¹ See also Rie Kido Askew, ‘Why Hearn?: The Critical Reception of Lafcadio Hearn in Japan’, *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies*, 18.1 (2016), pp. 57–73.

¹² Bernadette Lemoine, ‘Lafcadio Hearn as an Ambassador of French Literature in the United States and in Japan’, *Revue de Littérature Comparée*, 319 (2006), pp. 299–317 (p. 305–06). See also Stefano Evangelista, ‘“Clothed with Poetry”: Lafcadio Hearn’s Decadent Aesthetics of Translation’, *Modern Philology*, 121.1 (2023), pp. 104–23, <https://doi.org/10.1086/725415>.

¹³ Stefano Evangelista, ‘Translational Decadence: Versions of Flaubert, Pater, and Lafcadio Hearn’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 49.4 (2021), pp. 807–29 (p. 810), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1060150320000285>.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Bidland, ‘Introduction’, in Gustave Flaubert, *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, trans. by Lafcadio Hearn (Harriman, 1910), [n.p.].

¹⁵ George M. Gould, *Concerning Lafcadio Hearn* (Jacobs, 1908), p. xiii. For Hearn’s relationship with Gould, see Antony Goedhals, ‘Lafcadio Hearn and George Gould’s Philosophy of Spectacles: The Story of a Buddhist–Christian Encounter’, in *Diasporic Identities and Empire: Cultural Contentions and Literary Landscapes*, ed. by Anastasia Louridas and David Brooks (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), pp. 199–212.

¹⁶ Hearn, ‘Decadence as a Fine Art’, in *Essays in European and Oriental Literature*, ed. by Albert Mordell (Heinemann, 1923), pp. 28–33 (p. 28).

¹⁷ Dennis Denisoff, *Decadent Ecology in British Literature and Art, 1860-1910: Decay, Desire, and the Pagan Revival* (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

¹⁸ ‘Decadence as a Fine Art’, p. 28.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., p. 29.

²² Ibid., p. 33.

²³ Hearn, ‘Latterday Reviews’, in *Essays on American Literature*, ed. by Sanki Ichikawa (Hokuseido Press, 1929), pp. 138–42 (p. 138).

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 138–39.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 139–40.

²⁶ Hearn, ‘The Omnivorous Newspaper’, in *Essays on American Literature*, ed. by Sanki Ichikawa (Hokuseido Press, 1929), pp. 198–202 (p. 200).

²⁷ Ibid., p. 201.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 199.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 199–200.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 201.

³¹ Ibid., p. 202.

- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ See Paul Manning ‘Goblin Spiders, Ghosts of Flowers and Butterfly Fantasies: Lafcadio Hearn’s Transnational, Transmedia and Trans-Species Aesthetics of the Weird’, *Japan Forum*, 32.2, (2020), pp. 259–83, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09555803.2019.1676291>.
- ³⁵ Hearn, Letter to Osman Edwards [n.d.], in Osman Edwards, ‘Lafcadio Hearn on the Decadent School: His Views as Expressed in some of his Delightful Letters to a Friend’, *The Craftsman*, 1 October 1907, pp. 14–22 (pp. 15–16).
- ³⁶ Ibid., p. 16.
- ³⁷ Ibid., p. 20.
- ³⁸ Ibid., p. 21.
- ³⁹ Hearn, ‘On Composition’, in *Complete Lectures on Art, Literature and Philosophy*, ed. by Ryuji Tanabé, Tesaburo Ochiai and Ichiro Nishizaki (Hokuseido Press, 1932), pp. 70–94 (p. 93).
- ⁴⁰ Hearn, ‘English Fiction in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century’, in *Complete Lectures on Art, Literature and Philosophy*, pp. 348–85 (p. 383).
- ⁴¹ ‘Decadence as a Fine Art’, p. 30.
- ⁴² Hearn, ‘Pessimists and their Kindred’, in *Interpretations of Literature*, ed. by John Erskine, 2 vols (Heinemann, 1916), I, pp. 321–47 (p. 336).
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (University of California Press, 1990).
- ⁴⁶ Hearn, ‘Naked Poetry’, in *On Poetry*, pp. 1–9 (p. 2).
- ⁴⁷ Hearn, ‘Some Symbolic Poetry’, in *On Poetry*, pp. 141–70 (p. 141).
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 170.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ For an insightful discussion, see Stephen Cheeke, *Walter Pater and Persons* (Oxford University Press, 2024), pp. 183–88.
- ⁵¹ For the relationship between Spencer’s thought and Eastern mysticism in Hearn’s writings, see Antony Goedhals, *The Neo-Buddhist Writings of Lafcadio Hearn: Light from the East* (Brill, 2020).
- ⁵² ‘Crystallised Criticism’, *The North-China Herald*, 3 January 1896, p. 7.
- ⁵³ See Stefano Evangelista, ‘The 1890s and East Asia: Toward a Critical Cosmopolitanism’, in *Nineteenth-Century Literature in Transition: The 1890s*, ed. by Dustin Friedman and Kristin Mahoney (Cambridge University Press, 2023), pp. 61–77; Evangelista, ‘Lafcadio Hearn and Global Aestheticism’, in *Literary Cosmopolitanism in the English Fin de Siècle: Citizens of Nowhere* (Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 72–116; Daichi Ishikawa, ‘For Curiosity’s Sake: British Aestheticism and Cosmopolitan Notions of Curiosity in Walter Pater, John Addington Symonds, and Lafcadio Hearn, 1864–1904’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Queen Mary, University of London, 2018).
- ⁵⁴ Evangelista, ‘Lafcadio Hearn and Global Aestheticism’, p. 76–77.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 110; Roy Starr, ‘Lafcadio Hearn as Japanese Nationalist’, *Japan Review*, 18 (2006), pp. 181–213.
- ⁵⁶ Yone Noguchi, ‘Lafcadio Hearn’s *Kvaidan*’, *The Bookman*, October 1904, pp. 159–60 (p. 160).
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 159.
- ⁵⁸ Alex Murray, *Decadent Conservatism: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Past* (Oxford University Press, 2023), p. 187. For a related argument on the ‘antiquarianism’ of Hearn’s Martinique writings, see Mary Gallagher, ‘Lafcadio Hearn’s American Writings and the Creole Continuum’, in *American Creoles: The Francophone Caribbean and the American South*, ed. by Martin Munro and Celia Britton (Liverpool University Press, 2012), pp. 19–39.
- ⁵⁹ Robert Stilling, ‘The Unfinished Fin de Siècle: Global Modernism and Postcolonial Decadence’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Virginia, 2012); Jacqueline Couti, ‘Sexualizing and Darkening Black Female Bodies: Whose Imagined Community?’, in *Dangerous Creole Liaisons: Sexuality and Nationalism in French Caribbean Discourses from 1806 to 1897* (Liverpool University Press, 2016), pp. 121–68.
- ⁶⁰ Peter Bailey, ‘Deforestation and Decolonization: Lafcadio Hearn’s French Antillean Writing’, *Volupté*, 6.1 (2023), pp. 1–19.
- ⁶¹ Hearn, ‘A Midsummer Trip to the Tropics’, in *Two Years in the French West Indies* (Harper, 1890), pp. 13–98 (pp. 97–98).
- ⁶² Hearn, ‘West Indian Society of Many Colorings’, *Cosmopolitan*, 9 (July 1890), pp. 337–41 (p. 337).
- ⁶³ Charles Battell Loomis, ‘Neuva York: A Study in Color – With Apologies to Mr. Lafcadio Hearn’, *Puck*, 28 (18 February 1891), p. 433.
- ⁶⁴ Hearn, Letter to Ellwood Hendrick (April 1892), in *Life and Letters*, II, p. 85.
- ⁶⁵ Hearn, Letter to James Daniel Hearn [n.d.], in *Life and Letters*, I, p. 10.
- ⁶⁶ John Carter, ‘Queer Lafcadio Hearn: A Biography of One of the Strangest and Most Interesting Figures in American Letters’, *New York Times*, 7 December 1924, p. X.16.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid.
- ⁶⁸ For a discussion of the association between Wilde and racial primitivism in the United States in the period, see Michèle Mendelssohn, *Making Oscar Wilde* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

- ⁶⁹ Richard Le Gallienne, 'Lafcadio Hearn's Love for the Horrible', *Literary Digest International Book Review*, 4.4 (March 1926), p. 251.
- ⁷⁰ Havelock Ellis, Letter to George M. Gould (24 June 1908), George M. Gould Collection, Library of Congress, Box 7, Gould Correspondence, June to August 1908.
- ⁷¹ Catherine Maxwell, 'Scent, the Body, and the Cosmopolitan Flaireur: John Addington Symonds and Lafcadio Hearn', in *Scents and Sensibility: Perfume in Victorian Literary Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 135–81 (p. 135). For a similarly perceptive discussion of Hearn's interest in colour see Stefano Evangelista, 'Symphonies in Haze and Blue: Lafcadio Hearn and the Colours of Japan', in *The Colours of the Past in Victorian England*, ed. by Charlotte Ribeyrol (Peter Lang, 2016), pp. 71–94.
- ⁷² Kathryn Webb-Destefano, 'Seeing and Non-being: Lafcadio Hearn, Blindness, and Collapsing Boundaries of Transnational Aesthetics', in *The Oxford Handbook of Disability and Literature in English, Vol. 3 (1700-1900)*, ed. by Essaka Joshua (Oxford University Press, forthcoming), [n.p.].
- ⁷³ Fraser Riddell, 'Lafcadio Hearn, Sensory Description and Decadent Style: A Neurodiversity Studies Approach', in *The Role of Narrative in the Medical and Health Humanities: Questions of Method, Scale, Genre, and Form*, ed. by Alexandra Effe and Melissa Schuh (De Gruyter, forthcoming), [n.p.].
- ⁷⁴ Mark W. Turner, 'Seriality, Miscellaneity, and Compression in Nineteenth-Century Print', *Victorian Studies*, 62.2 (Winter 2020), pp. 283–94.
- ⁷⁵ Hearn, Letter to William H. Patten (28 November 1889), Lafcadio Hearn Collection, Container 2.1, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas.
- ⁷⁶ Hugo von Hofmannsthal, 'Umriss eines neuen Journalismus', in Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. by Rudolf Hirsch and others, 40 vols (Fischer, 1975–), *Reden und Aufsätze* 2, ed. by Konrad Heumann and Ellen Ritter (2009), XXXIII, pp. 149–51 (p. 149).
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 150.
- ⁷⁸ Thérèse Bentzon, 'Un Peintre du Japon: Lafcadio Hearn', *Revue des Deux Mondes* (June 1904), pp. 556–92.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 556.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 556–57.
- ⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 558.
- ⁸³ 'Poems in Prose', *New Statesman*, 24 January 1925, p. 450.
- ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁵ Hearn, Letter to Ellwood Hendrick (December 1894), *Life and Letters*, II, p. 187.

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 *Kvaidan* 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-Dajjin* [...]'.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.

Lafcadio Hearn's Proto-Buddhist, 'Oceanic' Caribbean Vision

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Lafcadio Hearn's early writings relating to the sea and evolution are precursors to what I call the cosmic or oceanic meditations of the later work, where the (Buddhist) oceanic quality of time and space takes a central place in his thinking about the universe. As has been shown, Hearn was one of the first European Victorians to imaginatively engage with Buddhism, fitting his own lived experience to ancient ideas newly (re)discovered and conveyed to the West from Indian, Ceylonese, Chinese, and Japanese texts, made available by the work of academic Buddhologists like Eugène Burnouf and Max Müller.¹ Such works introduced a whole new paradigm of thinking, enabling new ways of conceiving reality, which has continued for nearly two centuries with the gradual transmission and transculturation of Buddhist concepts out of its heartlands and into other fields and cultures the world over. In this article I address some of Hearn's earliest Buddhist tendencies in his Caribbean writings, his painterly descriptions of land- and sea-scapes, and how these meld into vast synaesthetic mindscapes, intimations of deeper and timeless truths – of borderless infinity and incessant change, and the transitoriness of experience. Once these writings begin to be seen within the framework of the developing Buddhist ontology in Hearn's *œuvre*, as outlined in *The Neo-Buddhist Writings of Lafcadio Hearn*, Hearn's early tropical writing takes on a deeper significance and dimension – as a precursor and preparation for that greater framework, that deeper ontology that flowers in Japan.

In 'Two Painters of the Tropics: Lafcadio Hearn and Paul Gauguin in Martinique', Mary Louise Vincent points out that the writer and painter were in Martinique at the same time in 1887 though they did not meet.² For Hearn, as for the French painter, the experience was 'primarily visual'.³ His medium was 'word pictures' and a certain 'impressionism' which this article will interrogate and expand upon.⁴ Vincent is right to discern that Hearn's canvases – canvases of the

mind and meditations on reality, as will shortly become clear – owe something to Pierre Loti and have some affinity with Paul Gauguin's *Paysages martiniquais*.⁵ She is right, too, about the central quality of these writings: the bold use of colour and the 'visual delight' of the pieces.⁶ Finally, Vincent touches on the qualities of the writing itself, particularly Hearn's use of 'verbals' (past and present participles) to create a sense of 'texture, form, and line as well as color'.⁷

In this article I expand upon such ideas to suggest that Hearn's Caribbean writings may be seen as precursors to the later Buddhist 'meditations' of the Japanese period, on the oceanic nature of reality. *The Neo-Buddhist Writings of Lafcadio Hearn: Light from the East* (2020), my book on Hearn, shows the development in the writer of a Buddhist vision of existence, which began to find expression in his American writings (from his arrival in America till 1890) and then blossomed and flowered into the later works of his Japanese period (1890 to 1904). The book shows in outline the development of Hearn's interest in the intersections between evolutionary science, physics, and Buddhism, concentrating on a central idea that runs throughout Hearn's work: the 'persistence of force' and its relation to, and implications for, *karma*.⁸ This resonant synergy of ideas, scientific and religious, is at the heart of Hearn's interest in the afterlife and ghost stories, in his writings of the American period, as well as the Japanese.

But the idea of the 'persistence of force' also explains Hearn's interest, while he was in America, in the marginal, the derelict, and the dying – beings both human and animal in the liminal spaces of society and life. This outer spectrum of existence is seen in such articles as 'SPCA Notes' (first published in *The Item*, 25 March 1879), 'Some Pictures of Poverty' (first published in *The Commercial*, 7 January 1877), and 'Les Chiffonniers' (first published in *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 26 July 1874).⁹ The last evokes desolate cityscapes – somewhere between Charles Dickens's slums and Gustave Doré's hellscapes – and descriptions of rag-pickers, deformed and stunted people. Nevertheless, as with both the French and British artists, Hearn's focus, in what might be called his rag-picker journalism, relates ultimately to transformation and regeneration, and the articles and essays of this period may be seen as first steps in a redefinition of what experience is, of what

gives rise to life and consciousness: these texts offer a deeper and more expanded sense of what it means to be human. This is most explicitly seen in such sketches as ‘When I was a Flower’, published first in *The Item*, 13 August 1880, or ‘Metempsychosis’ in the same newspaper on 7 September 1880.¹⁰ Hearn comes to the realization, gradual but increasingly compelling, in what he calls the ‘Fantastics’ of his American period, of a deeper and novel sense of the connections between the living and the dead: of how the living depend on, and feed off, the dead; and of how they are, indeed, connected to them physically as well as karmically.¹¹ We are, in so many ways, our dead. Stories of death – and more importantly dying – are everywhere in Hearn.¹² The iconic Hearnian metaphor of the ‘persistence of force’ in this period is the flower growing out of the grave of the dead beloved, which functions to frame the relations between the living and the dead, and the interdependence of the organic and the inorganic. The scent of the flower embodies the essence and energy of the deceased, and infuses what Hearn, in a story entitled ‘A Name in the Plaza’ originally published on 3 June 1885, calls a ‘dark alchemy by which flesh is transmuted into leaves and fruit – by which blood is transformed into blossom’.¹³ The senses and the very body of the being of the lover lingering by the grave, or passing by it, become one with it, wittingly or not. Such symbols are profoundly Romantic because they are primarily concerned with totalities and interconnection. They are decadent, too, in their engagement with the fecund imaginary of decay and death that underlies much of Hearn’s American journalism especially.¹⁴

And yet this work may also, in light of the above, be seen as proto-Buddhist, as occasioning meditations on impermanence and metempsychosis (a word Hearn uses interchangeably with ‘reincarnation’ and ‘transformation’) rather than, simply (and less charitably), as the morbid sensationalism in his early American writings of which Hearn was so often accused by his contemporaries and early biographers.¹⁵ Strangers become intimates in ways that transcend human consciousness – though we might call it *karma* or ‘love’ – and such Hearnian meditations redefine relations between apparently unrelated beings, as well as between the past (the dead) and the present (what *is*). An important aspect of this idea is that the interrelations between the inanimate

and animate are infinitely more complex than allowed for in any anthropocentric view of reality, and are ultimately unknowable (except, perhaps, to the enlightened). My book discusses such ideas, mostly in the ‘Fantastics’ and journalism of the American period, but also in the ghost stories of the Japanese period, and shows that these apparently morbid texts may be understood as meditations on the ‘persistence of force’ and the relations of all living things to a vast – and living – ‘dead’ precedence.¹⁶

Such relations are fundamental to the stories Hearn tells, and are, indeed, at the basis of the plot of his novella *Chita: A Memory of Last Island* (1886). From New Orleans he writes to his friend H. E. Krehbiel in October 1885 that he ‘dream[s] of a novel, or a novelette, to be constructed upon totally novel principles’ and says that underlying it is ‘the idea of evolutionary fiction’.¹⁷ A year later he writes again of what would become *Chita* and of how it shows ‘my fantastic metaphysics’: ‘I am writing a novelette. [...] It will be all divided into microscopic chapters of a page or half-a-page each. Every one of these is to be a little picture, with some novel features. Some touches of evolutionary philosophy.’¹⁸ And indeed, *Chita* is the story of a girl who is the sole survivor of a hurricane on the Louisiana coast. It demonstrates how the past inheres in the present: as the eponymous character’s father, Julien, lies in a fever at the point of death on the island which is now Chita’s home, rescued from his oceanic search for her, he sees his long-lost daughter in the moments before he dies, and the traces of her mother in the girl’s presence. Chita Viostra, on the other hand, will never know she has been with her father, and his joy is liminal, momentary. Like ‘Torn Letters’ (published first in the *Times-Democrat* of 14 September 1884), another text associated with the Louisiana coast, with death and love, this is a story of connection, of seeing, and yet not fully *knowing* connection.¹⁹ Significantly, that story, like *Chita*, is a story of love and loss, set on seaboards, in the Gulf of Mexico, in oceanic worlds – usefully defined by John Wharton Lowe as the ‘circum-Caribbean’ – from which all things come, and which brings things into consciousness from deep and from afar off in space and time.²⁰ In Buddhism, oceanic imagery is often associated

with interrelatedness and oneness, and also with death and the *bardos* of discovery – and the enlightenment potential in these liminal states.²¹

The ocean in Hearn's work of the period and in Japan is associated with such uncovering and discovery. It is in the context of these ideas that I wish to consider the oceanic meditations inherent in Hearn's Caribbean travelogues. There is a synaesthetic physicality to these, as well as, paradoxically, a meditative diaphanousness and sense of emptiness: whether the narrator is describing the vast blue-green ocean about him, or a new world arising hazy and purpling like a phantom from the sea as his ship nears it, a silent silhouette through the mist that belies the rocky physicality of the island foretokened, the accounts of his voyages and sojourns in the Caribbean show a new interest in the natural physical world writ large as a manifestation of some of the Buddhist ideas that were beginning to shape Hearn's thought. The texts are compulsively focused on the light and energy and the vast insubstantiality of apparent reality, and may be seen as precursors to the meditations on reality of the Japanese period, the 'oceanic meditations' of *Neo-Buddhist Writings* that are set, for example, in the seaside retreat of Yaidzu, or in Yokohama Bay with Mount Fuji in the background – foreshadowed (as is so often the case in the Hearnian imaginary of the *œuvre* as a whole) by Mount Pelée in Martinique.²²

'A Midsummer Trip to the Tropics'

I shall consider 'A Midsummer Trip to the Tropics' from Vol. III of the sixteen-volume Koizumi Edition of Hearn's works, *Two Years in The French West Indies*, as well as refer to other sketches of this period collected as *Martinique Sketches*: 'La Pelée', 'Ma Bonne', and 'Pa Combiné, Chè'.²³ None of these texts is examined in my book, which concentrates on other works of this period – notably stories from *Stray Leaves from Strange Literatures*, and *Fantastics and Other Fancies* – and makes clear the proto-Buddhism of the latter.²⁴

'A Midsummer Trip to the Tropics' was first published in three monthly parts or 'papers' from July till September 1888 in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, and was entitled 'A Midsummer

'Trip to the West Indies'. This travelogue was later revised and incorporated into the larger book project – *Two Years in the French West Indies* – in 1889, while Hearn was living at the residence of Dr George Milbry Gould in Philadelphia.²⁵ In an interesting analysis of 'Midsummer Trip', Peter Bailey shows that the changes between the original text as it appeared in *Harper's*, and the text as it appears in the first book version, indicate how Hearn constructs what Bailey calls the 'rhetoric of colonial decadence' against the "'negro-radical" rule' feared by the 'plantocracy'.²⁶ Bailey examines Hearn's construction, in rewriting, of a 'postlapsarian rhetoric' using what Laura Brown calls 'the rhetoric of acquisition' which is set against 'Hearn's paradisaical representations of Martinique'.²⁷ All of this shows that Hearn was very much a man of his times – employing, as John Lowe puts it, many of the usual stereotypes about colonial subjects. Lowe writes compellingly of Hearn's 'colonizing gaze', yet also notes that Hearn manages, in the end, to somewhat 'transcend his racial biases'.²⁸ I hope in this article to show a redeeming side of Hearn's vision – one which valorises the colonial subject in part, and celebrates and loves the abundance of 'coloured' life. For unlike as with the two studies just referenced, this article is not immediately political, and no ideological rhetorizing is evident in textual revisions – only artistic ones. These will be pointed out if they are relevant stylistically.

'Midsummer Trip' describes a return voyage Hearn took on the *SS Barracouta*, beginning in July 1887, from New York to the Windward Islands, particularly Martinique, returning in August-September, only to leave again – this time for eighteen months – to sojourn in Saint Pierre on Martinique and the village of Mourne Rouge during an outbreak of smallpox. The first part of the journey was, as he says in the 'Preface' to *Two Years*, a 'voyage of nearly three thousand miles, accomplished in less than two months'.²⁹

'Midsummer Trip' is the most colour-filled of all Hearn's writings. The journey begins on a 'gray' morning at Pier 49 on the East River and, as the ship moves out to sea, the narrator begins his extended meditation on the blueness of the sea, ever-changing, ever-deepening:

The morning is still gray, but the sun is dissolving the haze. Gradually the gray vanishes, and a beautiful, pale, vapory blue – a spiritualized Northern blue – colors water and sky. A cannon-shot suddenly shakes the heavy air: it is our farewell to the American shore; – we move. Back floats the wharf, and becomes vapory with a bluish tinge. Diaphanous mists seem to have caught the sky color; and even the great red storehouses take a faint blue tint as they recede. The horizon now has a greenish glow. Everywhere else the effect is that of looking through very light-blue glasses....³⁰

The daily intensification of the blue as the ship sails further towards the Sargasso Sea and Caribbean is dramatized by an ‘old French gentleman from Guadeloupe’ who comments, from sections II through IX of the account, on the narrator’s reactions to the sea’s colour: ‘[...] he declares it greenish (verdâtre) [sic]. Because I cannot discern the green he tells me I do not yet know what blue water is. Attendez un peu! ...’.³¹ He will have to wait till he gets to the Caribbean to see, as the old gentleman puts it, the ‘true blue of the tropics!’³²

The shock of discovery of the ever-changing and deepening blue is minutely described throughout the text, from moment to moment – ‘now ... then ... now’, as the days are enumerated and pass, and they sail further into the unknown. The sense of the passing of time is, like the colours arising from it and expressive of it, also acutely documented in Hearn’s essay. The deepening colour scenes are couched in a continuous, ever-changing, present. The sea is ‘spectral blue’, ‘[t]hen [...] pale-green lights play through it’, and ‘now the whole world is blue – not the least cloud is visible; and the perfect transparency and voidness about us make the immense power of this invisible medium seem something ghostly and awful ...’.³³ The blue has an ethereal, spectral quality and is variously described as: deepening into ‘ultramarine’, ‘spectral blue’, ‘glaucous’, ‘greenish black’, ‘blazing azure’, ‘azure splendor’, ‘flaming, dazzling lazulite’.³⁴ In the *Harper’s* version this is ‘a flaming, dazzling lapis-lazuli’.³⁵ The noun in the original suggests a sudden sense of opacity and hardness – present elsewhere in the sub-stream of the text in the metaphors of flashing and sparkling jewels and precious stones, gold and silver: the ocean flips instantly, subconsciously, from watery transparent depth to flashing, hard solidity, and back again. And in the changing moods of the sea seen in these colours (and the textures and elements that give them

their names) there is a sense of an energy and light present in the world, arising and emanating out of the sea. This sense of its ever-presence is captured in the present participles that dominate Hearn's account of the voyage and the islands: the 'huge tumbling of mountain-purple waves', the 'indigo sea [...] ocean color is deepening' into 'an opulent pansy hue' till, with the approaching night, the perspective drifting closer to the ship itself, it turns 'black-blue', 'the sea-circle [...] black as Acheron'.³⁶ Time is central: the evolution of each day, and days in succession to days, are described by the bewitched narrator. At intervals the narrator remarks on the reflected starlight, and the Milky Way and Southern Cross appear rhythmically throughout the text, almost as perceptual anchors in the mind of the observing consciousness rocked by the rhythms of the sea and the overwhelming vast oneness of the observable universe, above as below.³⁷ Indeed, in a slightly later story 'A Winter Journey to Japan' (first published in *Harper's* in June 1890) Hearn will pick up these colours and textures – the patterns of texture and colour spread across the *œuvre*, from text to text, that should be considered as deep patterns in the Hearnian imaginary – and characterise the sea as inky black.³⁸ This is a suggestive and satisfying deep metaphor for a writer and creative such as Hearn, who writes worlds into being, black ink upon blank white (or yellowish) paper, and whose thinking was, as we have seen in this article, 'oceanic'.

In all of this deepening and darkening world, whether at night or during the day, or at the liminal moments of transition,³⁹ the sea echoes the colours and moods of the sky and there is a sense of the interconnectedness of the whole visible spectrum of light, of all that is energy: whether it is the natural translucency of water, or the phosphor trails of the ship's single propeller, or the sun and the stars' light reflected upon the sea, above and below become one vast continuity, or indeed the orb of the sun setting orange and 'spectral' upon the 'monstrous disk' of the horizon, as the yellow light mingles with the blackening yet glittering blue to produce a whole new spectrum of greens (which we shall see picked up later in descriptions of island arboreal vegetation):

Now the horizon is gold green. All about the falling sun, this gold-green light takes vast expansion.... Right on the edge of the sea is a tall, gracious ship, sailing

sunsetward. Catching the vapory fire, she seems to become a phantom – a ship of gold mist: all her spars and sails are luminous, and look like things seen in dreams.

Crimsoning more and more, the sun drops to the sea. The phantom ship approaches him – touches the curve of his glowing face, sails right athwart it! Oh, the spectral splendor of that vision! The whole great ship in full sail instantly makes an acute silhouette against the monstrous disk – rests there in the very middle of the vermillion sun. His face crimson high above her topmasts – broadens far beyond helm and bowsprit. Against this weird magnificence, her whole shape changes color: hull, masts, and sails turn black – a greenish black.

Sun and ship vanish together in another minute. Violet the night comes; and the rigging of the foremast cuts a cross upon the face of the moon.⁴⁰

Besides this universal irradiation and almost Hopkinsian merging of light in light, there is also a sense of the emptiness and ghostliness of experience: the ‘phantom’ ship, the ‘spectral vision’, things appearing and disappearing into the ever-changing kaleidoscope of reality, and the sub-stream, as noted heretofore, of metaphors colouring the mindscape of the reader: gold and silver, light and dark, flashing burning jewel-like hardness and cold elemental wateriness, to name but a few of the text’s governing deep metaphors. Such scenes are more than merely seascapes: they are, in my view, mindscapes – and are thus amongst Hearn’s first ‘oceanic meditations’, such as I describe in my book, and which are associated with Yaidzu, Fujisan, Yokohama Bay.⁴¹ In all of these writings both in the ‘circum-Caribbean’ and in Japan, there is the sea; always the idea of the oceanic nature of existence, of being. It is at once full and empty, embodied and ghostly, multifarious and unitary, glittering surface, dark and infinite depth. The very language of the text plays with and mixes grammatical elements: in the passage above ‘light blue’ is at once a complex compound of two nouns each of a different abstract type (light and blueness) but fuses in its following instance into the adjectival ‘light-blue’. It is as though the mixing of the energies of experience is spilling over into the categories of the language used to express this: a kind of grammatical synaesthesia and a vertigo. Even the strange distortion, at the end of the passage, of noun and preposition show the vertiginous topsy-turviness of the moment: the ‘foremast cuts a cross on the face of the moon’. Here verb and direct object (noun) fuse to become (if read slightly faster, more breathlessly) the prepositional, ‘across’ succeeded directly by another preposition –

‘on’. The height of the black ‘foremast’ collapsing – or perhaps instantly expanding – into the brilliant moon echoes the Southern Cross anchoring the whole meditation (as we saw above) and foreshadows the vertiginous heights of Mount Pelée suspended above Saint Pierre, which, in turn, is suspended above the glassy, void depths of the bay below (as we shall shortly see). A few pages later in Part VI, the ‘Southern Cross [...] is only the *suggestion* of a cross’: just as these images and deep pictures arise from the pattern-making mind looking at experience, so the stars (the speaker tells us) emerge in patterns from the vast ocean of space.⁴² Light and dark instantly transform into their opposites, and back again, in the meditation of the overwhelmed and breathless speaker. ‘Night’ is ‘violet’ and ‘violet’ ‘night’, in yet another gentle synaesthetic shock. It is almost as if the speaker has arrived at what we now call a flow-state, in which the minutest of verbal energies can transpose or overturn perception in an instant, and back again. This is the basis of Buddhist insight into the transient nature of reality, and Hearn is finding it here, in phenomena, and in the word-streams and patterns that arise from them in his meditating, and mediating, perception.

After a week at sea the islands begin to appear, also ghost-like, and made of the same ‘substance’, the colours, as sky and sea: as they steam on Santa Cruz, the island looms almost like a continuation of the waves, a ‘great gray mountain shape’:⁴³

The shape is still vapory, varying in coloring from purplish to bright gray; but wherever peaks and spurs fully catch the sun⁴⁴ they edge themselves with a beautiful green glow, while interlying ravines seem filled with foggy blue.

As we approach,⁴⁵ sunlighted surfaces come out still more luminously green. Glens and sheltered valleys still hold blues and grays; but points fairly illuminated by the solar glow show just such a fiery green as burns in the plumage of certain humming-birds. And just as the lustrous colors of these birds shift according to changes of light, so the island shifts colors here and there – from emerald to blue, and blue to gray....⁴⁶

Here the mediating consciousness moves seamlessly from sea to land, with even its minutest denizens the humming-birds seen as part of this established spectrum. Again, there is verbal play on stasis in motion (using a favourite Hearn wordplay: ‘still’ fused into adjective and adverb), in ‘sunlighted surfaces come out still’. Arising and falling in an instant, the moment passes, and the

same spectral yet sensuous green-blue vapoury quality is seen in the next destinations: St Kitts, Dominica, and, finally, Martinique: ‘all gray, a vapory gray; then [...] bluish-gray; then all green’.⁴⁷ The continuities between sea and sky and land are eroded: all is one vast and ever-changing spectrum of energies, waves of light.

The island townscape and the landscape itself are examined in ways that contain the same elements as the colour of the seascape mindscapes that the observer on the voyage thus far has been constructing, though there is a shift from the blue range of the spectrum to the more earthy colours – yellows, oranges, and foliage-greens.⁴⁸ The scale of the scene changes, however, to become more human and local, and there is an increased sense of vertiginousness, of suspension in nothingness, as ‘[w]e anchor in limpid blue water’ in the harbour city of Saint Pierre.⁴⁹ Perhaps this is due to the sense of relative scale, of the human dimensions of the town intruding into the elemental meditation on the spaces of the sea, seen *sub specie aeternitatis*. So, for example, there are Hearn’s descriptions of the harbour, of the *SS Barraconta*’s passengers watching the ‘nearly white soles’ of the boys’ ‘upturned feet’ diving into the clear depths beneath the ship; or of this crystalline volume of water-space perceived from the steep streets of the town; or of the volcano above (to be later echoed in the ghostly Mount Fuji he will see from aboard his ship to Japan).⁵⁰ All of these carry the same sense of sensual dislocation, of being hanging in suspension, the ships hanging in the water above their shadows below. There is a vertiginousness to the narrator’s ‘bird’s-eye view’ of ‘descending to the harbor – by flights of old mossy stone steps – that looking down them to the azure water you have the sensation of gazing from a cliff’ with the ‘roofs of the street below [...] under your feet, and other streets [...] rising behind you to meet the mountain roads’.⁵¹ And again, there is a sense of balance in the scene with the ‘gentian-blue sky overhead’⁵² echoed on the horizontal with bursts of sea blue through the nearby-below roofs, and the azure bay below and beyond these:

On the lower side of the main thoroughfare other streets open in wonderful bursts of blue – warm blue of horizon and sea. The steps by which these ways⁵³ descend toward the bay are black with age, and slightly mossed close to the wall on either side: they

have an alarming steepness⁵⁴ – one might easily stumble from the upper into the lower street.⁵⁵ Looking towards the water through these openings from the Grande Rue, you will notice⁵⁶ that the sea-line cuts across the⁵⁷ blue space just at the level of the upper story of the house on the lower street-corner. Sometimes, a hundred feet below, you see a ship resting in the azure aperture –⁵⁸ seemingly suspended there in sky-color, floating in blue light.⁵⁹

This whole scene is bound together by the subtextual metaphor-image of the water channels cascading, sparkling, gurgling and glittering through Saint Pierre, from mountain streams to the bay below.⁶⁰ It is as though a synaesthetic stream of light and sound and sensation ties all together. The final view downwards, of the bay, sensual, verbless – timeless and still in the mind – crystallises the vision: '[s]hips at anchor in blue water, against golden-yellow horizon. A vast blue glow. Water clear as diamond, and lukewarm.'⁶¹

The vertiginousness of this and the later ascent up the 'burning green of the lofty island',⁶² up volcanic Mont Pelée covered in 'green fire' to where the narrator looks back, thousands of feet down to the present scene, has a certain pathos given Hearn's own visual disability.⁶³ The \$106 camera he bought in New York was all but useless to him in these tropics of the mind's eye.⁶⁴ The confusion of the sensual profusions with which the Caribbean world met him must have been at once delightful and painful. And one gets the sense here – as in the mature Japanese essay-meditations, and the 'oceanic meditations' on reality – that the very patterning of his vision and his writing – the spectrum of colour-energies from blue through green through yellow to the profusion of the reds of fruit and life to the gentians of elemental eternity, of fire and spark and stone – the very imagery and words and alliterative sounds in these texts – enact a balance and calming, a kind of psycho-sensual anchoring in the chaotic profusion of loveliness and existential wonder that had opened up on this voyage.

Stefano Evangelista has done excellent work on Hearn's use of colour, especially in the context of Japan, and 'international decadence', the effect of (particularly) the French Symbolists on Hearn, and the use of colour in his Japanese writing.⁶⁵ He shows that much of Hearn's 'art writing' is ekphrastic, placing the art object at the centre of his 'translations' of Japanese culture.⁶⁶

Evangelista's analysis of the history and deeper significances of colours – especially blue in Japan and in Hearn's vision – sheds light on the deeper significance of blue in some of Hearn's 'art writing'. Of most direct relevance here is his observation that the style of the *ukiyo-e* seems present in Hearn's land- and skiescapes to achieve what Hearn calls 'Cosmic Emotion' (in an essay of 1898 called 'Azure Psychology').⁶⁷ Blue, he points out, is the colour of ghostliness.⁶⁸ And finally, Evangelista observes the parallel between the traditional Japanese technique called '*aizuri* – a mode of printing that uses only the colour blue, in several shades, on white backgrounds' and Hearn's own verbal painting: he observes that often the blue haze of the phenomenal world is offset by lighter tints – almost as though to mimic the glassiness of the effect of the *aizuri* and the layering of lacquer over the paint.⁶⁹ In light of this observation these very effects are evident, as we have seen, in 'Midsummer Trip': the recurring base 'gray'; the silver and golden lights in the sea and sky; the gem-like sparking of the sea's surface; the phosphorescence in darkening water; the starlight and Milky Way above – all of these recurring images suggest that Hearn had a natural understanding, as of a watercolourist, that depth cannot be achieved unless by a trick of surface light. And in the sub-stream of the text, too, the repetition of an element or motif like the clear sparkling, gushing mountain streams pouring through Saint Pierre seems intentional and analogous to this – silver sparkling streams of light from sky, to rivulets, through stone water channels, flowing to the sea, fusing above and below into a continuum of the senses such as that which he sees in Pierre Loti's synaesthetic 'word-paintings' and 'verbal photographs'.⁷⁰ The sound of the sparkling water mingles with imaginations of light – just as (say) the texture and feel of the colours is accentuated in moments when their base elements are elicited, as we have seen Hearn do in 'Midsummer Trip': 'indigo', 'lapis lazuli', silver, gold, gemstones of all colours.⁷¹ The same can be said of Hearn that he says of Loti's 'exquisite notework': '[f]or mere description of external objects alone forms but a small part of the charm of his books; – he subjoined notes of the thoughts and fancies also which such impressions of sight, sound, or smell produced in the mind; and thus his work is as much introspective [as] it is retrospective'.⁷²

Conclusion

What, then, do we make of this vision? I have tried to show that Hearn's 'circum-Caribbean' voyages may be seen as belonging to his developing Buddhist view of the changing oneness of reality, which, indeed, is most beautifully expressed in his Japanese essay-meditations, the 'oceanic' works. There, as in the travelogue discussed here, the ocean is a metaphor for reality, and Hearn's trip to Martinique allowed him to experience the world anew, in a proto-Buddhist way.

Perhaps understanding this helps to explain more fully the animosity which arose at the very moment he was in Martinique, between Hearn and Dr George Gould, the Philadelphia ophthalmologist who became his best friend – and worst enemy – at this time. I have written about their extended encounter in 'Lafcadio Hearn and George Gould's "Philosophy of Spectacles": The story of a Buddhist-Christian encounter' as well as in my book on Hearn's Buddhism.⁷³ In both places I have surmised that it was Hearn's friendship with, and love for, women of colour on Martinique and elsewhere – as set forth in essays from *Martinique Sketches* like 'Ma Bonne' and 'Pa Combiné, Chè' – that triggered Gould and caused him to attack Hearn's faulty eyesight as being at the root of an atheistic defective vision of the world.⁷⁴ This new and boundaryless – this colourful in the greater sense – world of energy and delight, was terrifying to Gould. Adam Rothman discerns a 'tropicality' (borrowing from Edward Said's 'Orientalism') in Hearn's New Orleans and Caribbean writings. The tropics, he reminds us, were (and still sometimes are) associated with religious deviation and a 'degenerative power' that was 'either Paradise or Hell'.⁷⁵ Ironically, in May 1902, Saint Pierre was destroyed when Pelée erupted, making a Hell of this Paradise, and showing the transience of all things in the most terrifyingly physical form.

Just as in Buddhist vision the lotus blossoms from the mud, so Hearn's Caribbean writings of the later 1880s flower from the grime of destitution, the poverty and darkness described in the earlier journalistic writings mentioned at the outset of this article as part – even these – of Hearn's incipient Buddhism. His new vision, even as his physical eyesight is deteriorating, is lotus-like, a

celebration of the effusion of light and a deepening of his understanding of reality. ‘Midsummer Trip’ is at the opposite end of the spectrum that begins in the degradations Hearn revealed and discussed in his early rag-picker journalism: the diaphanous blue-green sea- and landscapes, the elementals of experience, the ocean of myriad blues, blue-greens, and reddening, golden sunsets, and the lilac evenings and black inkiness of water and night, shot through with the silver light of stars and an inner, churning phosphorescence. Like Gauguin, Hearn made sense of reality through light and colour and form in these Caribbean ‘aquarelles’ and the experiences and attitudes he took away with him to Japan would find their ultimate Buddhist expression there.⁷⁶

¹ John Antony Goedhals, *The Neo-Buddhist Writings of Lafcadio Hearn: Light from the East* (Brill, 2020), p. 141.

² Mary Louise Vincent, ‘Two Painters of the Tropics: Lafcadio Hearn and Paul Gauguin in Martinique’, *Caribbean Studies*, 10.3 (1970), pp. 172–81 (p. 181).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 178 and 179.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 180–81.

⁸ For the ‘persistence of force’, see, especially, *Neo-Buddhist Writings*, p. 1; for *karma*, see *Neo-Buddhist Writings*, pp. 74–76; pp. 113–16; pp. 162–65.

⁹ ‘SPCA Notes’, in *Lafcadio Hearn’s American Articles: Buying Christmas Toys and Other Essays*, 5 vols, ed. by Ichiro Nishizaki (Hokuseido Press, 1939), II, pp. 156–58; ‘Some Pictures of Poverty’, in *Miscellanies by Lafcadio Hearn*, 2 vols, ed. by Albert Mordell (Heinemann, 1924), I, pp. 214–27; ‘Les Chiffonniers’, in *Lafcadio Hearn’s American Articles: Barbarous Barbers and Other Stories*, 5 vols, ed. by Ichiro Nishizaki (Hokuseido Press, 1939), V, pp. 55–65.

¹⁰ In *Stray Leaves from Strange Literature and Fantastic and Other Fancies*, in *The Writings of Lafcadio Hearn*, 16 vols (Houghton Mifflin, 1923), II, pp. 257–78; pp. 259–62.

¹¹ In a letter to H. E. Krehbiel written sometime in 1880, he explains that these are imaginative explorations of these extremes of the human condition: the ‘Fantastics’ have ‘one twin-idea running through them all – Love and Death’, in *Life and Letters*, in *Writings of Lafcadio Hearn*, XIII, p. 211.

¹² See, for example, ‘Gibbeted’ published in *The Cincinnati Commercial* on 26 August 1876, where he feels the dwindling pulse of a hanged man, in *Lafcadio Hearn’s American Articles: Barbarous Barbers*, pp. 220–37; or ‘Two Curious Cases of Suicide’, first published in *The Item* on 12 Oct 1879, in *Lafcadio Hearn’s American Articles: The New Radiancy and Other Scientific Sketches*, 5 vols, ed. by Ichiro Nishizaki (Hokuseido Press, 1939), I, pp. 123–25; or, finally, an article about the dissection of human bodies, ‘The Dance of Death’, first published in *The Cincinnati Enquirer* on 3 May 1874, in *Lafcadio Hearn’s American Articles: The New Radiancy*, pp. 129–37.

¹³ In *Diary of an Impressionist, Creole Sketches, Chinese Ghosts*, in *Writings of Lafcadio Hearn*, I, pp. 30–36.

¹⁴ See, in particular, *Neo-Buddhist Writings*, pp. 133–43.

¹⁵ In *Neo-Buddhist Writings* I explain how critical writing on Hearn has always tended to be ‘bio-critical’, the life and the work being seen in his case as particularly interwoven: see, especially, pp. 42–45.

¹⁶ See, especially, *Neo-Buddhist Writings*, pp. 202–06.

¹⁷ In *Life and Letters of Lafcadio Hearn*, 2 vols, ed. by Elizabeth Bisland (Houghton Mifflin, 1906), I, p. 352.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 370.

¹⁹ Lafcadio Hearn, ‘Torn Letters’, in *Miscellanies by Lafcadio Hearn*, 2 vols, ed. by Albert Mordell (Heinemann, 1924), II, pp. 56–65. Edward Laforgue Tinker writes contemptuously of Hearn’s encounter on the island with Marie, a ‘dusky islander’ on l’Île Dernière, Last Island, where he holidayed in the Gulf of Mexico, in *Lafcadio Hearn’s American Days* (Dodd, Mead, 1925), pp. 220–21.

²⁰ John Wharton Lowe, *Calypto Magnolia: The Crosscurrents of Caribbean and Southern Literature* (University of North Carolina Press, 2016), p. x.

- ²¹ Almost certainly Hearn had not read about ‘the *bardo*’: it is only after Walter Evans Wentz’s publication in 1927 of the translation into English of the *Bardo Thödol*, the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, that the idea in this form, using this word, became known in the West. See Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead, or The After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane, according to Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup’s English Rendering* (Oxford University Press, 1927). And yet, Hearn seems to have understood the notion *a priori*, since it is inherent in Buddhist philosophy and incorporated into his neo-Buddhist vision, in the meditations he created out of Japanese ghost stories, and past lives.
- ²² For further discussion of ‘oceanic meditations’, see entries in ‘Index’, *Neo-Buddhist Writings*, p. 241.
- ²³ Part 2 of *Martinique Sketches* is contained in the volume *Two Years in The French West Indies*, in the collection *Writings of Lafcadio Hearn*, IV, pp. 47–111. All references to ‘Midsummer Trip’ are also to this collected edition of *Two Years in the French West Indies* (*Writings of Lafcadio Hearn*, III, pp. 1–112). ‘Midsummer Trip’ is thus hereafter referenced as being in *Two Years*. It should be noted that *The Writings of Lafcadio Hearn* were published in late 1922 as the Koizumi Edition, the year before the 1923 issue of the same edition, which is being quoted in this essay. The Koizumi Edition was a single printing project from late 1922 to early 1923. The 1922 deluxe edition of Hearn’s work was limited to 750 copies, and sold for the benefit of Hearn’s widow, Setsuko Koizumi, and their three children. Shortly after this 1922 ‘first issue’, the 1923 ‘second issue’ was published for wider distribution in the West.
- ²⁴ *Writings of Lafcadio Hearn*, II, pp. 1–194; II, pp. 195–386.
- ²⁵ See Paul Murray, *A Fantastic Journey: The Life and Literature of Lafcadio Hearn* (Japan Library, 1993), pp. 97–98.
- ²⁶ Peter A. A. Bailey, ‘Deforestation and Decolonization: Lafcadio Hearn’s French Antillean Writing’, *Volupté: Interdisciplinary Journal of Decadence Studies*, 6.1 (2023), pp. 1–19 (pp. 6, 8, and 11).
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 13, and 17.
- ²⁸ John Wharton Lowe, *Calypso Magnolia*, pp. 178 and 184.
- ²⁹ *Two Years*, III, p. vi.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- ³² *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- ³³ *Ibid.* pp. 4–5.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8, pp. 4–6 and 9–10.
- ³⁵ Lafcadio Hearn, ‘A Midsummer Trip to the West Indies’, First Paper, *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, 77 (June/November, 1888), pp. 209–26 (p. 211). The title of the initial magazine version differs from its final title as part of *Two Years in the French West Indies*.
- ³⁶ *Two Years*, III, pp. 11–13.
- ³⁷ For references to the Milky Way and Southern Cross see *Two Years*, III, pp. 13 and 23.
- ³⁸ ‘A Winter Journey to Japan’, in *Miscellanies by Lafcadio Hearn*, 2 vols, ed. by Albert Mordell (Heinemann, 1924), II, pp. 243–65. Hearn writes of his first taste of Japanese waters off the coast of Japan: ‘Remembering the wondrous azure stream of the Atlantic tropics, I had hoped to look again here upon a rich luminous water: it is black as its Japanese name; – the sea is a waste of ink!’, pp. 261–62. ‘Umi’ in Japanese means both ‘sea’ and ‘dark’: the radicals of the kanji (海) mean ‘water’ and ‘dark’ respectively.
- ³⁹ In Buddhist philosophy every moment (not only those assigned cultural or spiritual significance) is a transition, or *bardo*, from one state to the next.
- ⁴⁰ *Two Years*, III, p. 6. The original *Harper’s* version of this passage ends with ‘full-moon’: there is a pleasing simplification taking place in the revision process, a removal of unnecessary detail.
- ⁴¹ See *Neo-Buddhist Writings*, ch. 4: ‘Japan and the “Romance of Reality”’.
- ⁴² *Two Years*, III, p. 13.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- ⁴⁴ There is a comma here in the *Harper’s* original.
- ⁴⁵ In the *Harper’s* original this is: ‘[...] the shadowed heights change to a greenish-blue’ instead of ‘[...] sunlighted surfaces come out still more luminously green’.
- ⁴⁶ *Two Years*, III, pp. 15–16.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 30.
- ⁴⁸ This earthier and redder range of the spectrum will not be dealt with in this essay, as it may be seen as a whole new and, in some ways, *separate* meditation that proceeds upon the same mixing flow and profusion of colours. What might be said of it provisionally is that its palette is that of the teeming Creole life and culture of Martinique: its tones – both literal and metaphorical – are therefore politically more charged – indeed ambivalent – in its representation of brown subjects. See Peter Bailey’s ‘Deforestation and Decolonization’ and John Lowe’s *Calypso Magnolia*.
- ⁴⁹ *Two Years*, III, p. 31.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 31–33. Similar patterns of colour as those seen in ‘Midsummer Trip’ are seen in ‘A Winter Journey to Japan’. Hearn sees Mount Fuji for the first time from the ship in Yokohama Bay: ‘Then with a delicious shock of surprise I see something for which I had been looking, – far exceeding all anticipation – but so ghostly, so dream white against the morning blue, that I did not observe it at the first glance: an exquisite snowy cone towering above all other visible things – Fusi-yama!’, in ‘A Winter Journey to Japan’, pp. 262–63.

- ⁵¹ *Two Years*, III, p. 33.
- ⁵² Ibid. p. 35.
- ⁵³ In the *Harper's* original 'these ways' was 'the cross streets'.
- ⁵⁴ In the *Harper's* original this clause is: 'They are almost alarmingly steep.'
- ⁵⁵ In the *Harper's* original this clause reads: 'You could easily fall from the upper thoroughfare into the lower one by a single stumble.'
- ⁵⁶ In the *Harper's* original this reads: 'From the Grande Rue you will notice, as you look toward the water through these openings, [...].'
- ⁵⁷ The *Harper's* original has 'each' instead of the definite article.
- ⁵⁸ The *Harper's* original has a comma rather than this dash.
- ⁵⁹ *Two Years*, III, p. 35.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 33–35.
- ⁶¹ Ibid. pp. 48–49.
- ⁶² The *Harper's* original has '[...]' of the tropical mountain forest '[...].'
- ⁶³ *Two Years*, III, p. 53.
- ⁶⁴ John Wharton Lowe, *Calypso Magnolia*, p. 178. Jonathan Cott claims the camera cost \$400, but this seems excessively expensive. See *Wandering Ghost: The Odyssey of Lafcadio Hearn* (Knopf, 1991), p. 209. According to Paul Murray, in a letter to Annie Alden Hearn calls the camera 'a fraud' (*Fantastic Journey*, p. 95). In 'The Most Original of Modern Novelists: Pierre Loti' published in *The Times-Democrat* of 7 December 1884, Hearn laments 'the yet-undiscovered art of color-photography' (in Lafcadio Hearn and Albert Mordell, ed., *Essays in European and Oriental Literature* (Heinemann, 1923), pp. 133–40 (p. 136)). In the same article Hearn speaks of Loti's 'knowledge of color' and its 'technicological [sic] accuracy' (p. 137) and goes on to describe Loti's 'impressions' as 'verbal photographs' (p. 139).
- ⁶⁵ Stefano Evangelista, "'Clothed with Poetry": Lafcadio Hearn's Decadent Aesthetics of Translation', *Modern Philology*, 121.1 (2023), pp. 104–23 (p. 106).
- ⁶⁶ Stefano Evangelista, 'Translating the Beauty of Japan: Lafcadio Hearn's Art Writing', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 34 (2023), pp. 1–10 (p. 4).
- ⁶⁷ See Stefano Evangelista, 'Symphonies in Haze and Blue: Lafcadio Hearn and the Colours of Japan', Ch. 3 in *The Colours of the Past in Victorian England*, ed. by Charlotte Ribeyrol (Peter Lang, 2016), pp. 71–94 (p. 86).
- ⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 79.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 89.
- ⁷⁰ 'The Most Original of Modern Novelists: Pierre Loti', pp. 138–39.
- ⁷¹ Evangelista, 'Symphonies in Haze and Blue', pp. 91–92.
- ⁷² 'The Most Original of Modern Novelists: Pierre Loti', p. 137.
- ⁷³ John Antony Goedhals, 'Lafcadio Hearn and George Gould's "Philosophy of Spectacles": The Story of a Buddhist-Christian Encounter', in *Diasporic Identities and Empire: Cultural Contentions and Literary Landscapes*, ed. by Anastasia Nicéphore and David Brooks (Cambridge Scholars, 2013), pp. 199–212.
- ⁷⁴ In *Writings of Lafcadio Hearn*, IV, pp. 47–86; pp. 87–111.
- ⁷⁵ Adam Rothman, 'Lafcadio Hearn in New Orleans and the Caribbean', *Atlantic Studies*, 5.2 (2008), pp. 265–83 (pp. 267–68, p. 274).
- ⁷⁶ *Two Years*, III, pp. 33 and 89.

‘Hand and Soul’:
Japanese Craft and Embodied Spirituality in
Lafcadio Hearn’s *Gleanings in Buddha-Fields* (1897)

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Reporting on the Jidai Matsuri festival to celebrate the eleven hundredth anniversary of the foundation of Kyōto in October 1895, Lafcadio Hearn describes finding himself confronted by a dizzying array of crafts. ‘I saw a young man writing Buddhist texts and drawing horses with his feet’, Hearn recalled, noting his admiration also for ‘Butterflies of paper’, ‘maidens “made by glamour out of flowers”’ and an ‘artificial cuttlefish’ which could ‘move all its tentacles’ when air was blown into ‘a little rush tube fixed under its head’.¹ Sent to the festival by the *Japan Chronicle*, Hearn documented the city’s ‘festive appearance’: ‘A committee has been appointed which has decorated almost every street in the city with lanterns and flags, and [...] the town wears a most holiday-like appearance’.² When he expanded his taut reportage into a later article for the *Atlantic*, republished in his essay collection *Gleanings in Buddha-Fields* (1897), Hearn focused especially on the handicrafts he had encountered. He was particularly impressed by the virtuosic speed of their creation, which signalled to Hearn an extraordinary manipulation of the relationship between mind and matter. Describing himself ordering ‘twenty tiny paper dolls, each with a different coiffure’ from a doll-maker, he marvels at the speed with which a ‘girl went to work with white paper, paint, paste, thin slips of pine; and the dolls were finished in about the same time that an artist would have taken to draw a similar number of such figures’.³ The girl’s swift work is not, for Hearn, the ponderous process of an artist but something far more impressive and direct, raising the enticing suggestion that the activity of thinking might be outsourced from the brain to the hands themselves: ‘The actual time needed was only enough for the necessary digital movements, – not

for correcting, comparing, improving: the image in the brain realized itself as fast as the slender hands could work' (p. 63).

The relationship between mind and matter, and craft's potential to disturb any easy distinction between the two, is a common preoccupation across the essays collected in *Gleanings in Buddha-Fields*. The book's subtitle, *Studies of Hand and Soul in the Far East*, points first to matters of Japanese craft and religion, while also hinting at Hearn's fascination with the integration of the two in the act of craftmaking: figuratively, the hand's ability to touch and mould the soul. Through its reference to Dante Gabriel Rossetti's story 'Hand and Soul' (written 1849; pub. 1869) it also registers the collection's engagement with Western art writing more broadly.⁴ At the same time, the distinction between 'hand' and 'soul' also comes to register the tension between individual and collective identity in Hearn's work. Where the 'hand' is necessarily personal (discrete to the extent that bodies are), the concept of 'soul' is less clearly individual. Indeed, across the essays of *Gleanings* Hearn suggests that craftsmakers might be able to channel someone else's soul, whether through the inherited memory of previous generations of artisans or a looser sense of cultural unconscious. A young calligrapher's handprint, 'the red imprint of a tiny, tiny hand, – a *living* hand' (p. 47), signals to Hearn both personal identity and the impact of inherited supernatural skill; festival decorations represent the work of individual craftsmakers blended into a spectacle greater than the sum of its parts, 'the labor [...] of tens of thousands of hands and brains' (p. 62).

This article places Hearn's *Gleanings* in the context of his engagement with the Pre-Raphaelite and Arts and Crafts movements to reveal the central importance of collective craftmaking in his distinctive art writing. Critics have often tended to treat Hearn's art writing as marginal, both in terms of overlooking its prominence within his work and, more crucially, viewing it as disconnected from Western aesthetic debates due to Hearn's geographical displacement as a naturalized Japanese citizen. As Stefano Evangelista notes, the fact that 'art rarely features as the headline topic of [Hearn's] essays' has allowed the significant body of art writing within his work

to go largely unnoticed and, indeed, the question of genre surrounding the essays of *Gleanings* seems to have prevented critics from appreciating the breadth of their engagement with aesthetic debates.⁵ Viewed as ‘travel writing’, Hearn’s essays thus tend to be secluded in a separate generic category, allowing their many commonalities with the aesthetic essays of the likes of Vernon Lee and Walter Pater to go overlooked.

Hearn’s accounts of Japanese crafts in *Gleanings* bring prominent debates in Western art writing into dialogue with Buddhist and Shintō beliefs. In doing so, they develop a complex theory of collective mind in which the embodied processes of craftmaking express the workings of a communal soul channelled by, but not reducible to, the individual craftmaker. Hearn lectured on Rossetti and William Morris at the University of Tokyo from 1896, praising the former in his second series of lectures (1900–1903) as the ‘greatest of the Pre-Raphaelite poets’ and the latter as ‘[n]ext to Rossetti’ in literary quality, and Hearn inherited a decadent interest in decorative arts from his wider reading which came to influence his appreciation of Japanese crafts.⁶ Writing with almost Wildean disdain about *ikebana* or Japanese flower arranging, Hearn remarks in *Gleanings* that

[f]ive years ago I wrote that a little acquaintance with the Japanese art of flower arrangement had made it impossible for me to endure the sight of that vulgarity [...] which in the West we call a ‘bouquet.’ To-day I must add that familiarity with Japanese interiors has equally disgusted me with Occidental interiors, no matter how spacious or comfortable or richly furnished (pp. 174–75).⁷

Craft was a much-contested category in late-Victorian art criticism, still subject in many circles to the assumed distinction between fine art as supposedly the thoughtful product of individual genius and craft as purely material decoration, or between ‘the painting [...] that is full of thought, and of the panel that merely decorates’, as Whistler characterized it in his influential lecture ‘Mr Whistler’s “Ten O’Clock”’ (1885).⁸ More recently, this distinction has been examined in detail by Raymond Williams, in addition to Rachel Teukolsky’s discussion of late-Victorian aestheticism as the belief that ‘a whole utopian social world might be constructed out of art’ and

Jacques Rancière's examination of a fin-de-siècle discourse of 'aesthetic regeneration' associated with socialist artisanal cooperatives inspired by Morris and Ruskin, which aimed to recapture an originary 'unity of art' supposedly lost 'since the separation between "fine arts" [...] and so-called decorative arts'.⁹ A similar dichotomy is endorsed in Leo Tolstoy's essay 'What is Art?' (1897), which holds that 'art is not a handicraft' because it involves 'the transmission of feeling the artist has experienced', reiterating a common belief that craftmaking bears little connection to subjective 'inward' experience.¹⁰ Hearn himself read Tolstoy's study carefully, describing its publication as 'a very great literary event' and observing in a lecture that Tolstoy 'reinforces a great many truths' that Hearn had attempted to describe in other work.¹¹ Hearn's depictions of craftmaking as an embodied process of thinking in *Gleanings* trouble these distinctions, aligning more with Morris' suggestion that craftmakers treat their work as 'the material in which their thought could be embodied'.¹²

In this respect, Hearn took influence from late nineteenth-century *japoniste* artists, who used the post-Meiji Restoration influx of Japanese art into the West to question the distinction between fine and decorative arts that had long been foundational to Western aesthetics.¹³ As Evangelista has suggested, such artists cultivated public attention to Japanese craftworks as not 'merely decorative' artefacts but *objets d'art* that might encourage 'new ways of seeing that challenged artistic conventions'.¹⁴ This attitude was quickly embedded within late-Victorian popular culture: the exhibition of a 'Japanese Village' in Knightsbridge, for instance, in 1885–87 featured a staff of Japanese artisans who, as Grace E. Lavery describes, 'were displayed making various handicrafts while Londoners paid for the privilege of watching'.¹⁵ Drawing on such *japoniste* influences allowed Hearn not only to 'criticize [...] Western societies' by contrasting them with Japan's supposedly perfected 'democracy of the "beautiful"', as Evangelista suggests, but also to make considerable interventions within Western aesthetic debates.¹⁶

Hearn's continual emphasis on the role of touch within Japanese craftmaking enables him to blur the boundary not merely between fine and decorative art but also between matter and mind, bodily and spiritual experience. His close attention to the 'hands' of craftmakers (pp. 47, 48, 62, 63) registers his fascination with the processes by which seemingly 'inward' artistic designs become externalized as crafted physical objects. Aesthetic experience, similarly, is for Hearn a kind of touch: entering a garden in Kyōto, he remarks that his awareness of its 'vast antiquity [...] touch[es] the chord of the æsthetic feeling which brings the vibration of awe' (p. 50). Most interestingly, Hearn suggests that even 'thought' itself might be 'a modification of touch' (p. 226). Drawing upon his extensive reading in late-Victorian evolutionary science, particularly the work of Herbert Spencer whose theory of mind, as William Cohen describes, emphasised the 'dynamic interchange between inner and outer, material and immaterial, states of being' via the skin as sensory organ, Hearn contends that, because 'all the senses are modifications of touch', cognition itself, as a product of the senses, is equally an extension of touch: 'All our knowledge is derived and developed, directly or indirectly, from physical sensation, – from touch' (p. 226).¹⁷ Hearn's fascination with craftmaking, then, can be understood as an extension of his interest in the tangibility of mental processes, presenting artisanal evidence of thinking through touch in which manual dexterity offers a way of composing thought.

I here consider Hearn's representations of embodied crafting through the lens of recent scholarship on distributed cognition, bringing Erin Manning and Brian Massumi's identification of craft practices as 'a mode of thought, already in the act' (a way of thinking familiar to many late-Victorian art writers) to bear on Hearn's representations of craftwork and collective mind.¹⁸ Distributed cognition refers, broadly, to a critical approach that challenges an 'orthodox internalist tradition' of locating the act of thinking solely within the individual brain, giving attention instead to the ways in which cognition is often spread out, implicating the body, external tools, other individuals, environments and even social structures in the act of thinking.¹⁹ In recent years, this

framework has proven fruitful for critical examinations of the role of the body within literary depictions of thought, notably within several studies of decadent art writing. Marion Thain suggests that the emphasis on ‘tactile modes of perception’ within fin-de-siècle aesthetics serves as an important precursor for present-day theories of ‘embodied cognition’ while Benjamin Morgan has similarly argued that much late-Victorian art writing demonstrates an ‘exteriorization of mind’ by presenting aesthetic experience as ‘an event during which the embodied corporeality of a person and an artwork came into contact’.²⁰ Hearn’s playful blending of mind and matter in his own art writing contributes directly to this fin-de-siècle aesthetic discourse. At the same time, examining the distinctive stylistic aspects of Hearn’s literary depictions of craft reveals the potential limitations of the technical theoretical registers that often characterize work on distributed cognition. Hearn’s spiritualized descriptions of craftmaking flirt with the suggestion that such actions might bypass the workings of ‘cognition’ entirely, conjured up by the body alone: ‘Thus most of the wonders of festival nights are created: toys thrown into existence with a twist of the fingers, old rags turned into figured draperies with a few motions of the brush, pictures made with sand’ (p. 64).

I first examine Hearn’s presentation of touch as an extension of thought in his discussion of *kakemono* calligraphy in ‘Notes of a Trip to Kyōto’, in which nineteenth-century studies of fingerprints enable Hearn to explore the tension between the craftmaker’s individual imprint and inherited generational skill. I then consider the role of the craft object as a vehicle for the transmission of thought in ‘In Ōsaka’, reading Hearn’s depictions of both Japanese festival decorations and crowds as types of what Gustave Le Bon called ‘collective mind’.²¹ This leads me in turn to discuss Hearn’s interest in animate matter and his description of a ‘universe of psychical units’ in ‘Dust’ (p. 259). I close by examining Hearn’s representation of his own writing process as a kind of ghostly crafting.

Thinking Through Touch

Hearn's longstanding interest in Japanese crafts finds its most sustained expression in *Gleanings*, where he reflects at length on the psychological processes involved in craftmaking and the relationship between craft objects and embodied cognition. Touch, in particular, becomes a way of communicating and manipulating thought, suggestive even of a kind of 'plasticity of the soul' – that the individual craftmaker might themselves be moulded by the act of making.²² Brushing past an array of paintings at the festival exhibition in Kyōto, Hearn finds something he considers 'more interesting than any picture': a 'specimen of handwriting, intended to be mounted as a kakemono later on', depicting a 'Japanese poem' (p. 47). *Kakemono* scrolls are a ubiquitous feature of Japanese homes, typically displayed in the *tokonoma* alcove, a space where art objects are placed to be viewed by guests of the household and which is linked to the Japanese idea of *yama*, 'a mediating space between humans and gods'.²³ Like most of the craft objects Hearn describes in *Gleanings*, this *kakemono* calligraphy acts as a physical mediation between the spiritual and the material. The calligraphy itself is a masterpiece that 'no Occidental artist [...] could repeat', and Hearn describes it with religious fervour as a 'miracle' and a 'wonder' (pp. 47–48). What Hearn finds most remarkable about the scroll, however, is not its letterwork but the unusually bodily signature that accompanies it: 'Instead of the usual red stamp or seal' that features on traditional Japanese artworks, the scroll bears 'the red imprint of a tiny, tiny hand, – a *living* hand, which had been smeared with crimson printing-ink and deftly pressed upon the paper' (p. 47). This turns out to be the handprint of the calligrapher, a five-year-old child called Ito Medzui who produced the work in the presence of the Japanese Emperor, a 'wonder of calligraphy' that '[f]ew adult calligraphers could surpass' (pp. 47–48).

Hearn finds this experience touching in the fullest sense; from his poignant description of a 'tiny, tiny hand' to the italicized realisation that this hand is still '*living*', his account conjures the full physicality of the hand 'pressed upon the paper' and renders it with tenderness. Hearn

identifies the minute details of this handprint with care, to the level of picking out individual fingerprints: 'I could distinguish those little finger-marks of which Mr. Galton has taught us the characteristic importance' (p. 47). Hearn refers here to Francis Galton's recently published *Finger Prints* (1892), an early treatise which identified fingerprints as 'an incomparably surer criterion of identity than any other bodily feature', describing them as 'most trustworthy sign-manuals' that 'form patterns [...] which are little worlds in themselves'.²⁴ Reading Galton's monograph, Hearn would likely have been intrigued by the claim that fingerprints had been 'regarded by the cheiromantists in Japan' as a prediction of an individual's fortune where European palmists had overlooked them.²⁵ The fingerprints of Hearn's five-year-old calligrapher serve as an impression of the child's individual identity, a means of marking off both the handprint and the artwork as his own, underlined by Hearn's act of 'distinguish[ing]' each separate finger, a way of looking that disaggregates the hand into its distinct elements.

Hearn, however, unusually balances this mark of individuality against the perceived influence of a wider collective – the submerged workings of a broader, distributed mind: 'it was not the beauty of the thing in itself which impressed me, but the weird, extraordinary, indubitable proof it afforded of an inherited memory' (p. 48). Hearn discerns '[g]enerations of dead calligraphers revived in the fingers of that tiny hand'. In the context of his discussion of the tiny hand's 'imprint', Hearn's use of the word 'impressed' feels knowingly fleshed-out. The aesthetic experience registers as a haptic one, leaving its stamp on Hearn himself. This is not quite the same as the framing of aesthetic experience in bodily terms that characterized much fin-de-siècle art writing, such as Pater's description of the task of the 'aesthetic critic' as identifying the 'pleasurable sensations' produced by a work of art, or Lee and Clementina Anstruther-Thompson's 'psychological aesthetics' which traced the viewer's physiological responses to art objects, from changes in breathing to 'palpitations'.²⁶ Hearn's account here goes further than much decadent art writing by being fully attentive to the physicality of the craftmaking process that produced the

work it describes, closer in this respect to Morris' account of stonemasonry in 'The Story of the Unknown Church' (1856) – 'all my thoughts now were in my carving' – or Oscar Wilde's description of an artist who 'could only think in bronze' in his *Poems in Prose* (1895).²⁷

What is most distinctive in Hearn's account of the child's handprint is the idea it suggests to him of 'inherited memory', drawn in part from his reading of Buddhist discussions of rebirth which he had begun in New Orleans in the 1880s.²⁸ Such theories of inherited or 'ancestral' memory received 'widespread circulation, though not necessarily widespread acceptance' at the end of the century particularly through the work of Thomas Laycock and Samuel Butler, as Athena Vrettos has explored in depth, and Hearn's account should be recognised as an attempt not only to interpret Japanese culture through these Darwinian theories but equally to examine these theories through his exposure to Japanese Buddhist practices.²⁹ The extraordinary calligraphy is not really the achievement of the individual five-year-old child, Hearn suggests, but rather the tangible expression of a generational craft 'memory':

The thing was never the work of an individual child five years old, but beyond all question the work of ghosts, – the countless ghosts that make the compound ancestral soul. It was proof visible and tangible of psychological and physiological wonders justifying both the Shintō doctrine of ancestor worship and the Buddhist doctrine of preexistence (pp. 48-49).

Hearn here develops a suggestion he had first raised in *Glimpses*, that 'every artist is a ghostly worker' whose 'fingers are guided by the dead in the delineation of a flying bird, of the vapors of the mountains'.³⁰ In both accounts, the spectral is made tangible through the act of craftmaking, the 'dead' guiding the 'fingers' of both painter and calligrapher whose handprint registers the impression not only of individual worker but 'ancestral soul'. Hearn draws on a common trope in Arts and Crafts writing: the representation of craft as the product of inherited expertise, exemplified by Morris' description in 'The Lesser Arts of Life' (1882) of a 'body of almost mysterious skill' passed down from 'father to son, from generation to generation'.³¹ To this, Hearn

adds the notion of the ‘ancestral soul’, an idea which he associates with Buddhist and Shintō beliefs but which draws more from the lexicon of explicitly racialized sociological theories common at the end of the nineteenth century.³² This comes close to what Gillian Beer has called Hearn’s ‘darkly evolutionist’ understanding of touch expressed in his later essay ‘Nightmare-Touch’ (1900), where Hearn evocatively suggests that ‘the common fear of ghosts is *the fear of being touched by ghosts*’, an anxiety he attributes to ‘*some point of dream-contact with the total race-experience of shadowy seizure*’.³³ The same suggestion of a ‘a threshold between the living and the dead, the present and the past’ that Beer associates with Hearn’s ‘dream touch’ is evident in his interpretation of the child’s calligraphy, which resurrects the skill of the dead in the emphatically ‘*living*’ hand.

Hearn here invokes a sense of ‘craft’ as specialist knowledge that might be passed down through ghostly touch. Touch acts as a way of training the hand, via an apprenticeship that Hearn presents as spanning generations. As he suggests in *Glimpses*, ‘What was conscious effort in the beginning became unconscious in later centuries, – becomes almost automatic in the living man, – becomes the art instinctive.’³⁴ Hearn’s cautious use of the qualifier ‘almost’ holds him back from describing this work as entirely ‘automatic’, highlighting the contested ground that the concept of automation occupied in the late nineteenth century.³⁵ An action that is fully automatic has had all trace of mind removed, a suggestion that when applied to human agents risks subverting the very notion of the soul at the heart of Western Christian mores, partly explaining, perhaps, why Hearn’s idol Spencer took pains to stress in *The Principles of Psychology* (1855) that ‘the commonly assumed line of demarcation between Reason and Instinct has no existence’.³⁶ Thomas Hardy would exemplify the spiritual quandary surrounding automatic action in his poem ‘Nature’s Questioning’, in which the poet ventriloquises nature as enquiring:

[...] come we of an Automaton
Unconscious of our pains? ...
Or are we live remains
Of Godhead [...]?³⁷

While Hardy equates the possibility of an ‘Unconscious’ automatic universe with a bleak image of a disenchanted world, Hearn uses the same terms to convey his own feeling of wonder, hinging on a much earlier sense of the word ‘automaton’, traceable to Aristotle, as indicating ‘spontaneity’.³⁸ Hearn ‘almost’ hints again at his fascination with the thought that the highly seasoned artisan might be able to entirely bypass conscious thought and produce crafts purely automatically, a marvellous achievement that Hearn presents as a secular version of God-like creation: ‘the divine art of creating the beautiful out of nothing’ in which the ‘power of enchantment puts human grace under contribution’ (pp. 60, 64). The craftmakers that Hearn singles out in *Gleanings* serve as almost-candidates for this kind of ability: the Kyōto dollmaker who works too fast to think and the five-year-old calligrapher who (Hearn implies) is too young to think. In each instance of craftmaking, the role of inherited memory outweighs the conscious knowledge of the individual artisan, a suggestion which comes to imply that the craft object might even know more than the craftmakers themselves.

‘Tens and Thousands of Hands and Brains’: Craft as Vehicle for Thought

At the same time as Hearn toys with the possibility of automatic craft, in which the individual’s soul is subordinated to a collective, his accounts of craftmaking often go as far as attributing souls to the craft objects themselves. In *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* (1894), Hearn discusses the belief, historically ‘less rare than it is now’ in Japan, that ‘a doll which is preserved for a great many years in one family [...] gradually acquires a soul’.³⁹ Hearn’s accounts of Japanese toys typically muddy the waters between the physical and spiritual, bringing together his extensive reading of Charles Baudelaire – who had suggested in ‘Morale du joujou’ [A Philosophy of Toys] (1853) that the ‘overriding desire of most children is to get at and *see the soul* of their toys’ – with Japanese depictions of animate objects or *tsukumogami*.⁴⁰

In *Gleanings*, craft objects are frequently presented as suffused with a kind of externalized cognition, rather than ‘soul’. This is clearest in Hearn’s depiction of handmade ‘mementos’ across the volume. The experience of being gifted a ‘new wine-cup of pure white clay’ as a festival ‘souvenir’ in Kyōto prompts Hearn to reflect on the many ‘queer little presents’ ubiquitous in Japanese towns:

Such small gifts and memories make up much of the unique pleasure of Japanese travel. In almost any town or village you can buy for a souvenir some pretty or curious thing made only in that one place, and not to be found elsewhere (p. 72).

Later in *Gleanings*, Hearn finds further examples in the form of souvenirs of the ‘Hat-Pine’, ‘an extraordinary tree’ whose trained branches form the shape of ‘an enormous green hat’ (p. 169).

Almost ‘every visitor’, Hearn remarks

buys some memento of it, – perhaps a woodcut of the tree, or a printed copy of verses written by some poet in praise of it, or a girl’s hairpin, the top of which is a perfect little green model of the tree, – framework of poles and all, – with one tiny stork perched on it.

All these objects demonstrate to Hearn the Japanese skill of ‘obtaining the maximum of beauty with the minimum of cost’ (p. 173).

Hearn’s frequent reference to the cheapness of Japanese materials echoes a common observation in Western accounts of Japanese crafts, demonstrated by reviews of the Knightsbridge ‘Japanese Village’ which noted the ‘conscientious perfection of detail’ evident ‘in the cheapest and most trifling toys’.⁴¹ While Hearn’s admiration for Japanese thrift echoes Morris’ valorisation of simplicity in ‘The Beauty of Life’ (1880) (‘the greatest foe to art is luxury [...] the higher the art rises, the greater the simplicity’),⁴² Hearn’s comments must also be understood in the context of the marketisation of Arts and Crafts products in the West, centred on the London shops of Morris & Co., Heal & Son, and Liberty, an enterprise to which affordable imported Japanese crafts posed a significant threat. As the *Furniture Gazette*’s reviewer remarked, ‘unrivalled in beauty and in cheapness’, these items became ‘the despair of workmen in this and every European country’ for their skilful balancing of quality and cost.⁴³

Hearn's choice of words for Japanese souvenirs highlights their role in the traveller's thought process as aides-mémoire, presenting them either as physicalized and external 'memories' in themselves, 'mementos' relatedly, or with the term 'souvenir', recalling the act of remembering via its cognate verb in French, which Hearn knew fluently. Rolf Potts has noted the function souvenirs play as reminders of a trip after returning, serving frequently as both 'a mechanism of reflection and wonder' as well as material 'proof that the owner has gone someplace most people haven't and gained knowledge that most people don't possess'.⁴⁴ The souvenir here acts as both a stand-in for, and prompt towards, the knowledge that one gains on a journey. Much like Hearn's travel essays themselves, the 'little green model of the tree' serves as a receptacle for the learning he has taken from his trip. In a period when mass-produced souvenirs were beginning to invade the global market, Hearn's emphasis on these objects' status as handmade and local – 'some pretty or curious thing made only in that one place' (p. 72) – allows them to retain their aura of artisanal significance.⁴⁵ Though Hearn had long since abandoned creedal belief, his Roman Catholic education at St Cuthbert's College, Ushaw, also primed him to approach these items as kinds of relics: charged objects that might satisfy 'the old spiritual hunger for some visible object of worship, – something to touch, or put close to the heart', as he ventures later in the volume as explanation for 'how strong Roman Catholicism remains to-day' in the West (p. 165). Where touch serves to express creative ownership and build intimacy with the viewer in Hearn's account of Medzui's calligraphy, here the touching of devotional objects offers to satisfy a 'spiritual hunger' and suggests a comparable form of moulding the self through the practice of 'worship'.

In Japan, meanwhile, craft objects carry specifically Buddhist import for Hearn: 'there is scarcely an object of handiwork', he suggests later in *Gleanings*, 'possessing any beauty or significance of form [...] which does not in some way proclaim the ancient debt to Buddhism of the craft that made it' (pp. 185-86). This is not simply a claim about Buddhism's cultural influence; rather, Hearn seems to think that 'Buddhist thoughts' permeate the handicrafts themselves. 'One

may discern Buddhist thoughts', Hearn suggests, 'in the cheap cotton prints from an Ōsaka mill not less than in the figured silks of Kyōto', and everything from the 'reliefs upon an iron kettle' to the 'patterns of screen-paper [...] relate, with equal eloquence, the traditions of faith' (p. 186). There is more than a little orientalized over-reading in Hearn's account, a foreign commentator's tendency to interpret every unfamiliar object as thick with significance, evident in Hearn's particularly comical claim that 'cries of itinerant street-venders [...] recall to me some story of saints and Bodhisattvas, or the text of some sutra' (p. 187). Hearn's discussion of the 'traditions' of faith, however, point to a less fanciful sense of inheritance: in much the same way as knowledge is handed down to Medzui the calligrapher, crafts demonstrate legacies of embodied expertise as much as customs of faith.

Hearn's emphasis on the potential for craft objects to act as vehicles for disseminating thought is particularly evident in his discussion of the spectacle of craft decorations made for festivals. The production of such objects draws on the skills of many workers, and, in the Kyōto festival, this suggests to Hearn a kind of distributed cognition, in which the often-anonymous craft displays at *matsuri* come to represent the 'labor, perhaps, of tens of thousands of hands and brains', an echo, again, of the subtitle of Hearn's collection (pp. 62–63). This public work hinges on the affordability of its elements: Hearn's observation that 'Anybody can contribute to such an occasion; and everybody does, for the cheapest material is used' exemplifies what Pamela Genova has described as the late-Victorian tendency to view Japanese culture through the lens of European preoccupations as demonstrating a 'fundamental democratization of art'.⁴⁶ Hearn claims that 'each individual contributor to the public effort works according to his particular thought and taste, even while obeying old rules, so that the total ultimate result is a wondrous, a bewildering, an incalculable variety' (p. 62). John Ruskin's influence is detectable in Hearn's admiration for varied decoration, recalling Ruskin's praise of 'perpetually varied ornamentation' in architecture as a necessary consequence of it being 'thoughtful': 'as men do not commonly think the same thoughts twice,

you are not to require of them that they shall do the same thing twice'.⁴⁷ In contrast to Ruskin's emphasis on the individual craftsman, Hearn's 'wondrous, [...] bewildering' variety is a collective work, a 'public effort' which merges 'tens of thousands of hands and brains' into a unified, if incalculably various, whole.

Hearn develops a parallel to this communal craftwork a few pages later when describing the sensation of being pressed in by the festival crowd, which he presents as a collective entity able to communicate via touch. His account of the experience of moving through the crowd is remarkably similar to his description of Japanese cooperative crafts, a 'universal gliding and slipping, as of fish in a shoal' (p. 65). He goes on to note his wonder at the crowd's smooth coexistence: 'How any crowd could be packed so closely, and yet move so freely, is a riddle to which Japanese character alone can furnish the key. I was not once rudely jostled' (p. 66). Hearn frequently remarked on the apparent cohesion of Japanese crowds, making a similar comment on a crowd at the Bon festival he visited in 1891: 'there is no jostling, no rudeness; everybody, even the weakest and smallest, has a chance to see everything'.⁴⁸ Despite Hearn's uncritical appeal to a monolithic 'Japanese character', he was well aware that not every crowd in Japan is quite so considerate, noting that 'Japanese crowds are not all alike: there are some through which an attempt to pass would be attended with unpleasant consequences', which he prudently leaves unspecified. In this 'good-natured and good-humored' Kyōto crowd, however, the mass of festival-goers manage to function in harmony.

Like the aesthetic phenomenon of festival decorations, in which 'tens and thousands of hands and brains' blend into a coherent spectacle which nevertheless leaves room for 'individual [...] thought and taste', a 'good-natured' crowd suggests to Hearn the harmonious working of a collective. Hearn was writing at a time when the sociological function of crowds was beginning to receive sustained attention. In 1895, Gustave Le Bon described the *fin de siècle* as the 'era of crowds', theorising crowds as a 'collective mind' characterized by 'unconscious working' that

dissolves the individual's 'conscious personality'.⁴⁹ A crowd, according to Le Bon, becomes 'a new body possessing properties quite different from those of the bodies that have served to form it'.⁵⁰ In a ghostly register close to Hearn's, Le Bon noted that crowds often 'appear to be guided by those mysterious forces which the ancients denominated destiny, nature, or providence, which we call the voices of the dead'.⁵¹

While Hearn's crowds are 'good-natured', however, Le Bon is far more suspicious. Le Bon's crowds risk becoming a mob, flashing into existence 'under the influences of certain violent emotions – such, for example, as a great national event' (p. 21). A witness to the Paris Commune of 1871, where he was scandalized at the destruction of the Palais de Justice and the Louvre's Richelieu Library ('If they did not burn Paris completely [...] it was only because their means were at fault', he excoriated in 1899), Le Bon viewed crowds as a degenerative influence: 'In crowds it is stupidity and not mother-wit that is accumulated.'⁵² Hearn's depictions of Japanese crowds, by contrast, are far more harmonious and optimistic on account, perhaps, of Hearn's lifelong practice of 'following the drift of the crowd'.⁵³ A *flâneur* among shrine visitors, festival processions, and temple markets, Hearn rarely records experiences more punishing than 'long waiting' in 'densely packed streets' (pp. 66-67). 'I mingle with crowds of pilgrims at the great shrines', Hearn remarked in a letter to Joseph Tunison; 'I ring the great bells; and burn incense-rods before the great smiling gods.'⁵⁴ Far from being a hazardous mob, Hearn's Japanese crowds often prioritise egalitarianism, arranging themselves 'in the least egotistical manner possible, – little children to the front, adults to the rear' (p. 66). Like Le Bon, though, Hearn still finds Japanese crowds as evidence for spuriously essentialising racial claims, treating the 'squeezing and crowding' of Ōsaka houses as indications of 'an indefinable Far-Eastern queerness, – a sort of racial character' (p. 141).

The influence of what Paul Murray identifies as one of Hearn's 'most important perceptions about Japan' – 'that it was assimilative, not imitative' – can be detected in his recurrent desire to become part of a coherent spectacle, be it in crowd or craft form.⁵⁵ Hearn's attentiveness

to the crowd, and admiration for its perhaps exaggerated cohesion, must be understood in terms of his own desire for assimilation into the Japanese polis as a foreigner. Seven months after his arrival in Japan, Hearn noted in a letter to Henry Watkin that ‘I pass much of my time in the temples, trying to see into the heart of this mysterious people. In order to do so, I have to blend with them and become part of them: It is not easy.’⁵⁶ Hearn’s desire to enter into what he figures as the Japanese collective requires a shift in personal identity similar to the processes of craftmaking described in *Gleanings*. He is careful, meanwhile, to avoid depicting this Japanese collective as an indistinct mass; turning a racist trope – of ‘Oriental inscrutability’, as Xine Yao has termed it – on its head.⁵⁷ Here, Hearn observes that:

The newly arrived Westerner often complains of his inability to distinguish one Japanese from another [...]. He does not imagine that our more sharply accentuated Occidental physiognomy produces the very same effect upon the Japanese. Many and many a one has said to me, ‘For a long time I found it very hard to tell one foreigner from another: they all seemed to me alike’ (p. 111).

Hearn visualizes himself as already part of an undifferentiated crowd, but one that is potentially unintelligible to members of his newly adopted community, raising the question of whose contribution can be incorporated into the collective – a familiar anxiety for Hearn as a migrant writer. At the same time, Hearn’s interest in crowds, like craftmaking, returns continually to touch – or rather the notable lack of it which he finds in most Japanese crowds, attended by ‘no jostling, no rudeness’ but only decorous ‘gliding and slipping’ despite being ‘packed so closely’. Much like the deft and delicate work of the craftsman’s ‘automatic’ hands, the minute adjustments in movement required to regulate the harmony of a crowd function almost unconsciously at the level of each individual participant. The elegance that attracts Hearn both to Japanese crowds and craftmaking processes can be attributed to a kind of entrainment discernible in each, by which a semi-conscious mode of movement becomes second nature to the individual participant whose agency is subordinated to the collective mind either of the procession or the artisanal ‘ancestral soul’.

A 'Universe of Psychical Units'

Across the essays of *Gleanings*, Hearn associates Japanese aesthetics with the 'subordination of individualism to type, of personality to humanity, of detail to feeling' (p. 107). In painting a flower, for instance, he claims that the average Japanese artist tends not to 'depict a particular, but a typical flower', presenting 'the morphological law of the species, or, to speak symbolically, nature's *thought behind the form*' (p. 108, my emphasis). This suggestion that craftmaking might channel a kind of 'thought' acting as a submerged feature of the nonhuman world is part of what Murray describes as Hearn's 'life-long attempt to reconcile' Buddhism with 'evolutionary philosophy'.⁵⁸ In the passage that follows, Hearn refers to the work of Alfred Russel Wallace to support his claim that Japanese art depicts 'the law of the type', relevant equally to late-Victorian evolutionism and to craftmaking, both of which rely on repeated iterations of patterns. The notion of a 'universe of psychical units' instead of 'physical atoms', as Hearn took Buddhist cosmology to suggest (p. 259), preoccupies Hearn across *Gleanings* and represents his understanding of mind at simultaneously its most distributed and most material. 'The man of science to-day cannot ignore', Hearn suggests, the evidence pointing to 'the development of what we call mind as a general phase or incident in the ripening of planetary life throughout the universe' (p. 209). As such, he predicts that a 'future union of Western knowledge with Eastern thought' will one day produce 'a Neo-Buddhism inheriting all the strength of Science, yet spiritually able to recompense the seeker after truth' with a sense of wonder lacking in Western science (pp. 209–10).

This spiritualized understanding of matter as coextensive with 'what we call mind' finds clearest expression in 'Dust', one of the most remarkable essays in the volume. Here, Hearn takes inspiration from a quotation that he attributes to 'Engaku-Shō' later in *Gleanings* (p. 220) and uses

to close 'Dust': '*there shall not remain even one particle of dust that does not enter into Buddhahood*' (p. 96, Hearn's emphasis). This leads him to muse at length on what he considers the necessary conclusion of both Buddhist rebirth and Western evolution: that even inanimate matter is mixed with mind. The influence of the *Kegon Kyō* or 'Flower Garland' sūtra (central to East Asian Buddhism) is clear, which uses the image of dust to present a universe of total interpenetration, describing Buddhas who 'perceive that [...] the beings and aeons which are as many as all the dust particles, are all present in every particle of dust'.⁵⁹ Hearn presents readers with a list of charged questions in an energetic sequence that recalls Pater's 'Conclusion' to *The Renaissance* in its evocation of a 'perpetual motion' of elements:⁶⁰

Is there aught visible, tangible, measurable, that has never been mixed with sentiency? – atom that has never vibrated to pleasure or to pain? – air that has never been cry or speech? – drop that has never been a tear? Assuredly this dust has felt. It has been everything we know; also much that we cannot know. It has been nebula and star, planet and moon, times unspeakable (p. 89).

Hearn again mixes the 'tangible' and the sentient, using his signature move of blending matter and spirit to make the disorientating claim that even dust has 'felt'. Where Pater presents 'each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world', Hearn takes cosmic flux as evidence for a radically distributed and open vision of mental processes.⁶¹ In addition to the 'ancestral' memory he finds in craftmaking, Hearn posits the existence of a material memory, in which each particle of the endlessly reconstituted universe retains the memory of its previous experiences as a conscious being ('everything we know'). The essay reaches a head in a particularly breathless paragraph in which Hearn rejects Catholic liturgy in favour of Buddhist cosmology, calling on the dust to 'Remember':

'Remember, Man, thou art but dust!' – a saying profound only as materialism, which stops short at surfaces. For what is dust? 'Remember, Dust, thou hast been Sun, and Sun thou shalt become again! ... Thou hast been Light, Life, Love; – and into all these, by ceaseless cosmic magic, thou shalt many times be turned again!' (p. 89).

The dizzying recirculation of Hearn's dust particles recalls again the Flower Garland sūtra, in which Sudhana sees 'as many worlds as atoms in a buddha-land [or Buddha-field] forming and dissolving in each particle of fire, water, earth, diamond, various jewels, flowers, perfumes, incenses, arrays of gems, and all objects'.⁶² At the same time, the essay bears the influence of Hearn's work translating Gustave Flaubert's *La tentation de Saint Antoine* [*Temptation of St Anthony*] (final version pub. 1874), begun in 1875 or 1876 though published posthumously, particularly Anthony's desire to 'be in everything [...] penetrate each atom – descend to the very bottom of matter, – be matter itself'.⁶³ Indeed, Flaubert's novel presents an image of material flux which Hearn was already interpreting through a Buddhist lens in 1876. In an unpublished footnote to the manuscript of his translation, Hearn explains that the 'idea of the universe being a perpetual ebb and flow of shapes, a flood of forms [...] passing away to reappear like waves, is that of the *Nidana Sutra*'.⁶⁴

The perpetual ebb and flow of Hearn's dust comes to parallel the depictions of craftmaking presented across the essays of *Gleanings*. Where the 'ceaseless cosmic magic' of Hearn's mutable universe is characterized by infinite variety yet continually returns to the same forms, the 'miracle[s]' conjured up by Hearn's craftmakers are both bewilderingly novel yet follow the 'law of type' in constantly reproducing the same patterns. By locating 'nature's thought' within the very matter of his endlessly circulating universe, Hearn sidesteps conventional Western depictions of craft as devoid of thought and purely decorative: how can craftmaking possibly lack thought if even the material it manipulates once 'felt'? Cotton prints and iron reliefs divulge 'Buddhist thoughts', while a 'twist of the fingers' is all the cogitation needed to produce 'wonders'. In the lecture on Rossetti in which he discusses 'Hand and Soul', Hearn explicitly compares the crafting process – this time of his own craft of writing – to the Buddhist cosmology of continual rebirth: 'Like everything else, even a good story must die and be re-born hundreds of times before it shows the highest possibilities of beauty.'⁶⁵ Alongside haunted calligraphy, virtuosic doll-making and festival decorations, Hearn often described his approach to writing as a similar kind of extended

consciousness that might commune with crowds of the dead: ‘It is like spiritualism’, Hearn summarized his writing process in a letter to Basil Hall Chamberlain; ‘Just move the pen, and the ghosts do the wording.’⁶⁶ Channelling the ghosts of Morris, Rossetti, and Pater – one among many generations of dead art writers – Hearn’s depictions of craftmaking find him as a collaborator among the labour of tens of thousands of hands and brains.

¹ Lafcadio Hearn, ‘A Trip to Kyōto’, *Atlantic*, 77 (May 1896), pp. 613–24 (p. 617). Hearn quotes Alfred Tennyson, *Idylls of the King* (Edward Moxon, 1895), p. 40.

² Hearn, ‘The Kyoto Memorial Festival’, *Japan Chronicle*, 26 October 1895; typescript by P. D. Perkins held in Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia (UVA), MS 6101.

³ Hearn, *Gleanings in Buddha-Fields: Studies of Hand and Soul in the Far East* (Houghton Mifflin, 1897), p. 63. Subsequent references to this edition are cited in the text.

⁴ In a lecture given at the University of Tokyo, Hearn described Rossetti’s story as ‘a little philosophy of art that is well worth studying’; see *Pre-Raphaelite and Other Poets: Lectures*, ed. by John Erskine (Dodd, Mead, 1922), pp. 109, 112.

⁵ Stefano Evangelista, ‘Translating the Beauty of Japan: Lafcadio Hearn’s Art Writing’, *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 34 (2023), pp. 1–10 (p. 3), doi.org/10.16995/ntn.9130.

⁶ Hearn, *A History of English Literature in a Series of Lectures*, [ed. by R. Tanabé and T. Ochiai] (Hokuseido Press, 1927), 2 vols, II, pp. 664, 695.

⁷ Hearn refers to comments he made in his article ‘The Chief City of the Province of the Gods’ which appeared in the November 1891 issue of the *Atlantic*, 68.409, pp. 621–35.

⁸ James McNeill Whistler, ‘Mr Whistler’s “Ten O’Clock”’, in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (Lovell, 1890), pp. 131–59 (p. 138).

⁹ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (Chatto & Windus, 1958; repr. 1959), pp. xv–xvi. Rachel Teukolsky, *The Literate Eye: Victorian Art Writing and Modernist Aesthetics* (Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 147. Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, trans. by Zakir Paul (Verso, 2013), p. 135.

¹⁰ Leo Tolstoy, *What is Art?*, trans. by Aylmer Maude (Crowell, 1899), p. 195.

¹¹ Hearn, ‘Tolstoi’s Theory of Art’, in *Life and Literature*, ed. by Erskine (Dodd, Mead, 1917), pp. 288–99 (p. 288).

¹² *Collected Works of William Morris*, 24 vols (Cambridge University Press, 2012), xxii, p. 236.

¹³ Williams identifies the emergence of the academic discipline of Western ‘aesthetics’ with the distinction between ‘artist and craftsman’ which developed from the 1840s onwards, the former associated with ‘a special kind of [...] “imaginative truth”’; Williams, *Culture and Society*, p. 13. Rancière, by contrast, considers the distinction between ‘fine arts’ and ‘mechanical arts’ (associated with the leisure class and working class, respectively) to predate the development of Western aesthetics, tying the emergence of ‘Art as a notion designating a form of specific experience’ to social upheavals in the late eighteenth century which allowed this ‘hierarchy of forms of life’ to become more flexible; see Rancière, *Aisthesis*, p. ix.

¹⁴ Evangelista, ‘Japan: Decadence and Japonisme’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Decadence*, ed. by Jane Desmarais and David Weir (Oxford, 2022), pp. 264–82 (p. 266).

¹⁵ Grace E. Lavery, *Quaint, Exquisite: Victorian Aesthetics and the Idea of Japan* (Princeton University Press, 2019), p. 71.

¹⁶ Evangelista, ‘Decadence and Japonisme’, p. 273. For a recent study of *japonisme*’s influence on Hearn, see Naomi Charlotte Fukuzawa, *Japan and Japonisme in Late Nineteenth Century Literature* (Routledge, 2025).

¹⁷ William A. Cohen, *Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 5.

¹⁸ Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, *Thought in the Act: Passages in the Ecology of Experience* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014), p. vii.

¹⁹ Miranda Anderson, Michael Wheeler, and Mark Sprevak, ‘Distributed Cognition and the Humanities’, in *Distributed Cognition in Victorian Culture and Modernism*, ed. by Anderson, Peter Garratt, and Sprevak (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), pp. 1–17 (p. 19).

²⁰ Marion Thain, ‘Aesthetic Perception and Embodied Cognition: Art and Literature at the *Fin de Siècle*’, in *Distributed Cognition*, pp. 79–94 (p. 80); Benjamin Morgan, *The Outward Mind: Materialist Aesthetics in Victorian Science and Literature* (University of Chicago Press, 2017), pp. 5–6.

- ²¹ Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, 2nd edn (T. Fisher Unwin, 1897), p. 20.
- ²² I borrow Niklaus Largier's term 'plasticity of the soul' from 'The Plasticity of the Soul: Mystical Darkness, Touch, and Aesthetic Experience', *MLN*, 125.3 (April 2010), pp. 536–51, doi:10.1353/mln.0.0268.
- ²³ Masao Yamaguchi, 'The Poetics of Exhibition in Japanese Culture', in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Smithsonian, 1991), pp. 57–67 (p. 58).
- ²⁴ Francis Galton, *Finger Prints* (Macmillan, 1892), p. 2.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- ²⁶ Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, ed. by Matthew Beaumont (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 4; Vernon Lee and Clementina Anstruther-Thomson, *Beauty and Ugliness* (Bodley Head, 1912), p. 251.
- ²⁷ Morris, I, p. 155; Oscar Wilde, 'The Artist', in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, 8 vols (Oxford University Press, 2000–2017), I, *Poems and Poems in Prose*, ed. by Bobby Fong and Karl Beckson (2000), pp. 173–74 (p. 173).
- ²⁸ Paul Murray, *A Fantastic Journey: The Life and Literature of Lafcadio Hearn* (University of Michigan Press, 1997), pp. 20, 84.
- ²⁹ Athena Vrettos, "'In the Clothes of Dead People': Vernon Lee and Ancestral Memory", *Victorian Studies*, 55.2 (Winter 2013), pp. 202–11 (p. 203), doi.org/10.2979/victorianstudies.55.2.202. See also Vrettos, "'Little bags of remembrance': du Maurier's *Peter Ibbetson* and Victorian Theories of Ancestral Memory", *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*, 53 (February 2009), doi.org/10.7202/029899ar.
- ³⁰ Hearn, *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*, 2 vols (Houghton Mifflin, 1894), I, p. 10.
- ³¹ Morris, XXII, p. 236.
- ³² E.g., Le Bon similarly focused on the role of collective 'hereditary influences' on individual acts, presenting these as the result of 'innumerable common characteristics handed down from generation to generation, which constitute the genius of a race'; in *Crowd*, p. 25.
- ³³ Gillian Beer, 'Dream Touch', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 19 (2014), pp. 1–12 (p. 3), doi.org/10.16995/ntn.702; Hearn, *Shadowings* (Little, Brown, 1919), pp. 237, 246; Hearn's emphasis.
- ³⁴ Hearn, *Glimpses*, I, p. 10.
- ³⁵ See, for example, Vanessa L. Ryan, *Thinking Without Thinking in the Victorian Novel* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), pp. 79–83; Suzy Anger, 'Introduction: The Victorian Automata/Automatism Schema', in *Victorian Automata: Mechanism and Agency in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford University Press, 2024), pp. 1–25; Daniel Tiffany, *Toy Medium: Materialism and Modern Lyric* (University of California Press, 2000), pp. 146–49.
- ³⁶ Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Psychology* (Longman, 1855), p. 564.
- ³⁷ Thomas Hardy, *Wessex Poems and Other Verses* (Harper, 1899 [1898]), p. 166.
- ³⁸ See Ross Hamilton, *Accident: A Philosophical and Literary History* (University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 18.
- ³⁹ Hearn, *Glimpses*, I, p. 267. Fabio Gygi identifies the doll Hearn describes as an *Ichimatsu* doll, typically gifted to new parents as a 'body substitute[]' for the child, though Gygi presents Westerners' beliefs in these dolls' 'animation' as 'fantasies'; 'Things that Believe: Talismans, Amulets, Dolls, and How to Get Rid of Them', *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 45.2 (2018), pp. 423–52 (pp. 437–38), doi.org/10.18874/jjrs.45.2.2018.423-452.
- ⁴⁰ Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. by Jonathan Mayne (Phaidon, 1964), p. 202. For animate objects in Japanese culture, see Noriko T. Reider, 'Animating Objects: *Tsukumogami ki* and the Medieval Illustration of Shingon Truth', *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 36.2 (2009), pp. 231–57, doi.org/10.18874/jjrs.36.2.2009.231-257.
- ⁴¹ Unsigned review, 'Japanese Life and Industry', *Furniture Gazette*, 22, n.s., 17 January, 1885, p. 56.
- ⁴² Morris, XXII, pp. 75–77.
- ⁴³ 'Japanese Life and Industry', p. 56.
- ⁴⁴ Rolf Potts, *Souvenir* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), pp. 99–100.
- ⁴⁵ Potts identifies the 1889 Paris Exposition (which sold 'future gift-shop staples such as snow globes and collectible thimbles') and the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition (which started a global 'souvenir spoon craze') as decisive moments in the development of an 'organized, globally minded' souvenir industry, pp. 53–55.
- ⁴⁶ Pamela A. Genova, *Writing Japonisme: Aesthetic Translation in Nineteenth-Century French Prose* (Northwestern University Press, 2016), p. 4.
- ⁴⁷ John Ruskin, *Lectures on Architecture and Painting* (Routledge, 1854), pp. 105–06.
- ⁴⁸ Hearn, 'At the Market of the Dead', *Atlantic*, 68 (July–December 1891), pp. 382–88 (p. 386).
- ⁴⁹ Le Bon, *Crowd*, pp. 11, 20, 4.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, *Crowd*, p. 4.
- ⁵² Le Bon, *The Psychology of Socialism* (Macmillan, 1899), p. 359; *Crowd*, p. 27.
- ⁵³ *Historical Sketch Book and Guide to New Orleans and Environs*, ed. by Hearn and others (Coleman, 1885), p. 258.
- ⁵⁴ Hearn, letter to Joseph Tunison, [10 June 1890], in Oscar Lewis, *Hearn and his Biographers: The Record of a Literary Controversy* (Westgate, 1930), pp. 9–12 (p. 10).
- ⁵⁵ Murray, *A Fantastic Journey*, p. 128.

- ⁵⁶ Hearn, letter to Henry Watkin, 25 April 1890, in *Letters from the Raven: Letters from Lafcadio Hearn to Henry Watkin*, ed. by Milton Bronner (Brentano's, 1907), p. 94.
- ⁵⁷ Xine Yao, *Disaffected: The Cultural Politics of Unfeeling in Nineteenth-Century America* (Duke University Press, 2021), p. 172.
- ⁵⁸ Murray, *A Fantastic Journey*, p. 20.
- ⁵⁹ Luis Oscar Gómez, trans., in 'Selected Verses from the Gaṇḍavyūha' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Yale, 1967), p. lxxxviii.
- ⁶⁰ Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, p. 118.
- ⁶¹ Ibid. p. 119.
- ⁶² Thomas Cleary, *The Flower Ornament Scripture: A Translation of the Avatamsaka Sutra* (Shambhala, 1993), p. 1312; for the translation of 'Buddha-field', see Cleary, p. 1532.
- ⁶³ Elizabeth Bisland claimed that Hearn began translating Flaubert's *Tentation* in Cincinnati in 1875/76; see Murray, *A Fantastic Journey*, p. 37. Gustave Flaubert, *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, trans. by Hearn (Harriman, 1910), p. 260.
- ⁶⁴ Hearn, in MS translation of Flaubert's *Tentation*; UVA, MSS 6101a–6101d, vol. 2, fol. 518.
- ⁶⁵ Hearn, *Pre-Raphaelite*, p. 120.
- ⁶⁶ Hearn, letter to Basil Hall Chamberlain, 23 January 1893, in *The Japanese Letters of Lafcadio Hearn*, ed. by Elizabeth Bisland (Houghton Mifflin, 1911), pp. 41–45 (p. 44).

‘Peculiar, Exotic, Irresistible’:
Exotic Decay and the Fantasy of Enslaved Beauty in Lafcadio Hearn’s
Two Years in the French West Indies (1890)

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What role do racialized women play in the articulation of decadent aesthetics in the colonial Caribbean? This article takes up that question by turning to Lafcadio Hearn’s *Two Years in the French West Indies* (1890), a text that registers both fascination and ambivalence toward Creole culture in the wake of emancipation. Hearn is best known as a cosmopolitan figure whose work traverses the US South, the Caribbean, and Japan. Yet while much of the critical attention on Hearn has focused on his global mobility, folkloric ethnography, and *Japonisme*, his writing in and about the French West Indies has received less sustained analysis. In particular, scholars have yet to fully reckon with the aesthetic and ideological weight he places on the figure of the *femme de couleur* – a mixed-race woman whose beauty, agency, and racial proximity to whiteness make her a potent figure of both desire and decline.

Lafcadio Hearn uses the figure of the *femme fatale* to explore the cracks in colonial power. In his Caribbean writings, especially *Two Years in the French West Indies*, Hearn draws on the decadent fascination with transgressive women – figures who cross boundaries of sex, race, class, and spiritual order. Like Charles Baudelaire’s seductive corpses, Algernon Charles Swinburne’s tortured saints, or Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s sensual Madonnas, Hearn’s *femmes fatales* are never just beautiful: they are unsettling, excessive, and politically charged. But in Hearn’s case, these women carry the weight of a specific colonial history. They emerge from the plantation world and its afterlives, shaped by emancipation, creolization, and the threat of Black freedom. Hearn offers multiple versions of this figure: the *belle affranchie*, who embodies a sensual and racialized vision of Martinique’s past; *La Guiablesse*, a supernatural seductress who lures enslaved men away from the

cane fields to their deaths; and the towering *zombi* woman – fourteen feet tall – who surfaces as both fantasy and reckoning. These women work against the colonial figures Hearn otherwise references – such as Étienne Rufz de Lavison and Joseph Romanet du Caillaud – who try to control or explain the Caribbean through Western legal, scientific and theological discourses. By contrast, Hearn's *femmes fatales* resist explanation. They expose the limits of imperial knowledge and haunt the archive with their unruly presence. In Hearn's decadent imagination, the *femme fatale* is not just a symptom of social decline – she is a sign of colonial collapse.

Lafcadio Hearn's portrayal of the creole *femme fatale* in 'La Fille de Couleur', a sketch in *Two Years in the French West Indies*, entwines eroticism with racialized power, enslavement, and emancipation.¹ His depiction of the *fille de couleur*, both as an object of desire and as a figure of historical and cultural transition, reveals deep ambivalence toward freedom and the shifting racial and gendered dynamics of post-emancipation society. In Hearn's rendering, this racially mixed woman emerges as both alluring and doomed – a product of colonial decadence whose very desirability is tied to the structures of racial oppression that the abolition of slavery seeks to dismantle. The *fille de couleur* embodies a paradox: she is a source of erotic power and agency, yet one whose existence, in Hearn's imagination, is inextricably linked to a world vanishing with legal emancipation.

Martinique was a French colony from the seventeenth century, and like many other Caribbean colonies in the decades that followed, it became heavily dependent on enslaved labour for the production of sugar, tobacco, and rum. The transatlantic slave trade facilitated the forced labour of countless enslaved Africans and their descendants, some of whom were transported to Martinique over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By the late eighteenth century, the majority of the population in Martinique was of African descent, though the state was legally structured along racial lines that privileged white colonists and free people of colour over the enslaved population. The tropic island that fascinates Hearn has a dynamic past of slave

rebellions, one of which he fictionalizes in *Youma: Story of a West-Indian Slave* (1890). The abolition of slavery in French colonies was legislated in 1848, following the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804) and the rise of anti-slavery sentiments in Europe and the Americas. This process radically transformed Martinique's social and economic systems, but the legacy of slavery remained deeply embedded in the island's culture, politics, and economy.²

Slavery was a fixture of French imperialism in the Antilles from the earliest years of colonization in the seventeenth century. The French Antilles were formally colonized after the arrival in 1625 of Pierre Belain d'Esnambuc and Urbain de Roissey in Saint Christopher (modern-day Saint Kitts and Nevis). Backed by Cardinal Richelieu, d'Esnambuc established the Compagnie de Saint-Christophe (Company of Saint Christopher) and set sail for the island in February 1627 with French settlers.³ Over the following decades, the French expanded their colonial foothold across the Caribbean, seizing and settling islands including Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Saint-Domingue.

In 1635, d'Esnambuc led a group of approximately one hundred colonists from Saint Christopher to Martinique to establish a permanent settlement. Displaced by Spanish forces from Saint Christopher, some French settlers retreated to Tortuga before moving to northern Hispaniola, where they used wealth accumulated through buccaneering to finance participation in the transatlantic slave trade. This pattern of violent displacement and opportunistic accumulation laid the foundations for the French Antilles' plantation economies. By the 1697 Treaty of Ryswick, France acquired the western third of Hispaniola – later Saint-Domingue – developing it into 'the most prosperous slave colony in the Americas in the eighteenth century'.⁴

The demographic realities of these colonies fuelled the rise of a mixed-race Creole population. In Martinique between 1678 and 1687, the number of white men was roughly double that of white women, creating a stark gender imbalance. Colonial officials made repeated, often desperate attempts to attract white women to the Caribbean. Large and small planters sought

wives, domestic labourers, and reproductive partners who could bear the next generation of settlers. To address the shortage, colonial authorities resorted to moral and social coercion: in November 1680, 128 ‘young women of ill repute’ aged between fifteen and twenty-two were forcibly transported from Paris to Martinique, followed by another shipment of fifty women in September 1682. These measures only partly addressed the imbalance. As historian Bernard Moitt has demonstrated, the small but impactful presence of free and enslaved African women on the islands created both opportunities and intense anxieties for colonial society.⁵ As these women’s sexual exploitation and relationships with white men produced mixed-race children recorded in colonial ledgers, the emerging Creole population became a site of colonial panic. One census from the early 1660s in Martinique, for example, counted 166 Black men, 147 Black women, and 178 mixed-race children – evidence of how deeply interwoven racial mixing was with everyday colonial life.

Moitt highlights a revealing tension in colonial discourse that helps illuminate Hearn’s later writing: while demographic and social pressures encouraged sexual relationships between white men and Black women, colonial elites condemned these same unions as threats to racial purity and social order.⁶ Moreau de Saint-Méry, a Martinique-born lawyer and chronicler of colonial life, gave voice to these anxieties when he claimed that enslaved Black women had an ‘indomitable propensity for Black men’, insisting that neither the privileges of relationships with white men nor the threat of severe punishment could restrain their desires.⁷ His words underscore how colonial narratives often sought to deny Black women’s agency even as they policed and exploited their sexuality.

Recent scholarship has expanded the field of decadence studies by centring its entanglements with race, empire, and ecology. Peter Bailey’s analysis of *Two Years in the French West Indies* situates Hearn’s lush prose within an ecology of imperial decline, arguing that his representations of Martinique’s landscapes and women reflect both aesthetic enchantment and a

deep ambivalence about modernity.⁸ The tensions that Bailey identifies between a desire to preserve the beauty of a vanishing colonial world and an anxious anticipation of its inevitable decline support my reading of the *belle affranchie* as a literary figure whose alluring power emerges from, yet threatens, the very plantation system that cultivated her. My intervention contributes to recent intersectional approaches to decadence, such as Cherrie Kwok's term 'Duvalian decadence'.⁹ This describes literature produced by enslaved and colonized peoples and their descendants – drawing inspiration from Jeanne Duval, the Haitian paramour and muse of Charles Baudelaire – to underscore an underexplored connection between decadence and the Black diaspora. Stefano Evangelista similarly repositions Hearn within transitional and cosmopolitan decadent contexts, particularly in his analyses of translation and aesthetic border-crossing.¹⁰ Mary Gallagher's work also explores Hearn's mediation of Creole folktales in Martinique as ethnographic, innovative, and informed by his close relationships with female interlocutors as repositories of key cultural knowledges.¹¹ Together, these critics offer crucial frameworks for understanding how racialized women in Hearn's Martinique writing emerge not only as exoticized figures of desire but also as products of and participants in the aesthetic and material economies of colonial modernity.

Alongside this, the Afro-Creole cultural elements that Hearn infuses into many of his representations of racialized women afford them disruptive beauty, knowledge, and power, resulting in a *femme fatale* born out of circum-Caribbean-inspired notions of decadence. This figure, at once enchanting and tragic, raises urgent questions: Why does Hearn construct a type of sensual, persuasive woman whose erotic power renders white men vulnerable – allowing her to secure not only her own freedom but also that of her loved ones through enfranchisement – while contrasting the fraught position of the less beautiful, endangered yet emancipated *fille de couleur* of his day?

In *Two Years in the French West Indies*, 'La Fille de Couleur' examines the declining status of mixed-race women in post-emancipation Martinique. Hearn contrasts the *fille de couleur* with the

belle affranchie, who, under slavery, occupied a privileged position due to her beauty and proximity to whiteness through her role in the extra-legal system of *plaçage*.¹² Hearn draws on archival texts to describe powerful, beautiful mistresses of white Creole men, who benefit from economic and social advantages that set her apart from the enslaved and even from free Black women. The *belle affranchie*'s refined hybridity destabilizes racial hierarchies, as her allure blurs distinctions between Black and white, complicating this colonial society's rigid structures. Hearn argues that with the fall of plantation society the *fille de couleur* inherits only a degraded beauty, losing the delicate refinement of her ancestors. He likens her decline to a conservatory plant losing its shelter – once protected and nurtured, she now hardens and grows less beautiful. Post-emancipation, she becomes more aware of racial injustice, less submissive, and increasingly detached from white men, signalling the erosion of the old social order. Hearn's portrayal of the *fille de couleur* as a decadent type reflects his marked, persistent anxieties about racial and cultural decline. He laments the disappearance of the *belle affranchie* as a sign of Martinique's broader degeneration, mourning both the loss of rigid racial hierarchies and the aesthetic ideals they once produced. Within the broader scope of *Two Years in the French West Indies*, 'La Fille de Couleur' serves as a meditation on racial hybridity, colonial decline, and the consequences of emancipation; the chapter encapsulates the broader tensions and contradictions within his works, which simultaneously acknowledge the injustices of slavery while lamenting the 'loss' of what he sees as its cultural and aesthetic byproducts.

While much of the discourse regarding Hearn's depictions of racialized women rightfully acknowledges and often critiques the author's exoticism of them, his personal history – specifically, his relationship with Mattie Foley, a Black woman whom he married in 1874 while living in Ohio – echoes in and complicates his literary constructions of race and eroticism. Some of the earliest published criticism of Hearn's relationship with mixed-race and Black women posits a connection

between his sexual attraction and his decadent literature. Nina Kennard, one of Hearn's early biographers, writes in 1912 that:

The school of French writers who have been dubbed 'decadents' and who exercised so great an influence on him were infected with a strange partiality for alien races and coloured women. Exotic oddness and strangeness, primitive impulses, as displayed in the quest of strange tongues and admiration of strange people, were a vital part of the impressionist creed [...]. Baudelaire boldly declared his preference for the women of black races. Most of Pierre Loti's earlier novels were but the histories of love affairs with women of 'dusky races', either Eastern or Polynesian.¹³

Kennard's use of 'infection' signals some outside force creeping in, ushering in contamination: a rhetoric of corruption. Pathogens exist, and so does the fear of them; to say Hearn was 'infected' suggests not just exposure but transformation and the implication that his attraction to Black and mixed-race women compromised him in some way. This frames his desire as something invasive, an independent influence that alters him, rather than something innate to his worldview. The language Kennard uses – 'strange', 'infected', 'influence' – suggests a form of moral or artistic corruption, as if attraction to racialized women relegates him beyond the norms of (implicitly white) bourgeois society. This site of 'infection' marks Hearn's violation of social and legal propriety by marrying Mattie Foley, while at the same time indicating prevalent forms of attraction to and models of representing racialized women within decadent literature. This inflammatory 'infection' is a symptom of friction, of the body responding to something it cannot absorb without consequence. Kennard sees Hearn's attraction as a literary contagion, something acquired, caught, rather than consciously chosen. Yet his marriage was not merely an aesthetic dalliance but a real disruption which destabilized his social positioning, not least in the termination of his employment with the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. Kennard's critical condemnation treats his attraction as something foreign and deleterious rather than something generatively structuring his experiences and shaping his writing.

Her claim that his attraction was part of an 'impressionist creed' reinforces this, positioning it as a mere artistic affectation rather than a sincerely felt and genuinely companionate relationship.

But if we take this ‘infection’ seriously – not as a sign of unnatural deviation but as a force of transmission, transformation, and disruption – it allows us to reframe our understanding of Hearn’s complex relationship with literary decadence. While Kennard’s assertion is fraught with xenophobia and racism, we might nevertheless take at face-value her observation that Hearn’s engagement with non-white women informs the decadent commitments of his work. What might it mean to understand the author’s racialized eroticism as a generative force in his literature, not merely fetish or exoticism? Kennard’s biographical provocation might illuminate the plentiful descriptions in Hearn’s Antillean writing of beautiful mixed-race and Black women, defined by a beauty which is enchanting and unique, but ultimately disposable, transient and in decline.

Hearn constructs an evolutionary narrative of racial beauty by drawing on historical texts by colonial figures: priests, scholars, physicians, and members of the French military such as Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre, Joseph Romanet du Caillaud, and Étienne Ruzé de Lavison.¹⁴ These sources, written from the perspective of colonial administrators and European observers, provide him with a genealogy of Creole racial mixing that he presents as naturalized historical fact. Through these texts, Hearn asserts that the conditions of slavery produced a uniquely beautiful type – the *belle affranchie* – whose refinement and allure gave her influence over white Creole men, unsettling the very racial hierarchies that structured plantation society. Hearn’s descriptions of histories of racial and sexual relations in Martinique reveals the deeply ambivalent function of the *fille de couleur* within the colonial order: she is simultaneously an agent of disruption and an object of containment. His assertion that ‘Nature, in the guise of the *belle affranchie*, had mocked at slave codes’, underscores the ways erotic desire subverts the rigid racial hierarchies upheld by colonial power.¹⁵ The *fille de couleur* embodies a paradox – her ‘irresistible fascination’ unsettles racial boundaries, yet her position within the economy of desire remains one of precarious subjugation rather than true emancipation. Hearn’s language oscillates between celebration and condescension, positioning these women as powerful figures who ‘mock’ and ‘laugh’ at racial pretensions, yet he

simultaneously underscores their marginalization, marking them as transient and outside the legitimizing structures of marriage and legal recognition.

Hearn's Creole *femme fatale* complements his aesthetic evolutionary theory to erase the sexual violence and forced labour of enslavement, apparently allowing him to maintain his erotic gaze without culpability. The text argues that decades of miscegenation created racialized beauty powerful enough to destabilize enslavement. I quote Hearn at length:

'After one or two generations', writes the historian Rufz, 'the *Africaine*, reformed, refined, beautified in her descendants, transformed into the creole negress, commenced to exert a fascination irresistible, capable of winning anything (*capable de tout obtenir*)'. Travellers of the eighteenth century were confounded by the luxury of dress and of jewellery displayed by swarthy beauties in St. Pierre. It was a public scandal to European eyes. But the creole negress or mulattress, beginning to understand her power, sought for higher favors and privileges than silken robes and necklaces of gold beads: she sought to obtain, not merely liberty for herself, but for her parents, brothers, sisters, – even friends. What successes she achieved in this regard may be imagined from the serious statement of creole historians that if human nature had been left untrammelled to follow its better impulses, slavery would have ceased to exist a century before the actual period of emancipation! By 1738, when the white population had reached its maximum (15,000), and colonial luxury had arrived at its greatest height, the question of voluntary enfranchisement was becoming very grave. So omnipotent the charm of half-breed beauty that masters were becoming the slaves of their slaves. It was not only the creole *negress* who had appeared to play a part in this strange drama which was the triumph of nature over interest and judgment: her daughters, far more beautiful, had grown up to aid her, and to form a special class. These women, whose tints of skin rivalled the colors of ripe fruit, and whose gracefulness – peculiar, exotic, and irresistible – made them formidable rivals to the daughters of the dominant race, were no doubt physically superior to the modern *filles-de-couleur*. They were results of a natural selection which could have taken place in no community otherwise constituted; – the offspring of the union between the finer types of both races. But that which only slavery could have rendered possible began to endanger the integrity of slavery itself: the institutions upon which the whole social structure rested were being steadily sapped by the influence of half-breed girls. Some new, severe, extreme policy was evidently necessary to avert the already visible peril.¹⁶

Hearn's depiction of the *belle affranchie* and *fille de couleur* not only aestheticizes their adornments but also obscures the material realities that underpin their refinement. The luxurious jewellery, silken dresses, and golden beads that mark these women as objects of fascination are not evidence of their autonomy but rather a testament to the wealth extracted from the plantation economy. These possessions, gifted or permitted by white Creole men, reinforce the fundamental dependency of these women on the very system that subjugates them. Across Rufz and Romanet's writings, Hearn

identifies and romanticizes the process by which these women ‘make even the fetters of slavery serve them for adornments’, yet in doing so, he erases the violent mechanisms of colonial exploitation that provide these trappings in the first place.¹⁷

This obfuscation is central to Hearn’s *femme fatale*. He presents these women as figures of seductive power, capable of reversing hierarchies by enthralling their former masters, yet this apparent agency is entirely relegated by the economic and racial structures of the plantation system. The wealth that allows them to dress in finery is not their own; their ability to captivate white men relies upon their desirability and sexual availability within a system that still positions them as commodities, as chattel. The trope of the *femme fatale*, as Hearn and those he cites construct it, depends on the illusion of power – an illusion that conceals the fundamental inequity at the heart of their position.

This contradiction is particularly evident in Rufz’s characterisation of the *belle affranchie* as both irresistible and powerless, capable of obtaining ‘anything’ yet entirely reliant on what white Creole men are willing to bestow to their intimate partners. Hearn erases the fact that these women were not simply beneficiaries of white men’s desire but products of a plantation system in which their very bodies were commodified, their beauty shaped by selective sexual violence, and their possessions the remnants of an economy built on racialized labour. Hearn’s nostalgia for the *belle affranchie* thus becomes a nostalgia for a world in which white men retained ultimate control – not just over wealth and power but over the women whose adornments, refinement, and very survival depended on their continued patronage.

Hearn’s *belle affranchie* and *fille de couleur* emerge as complementary figures, speaking simultaneously of disruptive erotic potency and of colonial decline. However, it is also worth asking whether Hearn’s movement to the Creole cultures of Louisiana and Martinique was, at least in part, an attempt to find a more hospitable environment where the process of Black abjection was less violently enforced. As scholars have noted, Hearn sought to redeem himself after the

scandal of his marriage to Mattie Foley, and his migration coincided with a period (1868–1894) when anti-miscegenation laws had been repealed in Louisiana, making such relationships legally permissible. Furthermore, Louisiana’s long history of extra-legal interracial relationships through the *plaçage* system – where white men and women of colour engaged in formalized, though unofficial, unions – provided a cultural precedent that likely shaped Hearn’s imagination. Similarly, his depiction of Martinique suggests a lingering nostalgia for a colonial past in which racial mixing, though officially unspoken, was widely practised. By tallying illegitimacy statistics, Hearn presents historical miscegenation as both an open secret and a symptom of social decay, framing the *fille de couleur* as both empowered and doomed. In this chapter, this contradiction is emblematic of Hearn’s broader anxieties: his fascination with women of colour seems almost inextricable from his impulse to frame their agency as fleeting, their power as an ephemeral by-product of colonial decadence rather than a step toward genuine liberation.

Hearn’s metaphor of mixed-race women as ‘rivaling the colors of ripe fruit’ evokes a logic of consumption – one that simultaneously aestheticizes and commodifies these women’s bodies. The comparison to fruit evokes taste, sensuality, and desirability, positioning these women as objects to be plucked, tasted, and consumed. It also implies a temporality – fruit is only desirable at a specific moment before it spoils. This reflects the author’s broader framing of the *belle affranchie* as a fleeting product of slavery’s social structures, a beauty that was cultivated under specific conditions and, in his view, has since deteriorated. The language of ‘peculiar, exotic, and irresistible’ reinforces this dynamic by rendering these women as foreign curiosities, beautiful and appealing because of their difference. Hearn’s emphasis on their ‘gracefulness’ situates them within a tradition of European aesthetic ideals, suggesting that their refinement is what makes them so dangerously attractive to white men. This speaks to the *femme fatale* trope that runs throughout Hearn’s work – these women do not merely captivate, they threaten. Their beauty is not just an

object of admiration but a force that disrupts social order, making them ‘formidable rivals’ to white women.

Yet, the passage also underscores a hierarchical temporality – these women, Hearn claims, were ‘no doubt physically superior to the modern *filles-de-couleur*’. This assertion constructs a narrative of decline, where the *belle affranchie* represents an unattainable past ideal that has since eroded. By linking beauty to racial mixing under slavery, Hearn implicitly ties aesthetic value to the very structures of oppression that produced it. The conservatory metaphor lingers here: just as certain plants flourish in controlled environments, Hearn suggests that these women’s beauty was cultivated under the forced conditions of enslavement and white patronage. With the collapse of that structure, he sees their beauty fading – another lament for what he views as the aesthetic and social loss of the pre-emancipation world.

Hearn’s portrayal of the *fille de couleur* in *Two Years in the French West Indies* reflects his deep ambivalence toward the shifting racial and sexual economies of the post-emancipation era. If French Creole societies like Louisiana and Martinique had once provided a structured, albeit highly racialized, space for extra-legal relationships between white men and women of colour through systems like *plaçage*, Hearn recognizes that these arrangements are increasingly threatened in the wake of abolition. The economic and legal conditions ushered in by emancipation – particularly the dissolution of slavery as an economic system and the granting of formal citizenship to formerly enslaved populations – undermined the very foundations that had sustained *plaçage*. For Hearn, this transformation represents not a triumph of freedom, but a form of disorder, a collapse of what he frames as a historically stable and mutually understood mode of interracial intimacy. In this way, Hearn’s investment in French Creole cultures reflects not simply an aesthetic or anthropological interest; it is also bound up with his anxieties over the loss of a social order that allowed for a regulated yet permissive form of interracial desire.

Hearn's reflections on the decline of the *belle affranchie* in *Two Years in the French West Indies* reveal a fundamental paradox in his thinking. While he acknowledges the immorality of slavery and the necessity of emancipation, he simultaneously mourns the loss of the very conditions that, in his view, made possible the most beautiful and refined mixed-race women. His description of these women as the result of a unique process of 'natural selection' under slavery underscores the extent to which he sees their beauty as an artificial product of the plantation system.¹⁸ Without the rigid structures of racial hierarchy and economic dependence imposed by slavery, he suggests, the distinct physical and social refinement of the *belle affranchie* is fated to disappear.

This tension between morality and aesthetics manifests in his discussion of racial mixing under slavery. He suggests that slavery, despite its undeniable cruelty, enabled the emergence of a unique hybrid beauty, one that could not have developed under any other circumstances, 'results of a natural selection which could have taken place in no community otherwise constituted... But that which only slavery could have rendered possible began to endanger the integrity of slavery itself.'¹⁹ Here, Hearn acknowledges that the presence of these women – their beauty, refinement, and especially their influence over white men – was itself a destabilizing force within the plantation system. The same structures that produced them also made their existence precarious, as their status often relied on extra-legal relationships like *plaçage* rather than formalized rights. In this way, he recognizes that the *belle affranchie* was always an unstable figure, her position contingent on the continued existence of a colonial order that was bound to collapse.

Dennis Denisoff's *Decadent Ecology* provides a useful framework for analysing the shifting racial, economic, and sociopolitical dynamics in Hearn's New World writings. Drawing on Ernst Haeckel's model of evolutionary ecology, Denisoff explores the decadent notion that a dominant species, in its relentless pursuit of self-enhancement, may ultimately exhaust the very resources that sustain it, leading to its own degeneration and eventual replacement by another species.²⁰

Slavery, as a hierarchical system designed to sustain white supremacy and economic dominance, saw the creation and recreation of the species ‘Man’, and ultimately created conditions that undermined its own stability. If white Creole power rested on the subjugation of enslaved populations, then the emergence of the *belle affranchie* – a figure whose beauty gave her influence over white men – signals the internal incongruities of that system. The same racial hierarchy that sought to contain and exploit non-white bodies also created the conditions for their ascendance. Hearn dramatizes this by suggesting that ‘the institutions upon which the whole social structure rested were being steadily sapped by the influence of half-breed girls’, whose seductive power eroded the normally fixed barriers between enslaver and enslaved.²¹ His account turns colonial anxieties about racial mixture into an aesthetic and evolutionary crisis, in which the refinement of the *belle affranchie* is at once a venerated product of Creole civilization and a marker of its collapse. By framing racial mixing as both a product and a disruptor of the slave system, Hearn maps the logic of Haeckel’s self-limiting model onto the decline of creole society. The ‘success’ of slavery in producing wealth and a stratified racial order also ensured its downfall, as the rigid structures that upheld it could not withstand the pressures of emancipation, universal suffrage, and Black political empowerment. In this way, Hearn’s work registers the decay of a system that, in striving to perfect and sustain itself, ensured its own extinction – just as Haeckel’s model predicts for dominant species in nature.

At the heart of Hearn’s dilemma is the question of preservation. How, he wonders, can the refined beauty of the mixed-race woman endure in the post-emancipation world? His writing suggests that he sees no clear solution. The *fille de couleur* of the present, he notes, is already losing the physical delicacy and submissive charm that characterized her predecessors:

The almost extreme physical refinement and delicacy, bequeathed to her by the freedwomen of the old regime, are passing away: like a conservatory plant deprived of its shelter, she is returning to a more primitive condition, – hardening and growing perhaps less comely as well as less helpless.²²

Hearn's metaphor of the conservatory flower underscores his investment in artifice, suggesting that the mixed-race woman's beauty is not inherent but cultivated under highly specific, unnatural conditions. Just as a delicate plant, removed from the wild and placed in a controlled environment, flourishes under careful regulation, the *fille de couleur's* refinement and physical allure, he implies, were the product of a colonial order that has since begun to decay. With emancipation, she is exposed to the unchecked forces of nature – blackness, hardship, and social upheaval – which Hearn frames as corrosive to the beauty and grace inherited from the *belle affranchie*. No longer sheltered by a system that once preserved her aesthetic and social appeal, she is, in his eyes, hardening, losing the delicate features that once defined her allure. For Hearn, this shift is not merely a transformation but a regression: a return to an unrefined, 'primitive' state that marks the decline of both the mixed-race woman and the creole world she embodied. Once a symbol of exotic enchantment, she now represents the inevitability of racial and cultural dissolution in the post-emancipation era.

Hearn invokes this same metaphor in 'The Creole Patios', lamenting the female octoroon of the pre-emancipation era:

Daughters of luxury, artificial human growths, never organized to enter the iron struggle for life unassisted and unprotected, they vanished forever with the social system which made them a place apart as for splendid plants reared within a conservatory. With the fall of American feudalism the dainty glass house was dashed to pieces; the species it contained have perished utterly; and whatever morality may have gained, one can not help thinking that art has lost something by their extinction.²³

Again, Hearn's conservatory metaphor suggests that the beauty of mixed-race women in the colonial era was an artificial product of slavery and the rigid social structures that upheld it. In 'The Creole Patios', however, this same metaphor takes on a more explicitly nostalgic and even an elegiac tone, framing the decline of the 'female octoroon' as a tragic aesthetic loss. By likening these women to 'splendid plants reared within a conservatory', Hearn suggests that their beauty and power were dependent on highly specific environmental conditions – conditions rooted in the brutal realities of slavery and racialized sexual economies. The conservatory, an artificial space

designed to cultivate exotic specimens, mirrors the plantation economy itself, which selected, commodified, and controlled the reproduction of enslaved women. These women did not exist outside of this system; rather, their allure was shaped and maintained by it. Hearn's assertion that they were 'never organized to enter the iron struggle for life unassisted and unprotected' reveals his view that emancipation left these delicate women exposed to a harsher reality, where their thoroughly cultivated beauty could no longer ensure their survival. The language of fragility – 'daughters of luxury', 'artificial human growths' – reinforces his belief that these women were not just dependent on the system but fundamentally unsuited to life beyond it.

Hearn's invocation of American feudalism here is particularly telling, as it frames the *antebellum* racial order as a noble, if doomed, social structure. His phrasing – 'the dainty glass house was dashed to pieces' – suggests a sudden and violent rupture, an irreversible destruction of a carefully maintained aesthetic order. He mourns not the system of racial and sexual exploitation itself, but the artistic and cultural loss that, in his view, accompanied its collapse. The passage highlights the depth of Hearn's ambivalence: while he acknowledges that morality may have gained from the end of slavery, his concern lies with what he perceives as art's loss. This aestheticized nostalgia erases the material realities of the women he describes, reducing them to objects of beauty whose worth is measured by their aesthetic and sexual functions rather than their autonomy or agency.

Ultimately, Hearn's writing on the *belle affranchie* reveals the contradictions of his racial and aesthetic politics. While he lightly condemns slavery, he also romanticizes the forms of beauty and social arrangement it produced. He mourns the loss of a type that could only have existed under oppressive conditions, even as he acknowledges that those conditions were unjust. In doing so, he articulates a distinctly decadent ambivalence – an attraction to the fading, the artificial, and the doomed, coupled with an anxiety about the inexorable forces of social change. In the end, Hearn's

vision of post-emancipation Martinique is one of irreversible decline, where not only economic stability and social order have eroded, but beauty itself is in peril of extinction.

Hearn's writing in *Two Years in the French West Indies* constructs decline as a racialized and gendered phenomenon, positioning the *fille de couleur* as a liminal figure whose existence is threatened by the transformations wrought by emancipation and universal suffrage. His anxieties about colonial decay are deeply tied to what he perceives as the impending erasure of mixed-race subjects, particularly women, who had once occupied a socially ambiguous but powerful position within the plantation economy. The mixed-race woman, for Hearn, is both a symbol of aesthetic refinement and a casualty of racial and political shifts that he believes will result in a homogenized, 'savage' Blackness.²⁴ His perspective thus reveals a troubling logic: while he fetishizes the *fille de couleur* for the beauty and cultural hybridity produced under slavery and colonialism, he also frames her as a tragic figure doomed to fade with the dissolution of these oppressive structures.

This sense of doom is not merely abstract – it is tied to the very real social and economic shifts following emancipation. White flight allows for a new threat: 'All these mixed races, all these beautiful fruit-colored populations, seem doomed to extinction', Hearn warns, alerting readers to the dangers of 'the true black element, more numerically powerful, more fertile, more cunning'.²⁵ His language betrays his fear that the structures that once sustained racial hierarchies are crumbling, leaving a power vacuum that will be filled by the formerly enslaved. Yet Hearn is not only preoccupied with the general fate of mixed-race people; he is particularly concerned with the *fille de couleur*, whose historical reliance on white patronage is increasingly unstable. In the past, she wielded a certain form of power – through beauty, charm, and strategic social positioning – but Hearn suggests that these advantages are slipping away. As he observes, "To-day it cannot be truly said of the *fille-de-couleur* that her existence is made up of "love, laughter, and forgettings".²⁶ Instead, she must navigate new economic and social realities, striving for self-sufficiency and the education of her children, while still navigating relationships with white men as potential avenues for upward

mobility. However, Hearn insists that these aspirations are ultimately futile, as racial divisions are deepening beyond repair.

Hearn emphasizes the *fille de couleur*'s growing autonomy as another marker of her decline. He contrasts her with her predecessors, who, in his view, embodied an almost ethereal refinement, precisely because they accepted their subordinate position within the racial and sexual economy of slavery and *plaçage*. In contrast, the modern *fille de couleur* is 'less humble and submissive, – somewhat more exacting', and crucially, she 'comprehends better the moral injustice of her position'.²⁷ Her increasing awareness of systemic racial and gendered injustices transforms her into a less desirable figure in Hearn's aesthetic hierarchy. Her shift from passive beauty to assertive agency disrupts the fantasy of the mixed-race woman as a product of aesthetic cultivation, further reinforcing the sense that her beauty is in decline.

Additionally, Hearn frames the *fille de couleur* as an endangered figure caught between racial poles, her existence threatened by the waning presence of white creoles and the growing dominance of the Black population. In doing so, he mourns not only her individual decline but the broader dissolution of a racial and social order that he associates with aesthetic sophistication. The *belle affranchie* – a product of a bygone era – represents, for Hearn, something idealized and ephemeral: beauty that could only exist under slavery's unnatural conditions. In contrast, the *fille de couleur*, struggling for survival in post-emancipation Martinique, embodies a form of cultural and racial decadence, a beauty that is fading and transforming under the pressures of modernity.

Ann Laura Stoler's *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power* draws our attention to how colonial discourses construct non-white women as objects of both desire and danger. Her study examines why 'the micromanagement of sexual arrangements and affective attachments were so critical to the making of colonial categories and deemed so important to distinctions of ruler and ruled'.²⁸ Such work brings into sharper focus the ways in which Hearn's *belle affranchie* becomes a transgressive embodiment of racialized desire – his sources present her as an object of white male

fascination, but also as a figure whose power stems from her ability to seduce and manipulate her oppressors. Yet, as Stoler reminds us, colonial accounts were typically less concerned with accurately portraying the lives racialized or Othered people than with shaping, alleviating, or stoking European anxieties about racial boundaries and hierarchies. The *belle affranchie*'s beauty, then, is not just a product of evolution under slavery, as Hearn suggests, but a colonial fantasy designed to contain the unsettling realities of miscegenation and the violent hierarchies of the plantation economy.

Moreover, Stoler's concept of the epistemic anxieties of colonial rule – how colonial powers were deeply preoccupied with controlling knowledge about race, sex, and social order – can likewise explain Hearn's lament for the *belle affranchie*'s disappearance. His portrayal of the *fille de couleur* as a degraded, less beautiful version of her mother, suggests a fear that racial mixing, when no longer controlled by white supremacy, would lead to disorder. This recalls Stoler's argument that colonial authorities sought to relegate racialized women, fearing that their bodies and desires could undo the social hierarchy, leading to degeneracy: "This Lamarckian feature of eugenic thinking in its colonial expression linked racial degeneracy to the sexual transmission of cultural contagions and to the instability of imperial rule."²⁹

Stoler's gestures to these frameworks of 'sexual transmission' and 'cultural contagions' invite a return to Kennard's invocation of 'infection' in her description of Hearn's attraction to racialized women. If we understand infection not as something unnatural but as a mode of corruption – one that threatens the integrity of social and racial hierarchies – then Hearn's depiction of the *belle affranchie* aligns with broader colonial fears about degeneracy and destabilization. His framing of these women as both dangerously seductive and aesthetically ideal reflects the same logic that Stoler identifies: a belief that racial mixing, especially through sexual relationships, could transmit cultural 'contagions' that would weaken imperial rule. Hearn's nostalgia for the *belle affranchie* – a woman whose beauty flourished under slavery but supposedly

diminishes in emancipation – suggests that her desirability was contingent on her subjugation. In his framing, once she becomes aware of racial injustice and no longer serves white Creole men, she loses not just social status but also the very beauty that once made her exceptional.

In *Two Years in the French West Indies*, Hearn's portrayal of the *belle affranchie* as a decadent, desirable *femme fatale* embodies enchantment and anxiety. He celebrates her as the paramount product of hybridization, a culmination of colonial histories that produced a woman of almost unimaginable beauty and social power. Yet, this same beauty is perilous – threatening to destabilize the very racial stratification that produced her and provided the conditions for her to flourish. The *belle affranchie* becomes a symbol of both cultural refinement and social decay: a force of attraction and anxiety that embodies the fragility of colonial structures. In aligning the mixed-race woman with the concept of decadence, Hearn positions her as a figure of both allure and ultimate demise, illustrating the paradox at the heart of his fascination with Creole women.

However, the *belle affranchie*'s power is much diminished in post-emancipation Martinique. As Hearn shifts focus to the figure of the *fille de couleur*, the vibrant and seductive qualities passed on by the *belle affranchie* of old begin to degrade. The *fille de couleur*, no longer elevated by the institution of slavery and the supposed privileges it granted, is a shadow of her foremother. No longer a *femme fatale*, she is increasingly seen as less beautiful, less delicate, and less powerful in Hearn's text. He describes her return to a 'more primitive condition', drawing on a racialized and evolutionary discourse that frames her as a lingering anachronism that will succumb to the changing social order. Her awareness of the racial injustice surrounding her heightens her dissatisfaction, leading her to reject the traditional relationships of dependency with white Creole men. Where the *belle affranchie* had once been a symbol of exquisitely cultivated beauty and subversive social influence, the *fille de couleur* represents a loss – a sign of cultural and racial decay that marks the collapse of the old plantation system.

Hearn's personal relationships with racialized women, especially his marriage to Mattie Foley, inform and intensify his investment in the *femme fatale*. His attraction to and anxiety about these women is not just observed but lived, giving his writing urgency and intimacy beyond the observed detachment typically associated with a decadent posture. Decadence offers him a way to turn personal transgressions into art, reframing his relationship to racialized women as part of larger aesthetic and philosophical projects. The racialized *femme fatale*, then, is not just a worn relic of a past era but a vital, generative force that animates his literary work.

¹ Lafcadio Hearn, *Two Years in the French West Indies* (Harper, 1890).

² See Rebecca Hartkopf Schloss, *Sweet Liberty: The Final Days of Slavery in Martinique* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Dale W. Tomich, *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar: Martinique and the World Economy, 1830–1848* (SUNY Press, 2016).

³ Bernard Moitt, *Women and Slavery in the French Antilles, 1635–1848* (Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 2–18.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Moreau de Saint-Méry, *A Topographical and Political Description of the Spanish Part of Saint-Domingo* (1796), qtd. in Moitt, p. 13.

⁸ Peter Bailey, 'Deforestation and Decolonization: Lafcadio Hearn's French Antillean Writing', *Volupté: Interdisciplinary Journal of Decadence Studies*, 6.1 (2023), 1–19.

⁹ Cherrie Kwok, 'After Haiti: Race, Empire, and Global Decadent Literary Resistance, 1804–1948' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Virginia, 2024) <https://libraetd.lib.virginia.edu/public_view/k930bz354>.

¹⁰ Stefano Evangelista, 'Lafcadio Hearn and Global Aestheticism', in *Literary Cosmopolitanism in the English Fin de Siècle* (Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 72–116.

¹¹ Mary Gallagher, 'Lafcadio Hearn's American Writings and the Creole Continuum', in *American Creoles: The Francophone Caribbean and the American South*, ed. by Martin Munro and Celia Britton (Liverpool University Press, 2012), pp. 19–39.

¹² Hearn, 'La Fille de Couleur', in *Two Years in the French West Indies*, pp. 311–37 (p. 314).

¹³ Nina Kennard, *Lafcadio Hearn* (Appleton, 1912), pp. 82–83.

¹⁴ Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre, *Histoire générale des îles Saint-Christophe, de la Guadeloupe, de la Martinique et autres de l'Amérique* (Jolly, 1667); Joseph Romanet du Caillaud, *Voyage à la Martinique* [n. pub], 1804; Étienne Rufz de Lavison, *Études historiques et statistiques sur la population de la Martinique* (Carles, 1850).

¹⁵ Hearn, 'La Fille de Couleur', p. 327.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 323–24.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 332–33.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Dennis Denisoff, "'Up & down & horribly natural': Walter Pater and the Decadent Anthropocene", in *Decadent Ecology in British Literature and Art, 1860–1910* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 31–60 (p. 38).

²¹ Hearn, 'La Fille de Couleur', p. 324.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 331.

²³ Bronner, Simon J., ed., 'The Creole Patois', in *Lafcadio Hearn's America: Ethnographic Sketches and Editorials* (University Press of Kentucky, 2002), pp. 126–32 (p. 128).

²⁴ Hearn, 'La Fille de Couleur', p. 331.

²⁵ Hearn, 'A Midsummer Trip to the Tropics', in *Two Years in the French West Indies* (Harper, 1890), pp. 13–100 (p. 97).

²⁶ Hearn, 'La Fille de Couleur', p. 335.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 334.

²⁸ Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (University of California Press, 2002), p. 8.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 62.

The Anatomy of Curiosity and Cosmopolitanism: Lafcadio Hearn's Medical Imagination¹

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I have half a mind to study medicine in practical earnest some day. Wouldn't I make an imposing Doctor in the Country of Cowboys? A doctor might also do well in Japan. I'm thinking seriously about it.²

A decade before he made a one-way journey to Japan in 1890, in an article entitled 'Travel An Educating Influence' (1880), Lafcadio Hearn, the inquisitive young journalist then working for the New Orleans *Item*, declared his departure from conventional ideas of nationalism, and instead determined to make 'one step toward a new and vast movement' of cosmopolitanism.³ Rather than abolishing local and historical peculiarities or going back to old nationalistic provincialism, Hearn pleaded for cosmopolitanism by way of curiosity – the insatiable 'desire or inclination to know or learn about anything', especially what is novel or strange.⁴ Recent work on Hearn's cosmopolitanism, by Stefano Evagelista and others, has brought to light the manner in which this characteristic curiosity attached itself to the art, literature, and religious practices of the cultures he encountered.⁵ However, it has tended to overlook the central place of the medical and the scientific in Hearn's transnational imagination. His cosmopolitanism transcended the traditional boundaries between the literary and the medical; the heightened sensory alertness that underpinned his curiosity was simultaneously that of the aesthete and the empiricist. Indeed, his bookshelf was one on which the works of Gustave Flaubert, Théophile Gautier, and Algernon Charles Swinburne sat alongside those of Herbert Spencer, Henry Maudsley, Wilhelm Wundt, and Francis

Galton.⁶ ‘It is a singular fact’, Hearn noted to Dr George M. Gould in 1887, ‘that most of my tried friends have been physicians.’⁷

In one of his little-known articles, ‘The Epic of Kings’, which appeared in the New Orleans *Times-Democrat* on 22 April 1883, Hearn evoked processes of cosmopolitan literary exchange by turning to tropes from anatomy and botany:

European literature has reached the apogee of that development given to it by its intrinsic vitality; it needs an invigorating impulse from without, – fresh blood from other sources. The ideas of the Orient are only now being fully understood and fairly appreciated; – they are certainly destined to influence Occidental thought more than superficially. The flowers of Western idealism will be marvellously improved by crossing with Eastern literary growths.⁸

The ‘invigorating impulse’ of ‘fresh blood’ figures cosmopolitan cultural exchange both as a blood transfusion and as cross-breeding, ultimately achieving a better understanding and appreciation of the ‘ideas of the Orient’. Aspiring towards ‘the beautiful fancy of a universal brotherhood of nations’, he imagined an authentic cross-fertilizing which would echo what his cosmopolitan contemporaries had already begun to envision on the other side of the Atlantic.⁹

Examining Hearn’s varied representations of medico-scientific curiosity allows for a richer understanding of his literary cosmopolitanism. Building on the recent Anglophone critical emphasis on Hearn as ‘a truly cosmopolitan writer’ or ‘the ultimate cosmopolitan aesthete’, this article reveals how Hearn reconciled his literary vision with his medical-anatomical curiosity within the global context of aestheticism and decadence.¹⁰ As scholars such as Meegan Kennedy and Lawrence Rothfield have demonstrated, Victorian literature formed a close relationship with contemporary discourses of medicine and pathology. Although it may ostensibly seem that literary and medical cultures were epistemologically opposed, in fact, as Kennedy notes, ‘the 19th-century novel and medical writing have much in common’,

for 'both novelists and doctors read, and wrote, in some of the same textual spaces and in response to some of the same pressures of the new print media'.¹¹ Rothfield has likewise observed that 'late Victorian literature is replete with hounded, haunted figures who represent the dangerously pathological'.¹² Taking such work as its starting point, the argument that follows traces the cosmopolitan nature of Hearn's literary-medical imagination from a historical and comparative perspective. In doing so, it focuses on Hearn's works written during his wandering years in Cincinnati, New Orleans, the French West Indies, and later in fin-de-siècle Japan, where he settled from 1890 until his death in 1904.

Before he was widely labelled the pre-eminent Western interpreter of the Japanese mind, Hearn had already established himself as a curious cosmopolitan journalist in the United States, where he spent nearly twenty years – longer than his fourteen-year stay in Japan – speculating and writing about almost anything available to his inquisitive mind. As Delia LaBarre has suggested, Hearn's inquisitive – occasionally wilfully abrasive – approach to journalism can be understood as akin to that of a surgeon wielding a scalpel.¹³ His journalistic sketches, she suggests, can be situated in a longer European satirical tradition, often working within the medical context, in which writers 'have historically seen themselves as providing remedies for social ills which usually require cutting and extraction'.¹⁴ In doing so, LaBarre gestures to the family connection between Hearn and the Augustan physician and satirist John Arbuthnot, observing that '[t]he practice of satire is often implied to be analogous to the medical profession'. 'It is unsurprising [...]', LaBarre notes, 'that Hearn took an interest in medical topics and that he may have identified with the great satirist almost as if he were a blood relation'.¹⁵ While it remains unclear whether Hearn was aware of this familial link, as a keen student of Spencerian heredity he was undoubtedly vividly conscious of the medical training of his father, Charles Bush Hearn. Hearn Snr. – a

nephew to Dr Arbuthnot – studied medicine at Trinity College Dublin and subsequently practised as a surgeon in the British Army from 1842 onwards, stationed consecutively in the Mediterranean, the West Indies, the Crimea, and India. It is likewise notable that many of Hearn's contemporary cosmopolitan aesthetes, whose works he read closely, had similar medical pedigrees. Walter Pater came from a long line of surgeons, and his brother, William, was a medical superintendent in psychiatric hospitals. John Addington Symonds's father, and namesake, was a prominent physician, while his grandfather, John Symonds, was a surgeon-apothecary. Oscar Wilde's father, William, was one of the most eminent eye surgeons of his generation, appointed in 1853 to the position of surgeon oculist-in-ordinary to the Queen in Ireland. These familial connections were matched by their shared fascination with literary precursors, such as Sir Thomas Browne, John Keats, and Gustave Flaubert, who were themselves also immersed in the relation between the literary and the medical.¹⁶

Hearn's scalpel of satire was often wielded against medical subjects during his Cincinnati years, where he turned both doctors and medical institutions (such as morgues and lunatic asylums) into objects of criticism and ridicule. In 'Giltenan the Ghoul' (1874), for instance, he narrates the story of the relationship between the Scrooge-like Dr Giltenan, 'the heartless old ghoul' and moneylender, and Mrs Margaret Sherwood, the widow of his former patient. Knowing that the penniless widow is not able to pay him back the money she owes, Dr Giltenan mercilessly insists that she should make up for it by letting him dig up 'her husband's infernal body and make a skeleton out of it', adding that the skeleton would be sold at \$40.¹⁷ The tale presents an ironic reframing of the notorious Burke and Hare story, in which the production of medical knowledge is revealed as callously inextricable from the profit motive. Around the same time, Hearn constructed an authorial persona that was similarly grotesque, casting

himself as ‘The Ghoul’ in a self-referential report on his short-lived satirical magazine *Ye Giglampz*, published in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* in October 1874.¹⁸ Here, he aligns his work as a journalist with that of a surgeon (or pathologist), presenting his sensational articles as ‘a reeking mixture of bones, blood and hair’ which he ‘thrust[s] [...] under people’s noses at breakfast time’.¹⁹

In a short illustrated contribution to the *Item*, ‘Journalistic Dissection’ (1880), Hearn adopted a similarly acerbic persona of a professor ‘performing surgery on a patient represented as the *Times* with a broadsword labelled “Democrat”, which became the *Times-Democrat*’.²⁰ The caption to the piece states that ‘[t]he Professor of the *Democrat* goeth for the *Times*, scalpel in hand, making deep incisions into the abdominal and thoracic viscera, and exposing much true inwardness’.²¹ Hearn’s sketch works simultaneously to foreground the strong visual and textual analogy between the discourse of anatomy and the instructive (or satirical) function of his early journalism, while also reflecting his long-lasting interest in hybridity and novelty in subject matter. Hearn was not only an observant commentator on culture and society but was also passionately engaged himself, through words and images, at the heart of contemporary literary, social, and political debates. In this context, this short piece emerges as his own meta-fictional take on contemporary journalism and its politics, in which he was intimately involved. As LaBarre has commented, ‘[t]he “professor” portrayed in this cut is E. A. Burke, publisher and managing editor of the *Democrat*, also Louisiana state treasurer and one of the most powerful figures in business and politics of Louisiana and New Orleans.’²² The literary relation between Burke and Hearn should not be neglected; for Burke was to acquire *The Times* the following year, in 1881, and ‘quickly made the *Times-Democrat* one of the most formidable newspaper enterprises in the South. (He also hired Hearn away from the *City Item* shortly after the acquisition)’.²³

During his formative years, the medical aspects of Hearn's journalism were nurtured by his close relationship with a young Spanish–American medic, Rudolph Matas (1860–1957), who graduated with a degree from the University of Louisiana in 1880. In later years, Matas developed notable expertise in neurology, and also made significant contributions to public health in his efforts to combat the spread of yellow fever in New Orleans.²⁴ Their friendship started soon after Hearn's employment at *The Times-Democrat* and Matas's appointment as the editor of the *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal* in 1883. Edward Larocque Tinker has suggested that Hearn's friendship with Matas must have excited Hearn's literary, scientific, and historical imagination and engendered an ethnographical sense of curiosity:

They often stayed up most of the night to wander miles all over the city in search of some stray incident or adventure that would serve to fire Hearn's imagination. As they walked they discussed, interminably, all sorts of queer subjects that appealed to Hearn's peculiar curiosities and trend of mind.²⁵

Like Hearn, Matas the cosmopolitan polyglot 'had an intense curiosity about many things'.²⁶ Their relationship eventually led Hearn to dedicate his first novel, *Chita: A Memory of Last Island* (1889), to Matas. It is not coincidental that *Chita* features a New Orleans Creole physician, Julien La Brierre, who is called to Last Island (L'Île Dernière) to treat a man with yellow fever.²⁷

In a letter of 1885 to H. E. Krehbiel – a journalist friend from his Cincinnati days – Hearn enthuses about his keen interest in 'comparative human anatomy and ethnology', which he had by then already shared with Matas, a 'warm friend of several years' standing – a young Spanish physician and professor', who 'is greatly interested in this new science'.²⁸ Matas in turn reveals the collaborative nature of their friendship, recalling Hearn's literary vision of curiosity merging into that of medical practice:

He often came to me to get information about medical points which he needed in some of his work. He was deeply interested in Arabian studies at that time, and I was able to give him some curious facts about the practice of medicine among the Arabs, which happened to be exactly what he was seeking. Not only did he read every book on Arabia which he could find, but he

actually practised the Arabic script, and he used to write me fantastic notes, addressing me as if I had been an Arab chief.²⁹

Elsewhere, Matas assumed the role of Hearn's personal physician, never failing to record the pathological anomalies that he perceived in his life and writing: '[b]oth in taste and temperament he was morbid, and in many respects abnormal.'³⁰ This 'morbid' taste and temperament, 'unconventionality', and 'an obsession of persecution' that Matas diagnosed in his friend did not, however, prevent his appreciation of Hearn's achievements. Matas continues, 'I listened to the brilliant, erratic, intemperate outpourings of his mind, aware of his eccentricities without allowing them to blind me to the beauty and value of his really marvellous nature.'³¹ Hearn is constantly seen by Matas as a curiosity, displaying such faculties of mind as singularity and inquisitiveness. He is represented as curious not only when his abnormal and impatient nature is under consideration but also even when his modesty or diligence are present: '[h]e was singularly and unaffectedly modest about his work – curiously anxious to know the real opinion of those whose judgement he valued, on any work which he had done, while impatient of flattery or "lionizing"'.³²

A New Orleans letter from 1887, sent to another physician, the ophthalmologist George M. Gould (1848–1922), reveals the deep psychological impact that his relationship with Matas had on Hearn's medico-artistic imagination:

Reading your letter, I was strongly impressed by the similarity in thought, inspiration, range, even chirography, with the letters of a very dear friend, almost a brother, and also a physician, – though probably less mature than you in many ways. A greater psychological resemblance I have never observed. My friend is very young, but already somewhat eminent here; – he has been demonstrator [sic] of anatomy for some years at our University, and will ultimately, I am sure, turn out a great name in American medicine. But he is a Spaniard, – Rudolph Matas. I first felt really curious about him after having visited him to obtain some material for a fantastic anatomical dream-sketch, and asked where I could find good information regarding the lives and legends of the great Arabian physicians. [...] I trust you will meet him some day, and find in him an ideal *confrère*, which I am sure he would find in you. It is a singular fact that most of

my tried friends have been physicians.³³

Hearn's intellectual curiosity draws two established medics, Matas and Gould, together into an alliance of scientific knowledge.³⁴ Just as Matas seems to have felt 'curious' about Hearn's morbid nature, saying that 'I was able to give him some curious facts about the practice of medicine among the Arabs, which happened to be exactly what he was seeking', so Hearn's letter to Gould expresses how the sender's literary sense of curiosity was being aroused by Matas. Hearn's representation of an ideal community consisting predominantly of physicians reflects his views of a cosmopolitan curiosity that simultaneously embraces both the medico-scientific and the aesthetic.

When Hearn writes about 'a fantastic anatomical dream-sketch' and 'the lives and legends of the great Arabian physicians', he refers to 'Three Dreams (Edited from the Note-Book of an Impressionist)', a short sketch published in *The Times-Democrat* on 11 April 1885.³⁵ The piece's titular dream visions are each narrated in the first person and followed by the initials of their respective dreamers ('M. R.', 'W. H. H.', and 'L. H.'). As 'L. H.' suggests, the third dream most explicitly (if in a disguised way) features the relation between Hearn and Matas. Here, the first-person narrator 'dreamed of a lofty and opulent dwelling in a strange city [...] and of a Man that waited there for the coming of a Physician, most learned of all Jews: wisest of those mighty in modern science' while also possessing 'the lost Arabian arts of Abu 'l-Kasem and Ibn Zohr, of Achmed Dhiaëddin and Ibn Roschd and Ibn Sina, who knew not only to heal the body but likewise to cure the soul'.³⁶ The dreaming man then assumes he is also 'aware of two sounds, – the ticking of a clock, the beating of a heart', and 'in the solemn stillness of the high dim room, the beating of the heart could be heard, like a sound of reverberation deadened by intervening walls, – like an echo of pulsant tapping, smothered, rapid, irregular'. The piece clearly recalls Edgar Allan Poe's

short story, 'The Tell-Tale Heart' (1843), which links a guilt-ridden murderer's psychological disintegration to his perception of the gradual amplification of 'a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton'.³⁷

Hearn's medical and anatomical imagery draws not only from Poe's story but rather represents a more intricate composite of English literary responses to the bodily grotesque, from the Pre-Raphaelites to Robert Browning and Walter Pater. In his characterization of the above-mentioned male dreamer, Hearn sketches out how his beating heart has been desperately entrapped by the mysterious power of an anonymous, serpent-like female figure, as is suggested by 'the Physician' who approaches this male patient to auscultate, and whispers:

*Older than the world is Her name, – old as Night; yet even the Rabbonin have forgotten Her secret.... But I have not forgotten! [...] Aye! Her loop is fast within... These are the same obstructive murmurs, – the same desperate straining of the valves: strangling in the aortic, – in the pulmonary, – in the mitral, – in the tricuspid! [...] He cannot know; but I know, – even by diagnosis alone, – how tightens the fine noose, made of the living gold that never breaks, strong as Death – aye, stronger far against this science of mine! [...] Thinner than sunbeam Her snare is, – lighter than woof of the spider; but is there a steel can sever it? – is there a force can fracture it?*³⁸

Here, Hearn creates a bifurcated narrative voice in which well-known imagery of the *femme fatale* is set alongside frequent use of medical and anatomical terminology. He ultimately concludes the piece with a description of the death of the male patient, which is followed by the vivisection of his corpse:

[T]here came a sudden, dull, snapping sound, as of a wine-skin bursting; and with never a groan the Man sank heavily down, – and his ghost went out from him....

Then the Physician summoned his servitors; and they lifted the dead Man, and laid him all unclad upon a table of a marble.

And without a word they severed the integuments of the dead Man's breast, and opened it, and took out his heart that they might examine it.

And still it quivered feebly in their hands, and the darkening blood dripped warm from its ruptured cavities to thicken upon the stone. And lo! All around it, and intertwined about the stems of its severed pipework, about the crimson stumps of its arteries and of its veins, there clung fast something lucid and fine, something yellow and thin as a fiber of silk, – one thread of light, – one line of gold, – one long bright strand of woman's hair.³⁹

There is an unmistakable link between Hearn, aestheticism, and decadence here. The sketch alludes to one of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's sonnets, 'Lady Lilith' (1868), collected in *The House of Life* (1870) under the title 'Body's Beauty'.⁴⁰ Although Hearn never mentions her name in his article, Rossetti's Lilith (as in Poe's short story) incessantly haunts his dream-sketch, where the male patient, as if following the same path trodden by the youth in 'Body's Beauty', is snared by 'her enchanted hair' until his 'heart and body and life are in its hold'. A sequence of imagery in Hearn's last paragraph, from '[a]nd lo! all around it' to 'one line of gold, – one long bright strand of woman's hair', combined with 'the same desperate straining of the valves: strangling in the aortic, – in the pulmonary, – in the mitral, – in the tricuspid', is intricately entangled with Rossetti's final image of 'one strangling golden hair' round the youth's heart. Hearn briefly alludes to Poe's influence on Rossetti in his article 'A Definitive Rossetti' (1887), writing that: '[o]f English poets, Coleridge probably exercised the first powerful influence on Rossetti, but he read Poe, Tennyson, and Keats together.'⁴¹ Much later, in his university lecture in Japan, Hearn refers to Poe's 'The Tell-Tale Heart' and his other stories, claiming that they 'represent the very highest expression of Poe's genius' and 'a very morbid condition of mind'. For Hearn, Poe produced 'some of the most splendid work in all modern literature, – work which has suggested new artistic effects and possibilities to hundreds of writers, – work also which taught us new values of words and new capacities of the English language'.⁴²

'Three Dreams' is not only a good example of Hearn's keen interest in the interaction between the literary and the medical, but also of his crystallized ideas of post-romantic influence, imagination, and intertextuality. Furthermore, the discovered 'woman's hair' is not only a curious reminiscence of fair femininity, as was popular in the nineteenth century, but also a more threatening symbol of post-romantic agony – with a recognisable precursor in Robert Browning's 'Porphyria's Lover' (1836) – as

caused by a venomous Medusa or a rebellious Lilith, emerging from the decadent tradition of *femmes fatales*. It is also worthy of note that Rossetti's characterization of Lilith, in particular the phrase '[a]nd still she sits', inherently corresponds with Pater's verbal portrait of the Lady Lisa, who 'is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire', appearing in 'Leonardo da Vinci' (1869) a year after this sonnet.⁴³ Echoing all of these and participating in a tradition of Gothic fiction with its gendered dynamics of the male gaze and female sexuality, 'Three Dreams' is all the more important because of its semi-autobiographical elements that reveal the nature of the intellectual debt Hearn must have owed to Matas. It also offers a fine specimen of the moment of alchemy when contemporary medical and anatomical discourses were absorbed into Hearn's literary imagination in the fragmented form of supernatural dream sketches.

These medical and anatomical writings are also intricately connected with Hearn's aspiration to establish an ideal community of medico-literary *confrères*. As Charles Woodward Hutson has noted, Matas himself was similarly 'cosmopolitan' in outlook; fluent in several languages, his medical practice served a diverse mix of French, Spanish, and Filipino settlers in the region around Grand Isle.⁴⁴ Matas's close engagement with these communities meant that he was well placed to respond to Hearn's own interests in the cultural and linguistic hybridity of the region. With Matas's assistance, Hearn's journalism participated in the growing literary cross-pollination of medical, ethnographical, and archaeological discourses in late nineteenth-century America. Hearn paid tribute to his intellectual kinship with Matas in an article entitled 'The Creole Doctor: Some Curiosities of Medicine in Louisiana' (1886).⁴⁵ The essay demonstrates the sophisticated manner in which Hearn assimilated the two intellectual fields of literature and medicine into a combined vision of curiosity. His interest in Creole medicine is closely linked to his

keen awareness of a 'natural art rapidly becoming obsolete', and thus also of the urgency of the need to save the tradition from cultural oblivion by collecting and publishing it.⁴⁶ This aim drove him naturally to plunge into the more domestic spheres of Creole medicine as well as to investigate its distant origin and peculiarity. In his writings, Hearn traces the roots of Creole medicine back to its African origin and 'the old slave-days', where, he imagines, 'in many cases the African slave was able to teach his master'.⁴⁷ Although he admits his own experiences have not enabled him 'to make any noteworthy observations of the more purely African features of this somewhat occult art', his sympathetic remarks on the tradition of Creole medicine, or 'those strange practices generally classed under the name Voodooism [sic]', are ultimately subversive in that they overturn the racial, hierarchical, and didactic tension between the master and the slave by enabling the latter to teach the former and so import his profound knowledge of Creole medicine.⁴⁸ It is in this context that Hearn reintroduces Matas to the reader as an important Creole friend who has helped to fill this crucial gap between the growing knowledge of a curious foreign enquirer and the secret of local Creole medicine:

The greater number of the recipes cited in this article I could not have obtained but for the aid of Creole friends; and I am especially indebted to a scholarly Spanish physician, Dr. Rodolfo Matas, now president of the New Orleans Medical Association, for many valuable facts and suggestions. He called my attention to the fact that a patient scientific inquirer might discover under the fantastic surface of Creole empiricism material of larger medical importance than that which formed the pharmacopeia of those old Arabian pharmacists and practitioners whose treatises have only been carefully studied by Europeans within the last few years.⁴⁹

As a curious 'scientific inquirer', Hearn maintains at the end of the article that 'the herb medicine of the Creoles deserves some scientific attention', and that '[m]any of these prescriptions and ideas are of negro origin; and but few of them are now ever used by the educated French-speaking people of Louisiana, with the exception of certain tisanes the medical value of which has been latterly recognized by

physicians'. Writing on 'some curiosities of medicine in Louisiana' and their almost forgotten origin, Hearn comes to grips with one of the central cultural concerns regarding the survival of ancient culture: 'the question of African survivals in the West Indies and America'.⁵⁰ 'The Creole Doctor' is not merely a token of Hearn's active collaboration with Matas, but also, more importantly, a literary–scientific attempt to publish and reinvigorate a vanishing collective knowledge of old Creole medicine.

Hearn's hybrid notion of literary–medical curiosity also strongly characterized some of the lectures he delivered at the Imperial University of Tokyo during his tenure as Professor of English Language and Literature between 1896 and 1903. In 'Notes on American Literature', a series of his special lectures given in the summer of 1898, he introduced Nathaniel Hawthorne's 'Rappaccini's Daughter' (1844), the 'Hoffmanesque fantasy' (as Fred Botting has called it) later collected in *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846).⁵¹ It is a story, as Hearn explains, where a 'rich Italian physician, entirely devoted to botany, conceives the idea of nourishing his daughter on poisonous food'.⁵² As an enthusiastic disciple (and perceptive translator) of the French Romantics, Hearn was likely aware of the extended comparison that Théophile Gautier made between Hawthorne's story and Charles Baudelaire's works in his 1867 obituary notice: 'We never read *Les Fleurs du mal* by Baudelaire, without thinking of that tale by Hawthorne: it has those sombre and metallic colours, those verdigris blossoms and heady perfumes.'⁵³ Before he settled in Japan, Hearn had referred to the story in a letter to Matas from St Pierre, Martinique, dated 25 July 1887, in which this 'cursed land' represents 'a monstrous creation of ridiculous trees, and phantasmal grasses': 'Everything has a queer shape and a queer name. [...] At present seems to me as if the Poison-plant Garden of Rappacini [sic] must be somewhere around.'⁵⁴

Hearn's reflections on Hawthorne's 'Rappaccini' are followed in his lectures by his discussion of another text which reflects his fascination with the dynamics of medical curiosity – Oliver Wendell Holmes's *Elsie Venner: A Romance of Destiny* (1861). Psychological and medical notions of curiosity permeate the work, whose thirteenth chapter is entitled 'Curiosity'. It first appeared serially in *The Atlantic Monthly* in December 1859 under the title of 'The Professor's Story', and concerns the story of a young woman who manifests snake-like characteristics. It is narrated from the perspective of a medical professor, echoing the author's profession, as Holmes later admitted in calling the work 'a medicated novel' in his second preface (1883).⁵⁵ As Hearn himself explains, Holmes

was sent to France to study medicine, distinguished himself as a student, and afterwards became Professor of Anatomy and Physiology at Harvard University. He kept this position until 1883, when he abandoned it for literature, and the private practice of medicine.⁵⁶

Hearn praises Holmes's novel as 'not only the most extraordinary book that Dr. Holmes wrote; it is also one of the most extraordinary novels of the 19th century.'⁵⁷

Having described Hawthorne's literary temperament as 'remarkable for [its] gloom', Hearn then interprets Holmes as Hawthorne's 'antithesis', as a writer with 'cheerful, light, sparkling mind'. In this respect, Holmes appears to Hearn to be 'a medical writer' who manages to reconcile the literary with the scientific without losing 'emotional feelings' or 'impulses of sympathy':

His professional studies are reflected in nearly all his work, but only in the very best way. The higher study of medicine develops, as perhaps no other scientific study does, the habits of observation and of thinking in relations; – perhaps it is for this reason that the literary work of doctors is nearly always marked by very solid qualities. In the case of Dr. Holmes, we have a medical writer who uses the best results of his studies without troubling the reader by scientific details. One might say that medical knowledge has a tendency to blunt emotional feelings and to chill impulses of sympathy. But Dr. Holmes' work affords us charming proof of the contrary. Warm sympathy and fine emotion are always there; but they are tempered by perception and comprehension such as can only be obtained through scientific study. A beautiful voice, he has shown us, does not touch the heart less because he happened to understand the mechanism of the vocal chords [sic]; and the pathos of grief need not be diminished because the observer has

familiarized himself with its physiological accompaniments.⁵⁸

Hearn's literary sympathy with doctors and his confidence in the possible function of medicine as a curative literary tool manifest in his appreciative description of Holmes. Paying attention to Holmes's skilful anatomy of one's own mind and feeling, and also even of one's 'faults or weaknesses or prejudices or hobbies, beautifully dissected and gently ridiculed', Hearn the cosmopolitan critic – and now professor of English – looks back on one of the major literary modes adopted during his journalist years in the 'Country of Cowboys'.⁵⁹ He suggests how this physician's gentle satire manages to save itself from being criticized, and illustrates the continuity underlying the harmonious relation between literature and medicine:

Dr. Holmes never went far enough, or spoke harshly enough, to make people seriously angry. Everybody quickly forgave him and began to recognize that he was not mocking people merely for amusement, but as medicine; – that he was a physician of souls as well as of bodies. The books are full of what we might call moral tonic; – they make stronger and healthier the mind of everybody that reads it.⁶⁰

Thus, by weaving numerous intertextual threads between literature and medicine, from his journalism through his dream sketches to his university lectures, Hearn managed to create a highly cosmopolitan space based on varied, vernacular representations of literary–medical curiosity with full awareness of its linguistic limits and possibilities. Hearn's cosmopolitanism remains distinctive not merely because of his remarkable global mobility, but because – with an imaginary microscope and scalpel in his hands – he cultivated a literary style that allowed him to attend carefully to the unseen and the seemingly 'anomalous', and to stay perpetually curious.

¹ For their invaluable comments on earlier versions of this paper, I would like to thank Catherine Maxwell, Stefano Evangelista, and the anonymous reviewer. I am also especially grateful to Fraser Riddell for his meticulous commentary and editorial work throughout the process of my revision.

² Lafcadio Hearn, Letter to H. E. Krehbiel (January 1885), in *The Life and Letters of Lafcadio Hearn*, ed. by Elizabeth Bisland, 2

vols (Houghton, Mifflin, 1906), I, p. 338.

³ Hearn, 'Travel An Educating Influence', *Item* (6 February 1880), in *Buying Christmas Toys and Other Essays*, ed. by Ichiro Nishizaki (Hokuseido, 1939), pp. 31–34 (p. 32).

⁴ See the entry 'curiosity' (I.5.b) in the *Oxford English Dictionary* <<https://www.oed.com>> [accessed 10 July 2025].

⁵ Stefano Evangelista, 'Lafcadio Hearn and Global Aestheticism', in *Literary Cosmopolitanism in the English Fin de Siècle: Citizens of Nowhere* (Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 72–116.

⁶ See *Catalogue of the Lafcadio Hearn Library in the Toyama High School* (Toyama High School, 1927) <<https://toyama.repo.nii.ac.jp/record/7521/files/CatHearn-Lib.pdf>>

⁷ Hearn, Letter to George M. Gould (1887), in *The Life and Letters of Lafcadio Hearn*, I, p. 395.

⁸ Hearn, 'The Epic of Kings', in *Essays in European and Oriental Literature*, ed. by Albert Mordell (Dodd, Mead, 1923), pp. 315–19 (pp. 318–19).

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 318–19.

¹⁰ Evangelista, 'Lafcadio Hearn and Global Aestheticism', p. 77; Evangelista, 'Symphonies in Haze and Blue: Lafcadio Hearn and the Colours of Japan', in *The Colours of the Past in Victorian England*, ed. by Charlotte Ribeyrol (Peter Lang, 2016), pp. 71–94 (p. 72); Catherine Maxwell, 'Scent, the Body, and the Cosmopolitan *Flair*eur: John Addington Symonds and Lafcadio Hearn', in *Scents and Sensibility: Perfume in Victorian Literary Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 135–81 (p. 161).

¹¹ Meegan Kennedy, 'The Victorian Novel and Medicine', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Victorian Novel*, ed. by Lisa Rodensky (Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 459–82 (p. 462).

¹² Lawrence Rothfield, 'Medical', in *A New Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. by Herbert F. Tucker (Wiley Blackwell, 2014), pp. 172–85 (p. 179).

¹³ Delia LaBarre, 'Introduction', in *The New Orleans of Lafcadio Hearn: Illustrated Sketches from the Daily City Item*, ed. by Delia LaBarre (Louisiana State University Press, 2007), p. xviii.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. xviii–xix.

¹⁶ The significance of tropes of medicine, disease, and illness has been widely explored in scholarship on decadence and aestheticism. For examples of recent work, see 'La Maladie Fin de Siècle: Decadence and Disease', Birkbeck, University of London (June 2019) <<https://decadencedisease.wordpress.com/programme/>>.

¹⁷ Hearn, 'Giltan the Ghoul', *Cincinnati Enquirer* (1 November 1874). I am grateful to Victoria L. Norman of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County for kindly sending me a scanned file of this article together with many other Cincinnati articles (including 'Dr. J. G. Holland') attributed to Hearn upon my request.

¹⁸ Hearn, 'Giglampz!', *Cincinnati Enquirer* (4 October 1874); repr. in *An American Miscellany*, 2 vols, ed. by Albert Mordell (Dodd, Mead, 1924), I, pp. 13–28.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

²⁰ Hearn, 'Journalistic Dissection', *Item* (21 October 1880), in *The New Orleans of Lafcadio Hearn*, p. 109; LaBarre, 'Introduction', pp. xxxviii, 161.

²¹ Hearn, 'Journalistic Dissection', p. 109.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 161.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ LaBarre, 'Introduction', p. xix. For a concise biography of Matas and his friendship with Hearn, see John Ochsner, 'The Complex Life of Rudolph Matas', *Journal of Vascular Surgery* 34.3 (September 2001), pp. 387–92 (pp. 389–90). I am grateful to Fraser Riddell for kindly sharing with me this useful information, together with some other materials that touch upon Hearn's relationship with Matas and Gould.

²⁵ Edward Larocque Tinker, 'Dr Matas', in *Lafcadio Hearn's American Days* (John Lane, 1925), pp. 227–37 (p. 228).

²⁶ Steve Kemme, *The Outsider: The Life and Work of Lafcadio Hearn, the Man Who Introduced Voodoo, Creole Cooking and Japanese Ghosts to the World* (Tuttle, 2023), p. 127.

²⁷ Kemme, pp. 140–41; Hearn, *Chita*, in *American Writings*, ed. by Christopher Benfey (Library of America, 2009), pp. 73–148.

²⁸ Hearn, Letter to H. E. Krehbiel (1885), in *Life and Letters*, I, p. 339.

²⁹ Charles Woodward Hutson, 'Introduction', in Lafcadio Hearn, *Fantasties and Other Fancies*, ed. by Hutson (Houghton, Mifflin, 1914), pp. 1–28 (pp. 16–17).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

³³ Hearn, Letter to George M. Gould (1887), in *Life and Letters*, I, p. 395.

³⁴ For a short biography of Gould, see Howard F. Hansell, 'George Milbry Gould, A.M., M.D.', in *Transactions of the American Ophthalmological Society* 21 (1923), pp. 15–20. For the relationship between Hearn and Gould, see John Antony Goedhals, 'Lafcadio Hearn and George Gould's "Philosophy of Spectacles": The Story of a Buddhist–Christian Encounter', in *Diasporic Identities and Empire: Cultural Contentions and Literary Landscapes*, ed. by Anastasia Nicéphore and David Brooks (Cambridge Scholars, 2013), pp. 199–212.

³⁵ Hearn, 'Three Dreams', in *An American Miscellany*, ed. by Albert Mordell, 2 vols (Dodd, Mead, 1924), II, pp. 66–73.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

³⁷ Poe, 'The Tell-Tale Heart', in *The Portable Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. by J. Gerald Kennedy (Penguin, 2006), pp. 187–91 (pp. 189).

³⁸ Hearn, 'Three Dreams', pp. 72–73.

- ³⁹ Ibid., p. 73.
- ⁴⁰ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 'Body's Beauty', in *Collected Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Jerome McGann (Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 161–62.
- ⁴¹ Hearn, 'A Definitive Rossetti', *The Times-Democrat* (17 April 1887), in *Essays in European and Oriental Literature*, pp. 221–28 (p. 224).
- ⁴² Hearn, 'Notes on American Literature', in *A History of English Literature*, 2 vols (Hokuseido Press, 1927), II, pp. 863–914 (p. 882).
- ⁴³ Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry: The 1893 Text*, ed. by Donald L. Hill (University of California Press, 1980), p. 99.
- ⁴⁴ Hutson, 'Introduction', pp. 21–22.
- ⁴⁵ Lafcadio Hearn, 'The Creole Doctor', *New York Tribune* (3 January 1886); repr. in *Occidental Gleanings* (Dodd, Mead, 1925), II, pp. 195–207.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 198.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 199.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 201.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 208.
- ⁵¹ Botting, *Gothic*, 2nd edn (Routledge, 2013), p. 110. Botting discusses Poe's tales and stories, including 'The Tell-Tale Heart', alongside 'Rappaccini's Daughter', grouping them into the same category of 'Homely Gothic' (p. 113).
- ⁵² Hearn, 'Notes on American Literature', pp. 898–99.
- ⁵³ Théophile Gautier, 'Charles Baudelaire', *Le Moniteur* (9 September 1867), cited in Maxwell, *Scents and Sensibility*, p. 103.
- ⁵⁴ Hearn, 'Newly Discovered Letters from Lafcadio Hearn to Dr. Rudolph Matas', *Ochanomizu University Studies in Arts and Culture* 8 (March 1956), pp. 85–118 (p. 100). I am grateful to Catherine Maxwell for kindly drawing my attention to this publication.
- ⁵⁵ Holmes, *Elsie Venner* (Houghton, Mifflin, 1892), pp. vii, ix.
- ⁵⁶ Hearn, 'Notes on American Literature', p. 900.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 904.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 900–01.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 903.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 903–04.

Hugo von Hofmannsthal, 'Lafcadio Hearn': A New Translation

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Hugo von Hofmannsthal's short essay 'Lafcadio Hearn' (1904) provides a brief but powerful insight into the resonance of Hearn's Japanese writing for European decadent and modernist writing in the early twentieth century. Writers and artists turning to Japan since the mid nineteenth century were building on a history of transnational engagements between East Asia and Central Europe, as well as long-established artistic and intellectual practices of European Orientalism.¹ Studies of *japonisme* have demonstrated the specific place that Japan held in German and Austrian imaginations by 1900, especially in Hofmannsthal's Vienna.² As European knowledge of Japanese art and culture developed over the nineteenth century, Hearn's work fuelled fascination with both the 'old Japan' and contemporary Japanese life.³ Hofmannsthal's essay shows this tension in his response to Hearn's work: his elegiac tone in describing ancient Japanese spiritual practices is combined with stark images of the ongoing Russo-Japanese War, his condescending praise of Japanese intellectuals placed alongside weary dissatisfaction with the 'burden' of Western culture.

Hofmannsthal wrote the essay in the days after Hearn's death on 26 September 1904 and published it in the Vienna monthly *Die Zeit* on 2 October. The news of Hearn's death came at a moment when Hofmannsthal was immersed in his books, having returned to *Kokoro: Hints and Echoes of Japanese Inner Life* (1896) in January and read *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* (1894) and *Gleanings in Buddha-Fields* (1897) in July of the same year.⁴ Hofmannsthal's essay was republished with minor amendments in 1905 as the foreword to Berta Franzos' German translation of *Kokoro*. The translation was extremely successful and ran to as many as thirty-five editions: even if Hofmannsthal's boast of the 'commercial significance' of his foreword may overstate his role in its popularity, he certainly became closely associated with Hearn's continuing reception in German-speaking Europe.⁵

In Walter Pache's analysis of Hofmannsthal's reception of Hearn's work, he locates this essay at an inflection point in the writer's development – from a 'melancholy, even decadent vision of Japan that was fashionable in Europe in the 1890s' to an increasing interest in Japanese spirituality and philosophy.⁶ Yet the power of Hofmannsthal's essay lies just as much in his experimentation with style. The back-and-forth of his lists, the rhythm of his repetitions and the powerful affective force of his writing all show Hearn's influence. Above all, Hofmannsthal ascribes great significance to, in his words, 'trivial', 'anecdotal', and 'sentimental' aspects of Hearn's style. By recounting the telephone call, pondering over time zones and often lapsing into lament, Hofmannsthal positions his text as an echo that speaks to Hearn as a source of literary inspiration.

The two versions of Hofmannsthal's essay are very similar, and I have mostly used the 1905 *Kokoro* foreword with its minor revisions and the added subtitle.⁷ The exception is the first sentence, where I retain the 1904 version from *Die Zeit*: 'Dazu hat man mich ans Telefon gerufen'. This earlier version better communicates the immediacy of the 'impression' made on Hofmannsthal by Hearn's death, which I have also endeavoured to convey in my translation of Hofmannsthal's tenses.

¹ See especially Joanne Miyang Cho, Lee M. Roberts, and Christian W. Spang, eds, *Transnational Encounters between Germany and Japan: Perceptions of Partnership in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). On German and Austrian orientalism in this period more broadly, see Todd Kontje, *German Orientalisms* (University of Michigan Press, 2004); Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (Cambridge University Press, 2009); and Katharina Herold-Zanker, *Decadence and Orientalism in England and Germany, 1880–1920: 'The Indispensable East'* (Oxford University Press, 2024).

² Mirjam Dénes, Györgyi Fajcsák, Piotr Splawski, and Toshio Watanabe, eds, *Japonisme in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy* (Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asiatic Arts, 2020), and Aglaja Kempf, 'Oskar Kokoschka und der Japonismus: Wien um 1900 und die japanische Ästhetik', in *Oskar Kokoschka: Neue Einblicke und Perspektiven*, ed. by Régine Bonnefoit and Bernadette Reinhold (de Gruyter, 2021), pp. 402–20.

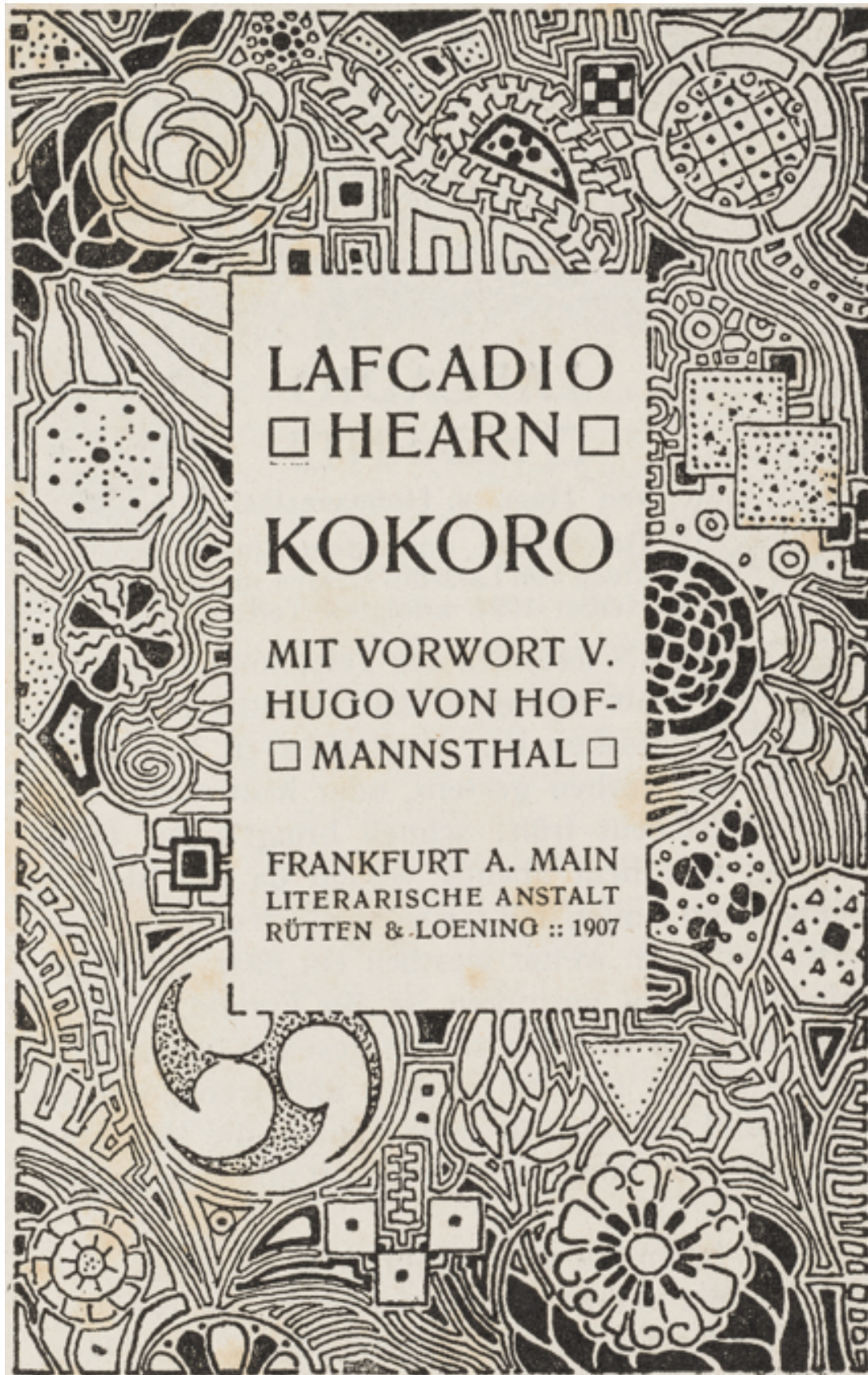
³ See Kathleen M. Webb, *Lafcadio Hearn and his German Critics: An Examination of His Appeal* (Lang, 1984), and Gerhard Schepers, 'Exoticism in Early Twentieth-Century German Literature on Japan', in *Japanese-German Relations, 1895–1945*, ed. by Christian W. Spang and Rolf-Harald Wippich (Routledge, 2006), pp. 98–116.

⁴ Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. by Rudolf Hirsch and others (Fischer, 1975–), xxxviii, *Aufzeichnungen: Text*, ed. by Rudolf Hirsch and others (2013), pp. 468 and 480.

⁵ Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Sämtliche Werke*, xxxiii, *Reden und Aufsätze 2*, ed. by Konrad Heumann and Ellen Ritter (2009), pp. 332–33. All translations are my own.

⁶ Walter Pache, 'Das alte und das neue Japan: Lafcadio Hearn und Hugo von Hofmannsthal', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 67.3 (1993), pp. 451–65 (p. 455).

⁷ For details, see Hofmannsthal, *Sämtliche Werke*, xxxiii, pp. 332–33.



Emil Orlik's artwork from the German translation of Lafcadio Hearn, *Kokoro*: Mit Vorwort von Hugo v. Hofmannsthal, trans. by Berta Franzos (Rütten & Loening, 1907)
Courtesy of the University of St Andrews Libraries and Museums.

Lafcadio Hearn

Written in response to the impression made by
Lafcadio Hearn's death in Autumn 1904

Hugo von Hofmannsthal

That was the reason I was called to the telephone: to tell me that Lafcadio Hearn has died. Died in Tokyo, died yesterday, or this evening, or this morning: the wire carries the news quickly, and this evening a few people here and there in Germany, and further west a couple hundred more, and even further west a few thousand will know that their friend has died, their friend to whom they owed a great deal and whom they have never seen. And I, too, have never seen him and never shall see him, and the letter that I so often meant to write to him will never find its way to his now motionless hands.

And Japan has lost its adoptive child. It is losing thousands of its sons now day by day: the corpses piled high on top of one another, blocking the flow of the rivers, lying with eyes unblinking on the sea floor, and in ten thousand houses, with proud, silent devotion, without weeping or crying, a small meal is being prepared, a friendly candle lit for a dead man. And now the foreigner has died too, the immigrant who loved Japan so dearly. Perhaps the only European who has truly known, truly loved this country. Not with the love of an aesthete or with the love of a scholar, but with a love that is stronger, all-embracing and all the more unusual: with the love that shares in the inner life of the beloved land. His eyes took everything in, and there was beauty in everything, because it was filled from within with the breath of life: the old Japan that lives on in the private gardens and unexplored houses of the great lords and in remote villages with their little temples – and the new Japan, criss-crossed with railways, burning with the fevers of Europe; the lonely beggar who wanders from Buddha to Buddha and the great new army, filled with ancient deadly courage; the small burial place by the side of the road, built by children from mud and scraps of wood, and the great Osaka, the powerful industrial city with its hundred thousand people who drive its trade with passion and dedication, just as others drive the war, with their vast silk stores

and salesmen with pale faces cowering for months behind their supplies, slaves to a sense of duty that almost makes a fairytale out of this trivial reality: 'A Salesman in a Silk Emporium'.

And his ears understood what they were saying: there are hundreds of children's words in his books and words spoken by grandmothers to grandchildren, and tender words, as delicate as birdsong, spoken by women in love and in torment, that without him would have faded away between the paper walls of their small chambers, and the words of ancient wise men, devout rulers and the words of the finest intellects of our age, whose words are chosen as meticulously as those of the most intelligent, most educated European, and whose tone is indistinguishable from the tone of one who bears the burden of our great inherited knowledge.

These books are inexhaustible. As I open them, it is almost unfathomable to think that they should still be all but entirely unknown to Germans. There they are alongside one another: *Gleanings in Buddha-Fields* and *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* and the lovely book *Kokoro*, perhaps the most beautiful of all. The pages that make up this volume are concerned more with the inner than the outer life of Japan – this is the reason why they are bound together under the title *Kokoro* ('heart'). Written with Japanese characters, the word all at once means 'mind', 'spirit', 'courage', 'resolve', 'sentiment', 'affection', and 'inner meaning' – just as in German we would say 'Das Herz der Dinge': the heart of things.⁸ Yes, the heart of things truly is contained within these fifteen chapters and, as I read over their titles, I understand that it is just as impossible to give a precise impression of their content as it would be of a new perfume, or of the sound of a voice that someone else has never heard. Yes, I could not even adequately describe the artistic form into which these artworks by an unrivalled pen have been compressed. Here is the chapter with the title 'At a Railway Station'. It is a short anecdote. An almost trivial anecdote. An anecdote that is not quite free of sentimentality. Yet it was written by a man who can write, and before that felt by a man who can feel. And then there is the story of 'The Nun of the Temple of Amida'. This is almost a little novella. And next to it the chapter 'A Conservative'. This one is no novella at all: it is a piece of political insight, condensed like a work of art, presented like an anecdote: I think, in

short, it is a product of a sort of journalism, the most highly cultivated, most fruitful and serious that there can be. And alongside it this unique series of thoughts with the title 'By Force of Karma', in which profound matters that evade our grasp are dredged up from the ocean depths into the light and laid out next to one another. That is philosophy, if I am not mistaken. But it does not leave us cold; it does not draw us into the barren wastes of terminology. That might make it religion. Yet it is not threatening, it does not wish to exist alone in the world, it does not weigh on the soul. I would like to call it a despatch, a friendly despatch from one soul to many others, journalism beyond any newspaper, artworks without pretention and without artifice, science without gravity and full of life, letters written to unknown friends.

And now Lafcadio Hearn is dead and no one from Europe, no one from America, none of all his unknown friends will ever answer him, no one will thank him for his many letters, not anymore.

⁸ Hofmannsthal translates almost word-for-word Hearn's own description in *Kokoro: Hints and Echoes of Japanese Inner Life* (Houghton Mifflin, 1896): 'The papers composing this volume treat of the inner rather than of the outer life of Japan, – for which reason they have been grouped under the title *Kokoro* (heart). Written with the above character, this word signifies also mind, in the emotional sense; spirit; courage; resolve; sentiment; affection; and inner meaning, – just as we say in English, "the heart of things".'

Two Poems

James Dowthwaite

Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz

Untitled Expression

I ache for you in the attenuation
of summer, the light tragic,
amber as Gdansk jewellery,
hammered into the sky and the water,
inlaid into the high windows.
I will love you as a city in this light,
total and fragile, youth receding,
bronze air negotiating its exit,
the heat dissolving itself
before the comic face of September.

Sacerdotal Expression

The moon leans towards the arabesque windows
suspended on the platform of the brown buildings,
gathering around the main station like rain clouds.
Water and light, forgive me, I have taken the dark by the hand.

Lafcadio Hearn and His American Biographers

Paul Murray

Independent Scholar

American biographies bookend – and dominate – the voluminous range of writings about Lafcadio Hearn published since his death in 1904, extending from Elizabeth Bisland’s important foundational study, *The Life and Letters of Lafcadio Hearn* (1906) to more recent treatments such as Steve Kemme’s *The Outsider: The Life and Work of Lafcadio Hearn* (2023). Examining this long tradition now allows us to bring into sharper focus the significance of two major preoccupations in Hearn’s reception – national identity and race – and to critically evaluate the ways in which American biographers have framed the distinctiveness of Hearn’s life and achievement in their work.¹

Summary of Biographies

A hard spine of Hearn biography was provided by three American female biographers over a period of approximately sixty years. The first of these, *The Life and Letters of Lafcadio Hearn*, published just two years after his death in 1904, by his good friend and former journalistic colleague, Elizabeth Bisland, was not a fleshed-out biography but consisted mostly of a mass of Hearn’s letters, whose publication provided a primary material resource that remains of value to researchers.² She would follow up in a similar vein with *The Japanese Letters of Lafcadio Hearn* (1910).³

Vera Seeley McWilliams published *Lafcadio Hearn*, the first full-length, dedicated biography by an American author, in 1946.⁴ Also titled *Lafcadio Hearn*, Elizabeth Stevenson’s well-regarded biography was published in 1961.⁵ Even *Concerning Lafcadio Hearn* (1908) by George M. Gould – a bizarre attempt to destroy Hearn’s reputation by a former friend – pays a certain tribute to him by including an eighty-page bibliography of Hearn’s work, compiled by Laura Stedman, Gould’s future wife.⁶ Perhaps more than any other biographical volume, Gould’s illustrated the

complexities and ambiguities inherent in the relationships of Hearn's American biographers with their subject.

Edward Larocque Tinker's *Lafcadio Hearn's American Days* (1924) was, as its title implies, concerned solely with its subject's years in the United States.⁷ A massive Hearn bibliography compiled by P. D. and Ione Perkins appeared in 1934.⁸ Interspersed between McWilliams and Stevenson came O. W. Frost's *Young Hearn* in 1958, a study of Hearn's life prior to his departure for Japan in 1890, a relatively short book at just over two hundred pages and without a bibliography.⁹ Alfred E. Kunst's *Lafcadio Hearn* (1969) was even shorter, at one hundred and twenty-seven pages of text, but with endnotes and a bibliography; it was essentially a study of Hearn's writings rather than his life.¹⁰ Kunst therefore starts with Hearn in Cincinnati, leaving out the first nineteen years of his subject's life. His chapters are brief surveys of Hearn's output with minimal biographical fact and little regard for the overall context of his life.¹¹

Subsequent American biographers and commentators include Jonathan Cott, whose *Wandering Ghost* (1993) contains extensive quotations from Hearn's work with linking narrative; Carl Dawson, whose volume is largely a critical study of Hearn's writings on Japan appended to a biographical sketch of his life up to 1890; and, more recently, Steve Kemme, and his full-length *The Outsider: The Life and Work of Lafcadio Hearn* (2023).¹² Linda Lindholm's massive (635 pages) *Lafcadio: A Writer's Journey* (2023), was followed a year later by a second biography, *Lafcadio's Legacy*.¹³ As each of Lindholm's books lacks an index, a bibliography, references, and any evidence of primary material research or original analysis of Hearn's life or literary output, it is not proposed to examine them further in this essay. Similarly, the books of Frost, Kunst, Cott and Dawson, not being full-length biographies, are also not considered in detail.

Biographical Battlelines

To understand the evolution of this impressive body of biographical work, it is necessary to go back to the beginning, to the immediate aftermath of Hearn's death, when the battlelines were

already being drawn up between opposing factions in the United States regarding the merits or demerits of his legacy. In the year following his death the critic Paul Elmer More included a chapter on Hearn in his *Shelburne Essays* (1905).¹⁴ While generally positive about Hearn's literary achievement – he sees Hearn employing 'the power of suggestion through perfect restraint' – More's primary focus was on his engagement with Buddhism.¹⁵ Although sceptical of Hearn's attempt to reconcile Buddhism with modern science, More nevertheless pointed the way towards an evaluation of a major element of Hearn's Japanese achievement, and one that was subsequently neglected by many of his later American biographers.

A different perspective was provided in a magazine article of August 1908, in which Edward Clark Marsh declared that 'Hearn was not a figure of the first importance' and was likely to be so regarded by posterity. He did allow, however, that Hearn's translations were 'almost without a peer in our latter-day literature' and his Japanese work was valuable as 'interpretations of Japanese thought'.¹⁶ Even if unimpressed by Hearn's work, Marsh's piece underlines the extent to which his biography had already taken off in America, citing as he does no fewer than three full-length volumes of related material that had been published in a two-year period from 1906 to 1908: Elizabeth Bisland's *Life and Letters*; Milton Bronner's *Letters from the Raven* (a 1907 edition of Hearn's letters to Henry Watkin, his original Cincinnati benefactor); and Gould's fiercely denunciatory *Concerning Lafcadio Hearn*, the inspiration for Marsh's article.¹⁷

Marsh is critical of Hearn's personal life, claiming that he 'failed of the biggest things [...] because of a fundamental defect of character'. This sprang, he suggests, from a rejection of conventional morality, resulting in a 'morbid delight in scenes and experiences that could only disgust a more normally constituted person'. Alleging that he had spent his time in Cincinnati and New Orleans as an 'outcast [...] among the negroes',¹⁸ Marsh alludes to Hearn's discomfort with American bourgeois culture and raises an issue that would pose – and continues to pose – problems for American biographers: his marriage in June 1874 in Cincinnati to Alethea 'Mattie' Foley, a mixed-raced woman who was formerly enslaved.

In these early years, there was a sharp conflict between two biographers who had known Hearn personally, Bisland and Gould. Bisland formed a close friendship with Hearn when they both worked for the New Orleans *Times-Democrat*. He had a wary appreciation of her beauty but, despite Carl Dawson's claim that Hearn idolized Bisland, it is clear that his feelings towards her were complex and conflicted.¹⁹ He dedicated *A Japanese Miscellany* (1901) to her.²⁰ After Hearn's death, his good friend and executor of his estate, the American naval officer, Mitchell McDonald, agreed that Bisland could write Hearn's official biography. As Stefano Evangelista has observed, she subsequently played 'a very active role in curating Hearn's legacy after his death'.²¹ Marsh's dismissal of Bisland's biography as 'little more than a sketch' was not entirely inaccurate, occupying as it did a mere one hundred and fifty-nine of the thousand pages comprising her two-volume work, the remainder comprising Hearn's letters.²² In addition, much of the biographical text was taken up with quotation and, even then, contained many omissions and inaccuracies.

Bisland found that former friends of Hearn, such as Joseph Tunison and Henry Krehbiel, were urging her to reveal his more seamy side.²³ Krehbiel was disappointed that Bisland failed to be shocked by his story of Hearn frequenting a brothel, dismissing it on the grounds that it merely proved that his interest in African American women was purely aesthetic.²⁴ While Bisland acted honourably in donating the profits from her book to Hearn's Japanese family, she was unscrupulous in editing his letters without making it clear that she was doing so.²⁵

The news of Hearn's marriage to Mattie Foley ultimately became widely known not because of any revelation by his biographers but rather by the actions of Foley herself. Thinking that she could claim substantial royalties from Hearn's estate on the grounds that she had never been divorced from him, she launched a legal action against his estate in 1906. The action failed as the court ruled that her marriage had been invalid due to the prohibition of interracial marriage under anti-miscegenation laws in place in Ohio from 1861. After the story had been publicized in the media including the Cincinnati *Enquirer*, ironically the newspaper that had fired Hearn for marrying Foley, a slew of sensational media coverage followed, most notoriously in the *New York*

Sun of 27 July 1906.²⁶ While further attacks on Hearn would follow, notably Gould's 1908 *Concerning Lafcadio Hearn*, the virulence of the rage directed against his transgression of the American racial norms of the era reflected not just its importance to his posthumous reputation but also represented a turning point in Hearn's life not properly reflected in American biography.²⁷ The coverage of Foley's claim by major national newspapers, such as the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, and the *Los Angeles Times*, are indicative of Hearn's standing at that time but also of the failure of American biographers to research this story properly, given that the material has been freely available and contains valuable information such as the destruction of the Hearn marriage records in a court house fire in 1884.²⁸

The year after Bisland's *Life and Letters* appeared, Milton Bronner, editor of *The Kentucky Post*, entered the biographical arena with an edition of Hearn's letters to Henry Watkin, *Letters from the Raven* (1907).²⁹ In 1930, Oscar Lewis claimed that Bronner had attempted to prevent Hearn's biography being written by anyone other than himself by threatening to disclose his marriage to Mattie Foley.³⁰ In 1905 Bisland believed that press reports on the subject were the work of Bronner who had 'raked the slums, apparently, to find details for this disgusting story which he has been holding as a threat to blackmail Mrs Hearn's [Setsu Koizumi] representative, Paymaster [Mitchell] McDonald'. She was critical too of Watkin, alleging that he had betrayed Hearn's trust by allowing the publication of letters written in friendship for monetary gain.³¹

Nina H. Kennard, *Lafcadio Hearn* (1912)

I now propose to examine the full-length biographies of Hearn that have appeared since his death. Nina Kennard was Irish, not American, but her 1912 work is important as the first attempt at a full-length biography of Hearn and as a significant primary source for future biographers, having interviewed people in Ireland, England, and Japan who had known Hearn personally.³² It provides a contrast with most American Hearn biography in that she engaged to a greater extent in thematic analysis, which is useful in the context of Hearn's general achievement. O. W. Frost commended

Kennard's biography for undertaking pioneering work in relation to Hearn's early years, noting that the biographies which had appeared since then, including that by McWilliams, had 'no substantial fresh material for the study of Hearn's early life'.³³

While Kennard was clearly conservative – she branded his 1874 marriage to Mattie Foley 'an unpardonable lapse from social law' and alleged that Hearn 'had made his body a house of shame' in Cincinnati (a possible reference to his predilection for prostitutes) – she also saw that her subject was himself essentially conservative in nature.³⁴ Kennard was the first biographer to cover the marriage issue. She created the narrative of Hearn being attracted initially by Foley's kindly attention to his creature-comforts and nursing him back from serious ill-health.³⁵ She also described Foley's birth into slavery and gaining of freedom through the medium of President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, a mere six years before Hearn entered the United States. According to Kennard, the pair 'talked much of her early days and years of slavery'. Describing Hearn as 'abnormal by inheritance', her summary of their marriage and the breakdown of the relationship was not favourable to Foley, alleging that it had 'completely turned her head; she gave herself airs, became overbearing, quarrelsome, and Hearn found himself obliged to leave Cincinnati to escape from an impossible position'.³⁶ Foley herself claimed that she had left Hearn in 1877 because of 'his morose and moody temperament'.³⁷

Although she was, like Bisland, positive towards Hearn's *Two Years in the French West Indies* (1890), Kennard devoted more than half her book to Japan, an early recognition of its relative importance to Hearn's achievement.³⁸ She noted that, in Japan, he was writing English with ease for the first time, a crucial break with his unsuccessful attempt to create an ornate, French-influenced, literary style which militated against the success of much of his American output.³⁹

Kennard understood Hearn's need to interpret Japan through its common people.⁴⁰ She examines his story, 'Yuko: A Reminiscence', published in *Out of the East* (1895), to determine whether or not Hearn was guilty, as some critics alleged, of his views being either 'unfavourable to an exaggerated extent' or, as others maintained, being 'too laudatory' of the Japanese.⁴¹ While

accepting, as Hearn himself did, that his sketch was perhaps too romantic, she concluded that ‘the real poetry of the event remained unlesened’.⁴² She went further with another essay in *Out of the East, Jiu-jitsu* (1895), describing it as ‘masterly’, which indeed it is. Kennard challenges ‘those who say that Hearn did not understand the enigmatic people amongst whom his lines were cast’ simply to read this essay.⁴³

Kennard declared *Kokoro* (1896), which she saw as having been inspired by his contact with Kyoto, as ‘absolutely truthful’, noting that he felt justified in ‘selecting facts to be used about Japan’, while being critical of a perceived tendency to generalize from insufficient premises as well as outright contradictions.⁴⁴ In the final chapter of her book, Kennard attempts a balanced appraisal, trying – and for the most part succeeding – to steer a middle path between excessive eulogy and dismissal.⁴⁵

Vera McWilliams, *Lafcadio Hearn* (1946)

The first full-length American biography of Hearn by Vera McWilliams was published thirty-four years after Kennard’s. Evangelista sees Hearn’s ‘international reputation [having] reached its peak in the first decades of the twentieth century’ at a time when his work ‘had a truly global reach’,⁴⁶ though it was in marked decline in the United States and Europe by mid-century. Substantial at over four hundred pages, McWilliams’s study mentions most of Hearn’s writings but with little sustained attention or analysis. She is mostly concerned with biographical information gleaned from primary sources, letters especially, and which were recast as her text. She does not footnote her sources although she uses a wider range than Kennard.

McWilliams’s most intractable problem was not, however, dealing with Hearn’s childhood but rather with the United States of her own era. Her summary of Hearn’s interaction with African Americans is redolent of the racial segregationist values then prevailing:

He prowled through the gaslit chiaroscuro of Bucktown where outcast whites and Negroes lived in criminal degradation and motley-tinted creatures sprang up from the borderland life of miscegenation. And he watched Negroes juba-dancing along the levees and studied

their half-savage, nostalgic simplicity. Their vices he pronounced for the most part acquired, and their virtues original.⁴⁷

Surprisingly, McWilliams does not confront the allegation contained in Tinker's *Lafcadio Hearn's American Days* that Hearn had found Mattie Foley not in a boarding house but in a brothel: 'instead of being a servant she was an inmate of a house in the segregated district, and that instead of Hearn's being actuated by a high moral purpose of atonement, he was simply the victim of an overpowering carnal infatuation'.⁴⁸ Tinker quotes an unnamed friend of Hearn's to the effect 'that Althea's mode of living was as shady as her complexion'.⁴⁹

While Hearn was concerned, after the breakup of his marriage, that Mattie did not 'sell herself' there has never been a claim that Mattie had been a sex worker other than this one by Tinker.⁵⁰ Basing his account on those 'who had known him best', Tinker cites Hearn's Cincinnati friends, Krehbiel, Tunison and the artist, Henry Farny, as sources of information regarding the marriage, which he describes as 'asinine' and invalid because of the law forbidding miscegenation.⁵¹ The engagement with journalism on the part of the three friends cited might imply that they would have had a better knowledge of the seamy side of life in Cincinnati than the average citizen and Tunison's wish for Bisland to reveal Hearn's dealings with prostitutes might point to him as a specific source. Given that Tinker lived until 1968, it is a pity that McWilliams and Stevenson do not appear to have attempted to follow up this explosive claim with him.

McWilliams did cover Hearn's marriage but from a distinctly patronising perspective, stating that 'the emancipation of slaves had separated her [Mattie Foley] from all protection and guidance'.⁵² Allowing that Hearn was 'indifferent to the state law which prohibited such unions', she made no reference to the wider racial issues involved. Nor did she mention that Mattie's father as the white owner of the slave plantation on which she was born. Her account of Hearn's 1875 firing by the *Enquirer* is straightforward: Colonel John Cockerill, the editor, decided that he could no longer 'risk the Foley scandal besmirching his paper'.⁵³

McWilliams makes some effort to come to terms with Hearn's interpretation of Japan. For example, she refers to Fustel De Coulanges' *La Cité Antique* (1864), Hearn's essays, 'Jiu-jitsu', and 'Of the Eternal Feminine' (1893), without seeing them as part of a coherent interpretation of Japan.⁵⁴ She mentions his falling out with the Japan-based, English academic, Basil Hall Chamberlain, but makes no mention of their political differences over the Anglo-Japanese Treaty of Commerce and Navigation (1894) or Chamberlain's patronising references to Japanese culture in his book, *Things Japanese* (1890), which Hearn had unavailingly attempted to get him to change.⁵⁵ Despite Hearn being essentially modern on these issues and Chamberlain revealing himself as an old-fashioned imperialist, Hearn is depicted as the sole, unreasonable cause of the break in relations. When McWilliams stated that 'the purpose of this work has not called for critical consideration of Hearn's writings', she was being strictly accurate.⁵⁶ However, the result is a severely self-imposed limit on what her biography could achieve. A number of contemporary reviews of her book reached much the same conclusion.⁵⁷

Elizabeth Stevenson, *Lafcadio Hearn* (1961)

Elizabeth Stevenson's *Lafcadio Hearn* was the first life of Hearn to meet the standards of modern scholarship. She greatly expanded the range of primary sources consulted, which are listed and referenced. The 'Select Bibliography' is fairly comprehensive for the time. While she follows much the same pattern as McWilliams, it is by far the best factual account of Hearn's life up to that point. At the same time it makes little effort to integrate the life and work or identify broad patterns both within the specific periods of Hearn's story or in the context of his life as a whole.

Contemporaneous concepts of race are critical to Hearn biography. It was, however, the institutionalized racism of Cincinnati and the South in the 1870s and 1880s that exercised the greatest influence on him – an aspect that was typically overlooked by his twentieth-century American biographers. Such racism took a number of forms – anti-African American and anti-immigrant, amongst others – relevant to how Hearn's life has been understood. Elizabeth

Stephenson points out that Ohio's anti-miscegenation law was 'valid only between 1861 and 1877'.⁵⁸ While this is correct, it nevertheless ignores the wider historical context. Writing of the laws forbidding interracial marriage, Peggy Pascoe states that they 'provide a virtual road map to American legal conceptions of race; they spotlight the multi-racial framework of white supremacy that emerged after the Civil War and stood at the centre of American law until the 1960s'.⁵⁹ During the century after the 1860s, 'the American legal system elevated the notion that interracial marriage was unnatural to commonsense status and made it the law of the land'.⁶⁰ Both McWilliams and Stevenson wrote their biographies while these laws were still in force: McWilliams's language suggests that she did not have difficulties with them, while Stevenson attempts to dilute their significance.⁶¹

Stevenson's assertion that Hearn was not a thinker is strange given Hearn's extraordinary and original interpretation of Japan, not to mention his status as a Buddhist scholar which has inspired no fewer than four books on the subject.⁶² Stevenson found Chamberlain's *Things Japanese* 'excellent and amusing', ignoring Hearn's efforts to get its author to change derogatory references to Japanese culture. In common with other American biographers, she showed little consciousness of Hearn's achievement in pioneering the projection of Japanese literature, albeit mostly folkloric, 'onto the international stage'.⁶³ It is similarly striking that neither Stevenson nor her predecessors engaged in any way with Hearn's lectures at Tokyo Imperial University, which were extensively transcribed and published in the United States and Japan from 1924 onwards.

Surveying Lafcadio Hearn biography sixty years after Hearn's death and just three years after Stevenson's book, the Korean American scholar, Beongcheon Yu, was unimpressed by what he saw as a general concentration on Hearn's life 'rather than his art and thought'.⁶⁴ He felt that there was an overeagerness to 'read his life experience into his writings and to translate his words into his life pattern', as well as sometimes having too narrow a focus on a 'particular facet rather than an overall synthesis of his achievement'.⁶⁵

Steve Kemme, *The Outsider: The Life and Work of Lafcadio Hearn* (2023)

Writing decades after McWilliams and Stevenson, Steve Kemme (President of the Lafcadio Hearn Society/USA) is more forthright in tackling the social context of the United States of Hearn's time. He provides better context for Hearn's relationship with African Americans and their culture than previous American biographies. Kemme details how the 'Black Laws' enacted in the early nineteenth century made it difficult for 'Black people to permanently settle in the state [of Ohio]', 'depriv[ing] them of their rights to attend public schools and [r]elegat[ing] them to second class citizenship'.⁶⁶ He also draws attention to the outbreaks of violence in Cincinnati in 1829 and 1836, which explicitly targeted African Americans and caused many of them to leave the city.⁶⁷ Additionally, Kemme provides invaluable information on the editorial orientation of the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, the newspaper that had employed Hearn at the time of his marriage to Mattie Foley. It was a supporter of the Democratic Party – then the party of opposition to the rights of African Americans – and justified the Ku Klux Klan in an editorial of 1872. It nevertheless reflected the widely held views of its white middle-class readership, who were upset by Hearn's humanising portrayals of African Americans in its pages, as well as his marriage to Mattie.⁶⁸

It is appropriate that Kemme, a former Cincinnati journalist, should bring these insights to bear on Hearn biography. It is not, and does not set out to be, radically new in terms of primary source material or the interpretation of Hearn's life, in Japan especially.⁶⁹ This is not to say that Kemme lacks insight – his point about Hearn being a folklorist at heart rings true – but he has set out to write a relatively short (just under two hundred and fifty pages, without an index), widely-available and reasonably priced introduction to Hearn and he has succeeded admirably.⁷⁰

An American Writer?

The confused and conflicted issues surrounding Hearn's identity raised their head at an early stage. Bisland, for example, claimed that Hearn had moved to Wales aged around seven after which he had 'visited Ireland but occasionally'.⁷¹ She considers the setting of the Hearn story, 'Hi-Mamari'

in Wales to be evidence of this relocation; although Nina Kennard corrected this, establishing that it was set on the estate of Hearn's Elwood relatives in Cong, County Mayo, in the West of Ireland, where today the topography of the story is still recognisable.⁷² Some commentators have clung to the Welsh story, despite its inherent unlikelihood.⁷³

These claims may reflect grotesquely distorted accounts of Hearn's early life given by him to friends such as Bisland while he was living in the United States, perhaps to dilute his Irish identity – and his privileged upbringing – at a time when he wished to be seen as an exotic Latin and was seeking to put behind him the scandal of his Cincinnati marriage. Similarly, Bisland's claim that Hearn had merely been at Ushaw, his English boarding school 'for a time' – he actually spent four years there – may have been to facilitate the possibility of his having been educated, partially at least, in France (Bisland cites reports that he had spent two years there).⁷⁴ Thus Bisland initiated a biographical muddle about Hearn's early life that persists still.

An identity conflict of a different kind arose in 1901, when Hearn had accepted an honorary membership of the prestigious Japan Society of London, which respectfully referred to him as 'Professor Hearn'. While lauding his 'marvellous sympathetic insight' into Japan and emphasising his birth as a British subject (on the basis of his birth in the Ionian Islands, then a UK protectorate) the Society suggested that he 'might be taken as a type of the Anglo-Japanese alliance'.⁷⁵ This connection with the Japan Society – and the British claim on Hearn – has not been covered in his American biography.

A related tussle began at an early stage about the relative worth of his American and Japanese outputs. The first shots were fired by Elizabeth Bisland who chose her ground skilfully by not insisting on the comparative merit of his American work but instead being emphatic about that of his West Indian literary output. She disputed an English commentator's dismissal of Hearn's pre-Japanese work and argued that in *Two Years in the French West Indies* 'the artist has at last emancipated his talent and finished his long apprenticeship' and 'it remains one of his most admirable achievements'.⁷⁶ While Bisland avoided any direct comparison between Hearn's

American and Japanese output, the critic Albert Mordell, writing in 1924, had no such compunction: 'It is a mistake to think of Hearn solely as a "writer on Japan". Japan gave him nothing [...]. He had done in America precisely what he did in Japan.'⁷⁷

There were, at the same time, dissenting voices. In the same year as Bronner's book was published, Matthew Josephson cast Hearn as 'An Enemy of the West' in a chapter of his book, *Portrait of the Artist as American*.⁷⁸ Depicting Hearn as a rootless, failed Romantic, Josephson, without making a sustained effort to evaluate the worth of Hearn's substantial output, concluded: 'Lafcadio Hearn was a minor artist; he contributed no invention, no energizing principle of form, that could give his work a significant order and force.'⁷⁹

Almost thirty years later, O. W. Frost would recycle the assertions of both Bisland and Mordell in his *Young Hearn* biography. He expanded Mordell's claim that Japan had given Hearn nothing by arguing that: 'In truth, America offered him a greater variety of writing experience for mature growth and mature expression; there is very little that he undertook in the Orient that he did not first take up in the Occident.'⁸⁰ Elizabeth Stevenson stated that the American case for claiming Hearn was stronger than that of the British but had never been exercised – a debatable claim given the assertions of Mordell and Frost.⁸¹ Russell Blankenship, having sketched Hearn's varied life in 1931, nevertheless decided that 'he is properly accounted an American writer'.⁸² Hearn was likewise described as having been 'a transient contributor to American literature' in a 1969 literary history of the United States.⁸³

The mischief which a confluence of nationalistic rhetoric and Hearn biography can cause is illustrated in our own day by John Clubbe's attempts to establish that Hearn was, quite simply, an American writer.⁸⁴ To this end, he tried to represent me as his Irish counterpart, allegedly claiming that Hearn belonged to Ireland. Clubbe attempted to buttress his theory by a quotation from my own Hearn biography, specifically a phrase about insisting on 'the Irish' in Hearn.⁸⁵ The phrase in question was not mine however, but came from the introduction to my biography by Professor Sukehiro Hirakawa of Tokyo University.⁸⁶

This was in spite of my clearly expressed view a decade previously that Hearn was a ‘citizen of the world’ who was not exclusively Greek, Irish, American, or Japanese but was rather a unique amalgam of a variety of influences who had an ambiguous relationship with the various countries in which he lived.⁸⁷ This accords with a more recent view expressed by Evangelista that Hearn’s ‘work resists single, stable, national literary identities. Irish, Greek, English, American, Japanese: Hearn was all and one of these at the same time.’⁸⁸ Evangelista also states that for Hearn’s work to become visible again it is necessary to work ‘outside and against rigid national perspectives’.⁸⁹ Accepting Hearn’s life as an organic whole, without trying to claim supremacy for any one element, has always seemed to me to be the best approach. American biography has not to date articulated a coherent conception of Hearn’s Japanese achievement, such as that recently advanced by Evangelista:

Hearn carved for himself a unique position of authority in the debate on the preservation of Japanese cultural traditions, in Japan as well as on a global stage. His work stands as a complex, sometimes fraught, and always brave attempt to reclaim literature and literary studies as the field for the articulation of an ethical cosmopolitanism simultaneously in Japan and in the English-speaking world.⁹⁰

For Kathryn Webb-DeStefano, by the time Hearn reached Japan, any sense of a distinctive ‘Irish imagination’ had transformed into a ‘transnational modernist imagination’.⁹¹ The American critic Mary Goodwin sees Hearn’s art developing from ‘a rather morbid obsession with the gruesome fringes of society’ and moving past ‘the conventions and typical Orientalist structure of Imperial Gothic’.⁹² She argues that ‘Hearn’s assimilation of Japanese culture and values’ is ‘key to understanding the power of his vision of Japan, reshaped to encompass moral and spiritual experience’.⁹³ As Elizabeth Hofmann Reade has observed, Hearn’s writing often ‘transforms a trope or figure associated with racial purity, eugenics, and empire-building – and repurposes it [...] to re-imagine new structures of lineage and descent that deviate from such norms’.⁹⁴ Such fresh thinking on Hearn points to an exciting future where biographical and critical interpretations are blended to create new visions of a unique inter-cultural pioneer.

- ¹ For a brief treatment of this topic see Paul Murray, 'Lafcadio Hearn (1850–1904)', *The Green Book: Writings on Irish Gothic, Supernatural and Fantastic Literature* 16 (Samhain 2020), pp. 70–71.
- ² Elizabeth Bisland, ed., *The Life and Letters of Lafcadio Hearn*, 2 vols (Houghton Mifflin, 1906). Later reissued as vols. 13, 14, and 15 of the *Koizumi Edition of the Writings of Lafcadio Hearn*, 16 vols (Houghton Mifflin, 1923).
- ³ Elizabeth Bisland, ed., *The Japanese Letters of Lafcadio Hearn* (Houghton Mifflin, 1910).
- ⁴ Vera McWilliams, *Lafcadio Hearn* (Houghton Mifflin, 1946).
- ⁵ Elizabeth Stevenson, *Lafcadio Hearn* (Macmillan, 1961).
- ⁶ George M. Gould, *Concerning Lafcadio Hearn*, with a bibliography by Laura Stedman (Jacobs, 1908). For further discussion of the Hearn-Gould dynamic, see Murray, *Fantastic Journey*, pp. 311–16; Antony Goedhals, 'Lafcadio Hearn and George Gould's Philosophy of Spectacles: The Story of a Buddhist-Christian Encounter', in *Diasporic Identities and Empire: Cultural Contentions and Literary Landscapes*, ed. by Anastasia Nicéphore (Cambridge Scholars, 2013), pp. 199–212.
- ⁷ Edward L. Tinker, *Lafcadio Hearn's American Days* (Dodd, Mead, 1924).
- ⁸ P. D. and Ione Perkins, *Lafcadio Hearn: A Bibliography of His Writings* (Houghton Mifflin, 1934).
- ⁹ O. W. Frost, *Young Hearn* (Hokuseido Press, 1958).
- ¹⁰ Alfred E. Kunst, *Lafcadio Hearn* (Twayne, 1969).
- ¹¹ For a comparative judgement on the relative merits of Kunst and other biographers see Robert L. Gale, *A Lafcadio Hearn Companion* (Greenwood Press, 2002), p. xii.
- ¹² Jonathan Cott, *Wandering Ghost: The Odyssey of Lafcadio Hearn* (Knopf, 1991); Carl Dawson, *Lafcadio Hearn and the Vision of Japan* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Steve Kemme, *The Outsider: The Life and Work of Lafcadio Hearn: The Man Who Introduced Voodoo, Creole Cooking and Japanese Ghosts to the World* (Tuttle, 2023).
- ¹³ Linda Lindholm, *Lafcadio: A Writer's Journey* (Glue Pot Press, 2023); Linda Lindholm, *Lafcadio's Legacy* (Glue Pot Press, 2024).
- ¹⁴ Paul Elmer More, *Shelburne Essays* (Knickerbocker Press, 1905), pp. 46–72.
- ¹⁵ More, *Shelburne Essays*, pp. 47–48.
- ¹⁶ Edward Clark Marsh, 'Lafcadio Hearn', *The Forum*, 40.2 (August 1908), pp. 175–80.
- ¹⁷ Milton Bronner, ed., *Letters from the Raven: Being the Correspondence of Lafcadio Hearn with Henry Watkin* (Brentano's, 1907).
- ¹⁸ Marsh, 'Lafcadio Hearn', p. 177.
- ¹⁹ See Paul Murray, *A Fantastic Journey: The Life and Literature of Lafcadio Hearn* (Japan Library, 1993), pp. 65–66; Dawson, *Lafcadio Hearn and the Vision of Japan*, p. 139.
- ²⁰ Lafcadio Hearn, *A Japanese Miscellany* (Little, Brown, 1901).
- ²¹ Stefano Evangelista, 'Lafcadio Hearn and Global Aestheticism', in *Literary Cosmopolitanism in the English Fin de Siècle* (Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 72–116 (p. 86).
- ²² Marsh, 'Lafcadio Hearn'; Bisland, *Life and Letters*, I, pp. 3–162.
- ²³ Lewis, *Hearn and his Biographers*, pp. 72–73. See also, Murray, *Fantastic Journey*, p. 308.
- ²⁴ Lewis, *Hearn and his Biographers*, pp. 81–82. See also, Murray, *Fantastic Journey*, p. 308.
- ²⁵ Murray, *Fantastic Journey*, p. 309.
- ²⁶ See *Ibid.*, pp. 314–15.
- ²⁷ The best attempt to situate Hearn's marriage in its contemporary context is to be found in Kemme, *The Outsider*, 81–83.
- ²⁸ *New York Times*, 14 July 1906; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14 July 1906; and *Los Angeles Times*, 20 July 1906.
- ²⁹ Bronner, *Letters from the Raven*.
- ³⁰ Oscar Lewis, *Hearn and his Biographers: The Record of a Literary Controversy* (Westgate Press, 1930), p. 27.
- ³¹ Elizabeth Bisland, Letter to Mr [Alexander?] Hill, 20 July 1905, reproduced in *Hearn and his Biographers*, pp. 72–73 (insert).
- ³² Nina H. Kennard, *Lafcadio Hearn* (Eveleigh Nash, 1912), pp. x–xi. Annie 'Nina' Kennard was born Anne Homan-Mulock in County Offaly, Ireland, to an Irish landowner who had changed his surname name from Molloy. Married to Arthur Kennard, she was known for her novels and biographies. See Paul Murray, 'Some New Hearn Primary Source Material', in *Irish Writing on Lafcadio Hearn and Japan, Writer, Journalist and Teacher*, ed. by Sean G. Ronan (Global Oriental, 1997), pp. 255–315, for letters written to and from Minnie Atkinson, Hearn's half-sister, in relation to a trip to Japan which she undertook with Nina Kennard in 1909.
- ³³ Frost, Preface, *Young Hearn*, pp. i–iv (p. ii).
- ³⁴ Kennard, *Lafcadio Hearn*, pp. 104, 111, 167, and 387.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 101–02, p. 207.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 102.
- ³⁷ 'Widow of Lafcadio Hearn, Negro Woman Says She Married Novelist – To Sue for Estate', *New York Times*, 14 July 1906.

- ³⁸ Kennard, *Lafcadio Hearn*, pp. 186–383.
- ³⁹ Ibid., p. 311. See Murray, *Fantastic Journey*, pp. 71–73.
- ⁴⁰ Kennard, *Lafcadio Hearn*, pp. 203–04.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., p. 233.
- ⁴² Ibid., p. 267.
- ⁴³ Ibid., p. 233.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 284–85 and 319.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 384–97.
- ⁴⁶ Evangelista, *Literary Cosmopolitanism*, p. 80.
- ⁴⁷ McWilliams, *Lafcadio Hearn*, p. 72. On the dustcover of her biography McWilliams is described as having ‘a marked preference for the South’ and looking ‘upon Louisiana as her instinctive home’.
- ⁴⁸ Tinker, *Lafcadio Hearn’s American Days*, p. 27.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ See Murray, *Fantastic Journey*, pp. 42–43.
- ⁵¹ Tinker, *Lafcadio Hearn’s American Days*, p. 28.
- ⁵² McWilliams, *Lafcadio Hearn*, p. 67.
- ⁵³ Ibid., p. 68.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 310, 325, and 351.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 367–68. See Murray, *Fantastic Journey*, pp. 152–53 and 180–83.
- ⁵⁶ McWilliams, *Lafcadio Hearn*, p. 447.
- ⁵⁷ John Ashmead Jr., Review of *Lafcadio Hearn* by Vera McWilliams, *The Atlantic* (September 1946); Edward Larocque Tinker, Review of *Lafcadio Hearn* by Vera McWilliams, *American Literature*, 18.3 (November 1946), pp. 264–65; William W. Clary, Review of *Lafcadio Hearn* by Vera McWilliams, *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, 6.1 (November 1946), pp. 80–81.
- ⁵⁸ Stevenson, *Lafcadio Hearn*, p. 52.
- ⁵⁹ Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 2.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 3.
- ⁶¹ The U.S. Supreme Court declared miscegenation unconstitutional in 1967: see Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*, p. 4.
- ⁶² Stevenson, Preface, *Lafcadio Hearn*, p. xv; Lafcadio Hearn, *Japan’s Religions: Shinto and Buddhism*, ed. by Kazumitsu Kato (University Books, 1966); Lafcadio Hearn, *The Buddhist Writings of Lafcadio Hearn*, ed. by Kenneth Rexroth (Wildwood House, 1981); Jeff Humphries, *Reading Emptiness: Buddhism and Literature* (State University of New York Press, 1999) (more than half of which is devoted to Hearn); Antony Goedhals, *The Neo-Buddhist Writings of Lafcadio Hearn: Light from the East* (Brill, 2020).
- ⁶³ Evangelista, *Literary Cosmopolitanism*, p. 94.
- ⁶⁴ Beongcheon Yu, *An Ape of the Gods: The Art and Thought of Lafcadio Hearn* (Wayne State University Press, 1964), p. x.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶⁶ Kemme, *The Outsider*, p. 81.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 82.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 82–83.
- ⁶⁹ For an overview of Hearn’s Japanese period see Steve Kemme, ‘Foreword’, in *Lafcadio Hearn’s Japan: Fascinating Stories and Essays by Japan’s Most Famous Foreign Observer*, ed. by Donald Richie (Tuttle, 2023), pp. 7–13.
- ⁷⁰ Kemme, *The Outsider*, p. 230.
- ⁷¹ Bisland, *Life and Letters*, I, p. 12. See also Murray, *Fantastic Journey*, pp. 243–44.
- ⁷² Kennard, *Lafcadio Hearn*, p. 39.
- ⁷³ See W. John Morgan, ‘The Lost Welsh Story of Lafcadio Hearn (alias Yakumo Koizumi)’, *New Welsh Review*, 136 (Winter 2024), pp. 39–45. For other adherents to this line of thinking see Dawson, *Lafcadio Hearn and the Vision of Japan*, p. 7, pp. 103–05; Jonathan Cott, *Wandering Ghost, The Odyssey of Lafcadio Hearn* (Knopf, 1991), pp. 20–21.
- ⁷⁴ Bisland, *Life and Letters*, I, p. 34.
- ⁷⁵ Lafcadio Hearn to Albert E. Price, Assistant Secretary, The Japan Society, London, 27 March 1901, cited by Heidi Potter, former Director of the Japan Society, in an email to Bill Emmott, 20 November 2024; Bill Emmott, email to the author, 13 April 2025; *Transactions and Proceedings of the Japan Society, London*, 6 (1902–1903), pp. 123–24.
- ⁷⁶ Bisland, *Life and Letters*, I, pp. 98–99.
- ⁷⁷ Albert Mordell, ‘Introduction’, in Lafcadio Hearn, *An American Miscellany*, ed. Mordell (Dodd, Mead, 1924), pp. i–lxxix (p. lxxvii).
- ⁷⁸ Matthew Josephson, *Portrait of the Artist as American* (Harcourt, Brace, 1930), pp. 199–231.
- ⁷⁹ Josephson, *Portrait of the Artist as American*, p. 230.
- ⁸⁰ Frost, *Young Hearn*, pp. 217–18.
- ⁸¹ Stevenson, *Lafcadio Hearn*, p. xiv.

⁸² Russell Blankenship, *American Literature as an Expression of the National Mind* (Olt, Rinehart and Winton, 1931), p. 46.

⁸³ Robert Earnest Spiller, ed., *A Literary History of the United States* (Macmillan, 1969), p. 1070.

⁸⁴ John Clubbe, 'Hearn as an American Writer', in *Lafcadio Hearn in International Perspectives*, ed. by Sukehiro Kirakawa (Global Oriental, 2007), pp. 93–102.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁸⁶ The phrase in question, 'Do I insist too much on the Irish in him...?', occurs in Sukehiro Kirakawa, 'Lafcadio Hearn: Towards an Irish Interpretation', in Paul Murray, *Fantastic Journey*, pp. 11–12. More recently, Hirakawa's claim that Hearn's imagination was 'distinctively Irish' is cited in Nicoletta Asciuto, 'Ghosts and Butterflies: Lafcadio Hearn between Ireland and Japan', in *Ireland's Cultural Empire: Contacts, Comparisons, Translations*, ed. by Giuliana Bendelli (Cambridge Scholars, 2018), pp. 71–92 (p. 76).

⁸⁷ Paul Murray, 'Lafcadio Hearn and the Irish Tradition', in *Irish Writing on Lafcadio Hearn and Japan*, ed. by Sean G. Ronan (Brill, 1998), pp. 172–87 (p. 172).

⁸⁸ Evangelista, *Literary Cosmopolitanism*, p. 77. Evangelista also describes Hearn as 'a European living in Japan', p. 110.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁹¹ Kathryn Webb-DeStefano, "'What is past, or passing, or to come': Transnational Modernism, Self-Transcendence, and the Rise of Ultrnationalism (1884–1945)" (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Virginia, 2024), p. 23.

⁹² Mary Goodwin, 'Stranger Fiction: The Asian Ghost Tales of Rudyard Kipling and Lafcadio Hearn', in *Transnational Gothic: Literary and Social Exchanges in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Monika Elbert and Bridget M. Marshall (Routledge, 2013), pp. 237–54 (p. 241).

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

⁹⁴ Elizabeth Hofmann Reade, 'The Tree of Life: The Politics of Kinship in Meiji Japan (1870–1915)' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 2018), p. 55.

Naomi Charlotte Fukuzawa, *Japan and Japonisme in Late Nineteenth Century Literature*
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Japan and Japonisme in Late Nineteenth Century Literature draws on diverse literary genres – ‘the French novel, the modernist novella in proximity to the German *Bildungsroman* or the Anglo-Saxon short or ghost story’¹ – to explore how the ‘poetic aestheticization’ of Japan played a crucial role within ‘an “eclectic” adoption of modernity’ in fin-de-siècle literature both from Japan and the West (p. 1, p. 6). Following in the footsteps of Japanese studies scholars such as Rachael Hutchinson and Mark Williams (*Representing the Other in Modern Japanese Literature*, 2006), Fukuzawa argues that a ‘mutual process of exoticism and autoexoticism’ shaped ‘the transnational modernization process in Meiji Japan (1868-1912)’ (p. 2). This work is therefore a valuable addition to the trend, carried by scholars such as Stefano Evangelista and Jennifer Yee, approaching *Japonisme* and exoticism as multipolar phenomena at the intersection of discourses on colonialism, modernity, and self-identity.

The book opens with a chapter on Pierre Loti, where *Madame Chrysanthème*’s main female character is analysed as ‘a national allegory for (early to mid-) Meiji Japan as a whole’ embodying ‘the dual nature of the nation, both its semi-subaltern status under Western influence and its resistance to Western hegemony through the strong attachment to Japanese customs’ (p. 46). Fukuzawa carefully re-contextualizes Loti within the political and cultural history of France-Japan relations during the Meiji era, as well as the ‘semi-documentary and semi-fictional nature of the book’ (p. 47) in regard to its author’s status as ‘a military and diplomatic servant’ (p. 38). What France represented for Meiji intellectuals and politicians such as Fukuzawa Yukichi – ‘an aesthetic democratic republican ideal’ (p. 39) – features alongside the more expected description of Japan

seen through French eyes, as the exotic other that ‘doesn’t fit easily into the categories for perpetrator and victim inherent to Orientalism’ (p. 40).

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on the works of Mori Ōgai and Natsume Sōseki and their experiences in Europe – Germany for the former and England for the latter. The two chapters benefit from the same careful consideration of the different understanding attached to these two countries in Meiji Japan. ‘Germany saw a “late” reception of Modernity in the nineteenth century that gave birth to a conservative modern nation-state, quite similar to the Japanese case’ (p. 71), while England was Japan’s ‘first model of modernization’, ‘still proud of its expanding industrial and colonial Empire’ (p. 101). Fukuzawa convincingly contrasts Ōgai’s adoption of ‘the European concept of the sovereign self, or more specifically, the German notion of emancipation from social circumstances’ (p. 126), as portrayed in *The Dancing Girl*, ‘a modern Japanese *Bildungsroman* [...] symbolizing Japan’s adoption of the military and medical leadership of Bismarck’s young German Empire’ (p. 79), to Sōseki’s ambivalence in ‘The Tower of London’. ‘This novella [...] represents an autoexotacist manifestation of Japanese self-identity [...] contain[ing] an element of antagonism through its cleverly woven parody of the paradigmatic literary genre of the Victorian Gothic’ (p. 127). This point is linked to a timely and well-handled discussion on the displacement and circulation of literary canons and genres across literary cultures. Fukuzawa rightly underlines how this often underappreciated text by Sōseki is key in ‘conceptualizing the formation of Japan’s national imagology through the analysis of exoticist and autoexotacist literary discourses of Self and Other together with processes of global translation’ (p. 130).

These two chapters, which deal with two literary giants, will be of interest to scholars of decadence who are unfamiliar with Japanese literature. Fukuzawa’s argument that Japanese modernity is founded on ‘eclectic hybridity’ is convincing when applied to the ‘mutual othering within the modernist construction of “Japan” as *another* “in-between”’, accomplished by both the ‘Western gaze’s exoticization’ and ‘the autoexoticization of Japan’s self-constitution as found in modern Japanese exile literature’ (p. 74). However, the post-colonial framework used to support

the argument does not always work in the author's favour. In particular, Fukuzawa relies on references from Marxist scholars, such as Katō Shūichi, who posits Japan's 'typical "hybrid" culture' by contrasting it to the supposedly 'typical "pure bred" cultures' of England and France, and on Sōseki specialist Komori Yōichi (pp. 8 and 9). The idea that some cultures can be 'pure bred' while others are 'hybrid' should surely have been questioned. The idea of a specifically and uniquely Japanese hybridity is based on an essentialist understanding of national characteristics, which post-colonial studies often fail to fully deconstruct. Similarly, Komori's controversial concept of 'self-colonization' to describe Meiji Japan's implementation of Western-style diplomacy and political reforms could have been handled with greater critical distance. The uncanny similarities between these scholarly discourses from the twentieth century and the fin-de-siècle exoticist laments over Japan losing its true self to Westernization would have been interesting to explore more fully.

The cultural essentialism inherent to *Japonisme* is more clearly explored in the last two chapters, which deal with Lafcadio Hearn. Fukuzawa re-frames Hearn within an evolving and uneven reception, historically very different in Japan and in the West. She proposes that 'the lack of interest in Hearn outside Japan appears to be a symptom of the continued dominance of certain modes of perception shaped by Western hegemony' (p. 155), a situation that is rapidly changing today. Chapter 4 focuses on Hearn's novel *Kokoro* and demonstrates that 'Hearn's *Japonist* [writings] contributed to the exoticization of meta-narratives that actively created "the West" in opposition to "Japan" through intercultural translation processes' within the context of 'the fin-de-siècle imperial age of Social Darwinism, filled with ethnocentric assumptions, including the notion of a universal Celtic or Pagan culture' (p. 160). Fukuzawa also begins to re-evaluate Hirakawa Sukehiro's psychoanalytic interpretation of Hearn's relevance in Japan. Hirakawa explains Hearn's popularity in Japan by a subconscious affinity between the author who suffered 'the trauma of his early loss of his mother' and Japanese culture as a whole, supposedly marked by a 'sentiment of mother-longing [...] called *amae*' (p. 141). This concept, among many others, has been amply criticized for

being rooted in the ethnocentric nationalist scholarship of the 1970s (*nihonjinron*), and there is an opportunity here to assess more robustly its problematic application to Hearn's works. It is surprising, perhaps, that Fukuzawa does not engage more closely with such critical reassessments.

Fukuzawa convincingly argues that 'Hearn's Romantic tribute to Japan's modernist national narrative [...] expresses Meiji's transition from a threatened Oriental country to a modern imperialist power with its own Asian colonies and the belief in its own ethno-cultural superiority' (p. 146). The chapter incorporates familiar material on Hearn's views on women, positing that he 'contributed to the formation of a national hegemonic discourse on the ideal of Japanese femininity' (p. 163). The comparison with Loti on this topic seems somewhat simplistic in places, despite Hearn being rightly described as having a 'tendency towards an over-idealization of Japanese female gender [...] as an antagonism to the individualism of Western society' (p. 163). Hearn is favourably opposed to the French author over two different quotes both drawing on the fact that the former was 'respectful towards women' and devoted to his Japanese wife (pp. 154 and 156). One wishes this comparison drew on their respective writings rather than biographies – not to mention that Loti owed his popular success in France by capitalizing on a chivalrous persona aimed at female readers. It might have been more fruitful to explore further the two authors' fixation on women as resulting from 'the same Orientalism' and 'narratological pattern of exoticism' (p. 164).

The last chapter deals with Hearn's ghost stories, *Kwaidan*, arguing that they should be read within 'a transnational historical background of planetary folklore' whose 'national romantic ethos [...] can be found in Germany in the Grimm Brothers [or] in Denmark in Andersen' (p. 171). This part of the book briefly addresses decadence, positing that *Kwaidan* offers 'hybridized multicultural modernist transcriptions of Western and Japanese decadent traditions of the supernatural and folklore' (p. 172). Here, Hearn's biography is put to better use by drawing parallels between his stories on Japan and the tradition of the Anglo-Irish ghost story, in particular W. B. Yeats's *The Celtic Twilight* (p. 175). Fukuzawa argues that these stories can be placed within the 'belittling,

whimsical imagology of *Japonisme*’ by portraying the Japanese as ‘a fairy-tale people’ (p. 175). She shows how Hearn’s ‘exoticist intention to popularize this supernatural tradition in the West’ and ‘fus[ing] [...] the Irish and Victorian Gothic [...] with the uncanny literary tradition of Edo oral tales’ have been incorporated within autoexoticizing and nationalist discourses about Japanese indigenous culture, such as folklorist Yanagita Kunio’s (pp. 180, 197, 184).

This work, based on Fukuzawa’s PhD thesis, offers a great deal of valuable information and is meticulously researched, but contains an abundance of secondary references that could have been quoted with more restraint. For example, a prominent place is given to the now well-established frameworks of twentieth-century theorists, such as Todorov, Barthes, Foucault, and Bhabha and this sometimes risks overshadowing more pertinent contributions by researchers on Japan and *Japonisme* – among whom recent scholars writing in Japanese are unfortunately very few. Better editing could have avoided some problems with repetition, the omission of references, and typographical errors. It is overall, however, part of a very welcome and highly relevant re-evaluation of *Japonisme* as a movement largely transcending the aesthetic to crystallize key questions on modernity.

¹ Naomi Charlotte Fukuzawa, *Japan and Japonisme in Late Nineteenth Century Literature* (Routledge, 2025), p. 212. All subsequent references are provided inline.

‘Kwaidan: Encounters with Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904)’,
Farmleigh Gallery, Dublin, 7 March-24 August 2025

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The Kwaidan Exhibition project emerged from an invitation from Irish artist Stephen Lawlor to forty artists, twenty Japan-based and twenty Ireland-based, to create prints inspired by their choice of text from one of Lafcadio Hearn’s best-known works, completed in the year of his death in Tokyo in 1904. No stranger to curating collective creative crossovers between literature and the visual arts, Lawlor had previously organized an exhibition of the work of Irish writers and artists inspired by Hearn’s contemporary, the Irish ‘Celtic Twilight’ poet and Nobel laureate, W. B. Yeats. Indeed, it was while presenting this latter exhibition in Japan in 2017 that he first encountered Hearn’s potent aura.

The challenges of writing an academic review of the Kwaidan exhibition reflect those underlying the project itself. They are further magnified when the focus of the commissioning journal is as specific as ‘the study of decadence from antiquity to the present’. Clearly, the most meaningful encounters with authors, ‘decadent’ or not, are those that engage most searchingly with the actual writing. In the case of an œuvre as prolific and multipolar as that of Hearn, the deeper and more complete the engagement with both its unity and heterogeneity, its unspoken principles and diverse articulation, the more resonant and illuminating the encounter. In Hearn’s case, the principal obstacle to such an engagement is the intrinsically translational and multiple or protean quality of the writing. Consequently, its quiddity is just as difficult to identify as the author’s principal cultural affiliation or association: Anglo-? Hiberno-? Greco-? Creolo? Americano-? Japano-? Or just migrant, global or multiply creolized? And what about his Francophilia? Ironically perhaps, the exhibition’s principal feat was to bring, by degrees, these challenges and questions into focus, none more sharply than the question of where Japan and things Japanese fit in the overall arc of Hearn’s life story, imaginary and poetics. The fact is that almost every line and image

of the œuvre as a whole registers the trauma of the losses and desertions suffered in childhood and adolescence, just as the succession of Hearn's own migratory pivots recalls the trail of his father's serial imperial postings overseas. The exhibition's decontextualized fixation on *Kwaidan* and Japan belies this recurrent reenactment of loss and rupture, just as it also belies the fact that, for about three years prior to his premature death in Tokyo aged 54, Hearn was actively seeking to leave Japan.

The word 'Kwaidan' means 'weird things' and the eponymous volume is usually, though reductively, construed as a collection of Japanese ghost stories. Like all the books published while Hearn was living in Japan, *Kwaidan* first appeared in English in the United States, but was quickly translated into Japanese under the naturalized writer's Japanese moniker. A subsequent Japanese film adaptation directed by Masaki Kobayashi in 1964 cemented his fame for a new generation in Japan. How many, though, of Koizumi Yakumo's Japanese readers, especially his child-readers, had any idea that the author was not just as Japanese as them? The subtitle of *Kwaidan* is *Stories and Studies of Strange Things* and perfectly illustrates Hearn's compulsive genre switching, a penchant perhaps linked to his mixed origins and subsequent 'transnationality'. Like so many of his collections, the volume includes both narratives and essays. Alongside seventeen tales of the supernatural it features three 'insect' studies, on butterflies, mosquitoes, and ants (indeed, the 'ant' study explicitly inspires one of the exhibition prints). The studies confirm the place of insects in both Japanese and Chinese mythology and, crucially, themselves incorporate stories and even poems (haikus).

Across Hearn's work, his trans-genre, composite or hybrid writing is a constant. Not only does he mix genres, but he liberally intersperses English with words from other languages (chiefly French, Creole, or Japanese). Furthermore, his preferred writing register is what he calls 'poetical prose'.¹ Indeed, Hearn seems to have implicitly and instinctively adopted a multiply blended, cross-over writing, which could perhaps be seen as a 'modern' equivalent of the creolization found in waning, late-stage cultural empires. Hence, even when the end-stage of a previously dominant

culture is not Hearn's direct thematic focus, his style and composition across time and place bear this same creolized/creolizing imprint.

Just as Creole is haunted by the languages from which it emerged, Hearn's entire œuvre is hauntologically driven. Yet ghost narratives specifically become progressively more dominant in his work, appearing to peak in Japan. Indeed, in the recent Penguin anthology of Hearn's *Japanese Ghost Stories* (2019), only eight out of the thirty-four tales are from *Kwaidan*. Already, the Cincinnati writings had included several remarkable ghost stories and, amongst the six volumes authored during the New Orleans years, three share a focus on 'strange things', including the volume entitled *Stray Leaves from Strange Literature* (Osgood, 1882). Crucially, though, all three collections emphasize two different modes of 'otherworldliness', both of them central to Euro-colonial fin-de-siècle decadence: firstly, the supernatural or fantastic; secondly, the culturally exogenous (Egyptian, Creole, francophone etc.). Indeed, this double emphasis is particularly explicit in the Egyptian or Chinese reference of two of the three titles: *One of Cleopatra's Nights and Other Fantastic Romances* (Worthington, 1882) – translations of Egypt-based and other tales by Théophile Gautier; and *Some Chinese Ghosts* (Roberts Brothers, 1887). This same double gravitation to 'other worlds' orients most of Hearn's narratives from the French Caribbean also. In the main section of *Two Years in the French West Indies* (the 'Martinique sketches'), Hearn represents Martinique as a space haunted above all by several 'pasts' or 'passings', including those of Greco-Roman antiquity. Moreover, he dwells on the fact that the then colony was known in French as 'l'île des revenants' [the Isle of Ghosts].

Hearn was a keen reader of Baudelaire and an accomplished translator of the work of several later French exponents of outright fin-de-siècle aesthetics like Flaubert and Gautier. Indeed, his speciality was re-telling the stories of others, mostly culturally distant others. He had often first discovered these tales in written form and his scholarly sources were frequently French Orientalists such as Émile-Louis Burnou, Antoine-Léonard de Chézy, and Stanislas Julien. However, he also relied in Ohio, Louisiana, and Florida, as also in Martinique and Japan, on oral

sources. His local informants included his own wives, Alethea (Mattie) Foley and Setsuko Koizumi or other women with whom he shared the same domestic space, for example his French-Creole speaking landladies or housekeepers in Martinique: these are identified only as ‘Cyrillia’ and ‘Manm-Robert’ in *Two Years in the French West Indies* (Harper & Brothers, 1890).

In his preface to *Kwaidan*, Hearn states that written his sources were mostly ‘old Japanese books’ and notes the Chinese, not Japanese, origins of some of his material. Furthermore, he volunteers the fact that only one tale had an oral source (an old Japanese farmer), adding that one other tale was based on his own experience (‘Riki-Baka’). These particular disclosures about provenance highlight Hearn’s acute awareness of two matters about which he regularly fretted in his correspondence: namely the ‘modern’ conflation of literary value with originality and fiction and his own limited ability to produce writing in this most prestigious of modern literary genres. In New Orleans he became so exercised by these limitations that he forced his fascination with the supernatural, psychic or fantastic-phantomatic to stretch beyond the transliteration, translation, or re-styling of the stories of others, whether traditional folktales or literary narratives like those of Gautier. This effort towards original fiction yielded the morbid mini-romances involving supernatural phenomena such as metempsychosis or lost/impossible love which were collected posthumously in *Fantastics and other Fancies* (Houghton Mifflin, 1914). Hearn’s two most substantial ‘fictions’, emerging respectively from his New Orleans and his French Caribbean years, were less marked by the morbid Creole Gothic exuded by the ‘Fantastics’. These were *Chita: A Memory of Last Island* (Harper & Brothers, 1889), a novella inspired by a true natural disaster story first heard from Hearn’s Louisiana-based friend, the novelist George Washington Cable and *Youma: The Story of a West Indian Slave* (Harper & Brothers, 1890), based on the history of recurrent slave uprisings, especially in Guadeloupe.

Neither the exact timbre of Hearn’s re-imagination of the source tales nor the texture of his re-writing can transfer, of course, into the prints inspired by the *Kwaidan* pieces. This explains the importance of Niall MacMonagle’s catalogue essay: ‘The Effect of Darkness’. It was for his

contribution to the appreciation of literature in Ireland and beyond that this former English teacher, a well-known art critic and editor of numerous poetry anthologies, was conferred with an honorary doctorate from University College Dublin in 2017. His vivid insights into Hearn's haunted imagination contextualize and illuminate the uniquely imaginative and aesthetic connections made with *Kwaidan* by each individual print.

It is crucial to acknowledge here the doubly dynamic dimension – peripatetic and teleological – of the exhibition project as a whole. The prints were first shown mid-June 2023 in the magical Lafcadio Hearn Memorial Museum in Matsue, run by Hearn's great-grandson Bon Koizumi and his wife Shoko. Through 2023 and 2024 they were shown in several other Japanese cities: Yaizu, Nagoya, Kyoto, and Toyama. In Ireland, the exhibition opened first in April 2024 at the Ballinglen Arts Foundation in Co. Mayo, before moving first to the Tramore Coastguard Cultural Centre, on to Sligo's Hyde Bridge Gallery, and thence to Limerick's Hunt Museum. The next two venues (Dublin and Osaka) had been the exhibition's magnetic poles from the outset. The April 2025 gala opening in April at Farmleigh, a major Dublin heritage estate and Ireland's official guesthouse for visiting dignitaries, was matched by the almost simultaneous showing in the Irish pavilion at World Expo 2025 in Osaka. Unlike all the aforesaid venues for temporary showings, 'Ireland House' in Tokyo, the brand-new premises of the Irish Embassy in Japan will have its walls permanently graced by the Kwaidan prints. These will also enjoy, however, several other tangible and permanent afterlives: firstly, in the catalogue, which was produced to coincide with the Osaka and Farmleigh climaxes; and secondly, in the limited number of boxed sets available for purchase at <https://kwaidanexhibition.com>.

The project's two ambitions as stated on the exhibition website were 'to raise Lafcadio Hearn's profile to its rightful place within the Pantheon of Irish writers' and 'through Hearn's words and the works of the forty printmaking artists, to bring Ireland and Japan closer together culturally'. As the second aim is vastly more defined and circumscribed than the first, its success is easier to gauge. That success was never in doubt given the support that the project received from

the Irish state, specifically from the Irish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and from the Office of Public Works (OPW), the main Irish built heritage body which manages Farmleigh. The objective of furthering Japanese-Irish *entente* matched to perfection the central plank of Ireland's foreign policy and also its trade policy: intense leverage of cultural heritage and connections.

Certainly, the exhibition's cultural connectivity was ostensibly limited to the Japan-Ireland axis. The exhibited content was confined, after all, to work by Japanese and Irish artists, and the latter's inspiration was exclusively work from Hearn's Japanese period. Moreover, with one vital exception (the closing UK coda from September 2025 in Ushaw, where Hearn had attended school), the exhibition did not physically travel beyond Ireland and Japan. Two points must be made, however, about this exclusive concentration on the Ireland-Japan axis. Firstly, it belies Stephen Lawlor's intense but ultimately unsuccessful efforts over 2023 and 2024 to bring the project to both the francophone and anglophone Americas, particularly French Creole America to which Hearn's spirit remained so deeply attached up to the very end. Secondly, the decontextualized tenor of the exhibition's encounter with Hearn's Japan period was appreciably mitigated over time in Ireland (where Hearn often seems much less well-known than in Japan) by the determination of the other main exhibition commissar, Kieran Owens of the OPW. The Dublin opening in March 2025 coincided, for example, with the latter's deft facilitation of an academic study day on 'Lafcadio Hearn's Japan: from Enchantment to Intercultural Understanding'. This was hosted jointly by Trinity College Dublin's Centres for Asian Studies and for Literary and Critical Translation. Of the three academic speakers, two – from UK universities – have been to the fore in examining Hearn's fin-de-siècle translational imagination and style.² The third, a postdoctoral speaker from the United States, addressed a matter that would merit a whole other exhibition and conference in itself: namely the illustration of Hearn's writing, particularly by the author himself (with ink sketches or woodblock prints).³ In an even more significant mitigation, Kieran Owens managed to have the exhibition's UK iteration and its final two Irish showings contextualized in relation to Hearn's family background and the author's complete

writing trajectory and multidimensional range. In all the smaller Irish venues – Ballinglen, Tramore and Sligo – there had been minimal curatorial emphasis on the broader, colonial context of Hearn's life and work, even in Japan. However, in the final showing before Dublin, at Limerick's Hunt Museum, viewers benefited from a small number of contextual storyboards about Hearn's origins, upbringing and peripatetic life-story. Furthermore, for both the gala opening in Dublin and the Ushaw coda these evolved into a much more comprehensive display, occupying a whole separate exhibition room at Farmleigh. Kieran Owens's fourteen richly informative panels are illustrated with documents such as Hearn's school reports, his parents' marriage certificate, family photographs etc., and some of the panels present Irish critical commentary on Hearn. The panels were supplemented, moreover, by cases exhibiting an impressive collection of Hearn's writings, some in translation, as well as critical and creative works centred on his life or work.

What, then, of the Kwaidan project's first stated ambition, namely to raise Lafcadio Hearn's profile within the Irish Writers' Pantheon? This aspiration seems to conflate two aims: firstly, that of having Hearn recognized as an Irish writer; secondly, that of apotheosis, or raising to 'Pantheon' status his profile in general, i.e. internationally and independently of his national classification. Certainly, Hearn's profile as an Irish writer is not, and has never been, high anywhere in the world, not even in Ireland, though it has benefited, in advance of the *Kwaidan* exhibition, from three major twenty-first century boosts in Ireland specifically. First, the steady amplification of the landmark 1993 study by former Irish diplomat, Paul Murray; second, the visit of the 2015 travelling exhibition *Coming Home: The Open Mind of Patrick [sic] Lafcadio Hearn* to Dublin's Little Museum; and third, the monumental achievement of Agnes Aylward in developing an outstandingly beautiful, meaningful, dynamic and alive *lieu de mémoire* in Tramore where Hearn holidayed as a child. The Lafcadio Hearn Japanese Gardens inaugurated in 2015 are about to boast a magnificent built extension named after another famous story collection, *Kokoro* (1896). In all three cases, Hearn's multi-lateral, transcultural range features as the single most significant dimension of his life's work.

Clearly, the Kwaidan exhibition has occasioned an unprecedented boost in Hearn's profile both in Ireland and in Japan, where it was already healthier than anywhere else. In many ways, however, it is the entire world and not just Ireland (or Japan), that needs to recognize Hearn's importance. Not, though, as an 'Irish writer' but as a multiply abandoned orphan whose part-Irish origins and mainly Irish childhood somehow propelled him to become a transnational, translingual, migrant 'world writer' in the mould of Joyce and Beckett. True, unlike those two canonical (Post-)Modernist figures and more like his fellow Irish-raised contemporaries Oscar Wilde or George Moore, Hearn was writing from or out of a recognizably colonial *fin de siècle*.⁴ Unlike all four, however, he was irresistibly drawn to the global scale of colonial encounters and to its promise of 'other worlds' on the cusp of emerging, haunted, from the old. Roy Foster may have been right to identify Hearn as a 'displaced person', but it is hard to see the trajectory of this constitutional nomad, more '*revenant*' than 'remainder', as having been, any more than that of Joyce or Beckett, 'a search for location', if location is taken to mean a singular place of belonging.⁵ As for Foster's suggestion that Hearn is a 'unique Irish writer' who is 'redefined, and in a way, reclaimed' in Paul Murray's study, this surely needs to be nuanced, as much in relation to Hearn's unsettled multipolarity as in relation to Murray's perspective. The fact is that neither Hearn nor his writings gravitate much at all towards Ireland and indeed the trajectory that Murray justifiably terms a 'Fantastic Journey' was no Odyssey. Ireland was surely no more Hearn's Ithaca than was Lefkada, and in any case there could be no homecoming to the place that had ceased to be his home after he was definitively disinherited around 1867. Moreover, Murray's putative 'national reclaiming' takes place within a painstaking study of all the multiple 'overseas' locations in which Hearn successively (or simultaneously) embedded a multipolar imagination so anticipatory of Creole modernisms. This fidelity to a restless, free-ranging poetics is what the ultimate Irish iteration of the Kwaidan exhibition also achieved in the final analysis by hybridizing the artistic, creative encounter with Hearn via the bio-bibliographical storyboards and bookcases.

According to the catalogue, the Kwaidan project has ‘magnetised the critical landscape of Hearn studies for many years to come’. How realistic is this claim in relation to the international future of Hearn studies, or even just its Japanese, Irish, and British future? Whatever the answer to this question, there can be no doubt regarding its stakes, and not just for the two named archipelagos. What makes it matter is not only Ireland’s exceptional historical position in Western Europe as a former settler colony and Japan’s exceptional historical position both in Asia and in relation to Europe and its former colonies, including the one that became an empire. It is also, if not principally, the choice now facing the planet between extractive, (self-)destructive, imperialist domination versus whole-world translational, multilateral, relational connectivity.

¹ See Lafcadio Hearn, letters to W. D. O’Connor, April 1886 and February 1887, in *The Life and Letters of Lafcadio Hearn*, ed. by Elizabeth Bisland (Houghton Mifflin, 1906), I, p. 364, p. 381; letters to H. E. Krehbiel, [n.d.] 1886 and October 1886, in *Life and Letters*, I, p. 374, p. 379.

² Papers included Stefano Evangelista’s ‘Lafcadio Hearn and the Invention of the Haiku’ and Fraser Riddell’s ‘Sensing Through Description in Lafcadio Hearn’s “My First Day in the Orient” (1894)’.

³ Kathryn Webb-Destefano’s paper was titled ‘*Kwaidan* Illustrated: The Unpublished Watercolours of Kazuo Koizumi’ and addressed the extensive Lafcadio Hearn materials held at the University of Virginia.

⁴ For wide-ranging reflection on the global context of decadence, see *French Decadence in a Global Context: Colonialism and Exoticism*, ed. by Julia Hartley, Wanrug Suwanwattana and Jennifer Yee (Liverpool University Press, 2022).

⁵ Roy Foster, ‘Foreword’, in Paul Murray, *A Fantastic Journey: The Life and Literature of Lafcadio Hearn* (Japan Library, 1993), pp. xi–xiv (p. xiv).

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