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Lafcadio Hearn and the Irish Tradition

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I should say at the outset that, while Lafcadio Hearn's relationship with Irish literature has generally been overlooked, I have not set out to cast Hearn in a narrow straightjacket of a particular tradition: he was far too elusive and his genius too malleable for that. If ever a man achieved Goldsmith's ideal of being a citizen of the world, it was Patrick Lafcadio Hearn. He was not exclusively Greek, Irish, American, or Japanese but was rather a unique amalgam of a variety of influences. His relationship with Ireland, like his feelings for the United States and Japan, was ambiguous although he came to terms with it in a series of remarkable essays towards the end of his life. We might also bear in mind that ambiguity is not necessarily a wholly negative phenomenon: in his *Redress of Poetry*, the Nobel Laureate, Seamus Heaney, defends what he terms "two-mindedness" in the context of what some would regard as conflicting cultural imperatives.

While, therefore, I am not claiming Hearn exclusively for the Irish tradition, he did spend his most formative years in Ireland and no biographer can afford to ignore their impact. In other words, while I do not believe that he should be seen exclusively in an Irish context, he certainly does have an Irish dimension. Today I propose to look at three inter-related aspects of Hearn's relationship

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with the Irish tradition: background, subject matter and language. I should make it clear that I am a biographer who aims to apply historiographical rather than literary critical analysis and my aim in examining Hearn's writing is to try to illuminate both his life and his meaning rather than entering the realm of academic literary criticism *per se*.

Patrick Lafcadio Hearn had a pronounced literary strand in his family background: Dr John Arbuthnot, of Pope's *Epistle*, was Lafcadio's great-great uncle on his mother's side and her sister, Susan, was an unpublished novelist. His father composed romantic verse as part of his wooing technique.

Looked at in a wider context, Hearn was one of an extraordinary quartet of writers who grew up in Dublin in the decades just after the middle of the 19th century. Bram Stoker, author of *Dracula*, was just a few years older: born in 1847, his family home was in Clontarf, a similar suburb on the north side of Dublin to the township of Rathmines on the south side where Hearn grew up. Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw were, respectively, four and six years younger than Hearn. Their families all lived within a short distance of each other: the Wilde residence in Merrion Square and the Shaw home in Synge Street are no more than a short walk from 73 Upper Leeson Street where Hearn spent some of his most formative years.

Church of Ireland middle class would describe all their family background although there were, of course, gradations of individual family circumstance. While championship of the common man would later be a feature of the work of Hearn and Shaw, and folklore a basis for the literary output of Hearn, Wilde and Stoker, they were the products of what might now be termed "drawing-room culture". The cradle of genius in the Dublin of their era was one of gatherings around the piano to sing the often maudlin songs and ballads of the time. James Joyce would later preserve this world in aspic in *Dubliners* and John McCormack would immortalise its torch-songs on shellac. Shaw, of course, was immersed in it from an early age, courtesy of his mother and her music teacher, George Vandeleur Lee, but Hearn too remembered those gatherings around the piano in Mrs Brenane's plush drawing-room, with

standards of the time, such as Father Prout's *The Bells of Shandon*, being performed. Indeed, it was memories of his beautiful aunt, Catherine Elwood, singing Thomas Moore's *Believe Me, If All Those Endearing Young Charms* which inspired one of Lafcadio's late Japanese pieces, "Hi-mawari".

Oscar Wilde proposed to, but Bram Stoker married, Florence Balcombe, daughter of a Lieutenant Colonel in the British Army. Both Stoker's and Hearn's grandfathers served in precisely the same regiment; Hearn's grandfather was a Lieutenant Colonel, as was Florence Balcombe's. Stoker was friendly with the Wildes, especially Oscar's mother, a famous collector of Irish folklore. Hearn was one of the first critics to see the sterling worth beneath the young Wilde's foppery and, as writers, they shared a common interest in fairy tales, both men publishing books of them within a decade of each other later in the century.

The Wildes were solidly comfortable materially but they were tainted by the whiff of scandal well before Oscar's downfall when Sir William Wilde was sued by a female patient for alleged sexual indiscretion. Indeed, beneath the proper Victorian decorum of these four writers' families, sex wreaked havoc in various forms. Not alone was Oscar Wilde imprisoned for homosexuality but his biographer, Richard Ellmann, believed that he died of syphilis. Similarly, Daniel Farson, Bram Stoker's great-nephew and biographer, states that he too died of the same disease. Hearn was perhaps lucky to escape that fate, given his sexual waywardness prior to his marriage in Japan.

Lafcadio was, in fact, the product of a passionate union between his officer-surgeon father and his Greek mother. Their first child was born out of wedlock and Lafcadio was in gestation when they married. Shaw's parentage and background contained similar complications. The de facto *menage a trois* in which Shaw's mother lived with her husband and her music teacher has given rise to speculation about his parentage. Both the Hearns and Shaws were downwardly-mobile minor gentry, attempting to maintain a semblance of respectability while the economic basis of their position was slipping away from them. Indebtedness was a feature common to both, as it was to the Stokers:

indeed, Lafcadio's father, who borrowed heavily from his great-aunt, was ruined, as was Lafcadio, when she became bankrupt. Both Shaw and Hearn experienced the grind of poverty in London in their youth.

The point I am making with this comparative material is that Hearn grew up in a small, tightly-knit, and intensely literary world in Dublin. If we look outside Lafcadio's immediate contemporaries, we find that Dion Boucicault, the dominant dramatist of the mid-century, was born in 47 Lower Gardiner Street while young Patrick Lafcadio spent his first period in Dublin at number 48 in the same street. J.M. Synge attended school in Upper Leeson Street where Lafcadio lived with Mrs Brenane for some years. W.B. Yeats was born in Sandymount, a nearby suburb, shortly after Hearn left for England. On the other side of the country, George Moore, just two years younger than Hearn, grew up on his family's estate on the shores of Lough Cara in County Mayo; Lafcadio spent a good deal of time in his youth, vividly recalled in some of his best Japanese work, on the estate of his Elwood relations, on the shores of Lough Corrib, also in County Mayo. Moore grew up listening to his father's tales of the East and went to Paris to study painting, as Lafcadio's uncle, Richard Hearn, had done a generation previously.

Hearn's work throughout his life was permeated by horror and he certainly he has a great deal in common with the older writers of the Irish Gothic tradition, Charles Maturin and Sheridan Le Fanu. Maturin was a Church of Ireland clergyman and Le Fanu the son of one; Hearn was the great-grandson of an eminent Archdeacon of Cashel and Church of Ireland clergymen abound in his family tree. Maturin's father, like Bram Stoker's, was a civil servant in the British administration in Ireland while Hearn's father was an officer-surgeon in the British Army. All previous three generations of the Hearn family had been educated at Trinity College, Dublin, as were Stoker, Le Fanu, and Maturin. Bearing in mind that the Church of Ireland was a State Church until 1869-71, it means that all these families occupied comfortable middle-class niches, employed either through the Church of Ireland or the armed forces by the State, then the union of Great Britain and Ireland. Yeats too, as you will

be aware, was a product of similar background.

Hearn, however, was sharply differentiated from the other Irish Gothic writers by the fact of having been brought up as a Roman Catholic although important elements of his consciousness-forming were Protestant rather than Roman Catholic. We know that his great-aunt, Mrs Brenane, made little effort to inculcate Catholic, or even Christian, beliefs into him; the only attempt at that was a rather hamfisted one by a religiously-obsessed young relative. When she died, she left her considerable collection of books to him, which, strangely, included nothing overtly religious, certainly nothing of a Roman Catholic or pietistic nature; indeed, the authors listed by Hearn were generally Protestant: Locke, Byron, Scott, Edgeworth and so on. The other writers whom we know influenced him were also outside the Roman Catholic tradition: Milton, whose *Paradise Lost* impressed him both for its imagination and its otherworld vocabulary; Defoe; and, most potently, the rabidly anti-Catholic Matthew Lewis whose *Tales of Wonder* gave him nightmares.

Lewis's *The Monk* was in some respects the prototype for Charles Maturin's Melmoth *the Wanderer*, arguably the first great classic in the Irish Gothic tradition and one with which Hearn was familiar. While one might discern Gothic elements in earlier Irish writers like Maria Edgeworth, whom Hearn had also read, Maturin's 1820 work shares Lewis's blazing, paranoiac, anti-Catholicism. His language and the cadences of his style seem to me to anticipate uncannily Hearn's early journalism. Take, for example, this passage describing a mad-house in *Melmoth*:

> Then your hours of solitude, deliciously diversified by the yell of famine, the howl of madness, the crash of whips, and the broken-hearted sob of those who, like you, are supposed, or driven mad by the crimes of others.

and compare it with a Cincinnati tenement as seen by Hearn:

> . . . the moans of the poor sufferer, the agonized scream of the tortured

> child, the savage whipping and violent cursing, the broken floor pried up in drunken fury,- all seemed the sights and sounds of a hideous dream, rather than the closing scene of a poor life's melodrama.

In his personality, Lafcadio embodied the wild anti-Popery of Maturin, extravagantly claiming that he would be pursued to the grave by the Jesuits, who had supposedly educated him, although he had never in fact attended a Jesuit school. At the same time, his ambiguity towards Roman Catholicism mirrored that of Le Fanu — whom he particularly admired as a writer — and Stoker, who, as Protestant writers, in "Carmilla" and *Dracula* respectively, accord a positive power to Roman Catholic ritual in subduing the forces of darkness. In his personal life, Hearn was friendly with a number of Roman Catholic priests. In the West Indies his imagination was impressed by the achievements of the Dominican priest, Père Labat and, in Japan, he was defensive of the Roman Catholic missionaries vis a vis their Protestant counterparts. Part of the answer to this riddle might be that Hearn's Irish background was essentially Protestant despite his upbringing as a Catholic. In this way Hearn was able to embody in himself the full ambiguity of the Irish Gothic tradition.

Hearn landed in Japan in 1890, the year that Bram Stoker is believed to have started work on *Dracula*. The similarities between the two men run much deeper than the coincidence of birth or geography. Horror pervaded the work of both. It is fascinating that Stoker should have begun *Dracula*, in its early pages overtly a journey to the Orient — Jonathan Harker in the very first paragraph states that he feels he is entering the East at Budapest — just as Hearn was beginning his Oriental sojourn in Japan. Hearn translated vampire material from the French and in his person, by drinking blood and eating bugs, reflected the proclivities of Dracula and his assistant, Renfield.

Stoker based his story — "The Burial of the Rats" — among the *chiffonniers*, the rag-pickers of the Paris dumps. One of Hearn's best Cincinnati pieces was "Les Chiffonniers", set in the dumps of that city. The declaration of

Stoker's narrator, that he "determined to investigate philosophically the chiffonnier — his habitat, his life, and his means of life", was very similar to Hearn's approach.

Lafcadio's translation of Gautier's "Arria Marcella", in *One of Cleopatra's Nights*, could be straight from the pages of writers in the Irish tradition of literary horror. As well as the crumbling into dust of the ghoul, you have the same mingling of the non-Christian world of ghosts, vampires and prehistoric religion which is controlled by Christian ritual. Later, in Japan, Hearn would also write of vampires: "The Story of Chugoro" in *Kotto*, for example, concerns a great and ugly frog who appears as a beautiful woman to drain young men of their blood. The theme of the interrelationship of the devil with the human world recurs in a number of Hearn's other translations from the French, most notably in Flaubert's *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*.

Lafcadio's translations from French were part of a complex inter-relationship with French culture, the importance of which extended far beyond these translations themselves and profoundly influenced his interpretation of Japan. This relationship should be viewed in the context, not alone of his family background, but of the wider cultural links between Ireland and France. These were symbolised by the Napoleonic vogue for the ancient figure of Oisín or Ossian, and the influence of Thomas Moore, whom Hearn admired, on such French cultural luminaries as Berlioz. Bram Stoker's father moved to France as a result of his debts, as Oscar Wilde would flee there after his release from prison and Hearn took refuge there mentally by claiming a French education and immersing himself in French literature. Indeed, Oscar Wilde took the name "Sebastian Melmoth" when he went in disgrace to France in 1897, emblematic of his outcast role, knowing that the French would understand a reference to Charles Maturin's Irish exile who had so influenced Baudelaire and Balzac.

Hearn's grandfather, a hero of the Napoleonic wars, prided himself on his fluent French. His uncle, Richard, was one of the first Irish artists to go to France to study art, blazing a trail which many others would follow in the mid-nineteenth century. Wilde composed original works in French, as Samuel

Beckett would do in the twentieth century, while Lafcadio translated extensively from it. Lafcadio claimed to have been educated in France; even if there is no evidence to substantiate the claim, the fact that he *wanted* to have been there is significant, as was his very deliberate immersion in French language and culture during his years in America.

We know from his correspondence with Yeats that, as a little boy in Dublin, he had had a Connaught nurse who told him Irish fairy-tales and ghost-stories. Thus began a life-long interest in folk material which had manifested itself in his journalistic writings on black culture in Cincinnati and found its first sustained outlet in book form in his New Orleans work.

I suspect that when many of us think of fairy tales, we think of the bowdlerised Victorian versions of the dark originals. In fact, the fairy stories common to much of the pre-industrial world, including Ireland, constitute a netherworld, living parallel to, and sometimes interacting with, the living, similar in some respects to the ancient Japanese religion of ShintÇ which Hearn would later make central to his analysis of Japan. There are clear parallels between the interaction of the otherworld beings with the living in Irish lore — by for example their women becoming lovers of mortal men — and some of the marvellous *Kwaidan*, those weird tales which Hearn translated from the Japanese folk tradition. There are also parallels between fairy tales and vampirism — the notion of the dead continuing to live in their burial chambers, sometimes seeking to lure to their doom unwary mortals by assuming enchanting shapes or presenting enticing spectacles.

Lafcadio's devotion to folk material links him, not alone with his contemporaries, but also to the younger figures of the Irish literary revival — Yeats, Lady Gregory, Synge — as well as backwards to the earlier Irish poets of the nineteenth century.

In tracing the line of Irish Protestant supernatural fiction through Maturin, Le Fanu, Stoker, W.B. Yeats, and Elizabeth Bowen, Professor Roy Foster has linked an interest in the occult with folklore. Hearn believed that folk tales were of priceless value to the true artist, which the uneducated peasant was

fully capable of being; indeed, education was likely to destroy the source of his poetry. His view of peasant life in Ireland was remarkably similar to the ShintÇ-based ethos of pre-Meiji Japan and, in a sense, provides a bridge from his Irish youth to his mature Japanese work:

> Anciently woods and streams were peopled for him [the peasant] with invisible beings; angels and demons walked at his side; the woods had their fairies, the mountains their goblins, the marches their flitting spirits, and the dead came back to him at times to bear a message or to rebuke a fault. Also the ground that he trod upon, the plants growing in the field, the cloud above him, the lights of heaven all were full of mystery and ghostliness.

Compare this with Yeats' vision of the survival of the supernatural in the Irish countryside:

> Once every people in the world believed that trees were divine, and could take a human or grotesque shape and dance among the shadows of the woods; and deer, and ravens and foxes, and wolves and bears, and clouds and pools, almost all things under the sun and moon, and the sun and moon, not less divine and changeable; they saw in the rainbow the still bent bow of a god thrown down in his negligence; they heard in the thunder the sound of his beaten water-jar, or the tumult of his chariot wheels; and when a sudden flight of wild duck, or of crows, passed over their heads, they thought were gazing at the dead hastening to their rest; while they dreamed of so great a mystery in little things that they believed the waving of a hand, or of a sacred bough, enough to trouble far-off hearts, or hood the moon with darkness.

What we have here is the same concept, being expressed in such similar language that the authors could almost be interchangeable. Both men believed in the fundamental importance of folk material to their respective art. In Yeats' case, it was some of the greatest poetry in the English language; in Hearn's a great body of work, culminating in the mastery *Kwaidan*, or Japanese ghost

stories of his later years. Hearn posited the fundamental importance to art of the supernatural in his lecture, "The Value of the Supernatural in Fiction" and, indeed, a phrase in it, "there is something ghostly in all great art" was considered by Yeats as possibly a definitive definition of poetry.

Hearn understood the grounding of Yeats' poetry in the myths and legends of Ireland. He connected romanticism, folklore and horror and maintained that the Celtic belief in fairies had created an imagination that was "romantic, poetic and also terrible". He believed that W.B. Yeats, "who himself collected a great number of stories and legends about fairies from the peasantry of Southern Ireland", was the most "representative" poet of the folklore-based genre. Yeats' poem, The Host of the Air, he regarded as the outstanding contemporary fairy poem, unsurpassable in its field, especially in its ability to communicate "the pleasure of fear", an art Hearn greatly admired. Not only did he appreciate the "rare excellence" of the early Yeats — the poet was thirty-nine when Lafcadio died in 1904 — he also understood that ancient Celtic literature had inspired much of his poetry.

Indeed, so passionate did he feel about this excellence that he wrote a letter of violent protest to Yeats in June 1901 when *The Host of the Air* appeared in *The Wind Among the Reeds* revised from its earlier form, telling the poet that "this wonderful thing . . . must have been blown into you and through you as by the Wind of the Holy Ghost". On the other hand, not alone was the hero of Yeats' unfinished novel called "Hearne" but he wrote of a real-life "Hearne", a witch-doctor who lived on the borders of Clare and Galway!

Both men were attracted by similar material. It is clear from a satire which he wrote in his Cincinnati days that Lafcadio was familiar, to some extent at least, with the Fianna Cycle of early Irish legend and, more specifically, that he was aware of the story of Oisín in this lore. Oisín was said to have accompanied a beautiful woman to the Land of Youth. After what seemed like a short time, he asks to go back to his homeland; the lady allows him but enjoins him not to set foot on the soil of Ireland. He finds when he gets back that he has actually been away for three hundred years and that the Fianna are

long dead and gone. Unthinkingly, he comes into contact with the ground and is instantly changed into an old man.

This story therefore parallels the Japanese legend of Urashima Taro that Hearn uses as the backbone for "The Dream of a Summer Day" where he entwines it with glorious memories of his youth in Ireland. Yeats too was attracted by the Oisín theme: his dramatic dialogue, *The Wanderings of Oisín*, was published in 1889, the year before Hearn went to Japan and, in its language and subject matter, mirrored many of his preoccupations.

Hearn's awareness of Irish myth and legend also found an outlet in New Orleans, where he wrote the story of "St Brandan's Christmas" for the *Times-Democrat*. It ends with the "horrid and frightful deformity" alone upon an ice cliff: the vision of Judas, on day-release from hell, seen by the ancient Irish saint, Brendan, on a Christmas morning. There is, incidentally, a passage in this tale which anticipates a vision of rural Ireland which found expression in Irish literature and politics in the last century:

> But now and again an Irish fisherboy, gentle and loving to an old mother spinning by the peat fire at home, pure of heart and careful of his duty, rocked as ever on the great waves that dash high up the iron-bound coast of Western Ireland, and dreaming of the lost glories of the green land, has seen the gold and purple curtains of the sunset lift for a moment over the shining sea . . .

There are other links between Hearn and the Irish literary tradition. For example, he appreciated the work of the older nineteenth century Irish poets who influenced the Celtic revival, particularly William Allingham and Sir Samuel Ferguson; the latter's "extraordinary power in arousing the sensation of the weird" he particularly admired. Ferguson had, of course, used ancient Irish saga material and it is noticeable that it was the elements of the ghostly and the weird in this tradition to which Hearn related. His use of the phrase, "terrible beauty", later immortalised by Yeats, is an indication of his probable familiarity with the work of Standish O'Grady, who is credited by Professor

Roy Foster with having originated it. We know from his lectures that he was also familiar with the work of Burke, Congreve, Farquhar, Goldsmith, Lever, Sheridan and Swift.

As a young journalist in Cincinnati in the 187Os, his main local interest was in the music and lore of the black inhabitants of the levee quarter on the banks of the Mississippi. I believe that the traditional music he would have heard in Ireland, and the value placed on folk culture in general by the Anglo-Irish elite, may well have conditioned Hearn to accept African-American culture without the prejudice which clouded the approach of so many of his contemporaries. He embodied in himself therefore two of the fundamental impulses in Irish 19th century culture, the aristocratic and the popular. Both of these were evident in his American and West Indian work on the coloured races, generally enlightened if sometimes condescending. It was only when he got to Japan that both elements fused into a coherent, unified, vision of another culture with which he could comfortably identify.

In addition to common subject matter, Hearn shared some fundamental intellectual and philosophical influences with his Irish contemporaries. Both Hearn and Shaw went through youthful periods of anarchism before converting to one of the grand, all-encompassing, evolutionary philosophical structures of the time. Together with Wilde, both were profoundly influenced by the philosophy of Herbert Spencer who, if largely forgotten nowadays, nevertheless wielded enormous influence on intellectuals both in the West and the East around the end of the 19th century. All three were concerned with socialism, albeit it different ways: Hearn and Wilde as critics, while Shaw adhered to Fabianism. Indeed, Hearn was deeply concerned with political issues all his life, as evidenced by his private correspondence and his newspaper editorials, including those in the *Kobe Chronicle*. He saw Japan's wars with China and Russia in terms of a wider geo-political historical perspective. One finds evidence of a political engagement also in the work of Yeats and, currently, Seamus Heaney. Another important intellectual influence on Hearn was the work of the Irish philosopher, George Berkeley, whose core argument that the

material exists only in the subjective consciousness of the observer also interested Joyce and Beckett.

Hearn's use of language is another area where traces of Irish influence can be discerned. Lafcadio set out his approach to language in his correspondence with Basil Hall Chamberlain. He pointed out that his approach to language was entirely different to that of his English friend:

> For me words have colour, form, character; they have faces, ports, manners, eccentricities;— they have tints, tones, personalities. That they are unintelligible makes no difference at all.

On another occasion, when Chamberlain admonished Hearn over the correct use of "shall" and "will", Lafcadio responded that tone to him was everything; the word nothing. He was guided by euphony and felt

> . . . angry with conventional forms of language of which I cannot understand the real spirit . . . I am "colour-blind" to the values you assert; and I suspect that the majority of the English-speaking races - the raw people — are also blind thereunto. It is the people, after all, who make the language in the end, and in the direction of least resistance.

The fact that the technically correct use of "shall" and "will" is part of the linguistic divide between Ireland and England is, I think relevant here. So too was his rejection of Chamberlain's plea that he write with "justice and temperateness"; he was far too passionate and anarchic in his approach to language for that.

Chamberlain may, somewhat unintentionally, have penetrated to the core of their difference when he suggested that Lafcadio's linguistic waywardness could be attributed to the "Irish invasion" of the United States, a mass movement of which Lafcadio had been a part a generation before. Indeed, when Lafcadio had lived in the United States he had maintained that he "hated" English and hoped to re-shape it to serve his specific literary ends. He continued doing this to

some extent for the rest of his life. Run a modern spell-check computer programme through Hearn and you will realise by its rejections how much Hearn manipulated the language out of the rules and regulations beloved of Chamberlain.

In his anarchic, creative, individualistic use of language Hearn is clearly related to the Irish tradition, Joyce in particular. His disregard for the rules and regulations which the Victorian English raised to such a fine art is representative of the process which Joyce which bring to such a triumphant culmination in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. There are, of course, other parallels with Joyce. As a young man in New Orleans, in correspondence with a American friend on the subject of the Irish keening wail (part of the "wake" for the dead which is, of course, celebrated in the title of Joyce's last work) Lafcadio wrote of the strong similarities between the Mongolian and certain Irish faces while Joyce in *Stephen Hero* describes the Irish peasantry as "Mongolian types". In his draft autobiography, Hearn describes an outburst from a sombre young girl of strong religious bent who had taken it on herself to instruct him in morality, which is very clearly similar to the celebrated sermon on hell which Joyce would later pen in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. While Lafcadio's autobiography was never finished or published, its picture of an unwilling young intellectual being force-fed with muscular Irish Catholicism anticipates not just Joyce, but later writers such as Patrick Kavanagh, John McGahern and Colm Tóibín.

The final rubric under which I would like to consider Lafcadio's relationship with the Irish tradition is that of Orientalism. I referred earlier to the Gothic component of Maria Edgeworth's writing: it also contained elements of Orientalism as did the work of the earlier 18th century Irish writer, Frances Sheridan, whose *The History of Nourjahad* in turn has Gothic as well as Oriental aspects to it. A recent critic, Robert L. Mack, has described the character of Nourjahad as "a kind of Faustus figure" — the Faustian legend being, of course, central to the Gothic genre — stating that his "misplaced desire for immortality, too, recalls Gulliver's account of the Struldbrugs in

Swift's *Gulliver's Travels.*" It also recalls Maturin's Melmoth and the vampires of Le Fanu and Stoker. The same critic states that "*Nourjahad* possesses a lush physicality - a delight in the voluptuous descriptions of sensuous excess..." and places it in a genre of English-language fiction which is able to "present readers with a range of alternative cultural possibilities . . ."

The parallels here with Hearn's American and Japanese work are too striking to be missed. The subject-matter and language of Hearn's *Stray Leaves from Strange Literature* and *Some Chinese Ghosts*, as well as his translations from the French in his American period, possess lush physicality and delight in voluptuous descriptions of sensuous excess, and his Japanese work, above all, presents readers with alternative cultural possibilities.

Maria Edgeworth's *Murad the Unlucky* has been described by the same critic as "a corrective oriental tale", the clear implication of which "is that the spoils of colonialism . . . are the results of misguided avarice and ambition" and "exposing beneath the lush romanticism of eighteenth-century orientalism the harsh realities of life in the 'gorgeous East' . . . Edgeworth tells us that we shall have to rethink the *Arabian Nights* if we are ever to understand the East." Hearn's Japanese work, with its rejection of colonialism and its insistence that Japan and even the Occident be viewed from a Japanese perspective has therefore much the same message for the Occidental reader as his Irish literary predecessor.

In dealing with the work of Frances Sheridan and Maria Edgeworth we have come full circle, linking some of the earliest Irish literary influences with the final phase of Lafcadio's life. I should like to leave the last word to Hearn himself, writing to Yeats of his Dublin childhood towards the end of his life in Japan:

> But I hope you will not think me unsympathetic in regard to Irish matters . . . forty-five years ago, I was a horrid little boy, "with never a crack in his heart", who lived in Upper Leeson Street, Dublin . . . So I ought to love Irish Things, and do."
>
> (Embassy of Ireland)