

## Home, Journey, and Literature

### LAFCADIO HEARN AND JAPAN: FROM A “JOURNEY” TO “HOME”

*Fabien Durringer*

#### **Abstract**

*Following the theme “Home and Journey around the Globe” of the 2<sup>nd</sup> symposium organized by the Society for Philosophy as Global Conversation, this article tries to analyze how Japan, which started as a travel destination via a journalistic assignment, became and remained, until the end of his life, “home” for the writer Lafcadio Hearn. Assuming that the reader is not necessarily well acquainted with this author, usually known in the field of Japonology, we start by describing in some detail Hearn’s life and work. This thorough overview allows us in the second and the third part to analyze two fundamental questions concerning Hearn’s life and work: first, we try to understand how Japan, a destination meant to be a place of a journey, could trigger Hearn’s desire to settle there; second, we analyze how this desire was sustained throughout his life. To answer our initial question, we describe and explain the process through which Hearn fell in love with Japan and how the Japanese, in return, showed their affection to him. In that part, we also tackle the problem of Hearn’s childhood and teenage life, which enables us to understand how a country like Japan, with its peculiarity in terms of people’s spirit, religious faith, and beliefs, could match so well with Hearn’s personality. Past the initial encounter, the passion and the delights of the first few years, which saw Hearn marry a Japanese woman and settle his home there, we analyze how he kept his desire to be in Japan and live in the long run. We show that this was rendered possible through his position as a scholar and his rich work on interpreting Japan and its culture. Hearn was a committed person and his position as an intermediary between West and East enabled him to question the presumed superiority of the Western culture over its Eastern counterpart. Besides this commitment, another factor, namely, the sharp insight of his writings on Japan, can also be seen as sustaining his desire to remain in that particular country. By means of his essays and stories, Hearn was indeed able to make its contemporary readers “undertake a journey” in Japan, and he played a crucial role in laying the foundations of cultural analysis studies about this country that would flourish in the twentieth century.*

**Keywords:** *Lafcadio Hearn, biography, work, Japan, travel, home, culture*

### **Introduction**

“Journey” and “Home” are two words that seem to fit perfectly with Lafcadio Hearn’s both life and work. As a *déraciné* (a rootless person) Lafcadio Hearn was in constant search of a “home” during his entire life. Having already had an extraordinary life filled with moments of extreme difficulties and numerous moves, Hearn finally settled down in Japan at around forty years of age, where he founded a family and spent the rest of his life. During his fourteen years there he wrote many books about Japan, which nowadays are still considered among the best work of interpretation of the culture of this country and the life of its people.

To assess Hearn’s life and work in the light of “journey” and “home” we will need to start with a presentation of who Hearn was and what he achieved in terms of writings. This first part will allow us to understand better the second one, which will focus on how Japan, where he was sent on an assignment, became indeed his *home*, how the encounter with this country made him fall in love with it, or more prosaically put, how the “chemistry” between him and Japan worked. The third part will focus on how Hearn kept his desire to stay in Japan, especially on his role of advocate and interpreter of the culture of this country, and on his literary capacity to take his contemporary readers – through his writings – “on a journey” to this land.

## **1. Hearn’s life and work**

### **1.1 Hearn’s life<sup>1</sup>**

It will not be an exaggeration to describe Hearn’s life as “extra-ordinary.” Throughout the course of his entire life he lived on three different continents: Europe in his youth, America from age of 19 to 40, and Asia – Japan – until his death when he was 54. He lived in at least six different countries and a total of about fifteen different cities.<sup>2</sup>

He was born on the Greek Island of Lefkada or Leucadia to an Irish surgeon of the British army, Charles Bush Hearn, and a Greek mother, Rosa Antonia Cassimati. His full name was Patrick Lafcadio Hearn, his middle name deriving from Lefkada, the Island on which he was born.

Lafcadio Hearn’s childhood and teenage years were in the main marked by a succession of abandonments. The first one came from his mother, described as “a young Greek woman, from a good family, but illiterate and very religious,”<sup>3</sup> who initially moved to Dublin with him in 1852 to her family in law. She left back for Greece two years later in the summer of 1854 mentally ill – having attempted suicide the previous year<sup>4</sup> – leaving the little Lafcadio in the hand of his grand-mother’s sister, Sarah Brenane, a wealthy widow, who was to take care of him until his departure for America. Hearn never saw his mother again upon her departure for Greece. His father, on the other hand, was rarely home; he was assigned by the army first to the

---

<sup>1</sup> Most of the dates and facts for this biography have been taken from: Paul Murray, *A Fantastic Journey: The Life and Literature of Lafcadio Hearn* (Trowbridge, Wiltshire: Japan Library, 1993); Edith De la Héronnière, “Lafcadio Hearn: Une voix venue du plus intime de l’invisibilité,” in *Lettres Japonaises* (Paris: Pocket Revue des Deux Mondes, 2014); Kyoto Gaidai, *Bibliotheca Hearniana*, Tokyo: The University Library (Kyoto University of Foreign Studies, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> See Document 1 for a summary map of his life prior Japan, Document 2 for his life in Japan.

<sup>3</sup> Edith De la Héronnière, “Lafcadio Hearn,” p. 12. Quote translated from the French by the author.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Murray, *A Fantastic Journey*, p. 220.

West Indies (Feb. 1850–Sept. 1853), then to the Crimean war (March 1854–July 1856), and finally for India, in August 1857, the year that he divorced Lafcadio Hearn's mother, to remarry. He will never return from India, dying in 1866 from Indian fever on a ship to Suez.<sup>5</sup>

From 1857, when it was agreed between his father and his great-aunt that he would be raised as a Roman Catholic,<sup>6</sup> until 1863, when he was sent by Mrs. Brenane to a Roman Catholic English boarding School, Lafcadio seemed to have enjoyed a life "of cultured leisure with, critically, untrammled access to books of all sorts."<sup>7</sup> A move to England after Mrs. Brenane married Henry Hearn Molyneux, a clerk at the Admiralty, and his life in his new school near Durham marked the start of a series of misfortunes.<sup>8</sup> First, entering this boarding school practically meant that Lafcadio was abandoned once more, this time by his great-aunt. He would even spend his holidays there. Next, he became a victim of an accident that resulted in the loss of his eye during a game at the school. His healthy eye would eventually deteriorate, making him all too preoccupied with poor eyesight. Finally, his great-aunt went bankrupt owing to some disastrous financial decisions by her new husband.

Without enough money to finance the completion of his secondary education, Mrs. Brenane withdrew him from school and had Lafcadio Hearn finish it in a day school in London, where they both had found refuge in the house of the maid who had accompanied them all the way from Ireland.<sup>9</sup>

In 1869, a decision was made to send Lafcadio to America, in Cincinnati, where relatives of Molyneux could help him move on with his life. Hearn's arrival in New York and the first few months that he spent there remain a mystery to his biographers. Some saw him spending one or two years in misery,<sup>10</sup> accepting little jobs to survive. But according to others, he relatively quickly<sup>11</sup> made contact with the people he was addressed to, reaching a person named Henry Watking who offered him a job in the printing trade in Cincinnati. Eventually, making his own way through, Lafcadio was able to start collaborating as a journalist in the *Enquirer* in October 1872 and joined it as a regular staff member in 1874.<sup>12</sup> Although recognized as gifted, the image of Hearn was that of an outsider.<sup>13</sup> As a journalist, he was primarily writing articles out of news items that were very much gruesome and macabre, in which he would exert his literary talent, the one he would later on use to tell thrilling Japanese ghost stories. Moreover, in his translation work he would venture on texts of the "unacceptably salacious French Romanticism."<sup>14</sup> To add to his image of an outsider, Hearn married a Black woman named Mattie Folley, despite the fact that it was illegal at that time. This marriage, although short-lived – a few months according to Hearn himself – cost him his job at the

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 230.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 233.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 267.

<sup>10</sup> Edith De la Héronnière, "Lafcadio Hearn," pp. 13–14.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Murray, *A Fantastic Journey*, pp. 24–25.

<sup>12</sup> Kyoto Gaidai, *Bibliotheca Hearniana*, p. 61.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Murray, *A Fantastic Journey*, p. 17.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 17

*Enquirer*.<sup>15</sup> And though his journalist talent landed him another job at *Cincinnati Commercial* in 1876, his time in this city would nonetheless come to an end the following year, when, trying to explain his move, he simply declared that it was time for him to leave Cincinnati.<sup>16</sup>

*Document 1*

HEARN'S LIFE BEFORE JAPAN	
EUROPE (19 years)	1. 1850 Birth in Greece (Leucadia or Lefkada)
	2. 1852 Dublin
	3. 1862 – 63 (Rouen ?)
	4. 1863 – 1867 Durham
	5. 1867 – 1868 London
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (21years)	6. 1869 New York
	7. 1870 – 1877 Cincinnati
	8. 1877 – 1887 New-Orleans
	9. 1887 – 1889 French West Indies (Antilles St Pierre)
	10. 1890 New York

Drawn by the author with the following sources:  
 Paul Murray, *A Fantastic Journey: The Life and Literature of Lafcadio Hearn* (Trowbridge, Wiltshire: Japan Library, 1993)  
 Edith De la Héronnière, "Lafcadio Hearn: Une voix venue du plus intime de l'invisibilité," in *Lettres Japonaises* (Paris: Pocket Revue des Deux Mondes, 2014), 11-29.  
 Kyoto Gaidai. *Bibliotheca Hearniana*. Tokyo: The University Library (Kyoto University of Foreign Studies, 1997).  
<https://fr.wikipedia.org> (blank map).

His next destination will be the south, which seemed to have attracted him because of its sunny and warm weather. His move to the south was also marked by an intention to move away from journalism and start a career in literary writing,<sup>17</sup> while at the same time moving

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

somewhat closer to his Greek roots by dropping the name Paddy for Lafcadio.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, during his stay in New Orleans journalism will remain his livelihood, working for the *Item* and *The Democrat* for three years (from 1878 to 1881) and later on taking the post of *Time-Democrat's* literary editor in 1881. His period in New Orleans, very productive in terms of journalistic work, will also mark the start of his books publications among which one can quote *One of Cleopatra's Nights* (1882), *Stray Leaves from Strange Literature* (1884), *Gombo Zhèbes* (1885), *Some Chinese Ghosts* (1887), *Chita: A memory of the Last Island* (1889).

The year of 1887 was to become important for him in that after visiting the French West Indies, he decided to return there the same year and to stay for almost two years.<sup>19</sup> Although, financially challenging, the two years spent there, provided him with material for other books, namely, *Two years in the French Indies* (1890) and *Youma* (1890).<sup>20</sup> Having ultimately gone bankrupt,<sup>21</sup> Hearn decided to return to New York in October 1889, where he remained a few months before boarding, in March 1890, on *Abyssinia* to embark on what was to become the biggest venture of his life: Japan.

Hearn was originally sent there on an assignment by *Harper's Magazine*, the idea of which was conceived in a conversation with the art director of the magazine.<sup>22</sup> Although Hearn was not quite satisfied with the terms of the agreement, which were rather unclear, he decided to go ahead with it. His interest in things Oriental had apparently won over his fears of the unknown and "prompted him to undertake the journey to Japan, where he arrived on April 4<sup>th</sup> 1890."<sup>23</sup>

His agreement with *Harper's Magazine* was soon to break, but with the assistance of Hattori Ichizô, a Japanese whom he met at the New Orleans Centenary Exhibition a few years earlier in 1885, he managed to secure a post as an English teacher in the town of Matsue. It is also at his arrival in Japan that he got to become acquainted with the famous British Japanologist Basil Hall Chamberlain.<sup>24</sup>

His time in Matsue actually proved to be one of the happiest he ever had.<sup>25</sup> Only four months upon his arrival there, in 1891, he married Koizumi Setsu, the daughter of a traditional fallen samurai family, who was 18 years younger than him. He will have four children with her, three sons (1893, 1897, 1899) and one daughter (1903), who was born just a year before his death.<sup>26</sup> In 1893, the birth of his first child will raise the question of Hearn's citizenship. He will find it wiser to ask for Japanese status even at the expense of dropping his British one. Two

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 94–95.

<sup>20</sup> Kyoto Gaidai, *Bibliotheca Hearnania*, p. viii.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Murray, *A Fantastic Journey*, p. 111.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>23</sup> Kyoto Gaidai, *Bibliotheca Hearnania*, p. viii.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. viii.

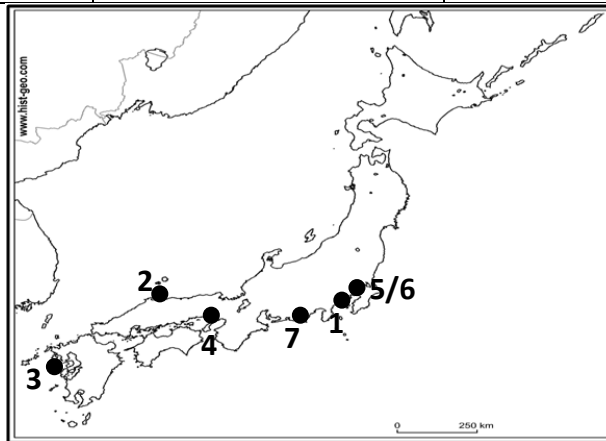
<sup>25</sup> This happiness is expressed in many of his early writings, especially in his two volumes book *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*. See Lafcadio Hearn, *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* (CN: Tuttle Publishing, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> Kyoto Gaidai, *Bibliotheca Hearnania*, pp. 62–63.

years later, he will be granted the Japanese citizenship and will adopt the name Koizumi Yakumo.<sup>27</sup>

*Document 2*

HEARN'S MOVES DURING HIS STAY IN JAPAN (1890 -1904)		
Date and place of residence	Job	Cause of change
<b>1.</b> Yokohama 1890 (april – sept.)	Reporter for the Harper's Magazine.	Rupture of « contract » with the Harper's magazine; need of a job.
<b>2.</b> Matsue 1890 (sept.) – 1891 (nov.)	English teacher in a school.	Health (cold weather).
<b>3.</b> Kumamoto 1891 (nov.) – 1894 (oct.)	English teacher in a school .	From the beginning financial strain on his post. Hearn not happy, unsecure financially.
<b>4.</b> Kobe 1894 (oct.) – 1896 (sept.)	Reporter for the <i>Kobe Chronicle</i> .	Eye problem in dec.1894. Need rest. Cannot take a job for a year and a half.
<b>5.</b> Tokyo 1896 (sept.) – 1904 (april)	Lecturer at the Imperial University of Tokyo.	University not wanting to renew the contract. Arrival of Natsume Sôseki in 1904.
<b>6.</b> Tokyo 1904 (april)	Lecturer at Waseda university.	Death by heart attack on the 26th September 1904.
<b>7.</b> Yaizu 1897 – 1904	Spend summer vacations there (except 1903?).	



Drawn and established by the author on the basis the following sources:

Paul Murray, *A Fantastic Journey: The Life and Literature of Lafcadio Hearn* (Trowbridge, Wiltshire: Japan Library, 1993).

Edith De la Héronnière, "Lafcadio Hearn: Une voix venue du plus intime de l'invisibilité," in *Lettres Japonaises* (Paris: Pocket Revue des Deux Mondes, 2014), 11-29.

Kyoto Gaidai. *Bibliotheca Hearniana*. Tokyo: The University Library (Kyoto University of Foreign Studies, 1997).

<https://www.hist-geo.com> (blank map).

<sup>27</sup> Paul Murray, *A Fantastic Journey*, 192: "Yakumo means eight clouds and was the first part of the most ancient poem extant in the Japanese language." An English translation of this Japanese poem can be found in: Basil H. Chamberlain, trans., *The Kojiki: Records of Ancient Matters* (Singapore: Tuttle Classics, 1981), pp. 76–77.

Hearn's life in Japan can be roughly divided into two main periods: the one before he settled in Tokyo and the one after. Before being appointed as an English literature lecturer at the Tokyo Imperial University in 1896, Lafcadio's life in Japan was rather unstable. His first year in Matsue, though filled with joy and excitement in the discovery of Japan, would end up in bad health due to the cold weather. With the help of Chamberlain, Hearn managed to obtain the position of English teacher in Kumamoto, a city located more to the south and with milder weather.<sup>28</sup> The three years he spent there were not his best in Japan.<sup>29</sup> He did not have the same rapport with the students that he enjoyed in Matsue, and his post was under constant threat for financial reasons each of these years. Tired of this situation Hearn decided to quit this job in 1894, and in October of the same year he became again a reporter, this time for the English newspaper *Kobe Chronicle*.<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, he had to put his work there to a halt because of an eye's neuritis. Compelled to rest in dark to cure his eye, Hearn would not work in the newspaper for a year and a half, and only articles that he sent to *Atlantic Monthly* allowed him to get by during this difficult times.<sup>31</sup>

During this period before Tokyo, despite his compelling jobs duties, Hearn started publishing his major books about Japan. Each of these books is more or less related to a city where Hearn was residing at the time of its writing. Thus, his most voluminous work *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*, which was published in two volumes in 1894, corresponds to his stay in Matsue. *Out of the East* (1895) is linked with Kumamoto, whereas *Kokoro* (1896) and *Gleanings in Buddha's Field* (1897) are attached to Kobe.<sup>32</sup>

The life of Hearn and his family significantly changed and became more stable when he was offered the post of professor of "English Language and Literature" at Tokyo Imperial University in 1896. For seven years, until 1904, he was to teach English literature with passion, integrity, and a high sense of duty. <sup>33</sup> He was much appreciated by his students, who stood by him protesting quite massively when his contract was not renewed in 1904.<sup>34</sup> The circumstances of Hearn's dismissal were not quite clear, but he was soon offered a similar post of lecturer the same year by Count Okuma, the founder of Waseda University, where he started teaching soon after.<sup>35</sup> However, in the meantime Hearn's health had seriously deteriorated, and after a first heart attack on September 19<sup>th</sup> 1904, he would not endure a second one a week later and will die on September 26<sup>th</sup>. His funeral was held on September 30<sup>th</sup> and was the first one to be conducted for a foreigner under the Buddhist office. It was attended by forty professors, one hundred students, and only three foreigners.<sup>36</sup>

During his Tokyo period, Hearn published a number of books on Japan. According to most of his interpreters, his view on the country did not significantly change over time during

---

<sup>28</sup> Paul Murray, *A Fantastic Journey*, 153.

<sup>29</sup> Edith De la Héronnière, "Lafcadio Hearn," p. 22.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Murray, *A Fantastic Journey*, p. 178.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 183–184.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 146, 160, 188.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>34</sup> For the details of the atmosphere surrounding Hearn's dismissal see Yōnejiro Noguchi, *Lafcadio Hearn in Japan*, 1910, Reprint (Kamakura: The Valley Press Japan, 1911), pp. 137–145. Those pages are a transcript of the journal of one of Hearn's former student named Kaworu Osanai.

<sup>35</sup> Kyoto Gaidai, *Bibliotheca Hearniana*, p. 63; Murray, *A Fantastic Journey*, pp. 298–299.

<sup>36</sup> Paul Murray, *A Fantastic Journey*, p. 301.

this period. The main difference was rather in the type of publications he produced, which were now ghost stories, together with essays. His books of the period were: *In Ghostly Japan* (1899) *Shadowings* (1901), *A Japanese Miscellany* (1901), *Kottô* (1902) and *Kwaidan* (1904), which was his most famous collection of ghost stories. His best-known analytical book, *Japan: An attempt at Interpretation* (1904), was published posthumously, whereas the last of his books to be published was *The Romance of the Milky Way* (1905).

### **1.2 Hearn's oeuvre: an analytical overview**

Looking more closely at Hearn's works, we can divide them into two periods: publications before Japan and publications in Japan. As already mentioned, Hearn started publishing books while in New Orleans. Except for two novels, which were fairly popular at the time, his other books have very much varied in terms of their contents. His Japanese books would include translations, short stories retold, proverbs, essays, and others, most of which were modeled on his *Two years in the French West Indies*.

#### *Document 3*

HEARN'S MAIN PUBLICATIONS BEFORE JAPAN
1882: One of Cleopatra's Nights, and other Fantastic Romances (Translation of Théophile Gautier)
1884: Stray Leaves from Strange Literature (Stories reconstructed from Anvari-Soheili, Baital, Pachisi, Mahabharata, Pantchatandra, Gulistan, Talmud, Kalewala, etc.)
1885: Gombo Zhèbes (dictionary of Créole proverbs)
1887: Some Chinese Ghosts (shorts stories)
1889: Chita: A memory of Last Island (novel)
1890: Youma, The story of a West-Indian Slaves (novel)
1890: Two Years in the French West-Indies (miscellaneous)
1890: The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard (Translation of Anatole France)
Source: George M. Gould and Laura Stedman, <i>Concerning Lafcadio Hearn</i> (Wroclaw: Leopold Classic Library, 2016), 248-250.

Hearn wrote a total of 14 books on Japan, published over a period of a little more than ten years (1894-1905).<sup>37</sup> His most famous books are probably *Kokoro* (1896), *Kwaidan* (1904) and *Japan: an Attempt at Interpretation* (1904), although most specialists would consider his other works as equally interesting and valuable because of Hearn's ability to always surprise the reader with the originality of his approach to the topic he treats or the story he tells. Overall, any writing approach he adopted, whether analytical or literary (retold old tales or legends from Japan, shorts stories, etc.), could become a valuable means to present Japan to the readers. In this sense, for Hearn, drawing on sensations and provoking feelings were tools of writing on the same par as ensuring understanding.

On the analytical side, he would either describe what he saw or heard, or draw on collected written materials. Although typically classified as "analytical," some of these descriptions or observations, which could have easily taken the form of a television documentary in our modern world, tell stories of real people and events happening in Japan in such a vivid, colorful, realistic, and at once brilliant style that they could be equally classified as literature.

---

<sup>37</sup> See Document 4.



For his purely literary work, the materials (legends, tales, folk stories, etc.) were taken from old Japanese books, or heard directly from his wife.<sup>38</sup> He would use his story-telling talent to recreate the atmosphere of some old legends or folk stories dear to the Japanese people. Thus, he made it possible for the Westerners to get to know better the Japanese folk and legends at a time when direct translations were still very scarce.

*Document 4*

HEARN'S PUBLICATIONS ABOUT JAPAN	
1894: Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan (2 Vol.) —Matsue—*	Analytical, use of re-told stories scarce
1895: Out of the East: Reveries and Studies in New Japan —Kumamoto—	
1896: Kokoro; Hints and Echoes of Japanese Inner Life —Kobe—	
1897: Gleanings in Buddha's Field: Studies of Hand and Soul in the Far East —Kobe—	
1898: Exotics and Retrospectives —Tokyo—	
1899: In Ghostly Japan —Tokyo—	Analytical with literature also (tales, legends, short stories, etc.)
1900: Shadowings —Tokyo—	
1901: A Japanese Miscellany —Tokyo—	
1902: Kottô. Being Japanese Curios, with sundry Cobwebs —Tokyo—	
1904: Kwaidan; Stories and Studies of Strange Things —Tokyo—	Mainly literature (legends, tales, etc.)
1904: Japan: An Attempt at Interpretation —Tokyo; posthumous—	Only analytical (mainly religion)
1905: The Romance of the Milky Way, and other Studies and Stories —Tokyo ; posthumous—	Analytical with literature
<p>* In brackets the place that the book could be attached to, according to where Hearn was living while writing it. Established by the author on the basis the following sources:                      George M. Gould and Laura Stedman, <i>Concerning Lafcadio Hearn</i> (Wroclaw: Leopold Classic Library, 2016), 248-250.                      Paul Murray, <i>A Fantastic Journey: The Life and Literature of Lafcadio Hearn</i> (Trowbridge, Wiltshire: Japan Library, 1993).</p>	

Considering Hearn's entire work, we can note that his first few books were more analytical (1894-1898), while beginning with *In Ghostly Japan* he started using short story-telling much more profusely. *Kwaidan* (1904) and *Japan: an Attempt of Interpretation* (1904) stand out somewhat as exceptions; the former consisting almost entirely of literature materials (ghost stories, legends, etc.) while the latter being an analytical, logically structured text.

<sup>38</sup> Yōnejiro Noguchi, *Lafcadio Hearn in Japan*, pp. 58–59; Murray, *A Fantastic Journey*, p. 278; Donald Richie, foreword to *Lafcadio Hearn's Japan: An Anthology of His Writings on the Country and Its People*, edited by Donald Richie (Singapore: Charles E. Tuttle Publishing, 1997), p. 15.

Document 5

A TYPICAL CONTENT OF HEARN'S BOOK	
The table of contents of « A Japanese Miscellany Strange Stories, Folklore Gleanings, Studies Here & There» (1901)	
<b>Strange Stories</b> I. Of a Promise Kept <i>(Ugetsu Monogatari)</i> II. Of a Promise Broken <i>(Izumo legend)</i> III. The Story of Kwashin Koji <i>(Yasô-Kidan)</i> IV. The Story of Umétsu Chûbei <i>(Bukkyô-Hyakkwa-Zenshō)</i> V. The Story of Kôgi the Priest <i>(Ugetsu Monogatari)</i>	<b>Literature</b> Re-told old Japanese ghost stories
<b>Folklore Gleanings</b> I. Dragon-flies II. Buddhist Names of Plants and Animals III. Songs of Japanese Children	<b>Analytical: Ethnology</b> From existing materials. Studies from gathered materials
<b>Studies Here &amp; There</b> I. On a Bridge II. The Case of O-Dai III. Beside the sea IV. Drifting V. Otokichi's Daruma VI. In a Japanese Hospital	<b>Analytical: Anthropology</b> From observation. Stories of real people that Hearn saw or heard about, stories of things Hearn experienced with the people, observation of religious rites, etc.
Source: Lafcadio Hearn, <i>A Japanese Miscellany: Strange Stories, Folklore Gleanings, Studies Here &amp; There</i> . The Writings on Japan by Lafcadio Hearn Vol.2 (Tokyo: ICG Muse, 2001).	

As an example of the kinds of topics Hearn's books treat, one can heed to the table of contents of *A Japanese Miscellany* (1901).<sup>39</sup> This table illustrates perfectly the range of Hearn's typical work. He himself must have been well aware of the different approaches he used, because the table of contents is logically split (which is not the case for all his books) between: 1) Strange Stories (literature: re-told old Japanese ghost stories), 2) Folklore Gleanings (studies from gathered materials, ethnological work) and 3) Studies Here & there (Observations or stories heard from people, anthropological work).

## 2. Lafcadio Hearn: home in Japan

### 2.1 Love at first sight

Perhaps the best way to explain the strong bond of Hearn with Japan is to use the popular expression "love at first sight." Hearn literally fell in love with the country, its landscape, and people. In his essay *My first day in the Orient*,<sup>40</sup> he associates Japan with the country of fairies and declares his wish to purchase everything in Japan, even Japan itself,

<sup>39</sup> See Document 5.

<sup>40</sup> Lafcadio Hearn, *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*, pp. 1–22.

The largest steamer that crosses the Pacific could not contain what you wish to purchase. For, although you may not, perhaps, confess the fact to yourself, what you really want to buy is not the contents of a shop; you want the shop and the shopkeeper, and the streets of shops with their draperies and their habitants, the whole city and the bay and the mountains begirding it, and Fujiyama's white witchery overhanging in the speckles sky, all Japan, in very truth, with its magical trees and luminous atmosphere, with all its cities and towns and temples, and forty millions of the most lovable people in the universe.<sup>41</sup>

Through the quote we feel Hearn's love declaration to Japan, understand how sensitive he was to the beauty of so many things there, and how in turn he was able express this love so beautifully in his romantic style. The marriage to Setsu Koizumi that will bind him to this country and its people was naturally capping his feelings in his first years in Japan.

In return, to gain Japanese people's trust, Hearn needed their appreciation. He certainly got it and the Japanese would not have opened their hearts so much to him if they felt he had not been the type of trustworthy person who could regard them positively. The key to understanding Hearn's positive reception by the Japanese is probably in his different attitude or state of mind compared to other Western scholars.<sup>42</sup> Many of the latter often considered themselves as coming from a superior cultural area, not only in a materialistic but also intellectual and spiritual sense. Hearn was a different sort; he had this gentle, human side that is so much appreciated in Japan. At the same time, he was also sensitive to the Japanese suspiciousness to the typical sharp, purely intellectual person, that was running low on a human dimension,

I confess to being one of those who believe that the human heart, even in the history of a race, may be worth infinitely more than the human intellect, and that it will sooner or later prove itself infinitely better able to answer all the cruel enigmas of the Sphinx of Life. I still believe the old Japanese were nearer to the solution of those enigmas than are we, just because they recognized moral beauty as greater than intellectual beauty.<sup>43</sup>

Nevertheless, like in any relationship, Hearn's feeling toward Japan had their ups and downs. Sometimes they oscillated between love and hate, but somehow, as he beautifully explained in a letter to Chamberlain from March 1895, even in difficult times, his mind was able to change easily to recover the Japan he loved,

I had a sensation the other day, though, which I want to talk to you about. I felt as I had hated Japan unspeakably, and the whole world seemed not worth living in, when there came two women in the house, to sell ballads. One took her *shamisen* and sang: and people crowded into the tiny yard to hear. Never did I listen to anything sweeter. All the sorrow and beauty, all the pain and the sweetness of life thrilled and quivered in that voice; and the old first love of Japan and of things Japanese came back, and a great tenderness seemed to fill the place like a haunting. I looked at the people, and I

---

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> George Hughes, "Lafcadio Hearn: Between Britain and Japan," in *Rediscovering Lafcadio Hearn: Japanese Legends Life & Culture*, edited by Hirakawa Sukehiro (Midsomer Norton: Global Books Ltd, 1997), p. 76.

<sup>43</sup> Lafcadio Hearn, *Kokoro: Hints and Echoes of Japanese Inner Life* (Singapore: Tuttle publishing, 1972), p. 36.

saw they were nearly all weeping and snuffing; and though I could not understand the words, I could feel the pathos and the beauty of things.<sup>44</sup>

But whether he was in a phase of rejection or love of Japan, Hearn, as a Japanese citizen, was a patriot who never failed to support his adopted country. In the wars against China (1895) and Russia (1904-05), he always supported Japan. Even more surprisingly, he was at odds with his British friend Chamberlain regarding the treaty between Britain and Japan from 1894 which abolished the unequal clauses of commerce. Chamberlain, backing Britain, was against it, while Hearn supported it.<sup>45</sup>

Taking into account his new nationality and patriotism allows us to better judge the negative feelings Hearn would sometimes have toward Japan: like any citizen, his feelings towards his own country could vary. However, Hearn fundamentally felt, through his Japanese family, as well as for the reasons that made him fall in love with Japan, that his bonds to this country were too strong to be broken and that it had definitely become *home* for him.

### ***2.2 Childhood memories and empathy for Japan***

Besides the "love at first sight" and all the factors we mentioned to explain the relation of endearment between Hearn and the Japanese, most of his researchers would also consider his childhood to have, in one way or another, played a part in conditioning his relation to Japan as something special and appealing to his personality. What triggered what, and how things were structured, consciously or unconsciously in Hearn's mind will always be difficult to demonstrate, especially as he was an author who did not talk much about himself. But everything that Japan represented in terms of its people (especially from lower classes), their faith and superstitions (relating to ghosts and death), their folk stories, their Buddhism, was for Hearn an inexhaustible source of inspiration and something whose mere existence and presence around him was fundamentally satisfying to his very being.

Perhaps his childhood upbringing, including the factor of his "abandonment" and the way Hearn was raised by Mrs. Brenane, played a crucial part in this respect. As Edith de La Héronnière writes,

[Mrs. Brenane]'s big dark house was terrifying the little boy [Hearn], especially at night when his imagination and sensitivity made him see phantoms and devils in the dark. All his life he'll believe in ghosts. One looks for ways of healing his fear by locking him up in his room at night, which will have the effect of increasing his fears and upset his hypersensitive soul.<sup>46</sup>

Other authors have also sought for a connection between the insecurities of his childhood and his sympathetic perception of ghostly Japan.<sup>47</sup>

If his identification to his father seemed to have faded already in the United-States when Hearn decided to drop his name Paddy (Patrick) to adopt Lafcadio (derived from Lefkada and

---

<sup>44</sup> Elisabeth Bisland, *The Life and Letters of Lafcadio Hearn*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1906), Vol. I, pp. 219-220.

<sup>45</sup> Paul Murray, *A Fantastic Journey*, pp. 180-181.

<sup>46</sup> Edith De la Héronnière, "Lafcadio Hearn," p. 46.

<sup>47</sup> Sukehiro Hirakawa, "Lafcadio Hearn: towards an Irish Interpretation," in *A Fantastic Journey: the Life and Literature of Lafcadio Hearn* (Trowbridge, Wiltshire: Japan Library, 1993), p. 2.

referring to his Greek origins and his mother), Japan had been also the perfect ground for Hearn to reactivate his repressed memories of all sorts linked to his painful relation to his mother. Such a link can be detected in many of his portraits of women – mostly poor and religious like his mother – that Hearn depicts in his stories. Japan had one advantage over other places where Hearn had also met similar people: although poor, less educated and attached to their seemingly primitive faith and superstitions, those people from lower classes that Hearn loved to portray, were living, in his eyes, in the most refined culture, with seemingly impeccable values and exquisite manners. In this sense, Japan can be seen as entering the role of enhancing the image of Hearn's repressed memories of his mother. In turn, Greece, which symbolized the relationship with his mother, can be thus seen as a key for understanding Hearn's approach and sympathy for Japan.

Other authors (Murray, Hirakawa) also stress the importance of the period Hearn spent in Ireland.<sup>48</sup> According to them, it is precisely because he spent his childhood in Ireland that he could become very receptive to a world that would appear as pagan, with all its faiths and superstitions. Hearn had indeed a nurse who told him fairy tales and ghost stories when he was as young as six years old.<sup>49</sup> Thus, Hirakawa states that,

Brought up in Dublin, listening to many Irish folk-tales told by unspoiled peasant maids and servant-boys coming from the countryside, Hearn was obsessed with the world of the occult. He was probably conscious of this Irish background which enabled him to enter into and feel the ghostly Japan so well.<sup>50</sup>

In order to complete the whole picture of his childhood and the influence it could have subsequently had on his deep sympathy towards the Japanese culture and people, one also needs to heed to Hearn's relation to Christianity and the Irish/ British Victorian gothic society. The Gothic art and religious values have certainly contributed to Hearn's taste for thrill and horror,<sup>51</sup> as he progressively rejected the Roman Catholic way he was brought up. Although Mrs. Brenane does not seem to have been as strict as some of his early biographers thought,<sup>52</sup> she still had an agreement with his father to raise him religiously as a Roman Catholic.<sup>53</sup> Hearn's rejection of the monotheistic religion appears to have accelerated during the time he was a pupil at the Boarding School in Durham. Harsh, strict, and austere education did not fit well Hearn's sensitivity. Consequently, the peculiar vacuum in his worldview that emerged upon his rejection of Christianity was later on to be filled by the Buddhism. He became interested in Buddhism during his stay in New-Orleans,<sup>54</sup> and from this point onwards his attraction and love for this religion will never lessen (quite significantly, Hearn was actually the first Westerner to be buried in Japan according to the Buddhist rite).<sup>55</sup> Questions relating to death, ancestor-

---

<sup>48</sup> Sukehiro Hirakawa, "Lafcadio Hearn: towards an Irish Interpretation," pp. 1-12; Murray, *A Fantastic Journey*, pp. 33, 35.

<sup>49</sup> Paul Murray, *A Fantastic Journey*, p. 35.

<sup>50</sup> Sukehiro Hirakawa, "Lafcadio Hearn: towards an Irish Interpretation," p. 11.

<sup>51</sup> Paul Murray, *A Fantastic Journey*, pp. 258–259.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16.

<sup>53</sup> See Note 6.

<sup>54</sup> Paul Murray, *A Fantastic Journey*, p. 20.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 301.

worship, souls, reincarnation, which haunted him at the time, were best answered by this religion, which he cherished until the end of his life. A great admirer of Herbert Spencer, he often endeavored to reconcile his evolutionary philosophy with Buddhism.<sup>56</sup> Many of his "reveries" and speculations in his essays dealt with this topic. The cultural importance of Buddhism in Japan, which stimulated his intellectual searches and provided him with pointers to his own identity, had a major impact on Hearn's deep sympathy and love for Japan.

### ***3. Lafcadio, the committed and the go-between interpreter***

#### ***3.1 A committed Hearn: some critical views of the West***

As we already saw in our first part, Lafcadio Hearn was not one of those Western critics who viewed Japanese culture as inferior to theirs in terms of development. On the contrary, Hearn took the Japanese civilization seriously and this helped him develop a critical mind toward what the West was and had to offer.

His first criticism that he repeats throughout his writing is related to religion and faith. For him, a monotheistic religion such as Christianity was not necessarily superior in this regard. Hearn believed that Buddhism could be put at least on the same level as Christianity on both the solutions it proposes for the salvation of the souls after death and the philosophical theory of life it developed. For Hearn who believed in transmigration, Buddhism was actually superior on both of these levels, which is why in his writings he had the willingness and the commitment to explain the Buddhism and to make it appealing and worth considering in the West.

His second criticism of the West addressed the destruction of Old Japan through the process of industrialization. As Murray puts it, "Hearn used Japan as a mirror to show the West its moral inadequacy."<sup>57</sup> During his poor years in the slums of London following the bankruptcy of his great aunt, Hearn had already accumulated terrible memories of the industrial rampage that modernization could bring about. In many of his writings (*Horaisa*, *The Japanese smiles*, etc.), he would warn the West of the terrible consequences that industrialization would have on the rural areas of Japan, this "ghostly" Japan that he loved so much. Witnessing the old traditions and folk stories slowly disappear, Hearn acted with the urge to collect them. In this regard, many researchers acknowledge the influence he had on the Japanese anthropologists, notably on Yanagita Kunio, known as the father of Japanese anthropology.<sup>60</sup> What Hearn feared the most was – beyond the destruction of the traditional architecture and buildings of Japan – a change in the kind, congenial and sincere character and temperament of the people of the rural area, whom he cherished dearly.

---

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>57</sup> Paul Murray, *A Fantastic Journey*, p. 19.

<sup>58</sup> Lafcadio Hearn, *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things*, Tuttle Classics (Singapore: Tuttle Publishing, 1971), pp. 171–178.

<sup>59</sup> Lafcadio Hearn, *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*, pp. 539–561.

<sup>60</sup> Ronald Morse, « Atelier-débat autour de Ronald Morse, traducteur américain de *Tôno monogatari* et de *Tôno monogatari shûi* » [Workshop and debate on Ronald Morse, American translator of *Tôno monogatari* and *Tôno Monogatari Shûi*] (Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, Centre d'Etudes Japonaises, Paris, June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2015); Sukehiro Hirakawa, "Lafcadio Hearn: towards an Irish Interpretation," p. 4.

### **3.2 A precursor of Japanese cultural identity analysis**

Lafcadio Hearn was an extremely talented analyst of the Japanese culture, and in many regards he was one of the pioneers in the cultural studies that bore on the culture of Japan and the Japanese people in the twentieth century. His ability to make his contemporaries "take a journey to Japan" by way of his writing was undeniable, and many important writers of his time, including Stefan Zweig (1881-1942),<sup>61</sup> Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874-1929),<sup>62</sup> and more recently, Marguerite Yourcenar (1903-1987),<sup>63</sup> had read his work. To illustrate the point of this paragraph, without being exhaustive or too explanative, we would like to finish it by giving a few examples of sharp insight from some of his essays drawn from two of his best books, *Kokoro* and *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*:

- In *The Genius of Japanese Civilization*,<sup>64</sup> he explores the importance of the notion of impermanency. This notion, deriving from Buddhism, states that everything is ephemeral and had a tremendous impact on the relationship the Japanese had with their architecture (for instance, it explains the practice to replace the sanctuary of Ise every twenty years). On a more psychological level, it helped them accept changes and things that do not last.
- In *At a railway station*,<sup>65</sup> when reporting about a criminal who is about to be hanged for killing a man, he describes a scene where this criminal apologizes to the child of the dead man. Here the importance of the act of contrition is suggested through this subtle and beautiful description without much analysis. Contrition, apologies, capacity to be well aware of the evil done, by begging a pardon, is still nowadays an important aspect of the Japanese society.
- In *A Glimpses of tendencies*,<sup>66</sup> a remarkable analysis about commerce at the time he was living in Japan, Lafcadio shows us how talented Japanese people were to acquire the knowledge of the Westerners and make it their own after taking the best of it. This notion in the discourse of the cultural anthropology will be later known as *itoko tori*.<sup>67</sup>
- In *The idea of preexistence*,<sup>68</sup> by explaining the notion of *Karma* (*innen* or *inwa* in Japanese) and the idea of preexistence in Buddhism, Hearn shows how such beliefs lead to determinism and resignation, two features that one can still find in the cultural identity of present-day Japan.
- In his famous article *The Japanese Smile*,<sup>69</sup> one particularly interesting part dwells upon the inter-communication between the Japanese people. He introduces us to a way of

---

<sup>61</sup> Stephen Zweig, "Lafcadio Hearn," in *Lettres Japonaises* (Paris: Pocket Revue des Deux Mondes, 2014), pp. 167–179.

<sup>62</sup> Hugo Von Hoffmansthal, "Lafcadio Hearn," in *Lettres Japonaises* (Paris: Pocket Revue des Deux Mondes, 2014), pp. 161–165.

<sup>63</sup> See back cover of: Lafcadio Hearn, *Lettres Japonaises*, translated by Edith de La Héronnière et Marc Logé (Agora. Paris: Pocket Revue des Deux Mondes, 2014).

<sup>64</sup> Lafcadio Hearn, *Kokoro*, pp. 8–39.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1–7.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 120–154.

<sup>67</sup> Roger J. Davies and Osamu Ikeno, eds., *The Japanese Mind: Understanding Contemporary Japanese Culture* (Singapore: Tuttle Publishing, 2002), pp. 127–133.

<sup>68</sup> Lafcadio Hearn, *Kokoro*, pp. 222–226.

<sup>69</sup> Lafcadio Hearn, *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*, pp. 539–561.

speaking indirectly that is bound with the Confucian culture. "The indirect way of conveying information is essentially Confucian. 'Even when you have no doubts', says the Li-ki, 'do not let what you say appear as your own view'."<sup>70</sup> This way of communicating will be also analyzed later on by cultural anthropologists trying to understand how to communicate with the Japanese people. It will be indeed labeled *aimai* (Japanese word for vague, unclear, ambiguous or equivocal), a notion that will be extensively studied and debated among researchers. Nowadays it is still a powerful concept for seizing intercultural communication with the Japanese people.

- In *Of a Dancing Girl*,<sup>71</sup> one of the most beautiful text of Hearn in our view, we are introduced to the art of painting "landscape views and life studies" by itinerant painters. Here Hearn underlines that in Japan "the Japanese artist gives you that which he feels—the mood of a season, the precise sensation of an hour and place; his work is qualified by a power of suggestiveness rarely found in the art of the West[...] he is a painter of recollections and of sensation rather than of clear-cut realities; [...]"<sup>72</sup> All this suggestive power in art is what later on Yasushi Inoue will call *Kokoro no bunka*, the "culture of the heart – or the mind – in an article read for NHK radio.<sup>73</sup> This culture, based on suggestion rather than full explanation, is still a powerful concept for understanding Japan. In the same essay, telling us a beautiful story of one of this itinerant painters lost in a mountain and welcomed by a geisha in a isolated house, Lafcadio Hearn will make us sensitive (without naming it) to the notion of *On-gaeshi* (reimbursement of a moral debt). The painter, who becomes famous in the years after their initial meeting, later on accepts the request of the geisha who was now old to paint her young, as she was when he met her for the first time, so that she put her picture on the Buddhist altar next to her deceased husband. He accepts but understanding that she was worried about not being able to pay him back, he will add: "'Of that matter', the good painter exclaimed, 'you must not think at all! No; I am glad to have this present chance of paying a small part of my old debt to you. So tomorrow I will paint you just as you wish'."<sup>74</sup> This is a typical example of what later on Ruth Benedict, in her famous book *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, will develop as a moral based on debt.<sup>75</sup>

In these few examples extracted from Hearn's work, one can already identify key notions about Japan that play parts in the cultural identity analysis: impermanency (*The Genius of Japanese civilization*), the importance of forgiveness (*At a railway station*), the talent to acquire knowledge or cultural items and make them Japanese (*A Glimpses of tendencies*), resignation

---

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 552.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., pp. 434–455.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., pp. 441–442.

<sup>73</sup> Inoue Yasuhi 靖井上, "Kokoro no Bunka" 心の文化 [A Culture of the Heart], in *Eigo de hanasu nihon no bunka: Japan as I see it* 英語で話す日本の文化 : Japan as I see it [Japanese Culture in English: Japan as I see it], translated by Don Kenny, edited by NHK Overseas Broadcasting Department, Bilingual Books (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2007), pp. 142–157.

<sup>74</sup> Lafcadio Hearn, *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*, p. 452.

<sup>75</sup> Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, 1967, Reprint, (US: Houghton Mifflin Company paperback, 1989), pp. 114–131.



and determinism (*The idea of preexistence*), the notion of *aimai*, or vagueness (*The Japanese smile*), the importance of the heart-mind in the sense that the Japanese culture is focused on one's suggested feelings (*Of a Dancing Girl*), the notion of *on* or debt (*Of a Dancing Girl*), and so on. These concepts do not necessarily appear straightforwardly in Hearn's works, but they are suggested through either stories or explanations. This, in turn, has made of Hearn's essays a definite point of departure for the cultural anthropological discourse on Japan, which developed after World War II, especially in America.<sup>76</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, upon a thorough review of his life and work, we were able to analyze how Hearn, who went to Japan on a simple assignment, fell in love with this country and settled there for the rest of his life. In a sense, his continuous attachment to Japan was a "love at first sight," but it was also conditioned by a compatibility of the culture of this land with his character, which could be traced back to his childhood. As a result, Japan and the Japanese people became the choice of his heart; he settled there and made it home. Beyond the family and possible materialistic reasons that tied him to Japan, Hearn remained – through his role of go-between and his work – undeterred in his desire to stay in this country. By studying Japan and its culture, Hearn came to the point of putting into question the superiority of the Western models. He also wrote insightful texts that allowed his contemporary readers to discover Japan, which for its part laid the basis for further cultural analysis of Japan.

To conclude, I will just quote Stefan Zweig who neatly summarized the chance that the field of Japanese studies had with a great author like Hearn,

And that was the secret goal in view of which destiny had hidden Lafcadio Hearn, a goal for which it had raised him. He was meant to tell us about unknown Japan; to tell us about all those little things, with their own style, left in the shadow until now; those little "nothing," so fragile, that many would have left running away through their fingers; those ephemeral moments that the storm of time would have taken away if he didn't come on time; all those popular legends so full of meaning, those touching superstitions, those puerile and patriarchal customs. Catching this scent, picking up gently this soft glare of the flower that had already been withering, that is what destiny had called him for.<sup>77</sup>

\*\*\*

---

<sup>76</sup> Ruth Benedict quotes Hearn in her famous book about Japan. See Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, p. 303.

<sup>77</sup> Stephen Zweig, "Lafcadio Hearn," p. 175. Translated from the French by the author.