



Reaction to Modernity and Westernization in Lafcadio Hearn's *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* and *In Ghostly Japan*

Janet Estherina

Universitas Sanata Dharma

Email: estherina.janet0624@gmail.com

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Abstract. This paper analyzed the works of Lafcadio Hearn, *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* and *In Ghostly Japan*, under the lens of Westernization and modernization of Japan at that time. Hearn was a writer who occupied a unique position in Japan. Despite his foreign origin, he, unlike the other Westerners at that time, showed a great deal of respect towards Japanese culture and even chose to live in the Japanese way. Hearn's works showed a fascination with Japanese folk tales and traditional way of life, and also concerns over modernization and Westernization. However, Hearn also believed that Japan was able to maintain its unique character in the face of Westernization. Hearn's love for the folk tales and traditional culture of Japan puts him with the folk Decadent who latch on to folk traditions in response to modernity. Both Glimpses and In Ghostly Japan showed Hearn's great interest towards traditional Japanese culture which is the characteristic of folk Decadence, although Glimpses showed a greater leaning toward Hearn's conservatism.

Keywords: *Lafcadio Hearn, modernization, Westernization*

Abstrak. Artikel ini menganalisis karya-karya Lafcadio Hearn, *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* dan *In Ghostly Japan*, melalui lensa Westernisasi dan modernisasi Jepang pada masa itu. Hearn adalah seorang penulis yang menempati posisi unik di Jepang. Meskipun berasal dari luar negeri, ia, berbeda dengan orang-orang Barat lainnya pada masa itu, menunjukkan rasa hormat yang besar terhadap budaya Jepang dan bahkan memilih untuk hidup sesuai dengan cara hidup Jepang. Karya-karya Hearn menunjukkan ketertarikan terhadap dongeng rakyat Jepang dan cara hidup tradisional, serta kekhawatiran terhadap modernisasi dan Westernisasi. Namun, Hearn juga percaya bahwa Jepang mampu mempertahankan karakter uniknya di hadapan Westernisasi. Cinta Hearn terhadap dongeng rakyat dan budaya tradisional Jepang menempatkannya dalam kelompok Decadent rakyat yang berpegang pada tradisi rakyat sebagai respons terhadap modernitas. Baik Glimpses maupun In Ghostly Japan menunjukkan minat besar Hearn terhadap budaya tradisional Jepang, yang merupakan ciri khas Decadence rakyat, meskipun Glimpses lebih condong ke arah konservatisme Hearn.

Kata kunci: *Lafcadio Hearn, modernisasi, westernisasi*

INTRODUCTION

Questions of threats faced by traditional cultures, especially those that are caused by modernity and globalization, have been the focus of many studies and articles. It has been posited that the increased connectivity between cultures, which is a characteristic of globalization, posed a threat to traditional cultures, especially as younger generations find foreign cultures to be more appealing than their traditional culture. Usually in Indonesia, the concerns are on the impact of Western culture on non-Western culture, also known as Westernization, although, in recent years some concerns have turned towards more

dominant Eastern culture, such as the recent phenomenon of *Hallyu* (Korean Wave) which led to the surge of popularity of Korean culture worldwide, including in Indonesia (Suratmi, 2024). However, the interaction between traditional culture and globalization as well as modernization tend to be more complex than a simple erosion of culture, as communities also tend to adapt their culture in response to globalization (Fauzan, 2025).

The concerns of the erosion of traditional local culture in the face of a dominant foreign culture is something that has been expressed for a long time. Such examples can be found in the works of Lafcadio Hearn, also known by his Japanese name Koizumi Yakumo. Hearn is perhaps best known for his works on Japanese folklore and culture, as exemplified by his most famous work, *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things* (1904), which primarily features Japanese ghost stories. Born in 1850 to an Irish father and a Greek mother, his name “Lafcadio” refers to the island of his birth. Young Hearn was raised by his great-aunt in Dublin and immigrated to the United States at age 19. He took up a job as a reporter in Cincinnati before moving to New Orleans, where he wrote extensively about Creole culture, and spent two years in the Martinique. Hearn eventually settled in Japan, where he worked as an English teacher, married Koizumi Setsu, the daughter of an impoverished samurai family and took a Japanese name. In his writings on Japan, Hearn showed a deep respect for the traditional culture and customs, often taking the themes of folktales and traditional beliefs. He held a disdain towards the Westernization and modernization that had swept Japan at that time.

This study looks at the works of Lafcadio Hearn, particularly *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* and *In Ghostly Japan*, within the context of Hearn’s disdain towards the encroaching Westernization and modernization in Japan at that time.

METHODS

This paper is a qualitative analysis on the works of Lafcadio Hearn. Its aim is to explore how Hearn depicted the modernization and Westernization of Meiji era Japan, particularly in contrast to the Old Japan that was his major interest. Hearn was a particularly interesting subject for this study, as his foreign roots made him an outside observer of Japanese culture, yet he also stayed for the rest of his life in Japan, taking a Japanese name and marrying a Japanese woman, and even became a Japanese citizen, although the last one was done primarily for financial reasons. However, Hearn had written all his works on Japan in English for American readers. Thus, it was difficult to categorize Hearn, who was described by Kemme (2023) as “A nomad at heart” (p. 9), as a national writer.

Hearn’s works on Japan are primarily focused on folklore and the ghostly and supernatural. He approached the different cultures he encountered with an open mind and without prejudice. He, as described by Hirakawa (1997), “did not take as an act of faith the superiority of Western Christian civilization” (p. 25). This love and appreciation of traditional Japanese culture also comes with a desire to preserve the Old Japan which he saw. Prior to his move to Japan, Hearn had found himself weary of the industrialized Western society (Kemme, 2023). Hearn thought that the modernization of Meiji era Japan would also bring with it moral degeneration, although he also saw that it is necessary for Japan to take “only what she needed materially from the West” (Murray, 1997, p. 247) and not merely imitate the West. This paper also takes into consideration Hearn’s position as a *fin-de-siecle* (end of the century in French) writer. While Hearn was rarely categorized as a *fin-de-siecle* or a Decadent writer, he did show alignment with the movement (Hughes, 1997). Hearn also had a “rapid progress from youthful radicalism to a trenchant conservatism while still a young man” (Murray, 1997, pp. 244-245). The



closeness between the *fin-de-siecle*/Decadent movement, with its association with transgression, while seemingly contradictory, was more common than it seemed. As Alex Murray noted in *Decadent Conservatism* (2023), the Decadent movement, beside embracing “the sensual experience for its own sake,” also involved “a conservative revolt against the dramatic social change of the fin-de-siecle that saw writers turn to the past, and others forms of nationalism, as a ballast against the disorientation of the modern” (p, 11).

This study analyzes two of Hearn’s works, *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* and *In Ghostly Japan*. *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*, first published in 1894, was Hearn’s first work about Japan, documenting his experience in the country, the places he saw and the customs he observed. *In Ghostly Japan*, first published in 1899, like Hearn’s other works on Japan, is a collection of essays on various aspects of Japanese culture and retelling of folk tales. Both of these works are chosen as representative of Hearn’s works and writing. *Glimpses* is chosen as it is the earliest of Hearn’s Japan works, where the themes of his latter Japan writings has started to form itself in the collection of essays on what had captivated him about the Old Japan that became his subject for later years.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Background

Hearn first arrived in Japan on April 12, 1890, 36 years after the American Commodore Matthew Perry forced Japan to end its two centuries of its exclusionist sakoku foreign policy, opening its ports to U.S. merchant ships and allowing trades, and 22 years after the fall of the Tokugawa shogunate and the Meiji restoration. Since then, Japanese culture and art has fascinated the U.S. and other Western nations, creating a demand for information about the distant, mysterious country (Kemme, 2023). Hearn himself already had an interest in Japan prior to his trip. He was exposed to Japanese art in Cincinnati and had visited the Japanese exhibit at World’s Industrial & Cotton Centennial Exposition in New Orleans multiple times. He also “had been collecting English and French translations of books by Japanese writers as well as scholarly studies of Japan by Western writers” (p. 174). Percival Lowell’s *Soul of the Far East*, in particular, deeply impressed him.

In return to the forceful opening by the U.S., Japan was faced with the threat of Western powers that could upend the country. In response, Japan underwent a political and social restructuring following the Western example and adopted Western science (Lilienfeld, 2023). The Old Japan, which Hearn took a deep interest in, was also fading by the time he arrived. But, integral to the modernization of Japan at that time is a resistance against the threat of Western imperialism. It is a matter of strengthening the country rather than passively accepting foreign influences.

In both *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* and *In Ghostly Japan*, Hearn collected Japanese folklore and traditions. Hearn’s writings reflected a deep appreciation towards the native folklore and religious customs. This is in contrast to the modernization of Japan that was happening at the time Hearn arrived. Hearn’s Old Japan, while full of ancient traditions and ghostly legends, was not, at his time, a thing that strictly belonged in the past. Alex Murray in *Decadent Conservatism* (2023) counted Hearn among the folk Decadent, a category of writers influenced by the Decadent movement who seek refuge from science and modernity in folk traditions. Hearn was, according to Murray, among the folk Decadent who “looked to regional folk cultures as part of their attempt to develop new forms of belonging and knowledge across and between cultures” (pp. 282-283). Hearn’s concern was, thus, with enchanting his writers with his depiction of the traditional

life of Old Japan, something which is fading in Japan itself and unfamiliar to the Western audience which he was writing for. In a way, Hearn was similar to the Irish poet W. B. Yeats who was also interested in folk traditions, in his case the traditions of his native Ireland.

2. Literature Review

Hearn's fixation on the fading Old Japan had led to him being seen as an obstacle to modernization and generally ignored in the Meiji era, even if he did have his admirers. However, his reputation changed after Japan's victory in the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars. Japan saw an emergence of nationalistic sentiment, and Hearn became to be regarded as Japan's benefactor and a symbol of nationalism. After Japan's devastating defeat in World War 2, Hearn came to be regarded more negatively as nationalistic sentiment faced a backlash, yet Hearn's postwar reputation would steadily be restored in the general public as a symbol of traditional Japan, in contrast to the modern Westernized postwar Japan (Askew, 2016). Hearn's reputation also underwent a depoliticization, becoming a purely cultural figure as opposed to his prewar political nationalist reputation, with the postwar backlash against political nationalism.

Outside of Japan, reception of Hearn's works was the opposite of how it was within Japan. Prior to the 1930s, Hearn was more popular outside Japan as opposed to within it, as the interest in Japanese culture of *Japonisme* and Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese war bolstered a popular positive image of the country, both a peaceful, feminine image of Old Japan in contrast to the modernized West, as exemplified by the popularity of Arthur Waley's translation of *The Tale of Genji*, and a chivalrous, gallant image of a nation shaped by the code of *Bushido*, which was credited for helping Japan win against a Western nation in the war (Askew, 2009). But in the 1930s, those positive images had been replaced by a fascist, imperialistic one as Japan embarked in a period of aggression and Hearn, with his romanticized image of Old Japan came to be seen as "enemy literature" (p. 53). The release of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1970 had led Hearn to be seen as another Orientalist who saw Japanese culture through an exoticizing lens (Starrs, 2006), yet some have contested the view and proposed that Hearn's relationship with Japanese culture is more complicated than just Orientalism. Paul Murray in *A Fantastic Journey: The Life and Literature of Lafcadio Hearn* (1993) saw him as someone who "hold up the mirror of Japanese moral superiority to his Western audience" (p. 13), while Roy Starrs in "Lafcadio Hearn as Japanese Nationalist" (2006) saw him as a romantic Herderian nationalist who developed into a modern state nationalist through his interaction with Meiji Japan. The differences between the Japanese and Western view of Hearn is something that had been noticed by the Hearn scholar Hirakawa (1997, 2007), who had attempted to rehabilitate Hearn image as a rare Westerner who was able to understand Japanese culture free from the Western Christian biases of the other Japanologists of his time.

3. Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan

Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan is a series of travel sketches of Hearn's first few years in Japan. It was published in two volumes. Some of the chapters were initially published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, although most of the material was original (Kemme, 2023). The first volume describes Hearn's impressions of the places he visited in Japan, as well as the customs of the local people, influenced by Buddhist and Shinto beliefs, which Hearn encountered during his travels. He documented the architecture of temples, worship of Buddhist and Shinto deities, as well as Japanese folktales and legends that



were related to the subjects such as stories about the 8th century monk Kobodaishi and the story of the Shinto god Susano-o and his wife Inada-hime. The second volume described Hearn's encounter with many aspects of Japanese lives, including his time as an English teacher in the fourth chapter, aptly titled "From the Diary of an English Teacher." It continued the themes of Japanese customs and rituals, such as describing traditional Japanese gardens, women's hairstyles and the Japanese funeral custom.

Hearn's first impression of Yokohama, the city in which he first landed, come across like an Orientalist rambling: "Elfish everything seems; for everything as well as everybody is small, and queer, and mysterious: the little houses under their blue roof, the little shop-fronts hung with blue, and the smiling little people in their blue costumes" (p. 8). But Hearn did not treat Japanese culture as "lesser" than Western culture. He wrote about Japanese culture with genuine wonder and admiration that permeated throughout his writings. He wrote that "everything Japanese is delicate, exquisite, admirable," (p. 13) and on the Japanese art he wrote "one coloured print by a Hokusai or Hiroshige, originally sold for less than a cent, may have more real art in it than many a Western painting valued at more than the worth of a whole Japanese street" (p. 14). It showed that Hearn regarded Japanese culture more highly than Western culture. This is further demonstrated in his description of the Japanese flower arrangement, in which he wrote: "For the Japanese do not brutally chop off flower-heads to work them up into meaningless masses of colour, as we barbarians do... At first you will not, as a Western stranger, comprehend such an exhibition at all: you are yet a savage in such matters compared with the commonest coolies about you" (p. 134). Here Hearn employed the words "barbarians" and "savages" to refer to his fellow Western foreigners as opposed to the non-Western others. Yet one might regard Hearn's praise of Japanese culture, in contrast to Western culture, as still being steeped in Orientalism, as he described the people of Izumo (in present day Shimane prefecture) as being uniquely gentle and polite: "I have not yet heard voices raised in anger, or witnessed a quarrel: never have I seen one man strike another, or a woman bullied, or a child slapped" (p. 188). He described that during his time as a teacher he "never had personal knowledge of any serious quarrel, and have never even heard of a fight among my pupils" (Hearn, 2005b, p. 73), and he also described the gentle manners in which lessons were carried: "He [the teacher] stands to his pupils in the relation of an elder brother. He never tries to impose his will upon them: he never scolds, he seldom criticizes, he scarcely ever punishes" (p. 79). Hearn's apparent fascination with the unique gentleness of Japanese people continued throughout the text. He even dedicated an entire chapter in the second volume, aptly titled "The Japanese Smile," to what he saw as the unique manner in which the Japanese people maintain a polite smile in serious matters, in contrast to Western solemnity. Hearn's description of Japanese culture in *Glimpses* is quite evidently a highly romanticized one.

Hearn even associated a lack of gentleness and degradation of morals with modernization and contact with outsiders. He wrote that he had never seen any "real roughness" in Japan, except "at the open ports, where the poorer classes seem, through contact with Europeans, to lose their natural politeness, their native morals— even their capacity for simple happiness" (2005a, p. 188). He also associated the rise of crime in the Oki islands with the advancement of transportation and commerce enabled by modern technology: "The whole trade of Western Japan has been increased by the rapid growth of steam communications with other parts of the empire; and the port of Saigo appears to have gained commercially, but to have lost morally, by the new conditions" (2005b, p. 198). He quoted a Japanese writer who had written: "civilisation, according to the interpretation of the Occident, serves only to satisfy men of large desires. It is of no benefit

to the masses, but is simply a system under which ambitions compete to accomplish their aims. . . . That the Occidental system is gravely disturbing to the order and peace of a country is seen by men who have eyes, and heard by men who have ears. The future of Japan under such a system fills us with anxiety. A system based on the principle that ethics and religion are made to serve human ambition naturally accords with the wishes of selfish individuals; and such theories as those embodied in the modern formula of liberty and equality annihilate the established relations of society, and outrage decorum and propriety" (pp. 257-258). Here Hearn, as Murray (1997) wrote: "rejected contemporary Western notions of *laissez-faire*, not from the viewpoint of socialism, which he abominated, but from the perspective of a traditionalist who believed that the collectivism of pre-capitalist societies could provide a morally superior form of existence" (p. 245).

In his impressionistic writings on the Buddhist and Shinto practices in *Glimpses*, Hearn wrote about these beliefs and practices with great wonder. He thought highly of the jovial and casual way Japanese people engage in their religious practices, in contrast to Isabella Bird and Basil Hall Chamberlain, who have little regard towards the Japanese religion, particularly Shinto (Makino, 2022). What Hearn appreciated in these practices is what both Bird and Chamberlain disdained. Bird wrote about the brief and lack of reverence of Japanese worshippers, while Chamberlain decried Shinto for its apparent lack of dogma and formalities. But Hearn interpreted these differently. There is, according to him, "nothing grim, austere, or self-repressive" about the faith of the Japanese people, far cry from the "fear" that Western religion practitioners have for their gods. Here Hearn's opposition towards Westernization manifests in him favoring the Japanese faith instead of Western faith, particularly Christianity. He once even wrote to Chamberlain in an 1893 letter: "the Japanese are better than the Christians, and Christianity only seems to corrupt their morals" (Kemme, 2023). Hearn praised Shinto for the very thing which Chamberlain looked down on. He wrote "Shinto has no philosophy, no code of ethics, no metaphysics; and yet, by its very immateriality, it can resist the invasion of Occidental religious thought as no other Orient faith can" (Hearn, 2005a, p. 165). Hearn saw the beliefs and customs of "Old Japan" as better than Western religion, as he describes in the preface that their darkness as "brightness compared with the darker side of Western existence," qualities which would force one to "doubt whether the course of our boasted Western progress is really in the direction of moral development" (Hearn, 2005, p. 4). Hearn's negative attitude towards Western religion (Christianity) was influenced by his childhood in Ireland. His great aunt, Sarah Brenane, wanted to raise him as a devout Catholic and sent him to Catholic schools in his youth. But her plan was thwarted by an encounter with a book filled with pictures of Greek gods and mythical creatures which captivated him. As Kemme (2023) wrote: "Hearn preferred these figures, which exuded beauty, health and energy, to the somber

Catholic saints depicted on the holy cards he had been given" (p. 24). Yet, despite his apparent dedication to Buddhist teachings, particularly Japanese Buddhism, Hearn "never was a fanatic follower of any religion" (Vassiliades, 2014, p. 43).

In the same preface as noted above, Hearn lamented the "Occidentalised Japan," the urban intellectual's apathy towards traditional Japanese religious belief and practices, an attitude which he saw as no different from Western agnostics. The Japanese religious practices described by Hearn thus, provided not just an alternative to the "gloomy" religion of the West, but to agnostic modernity as well. Yet despite the romanticization of Old Japan that Hearn engaged in, he did not wholly reject the rational explanations for the beliefs and rituals he witnessed, unlike many among the folk Decadents which Murray



(2023) observed. He occasionally cited Herbert Spencer, an English sociologist in his explanation of Shinto customs in the second volume. He also proposed that “early form of Shinto public worship may have been evolved out of a yet older family worship” in accordance to Fustel de Coulanges’ theory in his book *La Cite Antique* which “shown the religious public institutions among the Greeks and Romans to have been developed from the religion of the hearth” (Hearn, 2005b, p. 41). Murray himself has noted that not all Decadent writers with an interest in folklore were wholly hostile towards folklore studies or rejected the scientific approach towards folk tradition in general, such as Oscar Wilde who was interested in anthropology and comparative mythology, yet also “refused the rationalist imperative of [David] Nutt and the major folklorists of the *fin de siecle*” (Murray, 2023, p. 277). W. B. Yeats, another one whom Murray listed as a Folk Decadent, had “dedicated himself at the *fin de siecle* to collecting and documenting the beliefs of the Irish men and women he encountered” (p. 278). Yeats was well-versed in anthropology and ethnology, yet also critical in the way traditional beliefs had been reduced by academics into “relics of a lost rural past” (p. 279).

Hearn’s attitude towards Japanese religion and spirituality is exemplified by a story from the second volume. Hearn recounted an experience he had when teaching English in a middle school in Matsue. One day, one of his students told him that he was different from the former English teacher they had, because he bowed to the picture of the Emperor at the ceremony of his birthday. The student then told him that the former English teacher, a Christian clergyman, had called his students “savages” and that “there is nothing respectable except God — his God” (p. 97). Hearn responded “I think, my dear lad, that he himself was a savage—a vulgar, ignorant, savage bigot. I think it is your highest social duty to honour your Emperor, to obey his laws, and to be ready to give your blood whenever he may require it of you for the sake of Japan. I think it is your duty to respect the gods of your fathers, the religion of your country—even if you yourself cannot believe all that others believe. And I think, also, that it is your duty, for your Emperor’s sake and for your country’s sake, to resent any such wicked and vulgar language as that you have told me of, no matter by whom uttered” (pp. 97-98). Hearn seemed to have regarded Meiji Japan’s dedication towards the Emperor as particularly noble. In his farewell to his students, he told them as such: “And a symbol not only of your affection and loyalty as students to teachers, but of that other beautiful sense of duty you expressed, when so many of you wrote down for me, as your dearest wish, the desire to die for His Imperial Majesty, your Emperor. That wish is holy: it means perhaps even more than you know, or can know, until you shall have become much older and wiser. ... But however much the life of New Japan may change about you, however much your own thoughts may change with the times, never suffer that noble wish you expressed to me to pass away from your souls. Keep it burning there, clear and pure as the flame of the little lamp that glows before your household shrine” (pp. 262-263).

Yet, the modernity of New Japan still sometimes showed itself in Hearn’s Old Japan. At first, he noticed a mingle of the Old and the New Japan, such as the white telegram poles on the street, an electric bell in a teahouse, an American sewing machine shop next to a Buddhist image shop, and so on. When he was reminded to catch the train after a visit to the temple of Koshin, the God of Roads, he lamented that “Western civilization has invaded all this primitive peace, with its web of steel, with its ways of iron (Hearn, 2005a, p. 85). He also wrote about an Imperial warship that stopped by the coast of Mionoseki and caught the attention of the locals. Hearn drawn a comparison between the fearsome war machine of New Japan and the simple people of Old Japan as thus: “the magnificent horror of steel and steam and all the multiple enginery of death—

paid for by those humble millions who toil for ever knee-deep in the slime of rice-fields, yet can never afford to eat their own rice! Far cheaper must be the food they live upon; and nevertheless, merely to protect the little that they own, such nightmares must be called into existence—monstrous creations of science mathematically applied to the ends of destruction” (p. 191). The New Japan did not only show itself in technological advancement, either. When on a trip to the supposedly isolated Oki Islands, Hearn was offered Occidental (Western) cooking at his hotel, something which he found disappointing because “Having made my way into the most primitive region of all Japan, I had imagined myself far beyond the range of all modernising influences” (2005b, p. 185).

Nor did modern agnosticism be limited to the modern city people. Hearn noted that the belief in Inari in the people of Izumo is fading, not because of the efforts of Western missionaries, but because of modern schools, “where the teaching of modern science is unclogged by sectarianism or prejudice” (2005a, p. 265). He described in the second volume that his students had “a healthy tone of scepticism in regard to certain forms of popular belief” (2005b, p. 95). Yet Hearn also believed that the old way of Shinto would be able to survive the wave of modernity “For Shinto signifies character in the highest sense—courage, courtesy, honour, and above all things, loyalty” (p. 36). Hearn believed that “the Japanese admiration for Western material superiority is by no means extended to Western morals. Oriental thinkers do not commit the serious blunder of confounding mechanical with ethical progress, nor have any failed to perceive the moral weaknesses of our boasted civilisation” (p. 255).

4. In Ghostly Japan

In Ghostly Japan is a collection of Japanese folktales and accounts of Japanese customs and traditions alongside things Hearn encountered in Japan. Here, Hearn painted an image of Old Japan that is romantic, mystical and traditional, full of ghosts and supernatural happenings. The word “ghost” in the title is significant, as Hearn was “very much attracted by ghostly aspects of Japanese culture” (Hirakawa, 1997, p. 38). This image showed in the themes of the stories. Imagination and mysticism is just as present, if not even more so, than in *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*.

The theme of Buddhism, and religion in general, comes up in the first story, “Fragment,” which is the story of a Bodhisattva and his young companion climbing a mountain of skulls. Buddhist themes come up again in the seventh story, “Footprints of the Buddha,” which is, like the title implies, an account on the depictions of Buddha’s footprints in Japan, and the tenth story, “Japanese Buddhist Proverbs,” a collection of the titular proverbs. The fifth story, “Silkworms,” features a pondering on Buddhist teachings which is roused by the titular silkworms, while the eleventh story, “Suggestion,” featured a theory on Buddhist reincarnation proposed by an acquaintance of Hearn. Buddhist themes continue to permeate in other stories.

The theme of the supernatural in general is the focus of second story, “Furisode,” touches on the supernatural theme of the book with the titular furisode robe which was haunted by the unrequited love of its previous owner, the daughter of a rich merchant. Again, Buddhism shows up in the story in the prayer the young girl repeated to win the affection of the young man she fell in love with: “Namu myo ho renge kyo,” the invocation of the Nichiren sect (Hearn, 2021, p. 31). Supernatural themes would return in the sixth story, “A Passional Karma,” a retelling of the ghost story Botan Doro, about the ghost of a young girl who visited her lover at night, and “Ingwa-Banashi,” the story of a daimyo’s wife inflicting a horrible revenge on her husband’s concubine. Buddhism and a

supernatural encounter is the basis of the thirteenth story, “Story of a Tengu,” which recounts an encounter between a priest and the titular tengu, a kind of Japanese mythical creature. The third story, “Incense,” is an essay on the place of incense in Japanese culture, both secular and religious. Within it is a detailed description of the traditional incense game as well as a story about the Spirit-Recalling incense, which is said to be able to summon the vision of a dead or even living person. The ninth story, “Bits of Poetry,” is similar in that it is about the place of poetry in Japanese life. The fourth story, “A Story of Divination,” tells of an encounter with a local fortune-teller. The eighth story, “Ululation,” is unique in that it is an account of an old dog who lived in his place. The fourteenth and final story, “At Yaidzu,” is a personal account of the Bon festival at the coastal town of Yaidzu.

What ties together these stories is a fascination with the traditional and mystical. Hearn did not seek to offer any rational explanations to any of the things he observed or relay to the readers. Even in the observations of animals these fascination showed itself. In “Ululation,” Hearn offered a rather philosophical explanation for the howl of the old dog in which the story is concerned with: “But the night-howl of the white creature in my close forces me to wonder whether she does not mentally see something really terrible, — something which we vainly try to keep out of moral consciousness: the ghoulish law of life. ... Only by eating each other do beings exist!” (p. 118). Yet this observation on natural law turned into an affirmation on the superiority of Eastern religion: “Anyhow the faith of the Far East meets that problem better than the faith of the West. To the Buddhist the Cosmos is not divine at all — ... it is a ghastliness, a nightmare” (p. 120). Similarly, “Silkworms” turned an observation of silkworm farming into a meditation on the nature of heaven, both Western and Buddhist: “In a silkworm-paradise such as our mundane instincts lead us to desire, the seraph freed from the necessity of toil, and able to satisfy his every want at will, would lose his wings at last, and sink back to the condition of a grub....” (p. 67). Hearn, in his observation of the silkworms, showed that the heaven which is desired in the West is not necessarily good, for when all the needs are met the body will degenerate, thus pain is necessary.

Even in stories that are less focused on religion and spirituality, Hearn still sought to evoke the imagination of his readers. In “Bits of Poetry” he wrote about the Japanese poetic traditions. He documented poems that are, with their brevity and incompleteness, are able “to evoke an image or a mood, – to revive a sensation or an emotion” (p. 127). Hearn had let the imagination bleed into reality in some stories. In “A Passional Karma,” Hearn was so taken by the story he heard that he went to see the tombs of the characters in the story, and was disappointed when the tombs he was directed to turned out to not be the ones described in the story.

In Ghostly Japan does not show much of New Japan. Hearn did mention that the old Bon custom that was the main topic of “At Yaidzu” was, at that time, “dying rapidly” (p. 183), which pushed him to swim so he can observe the lanterns that were set adrift as part of the custom. He also observed the commercialization of the incense game in “Incense” with the full set of the game’s utensil which cost about \$50, “but the materials are of the poorest kind” (p. 51). But, unlike *Glimpses* which is a more general observation, Hearn’s observation in *In Ghostly Japan* is more focused, and Hearn’s interest, in this book at least, was in the folklore of Old Japan.

CONCLUSION

In *Glimpses*, Hearn recorded his first impressions on Japan, and his first years of living there. Here Hearn wrote down his thoughts of the Old Japan that, even then, he

realized was gradually fading. Here, Hearn had associated moral decay with Westernization, as he correlated rough character, which he saw as uncharacteristic to the Japanese people, with modernization and Westernization. Despite that, Hearn maintained a degree of optimism of Japan's future, that Japan would be able to distinguish between the material superiority of the West and its inferior moral character. He believed that Japan was able to maintain its own national character, what he called Shinto, in the future. Japanese religion had also begun to fascinate Hearn in *Glimpses*. He spent a great amount of time writing about temples and shrines, as he saw a lot of them in his time in Japan. The theme of religion, particularly Buddhism, continued in *In Ghostly Japan*, as he wrote about Japanese Buddhist practices and beliefs a lot in the book, even in stories that are seemingly unrelated at first.

Glimpses showed a stronger political bent in its association of modernity with the moral decay, and Hearn had found in Japan a traditional society which is different from the Western society that he was weary of. Hearn even wrote favorably of the worship of the Emperor and thought that the Japanese desire to die for the Emperor is a noble one. While *In Ghostly Japan* has much less to say about the New Japan, it still reflects the embrace of folklore as an alternative to modernity in its subject matters. The Hearn of *Glimpses* and *In Ghostly Japan* who seek refuge from modern Western society in the traditional culture of Japan fits nicely into the folk Decadents who embraced folklore as an alternative to modern progress that Murray (2023) described.

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