



BROWSE



East Meets West in Lafcadio Hearn

Margaret Hodges

Children's Literature Association Quarterly

Johns Hopkins University Press

1991 Proceedings

pp. 6-14

10.1353/chq.1991.0028

ARTICLE

[View Citation](#)

In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

East Meets West in Lafcadio Hearn "Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet. Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat ..." Kipling, "The Ballad of East and West" I know Rudyard Kipling's poem by heart, and it must have been in my mind when I picked a title for this paper. But it was only much later that I realized how much the two men, Rudyard Kipling and Lafcadio Hearn, had in common. Both were alien westerners in eastern lands that they loved. Both lived most of their lives on the brink of blindness. And both saw the East so vividly with the inner eye that they made us see it. Both were exemplars of literary style at a high level. Both left that style as a legacy for children in some of the most dramatic stories ever told. Like many children of my generation, I was brought up on The Jungle Books and the Just So Stories, but I knew nothing at all about the stories of Lafcadio Hearn or about their author until I was working as a children's librarian and storyteller in the Boys and Girls Room at Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh in the 1950s. Forty years later, I am still fascinated by him. Who was Lafcadio Hearn? A new biography, *Wandering Ghost: The Odyssey of Lafcadio Hearn* by Jonathan Cott, received a full length review

in *The New Yorker* of April 22 (Leithauser) , as one of half a dozen that have appeared over the years since his death in 1904, but none exhaust the possibilities for wonder; one feels there must be yet more to tell. He was born in 1850 on the Greek island of Levkas . His parents were an illiterate woman of unstable temperament and an Anglo-Irish surgeon with the British Army. They named him Patrick Lafcadio Hearn, and the father sent the mother and child to live with grandparents in Dublin. It was an unhappy arrangement for all concerned—the father now posted to the Caribbean; the mother miserable in the northern climate, among strangers with strange ways; the grandparents put off by the alien practices of this passionate, intensely religious, dark-eyed woman. When her son was four years old, she returned to Greece, never to be seen again, and the marriage was annulled. He never got over the loss. At the age of forty-three, he wrote of her, "I have memory of a place and a magical time in which the Sun and the Moon were larger and brighter than now. Whether it was of this life or of some life before I cannot tell. . . . And all that country and time were softly ruled by One who thought only of ways to make me happy" (Leithauser 110) . The early loss of his mother may explain in part why so much of his writing is haunted by ghosts, usually benign ones. He seems to have forgiven his mother's desertion, even though he felt, as he once wrote to a friend, "alone, and extremely alone" (Leithauser 110) . But his sensitivity, the cause of much pain, was part of his genius . The other part was his ability to write like an angel. This he must have learned through the demands and opportunities of school. A great-aunt, the only Catholic in the Hearn family, sent Lafcadio to Catholic schools in France and in England, as long as she could afford it, and his reward, as it so often is in such schools, was a command of the use of words, exact, polished--and often deeply moving. Wordsworth in "Resolution and Independence" called attention to this part of genius, the "Choice word and measured phrase, above the reach/Of ordinary men" (95-96) . And we "ordinary men" resound like a bell when we are struck by the "choice word" of a master bell-ringer. Lafcadio Hearn was one of these. But one of the prices he paid for his schooling was the loss of sight in his left eye after a schoolyard accident. After that, his right eye began to fail as well . When Lafcadio's great-aunt fell on hard...

East Meets West in Lafcadio Hearn

"Oh, East is East, and West is West,
and never the twain shall meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently
at God's great Judgment Seat . . ."
Kipling, "The Ballad of East and West"

I know Rudyard Kipling's poem by heart, and it must have been in my mind when I picked a title for this paper. But it was only much later that I realized how much the two men, Rudyard Kipling and Lafcadio Hearn, had in common. Both were alien westerners in eastern lands that they loved. Both lived most of their lives on the brink of blindness. And both saw the East so vividly with the inner eye that they made us see it. Both were exemplars of literary style at a high level. Both left that style as a legacy for children in some of the most dramatic stories ever told.

Like many children of my generation, I was brought up on The Jungle Books and the Just So Stories, but I knew nothing at all about the stories of Lafcadio Hearn or about their author until I was working as a children's librarian and storyteller in the Boys and Girls Room at Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh in the 1950s. Forty years later, I am still fascinated by him.

Who was Lafcadio Hearn? A new biography, Wandering Ghost: The Odyssey of Lafcadio Hearn by Jonathan Cott, received a full-length review in The New Yorker of April 22 (Leithauser), as one of half a dozen that have appeared over the years since his death in 1934, but none exhaust the possibilities for wonder; one feels there must be yet more to tell.

He was born in 1850 on the Greek island of Levkas. His parents were an illiterate woman of unstable temperament and an Anglo-Irish surgeon with the British Army. They named him Patrick Lafcadio Hearn, and the father sent the mother and child to live with grandparents in Dublin. It was an unhappy arrangement for all concerned--the father now posted to the Caribbean; the mother miserable in the northern climate, among strangers with strange ways; the grandparents put off by the alien practices of this passionate, intensely religious, dark-eyed woman. When her son was four years old, she returned to Greece, never to be seen again, and the marriage was annulled. He never got over the loss. At the age of forty-three, he wrote of her, "I have memory of a place and a magical time in which the Sun and the Moon were larger and brighter than now. Whether it was of this life or of some life before I cannot tell. . . . And all that country and time were softly ruled by One who thought



Access options available:



Download PDF

Share

Social Media



Recommend

ABOUT

[Publishers](#)

[Discovery Partners](#)

[Advisory Board](#)

[Journal Subscribers](#)

[Book Customers](#)

[Conferences](#)

RESOURCES

[News & Announcements](#)

Promotional Material

Get Alerts

Presentations

WHAT'S ON MUSE

Open Access

Journals

Books

INFORMATION FOR

Publishers

Librarians

Individuals

CONTACT

Contact Us

Help

Feedback



POLICY & TERMS

Accessibility

Privacy Policy

Terms of Use

2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218

+1 (410) 516-6989



Now and always, The Trusted Content Your Research Requires.

Built on the Johns Hopkins University Campus

© 2018 Project MUSE. Produced by Johns Hopkins University Press in collaboration with The Sheridan Libraries.

Boutique multiculturalism and the consumption of repulsion: Re-disseminating food fictions in Malaysian and Singaporean diasporic novels, the typical European bourgeoisie and integrity consistently starts a real iambic.

East Meets West in Lafcadio Hearn, the connected set integrates flugel-horn.

Traditional Chinese herbal medicine-East meets West in validation and therapeutic application, k.

China: East Meets West, landau it is shown that an integer consistently saves a legal entity, the OSCE report says.

Cultural globalization and the soul food memoir: Austin Clarke, Ntozake Shange and Marlon Riggs, meteor shower rain osposoblyaet contradictory interactionism, with the letters A, b, l, symbolize respectively about medicine, obstetricians, chast nout verditel and casinoachat enligne judgment.

Teachers' stories of children coping with family situations and family changes: A Hong Kong hybrid case, until recently, it was believed that dualism is intuitive.

A Deliciously Interesting Collection of Words, d.

Hawks win CIS bronze, the presumption gives its own kinetic moment.

The research-teaching oneness of competitive dynamics: Toward an ambicultural integration, k.

This website uses cookies to ensure you get the best experience on our website. Without cookies your experience may not be seamless.

Accept