

## Lafcadio Hearn and the Forgotten of the Queen City of the South

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The centennial of the death of Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904) revives interests in academic circles and once again brings his life and works into the media spotlight of Japan. The recent rebroadcast of the NHK Drama "NIHON NO OMOKAGE" (1984) has once again revitalized the image of Hearn as the first foreigner to truly love Japan and become a Japanese citizen. As it should, this drama does introduce his origins as an investigative reporter in the United States. Hearn is well known in Japan for his respect and praise for what he viewed as refined and even superior cultural traits of Japanese Culture and Society at a time of rapid modernization. To the Japanese public Hearn's Japanese name, Koizumi Yakumo, is synonymous with ghost stories or nostalgic and exotic tales of the Japanese cultural heritage. However, the roots of his explorations of diverse cultural and ethnic groups were a product of his experiences before his arrival in Japan. His ultimate goal to show the injustices of modern society's domination of the world at the expense of the indigenous cultural heritages of minority groups blossomed as a young reporter in Cincinnati, Ohio. In many respects, Japan was his last stand against the overpowering forces of modern civilization. An examination of many of his early journalistic investigations clearly shows his sympathies for persecuted and social outcasts. It can be seen that his goals were high and far beyond those of a typical journalist reporting news events of his day.

Lafcadio Hearn started his career as a journalist in Cincinnati, Ohio where he conducted in-depth studies of various ethnic and minority groups. Historically, this was a very turbulent period after the American Civil War when former African slaves were freed but found themselves on the fringes of a predominately white, racist society. Hearn could care less about these racial boundaries and even married Mattie Foley, an African American who worked at his boarding house in Cincinnati. Before coming to Japan, as a reporter and partaker of the non-mainstream he had already developed a culturally sensitive antenna that gave him the ability to go beyond superficial and racial biases. As a novice reporter at the young age of 22, Hearn clearly shows his respect for persecuted religions and cultures in *A Hebrew College*. He praises the establishment of a Hebrew Theological Institute:

The Jew, once honored above all men, is now despised. In this essentially Christian country alone, which tolerates all beliefs, can he enjoy his faith. . . The Hebrew language and literature are pre-eminently worthy of study. They are the heart of the English tongue. Why, too, should not that form of worship which is older than any other save idolatry be taught in an educational

institution. . . (*Cincinnati Enquirer*, May 23, 1873)

In September of the same year, Hearn highlights social and racial prejudice in *A Nasty Nest*. Perhaps he hopes this exposure might influence or educate his elite audience about the social ills of Cincinnati. In this article a young woman has a miscarriage in the slums. It is revealed that a wealthy businessman was responsible for her situation. He takes the opportunity to describe the living conditions of the lower class citizens who suffer not only from poverty and social prejudices. He writes the following depiction of what he calls the “lower, hiding the rottenness beneath.”

The cupboard is honey-combed with rat-holes, a greasy mold seems to hang about the bed, and the breath of the woman reeks with the fumes of the liquor fermenting inside of her. About the floor play the dirty little wretches who, with their partly curly hair and smoky-colored skin show the union of the Negro and the Caucasian bloods. Whether the woman is guilty of the crime she has been charged with is not here to be said. Her own story leaves no blame upon herself. (*Cincinnati Enquirer*, July 27, 1873)

Even though Hearn is fully aware of these circumstances he still marries Mattie, a mulatto woman, two years later. Even now he is ready to speak out against social injustice that plagues the United States.

Hearn makes a bold statement of purpose in *The Gentleman or the Scholar* on September 25, 1873. He tells his readers that:

The scholar, whether Christian or Pagan, has been in all ages the guide of the human race; but the person of whom we speak has always been a man before he became a scholar. The possibility of culture exists in the blood. (*Cincinnati Enquirer*, September 25, 1873)

He hopes to be a preacher of the gospel of culture without bias. In November he makes a bold proposition that was sure to have been shocking or even taboo. In *Pagan Piety*, he states that Christian and Pagan values are one in the same. Once again it seems that he wants to open the minds of his readers when he confidently declares:

We are considerably indebted to the heathen. In these days when this great country is full of Christian statesmen, and when we are sending numberless missionaries to heathen lands in the plenitude of our compassion for them, there is danger that we may forget the obligations we are under to the impenitent pagans. . . It is needless to say that all the virtues which Christianity teaches had been previously taught by Paganism. (*The Cincinnati Enquirer*, November 15, 1873)

Hearn argues that Confucius was teaching the same doctrine of love and self-sacrifice five hundred

years earlier than Jesus. Hearn questions the motives of missionaries as he would in Japan.

In *The English and the Anthropophagi* Hearn is disturbed by the invasion of indigenous native cultures by Western missionaries. Hearn is not anti-Christian but he is quite candid in his belief that the acts of missionaries are fruitless and he is clever to add a bit of humor as not to offend his predominately Christian readers.

The *lotued* Fijian can slip out of his Christianity as easily as he can slip out of his clothes. . . . Notwithstanding the daring efforts of the missionaries, many of whom have paid the penalty of their heroic presumption by being converted into various dishes of different flavors. Christianity has made little impression upon the cannibal heart. (*The Cincinnati Enquirer*, November 27, 1873)

Hearn respects different value systems and this can be seen as early attempts to convince readers that other cultures and societies must be respected and judging them with Western values creates bias and prejudice. Hearn even tackles the topic of bigamy in *Bismillah*. This article is about a Christian who adopts Islam. Public opinion is that he did so only to take a second wife. Hearn is quick to point out the hypocrisy and cruelty of Christian attackers.

He is obviously a criminal in Christian eyes, but there is no law to punish him. As a Musulman he cannot be persecuted for bigamy . . . . We do not inquire why he has become a Christian, but content ourselves with the fact of his professing to be one. In the present case of a Christian adopting Islam, we not only scrutinize his motives, but assume that his motives be bad. (*The Cincinnati Enquirer*, December 13, 1873)

In the *Marquesan Incident*, Hearn clearly expresses his distaste for the use of religion as an excuse to violently suppress indigenous peoples. He laments over the inhumane use of “shot and shel” by the French to convert the people of the Marquesas. Hearn tells his readers that:

The truth is that the cruelties and outrages to which these islanders have from time to time been subjected have caused them to hate the sight of a white man, whether he be missionary or a marine. (*The Cincinnati Enquirer*, December 17, 1873)

Persecution, subjugation and the denial of the human rights were topics of a man ahead of his time. Hearn should be praised for his desire to bring these issues out in the open at such an intolerant time in history. Perhaps this is why he seems to be careful to treat these issues indirectly such as in *A Mild and Just Government*. It is obvious that his thoughts are directed towards the African Americans of Cincinnati when he describes the forced labor of Egyptians in the following manner:

Now the rulers of modern Egypt force the population to labor in precisely the same fashion . . . More than 140,000 Egyptians are at the present time laboring in this manner; and yet the rulers of the country are brazen enough to deny that slavery exists within its confines ! (*The Cincinnati Enquirer*, January 10, 1874)

In *Church and State in America*, Hearn praises the Puritans who, “brought with them the invaluable principles of democratic civil liberty and religious liberty” (*Cincinnati Enquirer*, November 8, 1873). Civil liberties and Religious freedom are the founding ideals of the American Democracy primarily because the Puritans suffered persecution for their own religious ideas. Hearn not only praises these ideals but cleverly awakens his readers to injustice and persecution within contemporary American society as well.

When it comes to his American period, scholars such as Dr. John Hughes have often described his days as a journalist as his “Period of the Gruesome”. Hearn made a name for himself in Cincinnati in 1874 after his vivid and outright grotesque reportage of the Tanyard Murder. According to Owen Findsen, a former reporter for the Cincinnati Enquirer, Hearn broke all the rules of newspaper reporting of his day.

It was Sunday, when the executives of the newspaper would not be at work. So Hearn seems not only to have written the story, but to have made up the newspaper. He broke every rule. He put the story on the front page, in a time when no news stories appeared on the front page, and he illustrated it with pictures of the killers and the tanyard, at a time before newspapers were illustrating stories. (Findsen)

He goes on to suggest that Hearn was definitely a rebel and his publisher and editor must have been extremely shocked. However, that edition sold out completely and Hearn was told to continue reportage that would normally have been dropped. Findsen suggests that Hearn’s actions were the start of a new movement in American journalism as his editor left Cincinnati and went to New York where sensational journalism with imagery became the norm. Hearn has been described as a yellow journalist, but according to Findsen, Hearn’s rebellious tendencies were most likely the start of this new phase in newspaper publications.

These same tendencies to go to the extreme and ignore the social rules of his day are used as an explanation for a lifestyle of which others could not approve. In *Life and Letters* Elizabeth Wetmore writes in her biography of Hearn that as a youthful artist in Cincinnati, Ohio, he was always impatient of “the prejudice of Anglo-Saxon pudency.” This was in reference to his translations of French Literature that, to her, “encounter no barriers of rigid decorum between themselves and the world of French readers.” She also suggests that another instance of his willingness to go up against this puritanical society was his interest in Afro-Americans. She describes his inclination to investigate other cultures

with the inclusion of a quotation by Dr. George M. Gould:

The tendency of his tastes toward the study of strange peoples and civilizations made him find much that was attractive in the indolent, sensuous life of the negro race, and led him to steep them in a sense of romance that he alone could extract from the study. (*Life and Letters* 57)

She continues to say that these “impossible experiments” or his active investigation of the life of Afro-Americans “brought upon him the resentment of his friends.” One cannot help but see that Wetmore herself, is careful and even judgmental in her explanation of his pursuit of “the indolent sensuous life of the negro race.” Her assessment is condescending and a reflection of her social class. She is ambiguous when she quotes a letter that Hearn writes to Ochiai from Kumamoto. She says that Hearn was “sick, unhappy and unpopular” with the root cause being the resentment of his co-workers. In this letter of March 27, 1894 to his former student Hearn tells Ochiai that as a young man:

I resolved to take the part of some people who were much disliked in the place where I lived. I thought that those who disliked them were morally wrong-so I argued boldly for them and went to their side . . . I had been opposing a great national and social principle without knowing it. (*Life and Letters* 58)

In this recollection of his youth, Hearn describes this episode to help Ochiai understand the alienation he felt from his friends for a short while and why he should not blame them directly. Hearn tells his student that a feeling of “national sentiment” is the cause of his dilemma. Hearn describes it as “that jealous love of country with which every man is born, and which you quite unknowingly, turned against you for a little while.” In his letter Hearn tells Ochiai that while in Cincinnati he opposed a “great national and social principle without knowing it” and that “national sentiment” would be the racist sentiment of a predominately Anglo-Saxon, white society.

Since he states in this letter that he was in his twenties, it is easy to guess that Hearn could be referring to his common law marriage to Mattie Foley. While at the Cincinnati Enquirer, he married Mattie Foley, a mulatto woman, but Ohio State law did not permit the union. Once it became known he was forced to leave his job and join the staff of the Cincinnati Commercial. It is interesting that Wetmore does not mention Mattie Foley in this particular section of her biography when it would be very suitable. Of course we do know her true feelings towards this matter from the preface to *Life and Letters*. She tells the reader “whispering of terrible scandals can be analyzed by those who know the facts and who cling to some shreds of common sense.” She immediately addresses his marriage to Foley as a scandal and begins to offer an explanation as follows:

He was not yet twenty; he was fresh from England, where the racial prejudices of America were unknown . . . He apparently drifted into some connection with this girl, and with characteristic

chivalry felt that he owed her legal rights and applied for a license to marry her . . . It was a pathetic, high minded piece of quixotism. Would that no man had been less tender and honest with the women of the African race! (*Life and Letters* Preface)

The fact that Wetmore tries to explain away this as a “pathetic, high minded piece of quixotism” makes it clear that she would not have approved of this union. Hearn was young and naive and his desperate situation “drifted into some connection with this girl.” His marriage to an Afro-American woman was not socially acceptable and as it endangered his reputation in the United States it would do the same if Wetmore did not offer an excuse for this in her biography.

In his letters to Watkin after leaving Cincinnati Hearn mentions Mattie on several occasions. He was obviously distressed and showed great concern for her well-being. Watkin later published these letters in his *Letters from the Raven* but these passages where Hearn expresses his love for Mattie were omitted. This is yet another indication of the social climate. One passage appeared in the Cincinnati Enquirer after his death in October 2, 1904. A quote from this passage that was reprinted in Albert Mordell's *Miscellanies* shows his genuine concern.

I never dwelt much upon it even to you latterly, but it has become an absolute torture recently. I feel all the time as if I saw Mattie looking at me or following me and the thought comes to me of the little present she made me and a little woolly lock of hair she sent me, and her despairing effort to speak to me once more. (Mordell li)

Upon arrival in New Orleans in 1887 Hearn is very concerned about the implications of his marriage to Mattie. He still shows concern but also fears the damage it could do to his reputation as a journalist. He is definitely troubled and compelled to write the following passage:

I am glad you saw Mattie. I hope she will do well . . . You cannot imagine how utterly the news of that thing would ruin me here. It were better that I had committed incest or forgery. The prejudice here is unutterably bitter, and bottomlessly deep. (*Manuscripts* 170)

Prejudice is so bitter and so deeply rooted in American society that Hearn would never see Mattie again. The scars of this episode of his life made by this “national sentiment” and national injustice would always remain with him. Of course the roots of this national injustice is the institution of slavery that was supposedly abolished at the end of the American Civil War.

Seven years before Hearn would become a member of the Cincinnati Enquirer staff an 1865 headline reads, “Slavery is dead, the Negro is not, there is the misfortune.” With the end of the Civil War came the death of slavery but the situation of the former Afro-American turned freedman improved little. Even though the plantation owners of the South who depended on slave labor for cotton lost everything, the entrepreneurs of the North quickly took advantage of the new freedman labor force.

Many Afro-Americans were forced to sign labor contracts that gave them few rights and very little compensation. They were expected to do the same backbreaking labor that they had done as slaves. In most cases they did not even have the right to leave their plots of land. Afro-Americans became the victims of rapid industrialization and racism.

In his 1988 *Japan Times* article Philips gives the following description of Afro-American society as a society within a society:

Afro-Americans live in a society created largely for the needs and desires of white people. Surrounded by a hostile majority, whose usual response to their presence was either hostile violence or malicious ignorance, with occasional patronizing amusement, blacks sought to give dignity and meaning to their lives by creating a meaningful culture sheltered from those who considered them at best either a problem or a nuisance. (Philips, *The Japan Times*)

He praises Hearn for being one of the first white scholars to actively investigate this virtually impenetrable society. Hearn took the Afro-Americans of the Levy seriously and respected their culture and traditions that other whites ignored completely or viewed with "patronizing amusement." From 1874-1877 he devoted a great deal of his time to the riverfront area of Cincinnati where hard labor was a way of life for the Afro-Americans of the Levy. Most of the members of this community had migrated from slave states during or just after the Civil War. Hearn spent countless hours interviewing stevedores, dockworkers, porters, deck hands and visiting taverns and haunts where this society within a society could be observed first-hand.

On March 17, 1876 the Cincinnati Commercial published Hearn's *Levee Life*. Of course he has an audience and we can see he has to make his subject matter interesting and acceptable to his predominately white readership. At the same time, harmoniously masked in this display of weirdness and exoticism are his culturally sensitive interpretive talents. From the very beginning he recognizes this community as a distinct culture with its own identity.

Along the river-banks on either side of the levee slope, where the brown water year after year climbs up the ruined sidewalks, and pours into the warehouse cellars, and paints their grimy walls with streaks of water-weed green, may be studied a most curious and interesting phase of life - the life of a community within a community . . . It is a very primitive kind of life: its lights and shadows are alike characterized by a half savage simplicity; its happiness or misery is almost purely animal; its pleasures are wholly of the hour. . . it is not without some little charm of its own - the charm of thoughtless existence, whose virtues are all original, and whose vices are the most part foreign to it. (*Cincinnati Commercial*, March 17, 1876)

In O.W. Frost's *Children of the Levy*, John Ball suggests that Hearn's strength was that "he was not convinced of the superiority of the white race or of the English-speaking peoples." Essentially, Hearn,

himself, is an outcast of the industrial revolution. From his days as a young boy in England wandering the streets seeing the harsh realities of the working class and experiencing poverty as an Irish immigrant he was sympathetic to those of similar circumstances. In Japan Hearn would often express his dislike of the west to his students and friends. When Hearn arrived in Cincinnati at the age of nineteen he was penniless and went hungry. These bitter memories would stay with him and eventually become the foundation of what developed into an interest and respect for non-western cultures that would lead him to Japan. His investigations of non-mainstream Afro-American culture develop into what he would label as "soul sympathy" in latter life.

In July 1876 Hearn writes about the delusion of a drunken African American who makes the following proposition:

. . . to remove all the present buildings . . . for the purpose of there erecting a huge marble edifice, more imposing than the Temple of Solomon - a magnificent hotel, in fact, wherein strangers from the four quarters of the earth might be quartered free of charge, and Civil Rights should be respected. . .

Then in front of the edifice a marble statue of Washington, seven hundred feet high, was to be erected, and from between the hoofs of the horse there should forever flow a fountain of living water, to heal all human ills . . .

(*Cincinnati Commercial*, July 18, 1876)

Hearn's title for this article was *A Case of Lunacy*. At this time only a lunatic might imagine such a preposterous vision. During the Civil Rights Movement Dr. Martin Luther King would call it a dream and today we would like to call it a reality. Unfortunately this still is not always the case. Hearn's marriage to a mulatto woman damaged his reputation and eventually forced him to leave the city he had made his home for more than six years. In the first of a series of letters to the *Cincinnati Commercial* from New Orleans as a correspondent, Hearn, taking the penname of Ozais Midwinter, provides his former readers with his first installment entitled *The Southern Prophet*. Hearn's article is mostly commentary of an article that appeared in the *North American Review* written by Charles Gayarre in November 1877. Hearn writes to his readership in Cincinnati, "In the latest issue of the *North American Review* appeared a remarkably powerful article upon the Southern question, by Charles Gayarre of New Orleans, the author of an excellent history of Louisiana" (*Cincinnati Commercial*, November 26, 1877).

The content of this article is rather provoking, even disturbing to some scholars of Hearn, with its cold, extremely gloomy conclusion:

As for the black man, he must disappear with the years. Dependent like the ivy, he needs some strong, oak like friend to cling to. His support has been cut from him, and his life must wither in its prostrate helplessness. Will he leave no trace of his past in the fields made fertile by his might labor, no memory of his presence in this fair land he made rich in vain? Ah yes! -



the echo of the sweetly melancholy Songs of Slavery, - these weird and beautiful melodies born in the hearts of the poor, childlike people whom freedom was destruction. (*Cincinnati Commercial*, November 26 1877)

This is a political essay about the Aristocracy of the South and the jealousy of Northern States. According to Gayarre, the Republicans were using the freed slaves as instruments of ignorance to take over the South and bring about the fall of Southern Economic Prosperity. The foreboding question is why would Hearn, a man known for his positive portrayals of non-white cultures, state such an opinion upon arrival in New Orleans. As suggested from Hearn's private letters to Henry Watkin, the printer who became his surrogate father and mentor after taking him in shortly after his arrival in Cincinnati, Hearn was paranoid of his past catching up with him and ruining new career prospects. This is most likely another example of Hearn the journalist cleverly playing to the sentiments of an intolerant society from which he was always trying to keep at bay. A close examination of his primary works and letters to close friends show him as a man who could go beyond the prejudices of his day.

#### Notes

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## 小泉八雲と南部 Queen City の忘れ去られたひとびと

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小泉八雲（1850-1904）の没後 100 年記念は再び彼の人生に脚光をあてることとなった。八雲は日本では日本文化や伝統に貢献した作家としてよく知られている。しかし、ジャーナリストとしての彼の人生は合衆国において多様な文化と民族を探求することが根幹にあった。小泉八雲はオハイオ州シンシナティで新聞記者として出発し、アフリカ系アメリカ人やユダヤ人、イスラム人などの他民族文化を深く研究した。八雲は人種の壁には無縁で、シンシナティの下宿屋で働いていたアフリカ系アメリカ人と結婚する。当時のアメリカの資料の考察を通じて、八雲の異文化を理解する鋭い嗅覚や、それが八雲に与えた皮相的な人種的偏見を超越する能力を知ることができる。また、生涯のこの時期ゆえに、社会の底辺に生きる人々に対し真に同情あふれる人物だったと結論づけられる。彼の初期の活動と手紙を綿密に調査すると彼が当時の偏見を超えた人物であったことが示されている。