

*The Creation of Japanese and Irish Traditions
by Lafcadio Hearn and W. B. Yeats*

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Abstract

This essay will explore to what extent literature plays a role in the establishment or the creation of the perception of an age. We will regard the relationship between literature and national identity as mutually reflective. While literature tends to be a reflection of political, social and cultural trends of its time, it also has the potential to create its own reality. Hearn, an Irish writer of Meiji Japan, portrayed the country from the perspective of an outsider while the Anglo-Irish poet W.B. Yeats merged ancient Irish mythology with traditional Japanese Noh drama.

Interestingly enough, Hearn and Yeats's works correspond in many ways. Yeats traveled to the countryside and collected fairy stories and folk tales, because he believed that there was a source of Irish imagination in the stories recounted by peasants. It was his self-imposed lifework to establish Irish Identity. Hearn did exactly the same thing in Japan. When he arrived in Japan as a correspondent of Harper's Weekly, Japan was undergoing a period of rapid modernization making its westernization a primary focus

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for journalists of this era. While many journalists were trying to predict the future of a modernized Japan, Hearn intentionally turned his attention to Japan's traditions. He made it his mission to find the essence of the Japanese spirit by investigating the indigenous roots of local cultures. Similarly, Yeats tried to find the Irish national identity in the peasant beliefs of the Irish tradition. Hearn fell in love with the old beliefs and folklore of Japan, and intentionally ignored current events, choosing instead to glorify the aesthetic beauty and daily traditions of old Japan in his articles. In this respect he took criticism for romanticizing Japan, as Yeats was also accused of romanticizing Ireland.

Hearn and Yeats both shared unique viewpoints as "half-outsiders" in their surroundings. Yeats was an Anglo-Irish, not of genuine Irish descent. Therefore, he had to indicate whether he was on the side of the Irish or the British when the Irish independence movement had begun. It can be said that while Yeats was collecting folk tales for his beloved nation, he was in search of his own identity. His consciousness of being an outsider made him search for pure Irishness. The same thing can be said in Hearn's case. He was a naturalized Japanese citizen. Yet, even after he took Japanese citizenship, he never felt Japan to be his home. His position as an outsider allowed him to search for a romanticized Japan rather than the real Japan.

It is evident that the half-outsider's standpoint made the two writers seek the more traditional and romanticized aspects of their beloved nationalities. Yeats and Hearn deliberately ignored reality,

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even though they were both deeply aware of the current realities. These two Irish born writers felt and grasped for a universal, permanent realm of imagination lying beneath the normalcy of superficial realities that commanded people's daily lives. Their mission was to write about the beautiful traditions that existed in the deeper layers of life. The two writers did not belong completely to these traditions, thus recording Japanese and Irish cultures as somewhat half-foreign members of their environs. Therefore their creations from the outside would never be completely accepted as Japanese or Irish.

Yet, whenever romantic depictions of other cultures by outsiders are of issue, Edward Said's framework of "orientalism" is applied in a negative context. It is possible to criticize Hearn for writing about the beautiful side of Japan and Yeats for writing in the style of Noh drama that completely captivated him, from this standpoint. Both writers were criticized for romanticizing the countries while ignoring harsh realities. While it is regarded as an act of escape from reality, it is also possible to see it in a positive light. What Yeats and Hearn both tried to do by collecting rural legends and describing the beautiful side of Japan or Ireland, rather than the stark current events of their time, was to revive the powerful tradition of imagination handed down from generation to generation for hundreds of years.

Yeats and Hearn were both consciously indifferent towards actual political events but showed a great interest in ghosts. When Yeats was asked about the quality of great literature, he replied that it always has ghosts, echoing Hearn's words. The ghost keeps a

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distance from the actual world. It is a device for living people to recognize themselves paradoxically. It is a shadow or an echo of the present, which is in a state of perpetual change. This is why the ghost lovers appear in *The Dreaming of the Bones* as shadows of the present time and create an echo of The Easter Rising. This play of Yeats was influenced by a Japanese Noh drama called *Nishikigi*.

Yeats first encountered Japanese Noh drama in 1914, through a manuscript translated by Ernest Fenollosa and Ezra Pound. He published *Four Plays for Dancers*, which was created by borrowing the theatrical techniques of Noh drama. His first Noh-style play is *At the Hawk's Well* which was performed in 1916 in London. This was the first practical introduction of Japanese Noh drama in Europe and was a great success. After this performance, the strong influence of Japanese Noh drama began to spread all over the world.

It is interesting, however, to note that the usage of the Noh style in Western drama did not suddenly occur to Yeats. Before Yeats was inspired by it, he had already grasped the fundamental ideas from Shakespeare. His discussion of Shakespearean technique in his essay, 'Emotion of Multitude,' provides a perspective on his original theatrical theory that leads him to create a perpetual fiction by the use of sub-plots as situational shadowing, and a mask as a theme of the play that can be emerged from shadows by integrating them into one unity. Similarly, the Noh drama has its own 'emotion of multitude' by rendering multilayered images of a central theme. As the Noh drama is structured by centering *shite* (a main

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character), all of the other characters such as *waki* (a sub-character), *jiutai* (chorus) and *ohayashi* (musicians) echo the *shite*'s emotion, unifying the drama with the image of the *shite*.

The Noh drama is divided into two sections, the Genzai-Noh and the Mugen-Noh. The Mugen-Noh (the Dream-Noh) is a form of drama in which a ghostly existence appears in the sub-character's dream. It contains a double structuring of reality and dream episodes, making it similar to the play-within-a-play structuring in Shakespearean plays. This makes reciprocation between fiction and reality possible. As the world of dream is built as one unified world, it echoes the sub-character's reality. Simultaneously, it reflects the audience's mind as it generally takes up its main theme from well-known literature or history. For example, in the play called *Aoinoue*, the image of the character Aoinoue with which the audiences already know is merged with the image from the Noh drama, generating an amalgamated image of Aoinoue. Thus, *Aoinoue* continues to perpetuate along with the real world. Yeats tried to use this function to create Irish national identity.

The biggest influence that Yeats borrowed from the Noh drama is the usage of ghosts. He wanted to avoid fiction being connected directly to reality. Ghosts maintain a distance from reality. They reflect complicated and unsteady human lives paradoxically by its simplicity and form:

Because the ghost is simple, the man heterogeneous and confused, they are but knit together when the man has found

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a mask whose lineaments permit the expression of all the man most lacks, and it may be dreads, and of that only.
(*Later Essays* 11)

Ghosts are usually obsessed with a certain event. Unlike the human beings who care about miscellaneous affairs in daily life, the ghosts personify one certain emotion. Yeats wrote in his letter in 1938 that “to me all things are made of the conflict of two states of consciousness, beings or persons which die each other’s life, live each other’s death.” (*The Letter of W. B. Yeats* 918) Yeats’s theatrical space reflects life and death, the two phases of being. The ghosts are used as a device to recognize human beings paradoxically. Yeats wrote thus:

In poetical painting and in sculpture the face seems the nobler for lacking curiosity, alert attention, all that we sum up under the famous word of the realists ‘vitality’. It is even possible that being is only possessed completely by the dead...(*Early Essays* 166-7)

Yeats did not like ‘realists’ vitality’, because it only shows a picture of nature as it is. He desired to create an art being durable and permanent. Since ghosts lack vitality, it paradoxically reminds us of life itself.

The same thing can be said for masks of the Noh drama. Yeats writes in his essay, *Certain Noble Plays of Japan* thus:

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A mask will enable me to substitute for the face of some commonplace player, or for that face repainted to suit his vulgar fancy, the fine invention of a sculptor, and to bring the audience close enough to the play to hear every inflection of the voice. (*Early Essays* 166)

If an actor plays without a mask, his facial expression cannot avoid building up a character. Then, the character is recognized as an individual, and he loses a universality that can be felt by all mankind. By killing an actor's changeable facial expression, a director can create a universal character by using a mask. The mask expresses life by death as ghosts, who belong to the dead, can represent life indirectly or paradoxically. The Noh masks are always scary because their expressions are fixed and dead. The mask is dead not in the sense that a stone is dead. Its death is a vacancy of life and always reminds us of what is missing there. Yeats disliked a description of nature as it is. He rather liked to have a distance from nature:

All imaginative art remains at a distance and this distance once chosen must be firmly held against a pushing world.... Our imaginative arts are content to set a piece of the world as we know it in a place by itself, to put their photographs as it were in a plush or a plain frame, but the arts which interest me, while seeming to separate from the world and us a group of figures, images, symbols, enable us to pass for a

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few moments into a deep of the mind that had hitherto been too subtle for our habitation. (*Early Essays* 165)

A description of nature as it is for Yeats is just a picture in a frame. What he wanted for an art is permanence. Hence, he was charmed by Noh drama, which has a death-oriented beauty. Masks are used there to condense the essence of existence.

In the Noh drama, the facial expressions of masks are very limited. There are only 125 patterns, and even when the actors perform without a mask, they do not show their facial expressions. Zeami writes in *Fushikaden* thus:

The Noh actor should never reveal his mental processes, his creative intensions. So, even though every actor is trained in formal patterns, and every play has its own material, he should not let anyone know how he will interpret his part. Keeping his intensions a mystery, he gains power over his audience, gives his impersonations life, brings inner vitality to an artificial process. (*Yeats and the Noh* 94)

Instead of showing facial expressions, they use a limited number of fixed gestures for some particular expressions, called *kata*. While he is performing one of the gestures, he may say a simple sentence to indicate his emotion, but it is always minimal. After the encounter with the Noh drama, Yeats mentions that “I have invented

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a form of drama, distinguished, indirect and symbolic...an aristocratic form.” (*Early Essays* 163) Christopher Murray writes that the Noh drama’s “non-naturalistic style, the symbolism, the masks, the costumes, the stylized action, the use of chorus and musicians, the stage bare except for a drawing of a huge pine tree on the wooden backwall, and the minimum of properties, all coincided with Yeats’s own ideas on staging.” (Murray 7) As he mentions here, realistic movements are relatively stylized in the Noh drama.

Yeats borrowed these elements from the Noh drama, yet there is a significant difference in the structures of the plays. On Yeats’s stages, the emotions of characters reflect and react with each other and gradually accumulate energy that is heightened to a climax, spiraling as if in a vortex, while the Noh play always focuses on the main character’s emotion. So the Noh play is harmonic while Yeats’s plays are anharmonic.

In *The Dreaming of the Bones*, the past ghosts of Ireland confront a young man living in the present Ireland. Yeats lays a shade of myth on a political event in this play. One is the legend of Diarmuid and Dervorgilla’s betrayal of Ireland, while the other is the 1916 Rising. In doing so, he highlights a theme of a 700 year curse on Ireland by connecting and polarizing life and death, or past and present. Unlike *Nishikigi*, the ghost lovers cannot be forgiven by the young man and be released from their purgatory. Yeats does not let the young man forgive and reconcile with the ghosts. However, Yeats describes the ghost lovers beautifully. Therefore, it is difficult to tell whether he supports the 1916 Rising or not.

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Yeats does not give us a clear answer, but he generates a vortex of dichotomy in the audience's mind. This technique prompts the audience to reciprocate fiction and reality by relativizing present through past, or life through death. It is not a practical political message to solve specific problems, but an attempt to give meaning to life itself.

Yeats developed his literary movement in the period of growing nationalism in Ireland. His works were related to the creation of national identity. In this respect, his literary movement is directly connected with reality. Yet, he does not accept the Irish identity created by patriotic hatred toward Britain, which aims at differentiating them. When the Irish patriots were executed in the 1916 Rising, he was first bewildered but gradually started to understand its true nature.

Yeats's Noh-style play is a final result of his gradual development of his pursuit of symbolic drama to reach what he calls 'the depth of the mind'. Yeats disliked realism, yet it does not mean that he ignored the reality of Ireland. He regarded reality as multi-layered. To produce an echo between the superficial and deeper layers of reality, he tried to illuminate stereoscopic reality. By obtaining the theatrical method from Noh drama, Yeats attempts to create meanings within reality with the power of fiction by maintaining a distance from reality to enable a reciprocation between reality and fiction.

Artists who maintain a certain distance from journalism, such as Yeats and Hearn, try to draw a line between literature and politics. By distinguishing literature from political trends or

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movements, they could protect themselves from contemporary literary or journalistic criticism. Terry Eagleton criticizes this position by insisting that Yeats tries to reject politics without noticing that the attitude itself is political. Eventually Yeats and Hearn would be considered on the same equal footing as other contemporary writers, thus their safe extraterritorial sanctuary of art would be disregarded or lost in the political climate of the day. Nevertheless, there is an essential point that should be taken into consideration. The question is not how Yeats or Hearn were unintentionally political or not but what did they achieve for their beloved nations. In what respects did they exceed contemporary writers and to what point did they distort the truth? Now, probably it is safe to say that Yeats, whether he was conscious of being political or not, succeeded in creating an important part of Irish national identity in the same way as Hearn created an important part of Japanese national identity. So there seems to be an interesting irony here. Yeats and Hearn tried to avoid the current political or journalistic trends of the day but in the end they both became writers of enormous influence, culturally and politically, in each country's history.

Lafcadio Hearn comes to Japan in search of a place where he will no longer feel a sense of alienation that consumes him in the West. As an Irish immigrant, he lives for an extended period in the United States, never feeling completely at home. What he describes as "a spirit of restlessness" follows him throughout his life. Hearn's feelings of being a sort of hybrid between east and

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west would greatly shape his childhood. His affection for his Greek mother was greatly intensified by the betrayal of his Irish father who dissolved their marriage in 1863. She left Dublin and he never saw her again after the age of 13. He would later feel she had been the victim of western aggression. Hearn would never forgive his father. Hearn's bad experiences in a strict Catholic boarding school became a catalyst for his fascination with the exotic Greek pantheon of his mother's home. A root of Hearn's rebellious tendencies against western institutions most likely goes back to the abandonment by his father who chooses his military career over him and his mother. Before coming to Japan, he is a veteran travel writer and journalist with a reputation for studies of exotic, non-mainstream cultures. Henry Alden, editor of Harper's Weekly, sends Hearn to Japan in 1890 praising him as one capable "of fully appreciating and of adequately portraying . . . the life of strange peoples." (Murray 130). At thirty-nine, he is known for his keen ability of not only observing but trying to grasp the essence of the heart and spirit of different peoples. His interpretations would become an amalgam of his Western and Irish sensibilities imprinted upon an exploration of his own personal preferences in his study of the Japanese.

Before traveling to Japan as a correspondent for Harper's Weekly, Hearn states his intentions for a book on Japan to the art director of Harper's Weekly.

In attempting a book upon a country so well trodden as Japan,

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I could not hope - nor would I consider it prudent attempting, - to discover totally new things, but only to consider things in a totally new way, so far as possible. I would put as much life and colour especially into such a book, as I could, and attempt to interpret the former rather through vivid sensation given to the reader, than by any account or explanations such as may be found in other writers, whether travelers or scholars. (Murray 38)

In 1890, Japan is another interesting and exotic assignment to which he can focus and indulge his aesthetic and journalistic ambitions as a writer.

His departure without a written contract clearly shows his ambition and confidence as a journalist and interpreter of different cultures. He is already established as a highly acclaimed sensationalist journalist for his sketches of the Levy culture of Cincinnati and the Creole cultures of New Orleans and the West Indies. As a journalist in the United States, he exposed social problems, reported on city crime and made important commentary on the social ills that plighted America's forgotten and neglected minorities. During this intolerant and turbulent period after the American Civil War he even married the daughter of a former slave while conducting in-depth studies of ethnic and minority groups. As a journalist from the young age of twenty-two, Lafcadio Hearn endeavored to educate his readers about the faults and vices of the western world. As a writer of non-mainstream, marginal sub-cultures, he had developed a culturally

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sensitive antenna for orienting his observations to minute, yet profound details of society. A book on Japan would be his continuation and crowning achievement.

Upon his arrival in Yokohama in 1890, he writes to his mentor Henry Watkin, who saved him from starvation as a young Irish immigrant by apprenticing him in the print trade of Cincinnati.

I arrived here, by way of Canada and Vancouver, after passing some years in the West Indies. I think I shall stay here some years. . . I trust to make enough in a year or two to realize my dream of a home in the West Indies . . . I drift with forces in the direction of least resistance, -- resolve to love nothing, and love always too much for my own peace of mind -- places, things, and persons, -- and lo! presto! everything is swept away, and becomes a dream. (*Manuscripts*)

Lafcadio Hearn was a man ready to experience the sensations of new cultures and at this point Japan was but his next stop. His fascination with romanticism, exotic places, and the unusual in general, and a subtle sense of non-belonging that pervades his life in the United States are likely, primary factors that induce him to journey to Japan as a journalist. However, as he spends more time in his new location, Hearn senses something in the Japanese, something attractive that he cannot clearly define that makes his interpretations unique.

Upon arrival he discovers the accompanying photographer is

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being paid much more than him. His pride gets the best of him and he goes off on his own after writing an angry letter of resignation. Fortunately, as a Westerner, Hearn could fulfill a specific role as dictated by the needs of modern Japan. He could teach English. Hearn becomes so enchanted with Japan that he would marry a Japanese lady and take Japanese citizenship. His initial enthusiasm for a Japan that he sees as an artistic masterpiece and his growing appetite for the exotic and unusual compel him to write prolifically about his experiences. Before his death in 1904 he would produce 12 volumes, which include sixty sketches, fifty-eight essays, fifty legends and thirty-five prose poems.

His desire to examine Japan from the beliefs and folklore of the common man and his decision to live amongst the Japanese with his wife Setsu and her family, shape his vision of Meiji Japan. The dimension of Hearn's affinity for grass roots Japan can be attributed partly to his upbringing in Ireland. Lafcadio Hearn's correspondence with W.B. Yeats shows his strong connection to Irish tradition. Paul Murray, author of *A Fantastic Journey: The Life and Literature of Lafcadio Hearn* (1993) who gained access to this unpublished correspondence tells us that:

We know from his correspondence with Yeats that, as a little boy in Dublin he had had a Connaught nurse who told him Irish fairy-tales and ghost-stories. Thus began a life-long interest in folk material . . . In fact, the fairy stories common to much of the pre-industrial world, including Ireland, constitute

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of netherworld, living parallel to, and sometimes interacting with, the living, similar in some respects to the ancient Japanese religion of Shinto which Hearn would later make central to his analysis of Japan. (Murray, Matsue 1995)

Thus, it was natural for Hearn to recognize the good qualities of the Japanese by experiencing Japanese life through a medium that he knew so well because of his Irish upbringing. He naturally felt there was something of high quality, even superior in nature to the Westernized layers of Meiji Japan.

Hearn was able to establish himself fairly quickly as an educator by taking a teaching post at the Shimane Prefecture Common Middle School and Normal School of Matsue in 1890. He would later move to the Higher Middle School of Kumamoto in 1891 where he would stay until 1894. It would be at Tokyo Imperial University when Hearn names W.B. Yeats as “one representative poet,” “who himself collected a great number of stories and legends about fairies from the peasantry of Southern Ireland.” He explains to his students that,

Ireland and Brittany remain especially the regions in which fairy beliefs widely prevail; and the attachment of the people there to religion may have something to do with the continuance of the belief in fairies.

So you see there are three elements in the belief about fairies, the Northern, the classical, and the Celtic. Mingled altogether, these three elements eventually produced a wonderful

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amount of romantic, poetic, and also terrible, imagination.
(*Life and Literature* 325)

Hearn senses something corresponding to his own sensibilities through his interpretative approach via grassroots myth and folklore. Contemporaries such as Basil Hall Chamberlain admire him for his study of the commoner, but question its importance to understanding modern Japan. As a boy in Ireland, he was raised to respect the peasant beliefs of the Irish tradition and he chooses to investigate the roots of Japanese culture through this medium. His affinity for pre-industrial, ancient beliefs also make his investigations of Japanese culture an exploration of his own Irish sensibilities. What others see as uncivilized and crude, he sees as romantic and fresh.

While teaching in Kumamoto, Hearn writes his close friend and former colleague Nishida Sentaro of Matsue in 1893 about his preparation for a second book. He writes, "I am trying to write little stories illustrating the beautiful side of Japanese character -not of feudal times, but of today. I try to get ideas about the thoughts of children, and actions of common people, -peasants, servants, labourers. For people are the tree-root, trunk, and branches: the cultivated class are only the flower." (Ichikawa 101-2) He asks his friend to send him information about "anything noble, or beautiful, or touching, or brave in common life during the next two years." Hearn would continue to choose those subjects that interested him the most. To him, these were the foundations of beauty he saw in the Japanese.

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Osman Edwards, a colleague of Tokyo Imperial University, would later write about Hearn's tastes by telling of a time when Hearn had been accused by another professor "of sacrificing truth to flattery and of painting false pictures of Japan by exalting the lights and ignoring the shadows." He recalls Hearn as saying that "an artist's first concern was beauty" and it is "no part of his business to be a reporter or photographer, but to choose such subjects as satisfied his highest instincts and gave the noblest pleasure." (Edwards 18) Thus, Hearn describes a reporter and a photographer contemptuously, taking an artist's position. He differentiates art, which tries to find the universal beauty lying in the depths of superficial reality, from journalism that only tries to capture political or current events. In this respect, Yeats's standpoint on journalism perfectly overlaps with Hearn's. Yeats mentions in his essay, 'The Theatre, Pulpit and the Newspapers' that:

The priest, trained to keep his mind on the strength of his Church and the weakness of his congregation would have all mankind painted with a halo or with horns. ... The newspaper he reads of a morning has not only the haloes and horns of the vestry, but it has crowns and fool's caps of its own. Life, when in its essence is always individualizing, is nothing to it, it has to move men in squads, to keep them in uniform, with their faces to the right enemy, and enough hate in their hearts to make the muskets go off. (*The Irish Dramatic Movement* 37)

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Yeats tries to distinguish the theatre from the priest's sermon and journalism. These three are similar in sending a message to audiences. However, the priest's sermon and reporting of journalists segregate the audience into groups bound by the same purpose and lead them into the dichotomy of good and evil or right and wrong. Yeats also wrote: 'in our theatre we have nothing to do with politics: they would only make our art insincere': 'a literature freed from political objects is Muse escaped from the pots and pans.' (*Quoted in Foster* 367)

The very first essay in Hearn's second book *Out of the East*, entitled "The Dream of a Summer Day" is the beginning of a gradual movement towards the specific exploration of those Japanese subjects that "satisfy his own instincts." In "A Dream of a Summer day" Hearn retells the Japanese fairy tale of "Urashima Taro" that his wife would describe in her memoirs as his favorite of all Japanese tales. In an English translation of *Omoide No Ki* by Yoji Hasegawa she writes as follows:

Of Japanese fairy tales, he loves the tale of Urashima Taro best. Even when he would simply hear the name Urashima, he would be pleased and exclaim, "Oh, that Urashima!" Often out near the edge of the veranda, he would recite pleasantly in a singsong voice the verse from the poem . . . Hearn had memorized the verse so well that I myself came to learn it by heart from listening to him. (Hasegawa 37)

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This tale is of a young man, Urashima Taro, who catches a sea turtle but sets it free and as a reward he is taken to an underwater paradise where he marries the daughter of the Dragon King of the sea. When he returns to his seaside village, he finds that more than four hundred years have past. Upon opening a small lacquer box that he was requested not to open, a strange vapor escapes and he suddenly ages and dies an old man. According to Murray, this tale of a kingdom of eternal youth in the sea is very similar to the Irish legend of Oisín.

Oisín was said to have accompanied a beautiful woman to the Land of Youth. After what seemed like a short time, he asks to go back to his homeland; the lady allows him but enjoins him not to set foot on the soil of Ireland. He finds when he gets back that he has actually been away for three hundred years . . . Unthinkingly he comes into contact with the ground and is instantly changed into an old man. (Murray in Matsue 1995)

Of course, it is not known for sure that Hearn was attracted to this particular tale for its similarity to those he was told during his boyhood. But, the fact that this essay is a fusion of the legend of Urashima and a flashback from his childhood is a good indication. Just as Urashima Taro opens the box and loses eternal youth, Hearn remembers the trauma of the parting of his mother

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who once told him beautiful stories and “when the pleasure became too great, she would sing a weird little song which always brought sleep.” The box of Urashima Taro becomes a small charm from his mother that he loses and just as the vapor of youth evaporates with the opening Urashima Taro’s box, Hearn forever loses his childhood:

At last there came a parting day; and she wept, and told me of a charm she had given that I must never, never loose, because it would keep me young, and give me power to return. But I never returned. And the years went; and one day I knew that I had lost the charm, and had become ridiculously old. (*Out of the East* 21)

After chronicling his initial experience in his first book in Matsue, his later works become much more personal with Hearn not only taking the role of guide and storyteller. He begins his own journey of self-exploration within Japan. In his version of the legend of Urashima Taro he implants his own impressions of the day. He is the tour guide and he makes this tale part of the trip. His style becomes a synthesis of legend and adventure with a descriptive sketch of scenery and insertions of dialogue to present an interesting and exotic setting of events for the reader. A lady servant at a small Japanese Inn becomes Urashima Taro’s mythical bride and the jinrikisha becomes a creature of the sea.

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The fairy mistress came back to tell me that everything was ready . . . and summoned a sea-creature with Chinese characters upon his back . . . Then I slipped into a vehicle. . . Mile after mile I rolled along that shore looking into the infinite light. All was steeped in blue, like that which comes and goes in the heart of a great shell. Glowing blue sea met hollow blue sky in brightness of electric fusion. . . But what divine clouds! White purified spirits of clouds, resting on their way to the beatitude of Nirvana? Or perhaps the mists escaped from Urashima's box a thousand years ago? (*Out of the East* 12-13)

In his third book *Kokoro* he illustrates his belief that Japanese "moral beauty" is superior to Western "intellectual beauty" by telling the story of a young samurai who decides to become a student of Western Learning. In "A Conservative," a zealous and highly spirited samurai youth embraces the Meiji ideology of Wakon Yosai, "Japanese Spirit, Western Talents." He enthusiastically pursues what Hearn describes as the superior force of Western civilization. He becomes a devoted student of Western science and even goes abroad to follow this higher knowledge as his patriotic duty. This student comes to realize the necessity of foreign knowledge to ensure the security of Japan, but he also comes to see the superior beauty and worth of his own, native civilization. The young samurai comes to the conclusion that:

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Surely the old Japanese civilization of benevolence and duty was incomparably better in its comprehension of happiness, in its moral ambitions, its larger faith, its joyous courage, its simplicity and unselfishness, its sobriety and contentment. Western superiority was not ethical. It lay in forces of intellect developed through suffering incalculable, and used for the destruction of the weak by the strong (*Kokoro* 204).

In *Gleanings in Buddha-Fields* Hearn asserts that the ethics that this young samurai discovers are still present, contrary to outward appearances:

It is not true that Old Japan is rapidly disappearing. It cannot disappear within at least another hundred years; perhaps it will never entirely disappear. Many curious and beautiful things have vanished; but Old Japan survives in art, in faith, in customs and habits, in the hearts and the homes of the people: it may be found everywhere by those who know how to look for it . . . (*Gleanings* 152)

However, the reader would never suspect that beyond his passion to open the eyes of the West and the Japanese to those fine qualities that survive in the “hearts and homes of the people,” there lies overwhelming feelings of alienation in Japan. This is clearly documented in his correspondence. His move to Kumamoto and then

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to Kobe thrust him into the midst of the New Japan and his shock is fully expressed in a letter to Nishida of December 5, 1894 when he exclaims:

I am “blue” (unhappy) - an American expression. I don’t see my way clear. I am so disgusted with the treatment I received at Kumamoto that I feel inclined to dislike all Japanese--except my old Izumo friends. (Ishikawa 136)

It is Kumamoto where he first lives among the educated men of Meiji Japan and his interaction with them makes him feel isolated and used as a foreign educational tool. Even before going to Kumamoto, he writes about his dislike of occasional meetings with the “educated class.” He tells his close friend W.B. Mason that “my whole study must be the heart of the commonest people. The educated class repel me.” His interests bore them and they get insulted if he asks questions about topics such as Buddhism. He continues “It is impossible to make friends among them, and pure madness to expect sympathy.” (*Japanese Letters* 407) In a letter to Nishida from Kumamoto in 1894 he writes that he suspects that the government will eventually “get rid of all the foreign teachers receiving reasonable salaries.” The gulf he feels with the Japanese is clearly evident when he gripes to Nishida from his newly acquired position as the editor of the Kobe Chronicle in 1894 shortly after leaving Kumamoto:

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Besides the devilish treatment I received in the Government Service, I have been obliged to recognize the fact that I can never become a Japanese, or find real sympathy from the Japanese as whole. I am obliged to acknowledge that my isolation became too much for me. I felt the need of being again among men of my own race who, with all their faults, have sympathy and kindness, and who have the same color of soul as myself. How foolish the foreigner who believes that he can understand the Japanese! (Ishikawa 133)

Hearn is a man contradiction: it is the new Japan, not the old, that can pay him quite handsomely as a foreign lecturer and it is the new Japan that could decide foreign teachers are unnecessary. However, he does admit there is a comfort in his foreign surroundings. Unfortunately this would create blind spots that would add to his frustrations as an outsider. In a letter dated March 4, 1894 he tells Chamberlain that:

. . . I wonder whether Japanese life has not spoiled me . . .
The freedom of it, the laissez-faire, the softness of things, the indifference, the lonesomeness, really constitute a sort of psychological tropics. . . this psychological tropic of Japanese life may have already unfitted me to endure anything resembling conventions and unpleasant contracts . . . Is not the truth also that we English or Americans hate our "awful orderliness". . . (*Life and Letters* 134)

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Chamberlain's response to this letter is almost one of a scolding fashion. He writes in a letter to Hearn of March 9, 1894:

With regard to the social conventionalities of various countries, do you not think that the natural tendency is to imagine alien societies freer than they are, merely because, on the one hand, we cannot fully appreciate the nature of their conventions, and on the other because we are not bound by them even if we live among them. We English people talk of the free, unconventional life of the Continent. They utter a half-truth. The life is free to them, because they are out of the atmosphere of their own conventions, and neither choose nor are expected to follow those of the place of their temporary sojourn. (Koizumi 82)

Professor Ernest Foxwell, author of "Reminiscences of Lafcadio Hearn," who knew Hearn from 1897-1900, describes the life of a foreigner as of being "unchained" from conventions.

. . . in Japan we are "unchained." When at home in any country, men live chained by convention. We go about in chains everyday. We do not know it until we are transported . . . But to live in Japan is a unique experience for this reason. The Japanese leave us alone. . . so that each European who lives in Japan is in a sense an unsocial independent unit. . . untied by opinion or tradition, a law to himself. . . To live

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in Japan is like being born again, only with this difference - there is no one to mold us and teach us the way - of thought and action - in which we should go. (Foxwell 88-89)

Hearn's reaction to this coupled existence of freedom and isolation from social conventions in Japan is confining himself to "the most emotional phases of Japanese life - popular religion and popular imagination" in his literary work because of the lack of "fine inspiration" or "deep emotion" in his surroundings. (*Life and Letters* 137)

His disgruntlement with his life among the Japanese as a foreigner is expressed loud and clear when he writes of his experience on board the deck of the Kobe Maru in a letter to Chamberlain of July 15, 1894. While in the midst of his move from Kumamoto to Kobe, he writes,

Coming out of my solitude of nearly five years to stand on the deck of the Kobe Maru on the 10th, I felt afraid. I saw myself again among giants . . . A sudden sense of the meaning of that civilization I had been so long decrying and arguing against, and vainly rebelling against, came upon me crushingly. . .

Another day, and I was in touch with England again. How small suddenly my little Japan became - how lonesome! What a joy to feel the West! What a great thing is the

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West! What new appreciations of it are born of isolation!
What a horrible place the school! - I was a prisoner released
from prison after five years' servitude. (*Japanese Letters*
217)

Hearn would continue to oscillate between his love for "old Japan"
and feelings of alienation within modern Japan. After exclaiming
his jubilation to Chamberlain in this letter he continues:

Then I stopped thinking. For I saw my home - and the lights
of its household Gods - and my boy reaching out his little
hands to me - and all the simple charm and love of old Japan.
And the fairy-world seized my soul again, very softly and
sweetly - as a child might catch a butterfly. (*Life and Letters*
252)

Hearn feels an attachment that pulls him back to "the simple charm
and love of old Japan." He writes to his friend Hendrick in April
of 1895 that he treasures his isolation from the open ports and
foreign populations. He writes "I must confess that I am only happy
out of the sight of foreign faces and the hearing of English
voices." (*Life and Letters* 252) His decision to remain isolated is
his own and a product of his love for his Japan.

It becomes his mission to educate his Western audience about
what he sees as noble and good qualities of Japanese civilization
and the Japanese character. He hopes to persuade his readers that

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there are qualities of Japanese Culture that are highly refined and even superior to Western conceptions. As he settles into Japanese life, though, his status as a foreign instructor that had cushioned him from feelings of alienation during his initial interpretations gradually give way to feelings of ambivalence. He becomes self-conscious of an ever-present feeling as an outsider and this also feeds a tendency to attribute some cultural characteristics to ethnic and racial differences. For this he is often criticized. In order to illuminate what he describes as the beautiful side of the Japanese character that he sees in the life and actions of the common man, he goes to every extreme to seclude himself from the metropolitan surroundings of Tokyo. He comes to see his “ideal” as the Japan of the past. He refuses to lose this image and strives to keep it alive by isolating himself from other foreigners and Japanese. His vision and writings become his own realm where he loses himself in his literary attempts to create a vision of clarity for his readers and, most importantly, himself.

His message that the culture of Japan is in many respects superior to and transcends the accomplishments of Western intellect and technology is intended not only for the West, but also for the Japanese of the Meiji Era as well. Hearn tells his readers and his students that the old Japanese were morally superior because they recognized the human heart as infinitely more valuable than human intellect. His decision to ignore modern Japan is a product of his desire to convey his love of what he sees as remarkable traits threatened by the encroachment of Western ideas and institutions.

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He thought he was successful in conveying what he comes to treasure as the heart or Kokoro of the Japanese. Hearn tells his students at Tokyo University “Even from which is not true, truth may be learned.” He goes on to say that “The power to create is the special power which the study of literature should cultivate, and the power to create can scarcely be developed without a love for both poetry and fiction.” Hearn’s rewriting and interpretation of Japanese tales are exactly this. One could say that he tried “to put Japan in a bottle” to make it understandable for his Western audience, the Japanese and himself. Today he is a part of the Japanese cultural heritage and he will always be remembered in Japan as the foreigner who loved Japan more than the Japanese.

Edward Said’s “Orientalism” always talks about the already completed “self” talking about “others”. The relationship between Yeats and Noh drama, or Hearn and Japan are not so simple. Yeats writes about Noh drama and by doing so Noh drama acquired a modern and western interpretation. It revived itself by making those interpretations part of its own system. Here, the relationship of “oneself” and “another” cannot be one way: it always includes mutual interpretation, or rather mutual misinterpretation, where both sides create their new selves. Thus, the relation is not the interpretation of the weak by the strong as suggested by Said’s “Orientalism”. It is rather a process where one interprets/understands/misunderstands the other. What gives meaning to Japan is not the past tradition that Hearn cherished, nor pure Japanese culture, nor western culture as an external pressure. Japanese culture, especially

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the modern period, should be understood as a self-recreating system exposed to all kinds of influences. Every time it is exposed to something external and internal, the process of understanding it is reformed. Therefore the culture exists only in the reciprocating process between “self” and “others” where it tries to interpret others while it is interpreted by others, or in the reciprocating process between fiction and reality. In this sense it exists only in the form of “becoming” and not in the form of “being”.

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