

# Lafcadio Hearn: Extreme Motivations

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## Introduction

With the Centennial Celebrations of Lafcadio Hearn's death his time in the United States has gained new interest in Japan with the translations of important source materials such as Edward Tinker's *Lafcadio Hearn's American Days*. Unfortunately some of Hearn's earliest articles still remain unpublished after their initial appearance in *The Cincinnati Enquirer*. In 1974, Bill Spears praises Hearn as the "finest writer" to ever have taken residency in Cincinnati. According to Spears, "The copy he filed was exceptional for his or any time. He gave his readers more than an account of events that happened while they slept or worked. He gave them insights into their lives, an awareness of the good and evil forces of their worlds" (Spears 63). Of course as any journalist, one of Hearn's motivations was to write articles that would help increase the circulation of the paper. Hearn was exceptional in the fact that he could care less about the ramifications of his endeavors that continued to deplore politicians. His early actions are key, particularly his marriage to an African American, as they are clear evidence that his motivations went beyond just selling newspapers. The purpose of this paper is to present more evidence of Hearn's greater "idealistic" goals and how they would mold his initial perceptions of different ethnic groups.

## I. Enquirer Beginnings

For a short period his editor, John Cockerill, gave Hearn the freedom to explore moralistically divergent issues and ideas. Owen Findsen quotes Cockerill's recollection of Hearn's interests, "He prowled about the dark earners of the city, and from gruesome places he dug out charming idyllic stories. The Negro stevedores on the steamboats fascinated him. He wrote their songs, their imitations, their uncouth ways, and he found picturesqueness in their rags, poverty and juba dances" (Findsen 170). His success with the Tanyard Murder made him one of Cockerill's star reporters. Hearn's fortune took a turn for the worse when his "openly racist editors" caught wind of his "social transgression" of marrying a mulatto woman. According to Spears,

One day in 1874, Hearn arrived at *The Enquirer* to be told that he was dismissed for 'deplorable moral habits.' Politicians and civic leaders unsettled by Hearn's articles had threatened the newspaper with a scandal over his alliance with Mattie, and under pressure from John R. McLean, Cockerill gave in and fired his star reporter. (Spears 65)

It is this period that is important as Hearn could indulgently explore the underbelly of society and expose "social evils." Of course he tried to make his remarks digestible with a touch of humor or sarcasm. One such article that he wrote as a fledgling reporter in 1873 describes an interesting situation in Lowell, Massachusetts. It establishes his early eagerness to question or even irritate the status quo. In *A Curious Orientalism* he informs the reader of a rural area called "Galows Hill," "Not many miles from the spot where, a little more than a hundred and eighty years ago, nineteen persons were executed in the name of the Lord for witchcraft" (*The Cincinnati Enquirer*, May 2, 1873). He tells the reader that, "one hundred and sixty-two women, it is said, have become possessed of the devil, or of the desire for polygamy." This group petitioned the Massachusetts State Court "for a fractional part of a husband for each of them" (*The Cincinnati Enquirer*, May 2, 1873). This is a preposterous proposition that contradicts all social norms of the day, but, not surprisingly, Hearn takes the side of the "possessed" and suggests,

The excess of female population over the males in Massachusetts is nearly fifty thousand. There are 49, 306 white women in Massachusetts who cannot by any possibility marry in that State, under the monogamous system unless men are imported." (*The Cincinnati Enquirer*, May 2, 1873)

In a letter from Memphis en route to New Orleans, Hearn admits to Henry Watkin he was always taking extremes. He was a man of extremes living in a society of extreme turmoil. His tendency to take the side of the social downtrodden would be one of the major factors in his eventual flight from Cincinnati. In "Slow Starvation" Hearn takes on the exploitation of workers by big business. He undoubtedly angered many influential business leaders and, ultimately, the politicians they supported. His subtitle for this early social expose of 1874 reads "Beauty Beggary, Pants and Pistol-Pockets, The Women Who Sew, and the Men Who Pay (?) Them, The Story of 'A Dime a Pair' Told by an Enquirer Reporter." Hearn's affinity for exploited workers echoes contemporary social ills in this century. In an age of rapid mechanization and mass production, Hearn ironically tells the reader "Truly, the introduction of the sewing-machine does not appear to have bettered the condition of the women who 'stitch, stitch, stitch in poverty, hunger and dirt.' [ . . . ] situated in the most dilapidated suburbs of Cincinnati" (*The Cincinnati Enquirer*, February 15, 1874).

Hearn also takes the time to describe his own, battered appearance, revealing his own affinity for those down on their luck. Only a few years earlier, Hearn was on the street and hungry. Fate had been kind to him and he was motivated to report on those who had fallen victim to similar circumstance.

The reporter chosen for the expedition unfortunately happens to be the ugliest local in the office (the good-looking ones were all engaged on other work that day); and his spectacled visage, which bears a grotesque resemblance to the countenance of an owl, called forth a number of very uncomplimentary remarks from Ethiopian maidens during his progress through the negro

quarter. (*The Cincinnati Enquirer*, February 15, 1874)

Another social plight whose debate still rages till this day is abortion. Hearn has little use for politics and takes the side of a victimized girl who pays the price for her social indiscretion.

The poor girl who falls a victim to the seducer's wiles is at once socially outlawed by the loss of her reputation; held up to public scorn, deprived in many cases of her only means of support and prospects of happy marriage, and thus driven to the dire extremity from which there would seem to be but two paths of escape - those of physical and moral self-destruction, suicide or the life of the wanton. This mock-virtuous penal code of caste, which honors the seducer and makes a Pariah of his victim, is, beyond a doubt, a main source of the abortionist's practice, and the baby farmer's income and the infanticide's crime. (*The Cincinnati Enquirer*, April 5, 1874)

Why should this poor girl become the social outcast while the seducer escapes lacking any social scorn? Hearn, himself abandoned as a young child, always blamed his father for the break-up of his family. Hearn's early motivations to investigate topics of social and moral injustice were in the midst of intolerant times.

## II. Social Turmoil

American Society was plagued by rampant racism and Hearn's avid pursuit of the plight of African Americans put his career in jeopardy. When the Civil Rights Debate was raging during the forty-third congress in 1874, a front-page article in *The Cincinnati Enquirer* on January 7, 1874 clearly exemplifies the sentiments of Hearn's days as a young reporter. This article reads:

The proceedings of the House today were marked by an extraordinary scene, which would disgrace this country if Congress could disgrace anybody. The Radicals had fixed up a job to put up a Massachusetts negro, named Elliot, now hailing from South Carolina to deliver a speech full of insolence and malignity, which Hoar and other radicals had written for him. Their grand idea was to try to make it appear that a negro could be the peer of a white man in debate: [ . . . ] His most offensive utterances today were applauded to the echo by the Radicals of the House, and by the galleries, as if at a theatre [ . . . ] The bill will probably be recommitted tomorrow for motives of policy, and there is some talk of modifying the features in regard to public schools. (*The Cincinnati Enquirer*, January 7, 1874)

On March 1, 1875, Congress approved the Civil Rights Act, guaranteeing equal rights to black Americans in public accommodations and jury duty. However, the Supreme Court would invalidate this legislation in 1883. The court ruled that the Fourteenth Amendment forbid states, but not citizens, from discriminating. Incredibly, after the passage of this bill, fifty-three African Americans are known to have

been lynched. The following two years more than 125 black Americans were lynched.

On June 8, 1873, Hearn describes a terrible pestilence. In his article entitled "Epidemic in Embryo: The Plague Spots of Our Beautiful Community," he goes to lengths to describe the inhumane and hazardous living conditions of African American workers in a Cincinnati. He takes a tour of the Utah Plantation area located on Plum street.

[. . .] the collection of negro huts at the foot of Plum street, that have for years past been owned by Mr. G. W. Goodhue, a wealthy man of church-going habits, and rented by him through an agent named Lamb. The huts look as if a gust of wind would sweep them off the face of the earth. In each of them swarms of black people are huddled together, and although they strive to keep the premises clean the job is an uphill one. Their drainings dribble upon the riverbank, and there mingle with the matter that is dumped at the foot of the street, becoming sun-dried and making the odors of the locality throw the smell of the Chicago River completely into the shade. The "Plantation" has long borne the reputation of being a most offensive nuisance and the evil should be abated at the earliest day possible. (*The Cincinnati Enquirer*, June 8, 1873)

According to John Clubbe, "Cincinnati indeed taught Hearn much. First of all the city developed his powers of perception[ . . . ]Hearn looked hard not only at the physical city in all its multifarious confusion but at its interesting inhabitants, most of them foreign-born" (Clubbe 43). Fjendsen remarks, "The concentration of Northerners and Southerners, black and white; immigrant and native born; rich and poor gave Hearn a colorful, urban pageant to explore and chronicle. He was fascinated by the life styles of the lower classes, immigrants and African-Americans" (Fjendsen 168). Hearn's early perceptions of the make-up of Cincinnati can be seen in an article of September 23, 1875 entitled *A Human Exposition*:

The visitors who come to our annual display themselves unconsciously constitute an exposition of surpassing interest to a student of his race [. . .] As you look into each face, you can in a measure trace its owner's history. In nearly every case you can trace the ancestry of each one, whether he came of the great English, Irish, German or South European branches of the human race. Here is an unmistakably foreign face, there a face one remove from the ancestral nationality, and here again a sharp, delicate, somewhat thin face, reveals an ancestry American for several generations [. . .] Up stairs in the Main Hall is a stage looking affair called a water map of the world, for object lessons in schools. An honest granger studies it curiously. He has the expression of a not altogether satisfied man. [. . .] "Whar's Afriky?" says this son of the soil. "I say, whar's Afriky on thar?" No answer being made to this question, he asks it again, for the third time. "Whar's Afriky?" cries he desperately.

This time he was heard and answered. At length this honest granger found Africa. He gazed upon it was long and earnestly, and then turned away, shaking his head. He made but one

remark but it was to the point. "It mought be better made." said he. (*The Cincinnati Enquirer*, September 23, 1875)

Hearn was highly conscious of the ethnically diverse make-up of his surroundings. This is a prime example of his higher motivation to elevate the awareness of his readership. Interestingly, the African American is disgruntled with the representation of Africa at his exhibition. This is perhaps an allusion to the plight of former slaves and their outright disenfranchisement in American society.

### III. Flight from Cincinnati

Once Hearn settles in New Orleans, he writes his 'Old Man' Henry Watkin again to tell him about his success. Yet, his past in Cincinnati still hovers like a dark cloud. He writes to Watkin "I have succeeded in getting acquainted & being introduced into the best society. I see my way clear to a position here, - but then I feel sure some one will tell that story on me, sooner or later. Then I will have to go away" (*Kuwabara* 172). Edward Tinker's careful explanation of Hearn's relationship with a mulatto woman and his ties to George W. Cable is yet another example of the social climate even after Hearn's death.

Hearn's perennial sympathy with the under dog and his past connection with Althea Foley made him a quick convert to Cable's point of view, although he knew enough not to discuss it openly [ . . . ] Both the angle from which it was told and the story itself must have pleased Cable tremendously and the fact that they were supporters of a minority theory. (Tinker 123)

Cable's essay 'The Freedman's Case in Equity', calling on the nation to admit the former slaves into full citizenship and urging the South to leave behind its racist "sentiments," and "plant society firmly upon universal justice and equity" made a great impression upon Hearn. Tinker's description of Hearn and Cable as "supporters of minority theory" shows how little social sentiments had changed in 1924 when *Lafcadio Hearn's American Days* was published. Cable's strong tone and criticism of the Southern politics angered many and created difficulties for his own career.

But, as I have said over and over to my brethren in the South, I take upon me to say again here, that there is a moral and intellectual intelligence there which is not going to be much longer beguiled out of its moral right of way by questions of political punctilio, but will seek that plane of universal justice and equity which it is every people's duty before God to seek, not along the line of politics,--God forbid!--but across it and across it and across it as many times as it may lie across the path, until the whole people of every once slaveholding State can stand up as one man, saying, "Is the freedman a free man?" and the whole world shall answer, "Yes." (*The Century Magazine*, January 1885)

Tinker relates a tale that Hearn told Cable "as supporters of minority theory." At the end of the Civil War

a group of fugitives from the South, whites and blacks, are heading for the North. The steamer is carrying cotton that bursts into flame and the captain and other white passengers are the first to abandon ship. However the mulatto pilot stays at his post. The ideal of a free society in the North compels the pilot to keep course and try to save the ship. The mulatto man dies a hero while the white passengers escape in cowardice with little remorse for the loss of those left aboard. This comes from a letter to Hearn's friend and musician, Henry Krehbiel:

The captain and engineers deserted the vessel; there was a panic of selfish and furious men. One man kept to his post. He was not a white man; but a d-d nigger[ . . .]He was a free mulatto. He was the Pilot. [ . . .]Below men shouted madly to him to leap for his life, but he never heard them.

Suddenly the engines ceased to pant. The cords of the tiller vanished; and the wheel turned helplessly in the Pilot's hands. But he had brought her into the bank, and the threescore souls were saved. (Tinker 125)

Another interesting article in 1873 clearly defines Hearn's view of the blind ignorance that fuels prejudice. He tells the story of the disappearance of a Greek Child and how cultural misunderstanding results in unfounded persecution. In "Greeks, Jews, and Cannibals," the disappearance of a Greek child in a small town in Turkey is blamed upon Jewish residents and supported by complete ignorance of Jewish tradition and culture.

Of course, in Kilmasit Cassaba there was but one way of accounting for the disappearance of a child - the Jews must have kidnapped it for anthropophagial purposes. The frantic mother rushed through the streets, shrieking for vengeance upon the cannibal Israelites. . . . when the Greek priests brought out their holy books, and proved there from incontrovertibly that human sacrifices were indispensable to the faithful practice of the Jewish religion, the Turkish ruler seems to have thought it best to arrest all the influential Jews[. . .].(*The Cincinnati Enquirer*, December 29, 1873)

Echoes of this piece can be seen in a composition assignment for students at Tokyo Imperial University. Hearn's desire to stimulate his students to think about the connections between religion and civilization demonstrate the same irony he displays at the young age of 23.

At one time the Greeks and Egyptians, both highly civilized people believed in different Gods. Later, the Romans and Greeks although highly civilized, accepted a foreign belief. Later still, these civilized peoples were conquered by races of a different faith. The religion of Mahomet was at one time that of the highest civilization. At another time the religion of India was the religion of the highest civilization. It is very doubtful whether the civilization of a people has any connection whatever with their religion. (Ichikawa 375)

This composition assignment is not just a writing exercise for his students but a clear example of Hearn's reflections upon his experiences that began as a young reporter in Cincinnati, Ohio.

### Conclusion

Hearn continued to tackle issues such as racial prejudice from Japan. As the editor of the *Kobe Chronicle*, Hearn voiced his opinions on racial tensions in the United States in 1894. In an editorial of October 20, 1894 he establishes his unique perspective to readers of the *Kobe Chronicle* in that "by long residence in the Southern States of America" he was "familiar with the abnormal social conditions there existing [ . . . ] Rarely can one open an American newspaper without reading of lynchings and killings of negroes; [ . . . ] It would be impossible to contradict that conditions in certain parts of the South are not the conditions of civilization" (*Kobe Chronicle*, October 20, 1894).

He would continue his focus on American racial tensions in another editorial in November. This time he gives the South credit for trying to improve political conditions but is still genuinely concerned about the situation of African Americans.

[ . . . ] The Southerner has long ceased to believe in the principles for which he fought; and recognizes as fully as his antagonists ever did the necessity and the value of national union. But the social necessities which compelled him to control the black vote remain and grow; and his politics are influenced by the necessity of self-preservation. His views are far more liberal than those of his fathers, and his spirit more progressive [ . . . ] He is doing all that is possible to develop educational opportunities for blacks and whites alike; and would welcome heartily any constitutional amendments which could aid in the solution of the race question. (*Kobe Chronicle*, November 13, 1894)

Just before his dismissal from the *Enquirer* in 1875, Hearn writes, "the idealist, is the man that contributes to the culture, the elevation of mankind" (*The Cincinnati Enquirer* April 27, 1875). The fact that Hearn would continue to be concerned about the plight of African Americans clearly demonstrates the profound nature of his ideals developed as a young journalist for *The Cincinnati Enquirer*.

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## 若きラフカディオ・ハーン ideal と現実

ウィリアムソン・ロジャースティール

シンシナティ・インクワイアラー紙の記者であるビル・スピーアーズは、ラフカディオ・ハーンは、「読者に人生観を与え、彼らの世界の良識や邪悪な力に気付かせてくれた」ひとであったと書いている。もちろん、どんなジャーナリストにとってもそうであるが、ハーンの動機のひとつは新聞の発行部数を増やす記事を書くことであった。ところが、政治家たちが隠したがっていた事実をあえて公にすると、彼の試みが自らの職を失ってしまうことになる危険性には無頓着であった。それにもかかわらず法律で禁止されていた黒人女性と結婚した事実をみれば、単に新聞を売るため以上の動機が彼にあったことは明確である。