

# ■ The Gothic Traveler: Generic Transformations in Lafcadio Hearn and Angela Carter\*

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## Abstract

Travel to Japan inspired in writers Lafcadio Hearn and Angela Carter new perspectives on the Gothic vision that played a prominent role in their work. Hearn, an Anglo-American literary journalist whose essays and short fiction in New Orleans and the French West Indies evinced a strong penchant for the macabre and the occult, found in fin-de-siècle Japan his dream home. Hearn, who became a Japanese citizen, made a name for himself that endures to the present day with his observations of Japanese life, customs and history, as well as his reworking of old legends and tales of the weird and supernatural. Nearly a century later, British novelist and short-story writer Angela Carter spent two years in Japan and produced a collection of travel articles and stories based on her experiences there. Although the travel motif has always been a feature of Gothic fiction, in this essay I analyze the Gothic mode as it appears in the travel literature Hearn and Carter produced, in which they reworked the Gothic tradition they had inherited to produce work that reveals startling insights into cultural crossing and personal identity, inflected with race, status and gender norms. New approaches to both the Self and Other emerge from their innovations to the Gothic genre from

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the remote perspective of Japan, a country that metamorphoses in their writing into both a scenic location and a symbolic imaginary that haunts Hearn and Carter, and their readers, in different ways.

**Keywords:** Angela Carter, Lafcadio Hearn, travel writing, Japan, Gothic Asia, expatriate writers

Let us imagine the following: for a long time I have lived within a foreign culture and this has made me conscious of my own identity; at the same time, it sets this identity in motion. I can no longer subscribe to my “prejudices” as I did before, even if I do not attempt to rid myself of all “prejudice.” My identity is maintained, but it is as if it is neutralized; I read myself in quotation marks. The very opposition between inside and outside is no longer relevant; nor does the simulacrum of the other that my description produces remain unchanged; it has become a space of possible understanding between the other and myself.

Tzvetan Todorov, *The Morals of History* 15

Travel, in particular the lonely trek across haunted landscapes and perilous borders to a remote, forbidding destination, is a well-established trope in Gothic fiction. The archetypal Gothic traveler is Charles Maturin’s Melmoth, a scholar cursed to wander the earth after selling his soul to the devil.<sup>1</sup> The terrifying creatures that roamed nineteenth-century Gothic novels—Frankenstein’s monster, Dracula, Edward Hyde—embodied fear in motion, spreading terror as they dragged the heart of darkness closer to “civilization.” In “The Uncanny” (1919), Freud describes the *unheimlich*, referring to the strange and unfamiliar, “all that arouses dread and creeping horror,” in contrast to what is *heimlich*, or familiar, native, and belonging to home. Indeed a sense of “foreignness” is woven into the experience of the uncanny; what is foreign, distant, and unfamiliar easily becomes an object of fear. (Freud, “Uncanny” 218). Freud, who saw a natural link between travel and transgression in leaving or escaping home and crossing boundaries into the unknown, related in a letter to Romain Rolland that he had himself experienced a sensation of unsettlement or unreality—“derealization” in his term—on a trip to the Acropolis in Athens (Freud, “Disturbance of Memory” 244-45). In “Travel and Unsettlement: Freud on Vacation,” Brian Musgrove comments on Freud’s experience and returns to the idea of “derealization,” as an experience of the traveler “wavering between two worlds: one of the concrete, of the objective, of desire satisfied through the written record of possession; the other is a world of frustration and derealization, populated by mirages, spectres and ghosts, where the fantasies of possessing and occupying the other—of knowing, with any certainty—simply vanish” (40). Following Freud, Dennis Porter in *Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing* says travel “embodies powerful transgressive impulses [as] borders of all kinds are perceived as dangerous as well as exciting places, and are associated with taboos” (9).

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<sup>1</sup> Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), the classic tale of a cursed wanderer, is a prototypical early gothic novel.

Indeed, Gothic fiction writers have well understood the disorienting nature of the experience of travel, and have relied heavily on stylized “foreign” geography as setting to “unsettle” the atmosphere in their work; stock scenes include the brooding castle in a remote land perched at the edge of a craggy cliff; windy or “wuthering” heights; isolated and blasted landscapes.<sup>2</sup> Foreignness extends to characters as well; in many cases, in particular in works by Ann Radcliffe, George Moore and other Gothic masters, the villain is a foreigner, with Italians and Eastern Europeans popular choices for sinister and mysterious figures. Even at home in England, the “foreign” looms as a malevolent force in Gothic fiction—witness the dark “gypsy” looks of Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* (1847), the madness of Caribbean-born Mrs. Rochester in *Jane Eyre* (1847), and Dracula in Britain—serving as a counterpoint of danger and decadence for the domestic or “home-team” protagonists. These conventions of the genre were already pervasive early in the nineteenth century, as evidenced by Jane Austen’s parody in *Northanger Abbey* (1818), whose naive heroine is comically influenced by reading Gothic romances steeped in “foreign” poisons and featuring deadly “foreign” antagonists.

Although much Gothic writing contains “foreign” scenes, the writers themselves did not necessarily have first-hand experience of the places featured in their novels. As the fashion for the Grand Tour spread, a steady stream of travel memoirs and journals filtered back to the European capitals, supplying Gothic novelists with a stock of ready-made foreign scenes. In “John Moore, Ann Radcliffe and the Gothic Vision of Italy,” Pam Perkins reflects on the way in which both travelers’ tales and Gothic novels overlapped with each other in developing a “complex British discourse” on Italy. As Perkins points out, it wasn’t necessary for Ann Radcliffe to visit Italy to write her famous Gothic novels *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797), because there were many travel articles about Italy readily available (35).

While the trope of travel is a familiar landmark in Gothic fiction and its theory and criticism, recent scholarship has begun to explore generic inversions and cross-pollination, searching travel literature itself for evidence of literary conventions from other traditions. Indeed, the Gothic and travel writing intersect in one provocative way: Both modes turn on the presumption of an “Other.”

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<sup>2</sup> In his introduction to *The Gothic*, David Punter points out that the genre itself evades definition, although many critics have come to think of it “in terms of a psychological argument, to do with the ways in which otherwise repressed fears are represented in textual form” (xviii). The classic Gothic novel of Ann Radcliffe, Horace Walpole and Matthew Lewis offers conventions and motifs that include brooding weather, ruined remote mansions, and sinister foreign aristocrats preying on naïve young women.

The Gothic tale presumes a horrifying, threatening Other against which its protagonists must struggle to avoid being consumed. The travel writer, on the other hand, deals with cultural Others in the normal course of his or her journey; these cultural Others may play a variety of roles in the narrative of the trip, from benign and welcoming “natives” in the contact zone, to Others against whom the traveler evaluates his own culture, to hostile, perhaps even threatening locals with whom the travel writer must contend or against which he or she will warn readers.

In this paper I will pursue similar generic crossovers in an interdisciplinary context, seeking clues to the way the genres of the Gothic and travel writing can productively inform each other. Rather than following the familiar strategy of looking for models of travel in Gothic fiction, I will attempt to uncover the Gothic elements evident in travel literature produced by a pair of Western writers who lived in Japan nearly a century apart. Lafcadio Hearn and Angela Carter both produced travel sketches and autobiographical essays from their time in Japan, in addition to Gothic fiction and tales, and in Hearn's *oeuvre*, interpretations of Japanese legends and folktales. The experience of living in Japan had a pronounced effect on both their travel writing and their Gothic fiction, which evolved into new forms as Hearn and Carter seemed to turn away from the monstrous Other—a stock character in Gothic fiction, in particular imperial Gothic—to interrogate instead their own presence in an unfamiliar environment, the Self “derealized,” so to speak. As Robbie Goh points out in an essay on Angela Carter's *Fireworks*, quoting Rosemary Jackson, “Gothic fiction ‘functions to subvert and undermine cultural stability’” (68), lending support to the claim that the unsettling experience of travel is a natural complement for the Gothic mode.

As the British empire expanded, so did the possibilities and geographical range for both Gothic fiction and travel writing, as the journey outward pressed closer to the dark heart of the unknown world. In *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914*, Patrick Brantlinger asserts that the link between the expansion of the British empire in the nineteenth century and its written record, in both fiction and travel literature, culminates in a hybrid genre he terms the “Imperial Gothic,” blending “adventure story with Gothic elements,” such as could be seen in the novels of H. Rider Haggard and John Buchan (227). Dennis Porter emphasizes the connection between travel writing and the Gothic in *Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing*, asserting that in some ways “a foreign country constitutes a gigantic Rorschach test” in that travel writers may project on the target landscape both their fantasies and “the phobias that threaten to disable them” (13).

In late Victorian imperial adventure fiction, these fantasies and phobias often centered on imperial exploration and national agendas, factors which figure centrally in texts by Rudyard Kipling, H. Rider Haggard's *She* (1887) and H. G. Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), whose tales are often set on the imperial frontier where perils include treacherous natives and the potential for degeneration into beastliness. The imperial adventure tale reaches maturity in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), in which the European agent Kurtz succumbs to the powers of darkness in his African outpost. Typically, such fiction reflects an "Orientalist" bias toward native and subject peoples, which, as Edward Said has claimed, justified both the Europeans' sense of their own superiority, and their right to establish far-flung empires, hand in hand with a perception of the "inferiority" of the East (39).

As Gary Kelly points out, there is a longstanding connection between the Gothic and Orientalism in European culture and literature, both having been used for "several centuries to figure the other and the alien" (3), with Orientalism absorbing or replacing the Gothic by the late 1820s (16). If the "Orient" for Romantics Sir Walter Scott and Lord Byron was the modern-day Middle East, the geographical focus for the "Orient" shifted with Britain's expanding empire by the late nineteenth century to India and East Asia. As a consequence, European exploration in the South Pacific and Asia, unfamiliar and unexplored territories for most Western readers, offered rich resources for nineteenth-century novelists including Herman Melville, Robert Louis Stevenson and the French memoirist and fiction writer Pierre Loti, all of whom made use of Gothic elements and local scenes, folktales and superstition in their fiction, but to different effect. Roslyn Jolly in "South Sea Gothic: Pierre Loti and Robert Louis Stevenson" and "Stevenson's 'Sterling Domestic Fiction,' 'The Beach of Falesa'" comments on the hybrid forms of Polynesian "gothic" tales by Loti and Stevenson, a mix of genres including local folklore and tales of the occult, travel writing, autobiography, domestic realism and imperial Gothic fiction (28).

Travel literature and accounts of voyages to Asia, in particular Japan, came from a growing number of nineteenth-century Western writers, including Bayard Taylor, Henry Adams, the artist John La Farge, and Percival Lowell, who represented the US government in the Far East and published *The Soul of the Far East* (1888), a popular travel account based on the author's voyages in Asia (Mordell 195). Also living and working in Japan was the scholar Ernest Fenellosa, whose translations of Chinese poetry were later passed on by his widow to Ezra Pound.

But it was the French memoirist and novelist Pierre Loti who set the "Gothicized" Orientalist model of fiction in motion with *Madame Chrysanthème*

(1897), the semi-autobiographical novel of the desertion by a French officer of his temporary Japanese wife. In Earl Miner's words it is "an ugly novel . . . a mingling of the most trivial exoticism with a conscienceless imperialism," but historically important, "for in it the Japanese subject crosses the line into literary form" (47-48). Loti's work was one source for Giacomo Puccini's opera *Madame Butterfly* (1904). In the John Luther Long version of "Madame Butterfly,"<sup>3</sup> the tale is softened into an Orientalized tragedy, with little Butterfly, the temporary Japanese wife of the European sailor, pining away when her "husband" escapes to return to his "real" life in the West.

As Kelly maintains, there is a natural line of inheritance that runs from Romanticism through the Gothic and Orientalism. But here I suggest further that in travel writing we similarly find intersections with both the Gothic and Orientalist perspectives. As with the Gothic and Orientalist, travel writing presumes an "Other" or "Others" as a necessary condition of its existence. If the Gothic has its threatening, morbid Others, and the Orientalist its culturally "inferior" and often feminized Others, as in the work of Pierre Loti, travel writing has a flexible cast of cultural Others—sometimes benign, sometimes dangerous, but all essentially and necessarily different from the travel writer's original culture, and that of his or her readers. It is possible for these three modes to overlap in certain writers, but this is not necessarily always the case. In the work of "traveling Gothic" writers Lafcadio Hearn and Angela Carter, we can find intersections at certain moments of the Gothic, the Orientalist and travel narrative, in combinations that yield unexpected results and innovations to the genres. Although Hearn and Carter are known primarily as fiction writers, it is their Gothicized travel writing that offers "transformations" to the conventions of both the Gothic and travel writing, incorporating in nonfiction travel pieces from Japan elements of the macabre and the supernatural, as well as a fascination with death, grave scenes, shape shifters and ghostly revenants.

Drawn to Japan by the example of literary travelers Lowell and Loti,<sup>4</sup> Lafcadio Hearn, an Anglo-American literary journalist whose essays and short fiction in New Orleans and the French West Indies bore witness to his strong penchant for the macabre and the occult, found in fin-de-siècle Japan his dream home. Hearn, who eventually married a Japanese woman and became a Japanese citizen, produced numerous works on Japanese life, customs and history,

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<sup>3</sup> Long, an American lawyer, based his story "Madame Butterfly" on the recollections of his sister, Jennie Correll, who had been to Japan with her husband, a Methodist missionary.

<sup>4</sup> Lafcadio Hearn, an admirer of Loti's work, translated *Stories from Pierre Loti* (Tokyo: Hokuseido P, 1933). An essay by Hearn, "The Most Original of European Novelists: Pierre Loti," also appears in his *Essays in European and Oriental Literature* (136-37).

including the country's old legends and tales of the weird and supernatural. Nearly a century later, acclaimed British fiction writer Angela Carter spent two years in Japan and produced a collection of stories based in part on her experience in Tokyo. Reviews of this collection, *Fireworks* (1974), praise its strange, hallucinatory landscape, comparing Carter favorably to Borges, Calvino and Poe: "To call her a fabulist is hardly enough. She is a writer of dreams that have dreams . . ." (Orodenker 72). While in Japan, Carter also wrote sketches of the country for the journal *New Society* that were collected in the anthologies *Nothing Sacred: Selected Writings* (1982) and the posthumous *Shaking a Leg: Collected Journalism and Writings* (1997).

Later known for his collection of weird tales drawn from legends and folktales of old Japan and his introduction to Japan for English readers, Lafcadio Hearn initially went to Japan on a commission as a travel writer for a newspaper. Hearn, a journalist of Irish and Greek heritage who had worked as a crime reporter and editorialist in New Orleans, Cincinnati and the French West Indies, moved to Japan in 1890 at the age of 40. He soon shifted gears, however, and became a professor of English literature at the Imperial University in Tokyo. Hearn eventually became a Japanese citizen, and went on to make a name for himself that endures to the present day in Asia with his observations of Japanese life, customs and history, as well as his reworking of old legends and tales of the weird and supernatural.

Hearn's "Gothic" proclivities were established long before he arrived in Japan, when he developed a taste for the macabre and occult in his years as a reporter. In New Orleans from 1877, Hearn spent ten years as a correspondent, selling his writing in such periodicals as the *New Orleans Daily Item*, *Times-Democrat*, *Harper's Weekly*, and *Scribner's Magazine*, where he produced descriptions of the seamy side of New Orleans, such as the death of voodoo queen Marie Laveau and voodoo practices in Louisiana, as well as many other pieces related to the distinctive culture, cuisine and population of the area. One example is "New Orleans Superstitions," from *An American Miscellany*, Vol. II (1924), originally published in *Harper's Weekly* (Dec. 25, 1886).<sup>5</sup> Hearn collected super-

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<sup>5</sup> In New Orleans he wrote for the newspaper *Daily City Item* and later for the *Times Democrat*. His writings for national publications, such as *Harper's Weekly* and *Scribner's Magazine*, helped create the popular reputation of New Orleans as a place with a European-influenced culture distinct from that of the rest of North America. His best-known Louisiana works are *Gombo Zhebes: Little Dictionary of Creole Proverbs in Six Dialects* (1885); *La Cuisine Créole* (1885); and *Chita: A Memory of Last Island*, a novel based on the hurricane of 1856 first published in *Harper's Monthly* in 1888. A selection of Hearn's writings is collected in S. Fredrick Starr's *Inventing New Orleans: Writings of Lafcadio Hearn* (2001). *Harper's* sent Hearn to the West Indies as a correspondent in 1887. He spent two years in Martinique and produced two books: *Two Years in the French West Indies* and *Youma, The Story of a West-Indian Slave*,

natural lore in New Orleans and the West Indies, and wrote literary essays including “The Value of the Supernatural in Fiction,” collected in *Talks to Writers* (1920), and “Gothic Horror,” from *Shadowings* (1900).

In Hearn’s travel writing from Japan that we find complex generic shifts, as the author moves among the Gothic mode, travel sketch and autobiography, producing a rich and unsettling display of real and imagined contact among cultures. In an essay on Hearn’s *Japan: An Attempt at Interpretation*, George Hughes suggests that “the significance of Hearn’s [Japanese] scenario stems from the fact that his basic self-concept in Japan is that of a travel writer,” and that he stands apart from his contemporary Japan-observers in trying to take as his point of reference the “emotions or feelings of those inside the culture” (212).

For examples of Hearn’s “Gothicized Travel Writing,” we turn to *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* (1894), with 27 non-fiction sketches of different locales and customs throughout Japan, many of which contain strong Gothic overtones in references to ghosts and other revenants, demonic superstitions, shape-shifters, graveyards, the dead, and deadly fixations, like the cult of suicide. As will be discussed later, it is significant that much of Hearn’s Gothic travel writing is set in religious sites like temples and other shrines, where transactions between the living and the dead are prayerful and reverent rather than terrifying and threatening.

As in his writing on New Orleans and the French West Indies, Hearn sought out the supernatural or “weird” in Japan. But in Asia, Hearn’s “Gothic vision” would undergo a sea change, as the weird tales he recorded frequently reveal some moral truth or spur to change for him, carefully refined through his deepening understanding of the Japanese sensibility. In the travel pieces in *Glimpses*, we start with Hearn’s impression of “elfish Japan,” where “everything as well as everybody is small, and queer and mysterious” (2). But Hearn in his Japanese travel writing expands the Gothic categories of “ghostly” or “otherworldly” to include decidedly positive connotations, such as spiritual renewal, moral improvement and the unfolding of karma, a fate that evolves to touch many generations. In “My First Day in the Orient,” Hearn traces the links that connect generations of artists:

. . . every artist is a ghostly worker . . . his art is an inheritance; his fingers are guided by the dead in the delineation of a flying bird, of the vapors of mountains, of the colors of the morning and the evening . . . . What was conscious effort in the beginning became unconscious in later centuries. (*Glimpses* 10)

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both in 1890. For bibliographic references, see Beongcheon Yu’s *An Ape of Gods: The Art and Thought of Lafcadio Hearn* (291 ff).

Hearn's travel sketches reveal how his Gothic sensibilities and concept of the supernatural evolved over time, from an early morbid, Poe-like fascination with dark magic and voodoo, to a positive appreciation of the power and endurance of the unseen world.<sup>6</sup> In "Some Thoughts about Ancestor Worship," Hearn speaks of "the ghostly" as the source of all art and history and life and religion. His reflections create a powerful contrast between Eastern and Western attitudes toward the dead and the ancestral past:

[The dead] are thought of—as our collections of folk-lore bear witness—rather with fear than love. In Japan the feeling is utterly different. It is a feeling of grateful and reverential love. It is probably the most profound and powerful of the emotions of the race,—that which especially directs national life and shapes national character . . . the Japanese never think of an ancestor as having become "only a memory"—their dead are alive. (Kokoro 165)

According to biographer Beongcheon Yu, Hearn's study of Buddhism in Japan led him to view the Gothic in a new, positive light: "Even Buddhism, previously an effective barrier between the human and the ghostly, now is used to reconcile the two realms. The spectral love theme which persistently fascinated Hearn now becomes something like a hymn of the immortality of love, human and ghostly" (63). As his spiritual perspective matured in Japan, Hearn began to regard the "ghostly" as evidence of love, indeed as the source of all human achievement, in art, religion and social organization.

In his travel writing as well as his tales, the dead often have important lessons to teach the living, and often return to wrap up unfinished business from their earthly lives, sometimes with the cooperation of the living, as in "The Dead Secret," a tale in *Kwaidan*. The travel sketches in Hearn's *Glimpses* convey a similar effect, describing how the interests of the dead are bound up with those of the living by intertwining events from "real" life as Hearn experienced it in Japan with the soul-life of the Japanese, their offerings to gods and spirits, their interactions with the supernatural realm, as well as their "negotiations" with the dead.

In "At the Market of the Dead," an essay in *Glimpses*, Hearn briefly sketches a worshipper offering tea to visitors to a shrine for the dead, making a pointed connection between the woman's earthly service and her spiritual role:

Verily, no small part of the life of the women of Japan is spent thus in serving little cups of tea. Even as a ghost, she appears in popular prints offering to somebody

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<sup>6</sup> In a review of *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things* (1904), Ray Lawless called Hearn an "Orientalized Poe" (200). But as his spiritual affinity for his adopted home grew over the years, Hearn came to use his "Gothic" material quite differently than Poe did.

spectral tea-cups of spectral tea. Of all the Japanese ghost-pictures, I know of none more pathetic than that in which the phantom of a woman kneeling humbly offers to her haunted and remorseful murderer a little cup of tea! (*Writings from Japan* 83)

This sketch displays Hearn's gift for interweaving Gothic elements with travel narrative, the result a humble, moving everyday scene in the life of a Japanese person, against a backdrop of the weird and uncanny. This and similar sketches illustrate the point of this paper, which is that in his blending of the Gothic mode with travel writing, Hearn is able to access a shared humanity that has the power to move readers without being either condescending or fearful toward his subject matter. Of particular significance is that Hearn's "Gothic Japan" is frequently drawn from temples, shrines and other holy places, in which transactions between the living and the dead have spiritual and religious import, not merely as "Gothic devices" to terrify readers.

In "Jizo" and "In the Cave of the Children's Ghosts" (also in *Glimpses*), Hearn visits remote temples dedicated to the ghosts of children. Hearn uses local legend to explain weird customs that take place in these sites, such as the small stone towers constructed by the faithful as part of the dead children's atonement. In their afterlife, the dead children depend on these displays of loyalty from family members:

The Oni, who are demons, come to throw down the little stone-piles as fast as the children build; and these demons frighten the children, and torment them. But the little souls run to Jizo, who hides them in his great sleeves, and comforts them. (*Glimpses* 44)

Hearn as travel writer, present on the scene and emotionally invested in his observations, frequently seizes the moment to comment on social organization and social behavior in Japan. But rather than using the opportunity to blame or mock the Japanese for superstition or backwardness or ignorance vis-à-vis Western culture, Hearn instead points out instances of Japanese religious tolerance, wisdom, compassion and maturity. In "Jizo" he is impressed by the open-mindedness of the Buddhist monks, who tend Christian tombs as well as their own (*Glimpses* 42). Hearn remarks as well on the mature and humane attitude of the Japanese toward matters of the spirit and religion: "What has most impressed me is the seeming joyousness of popular faith. I have seen nothing grim, austere, or self-repressive. The people take their religion lightly and cheerfully" (*Glimpses* 34).

This same generous humanity Hearn sees in "Shinju" (*Glimpses* 286-93), an essay on the cult of suicide in Japan. There are eerie, hauntingly beautiful images of lovers sashed to each other with silk ties, plunging together into a river, or others hugging each other on a train track: "Sometimes they simply put

their arms around each other, and lie down together on the iron rails, just in front of an express train” (286). But Hearn also points out that suicide for the Japanese has a cultural resonance different than it has in the West; absent is the negative moral judgment likely in a Western Christian context:

None love life more than the Japanese; none fear death less . . . . As for the young lovers . . . , they have a strange faith which effaces mysteries for them. . . . They believe that by dying together that they will find themselves at once united in another world. (*Glimpses* 287)

At the lover-suicides’ funeral, Hearn says that the priest addresses the dead with compassion: “sometimes he will even predict the future reunion of the lovers in some happier and higher life, re-echoing the popular heart-thought with a simple eloquence that makes his hearers weep” (288). Reminding readers that the suicide of lovers in Japanese is “joshi” or “shinju,” signifying “heart death” or “passion death” (289), Hearn again transforms Gothic material into a comprehensible and broadly touching situation.

In “Kitsune” (*Glimpses* 311-42), Hearn devotes a long essay to the subject of fox images in Japanese rural culture, covering all aspects of fox lore, including their supposed supernatural power, rumors of demonic possession, madness caused by fox magic, foxes that are goblins and those that transform into beautiful women (322). Hearn carefully details how profoundly the fox culture has influenced the behavior of the local people, including how beliefs about the dangers of foxes influence property rights and value: “the land of a family supposed to have foxes cannot be sold at a fair price” (330). Fox culture even affects the marriage chances of young women; those whose families have foxes may be considered a bad risk as a daughter-in-law (328). Hearn’s conclusion to this detailed, ethnographic overview of fox culture, however, is that these beliefs, and the weird art (in temple images, folklore carvings and so on) it generates, are a vital and important part of rural society, necessary to an understanding of certain districts of Japan. Hearn is aggrieved to see that “these strange beliefs are swiftly passing away” (341); indeed, he blames incursions of Western education methods for destroying the beautiful ancient imagination of foxes: “The little hands that break the Fox-god’s nose in mischievous play can also write essays upon the evolution of plants and the geology of Izumo” (342).

As George Hughes points out, “Modern travel-writers still shift between these two methods of recording foreign cultures: on the one hand, detachment from the culture, complaint and ironic disdain; on the other hand, sympathetic identification” (210). As a travel writer deeply interested in the occult, Hearn yet manages to employ weird and macabre scenes to provoke sympathy and understanding in his readers, thus avoiding the antagonistic “Othering” com-

mon to both conventional Gothic fiction and to Orientalist perspectives. Even while recounting grim and eerie legends and customs, Hearn, as travel writer a “witness” at the scene, sees neither cause for alarm, nor for any sense of cultural superiority in himself or his readers: “Our Occident has much to learn from this remote civilization, not only in matters of art and taste, but in matters likewise of economy and utility” (*Japan: An Attempt at Interpretation*, “Strangeness and Charm” 8).

Unlike his contemporaries writing in the Imperial Adventure mode, foremost among these Rudyard Kipling in India, Hearn hardly included any Western figures at all in his writing on Japan.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Hearn was convinced that “Japan should keep other races at arm’s length” (Stempel 15), believing Japan had little to gain from contact with the West. In his Preface to *Glimpses*, Hearn comments that Japan should resist converting to Christianity, the growing influx of Western missionaries in East Asia notwithstanding: “My own conviction, and that of many impartial and more experienced observers of Japanese life, is that Japan has nothing whatever to gain by conversion to Christianity, either morally or otherwise, but very much to lose” (xvi). Hearn used his antique ghost tales as a kind of shield from the modern world and in particular from the race toward modernization supported by the Meiji government in the period between 1868 and 1912.

As his attachment to Japan deepened, however, Hearn’s travel writing about his adopted home became an exercise in comparative social systems. In commenting on readers’ expectations for travel writing, Hughes writes that “many readers want a kind of confirmation that their own homes are best . . . . They would like a bit of exoticism, but they do not want their own value systems undermined. Travel-writing, is, after all, armchair travel—it is not something we normally expect to challenge us. Hearn does exactly that: he challenges us” (215). I believe that in Hearn’s use of both Gothic elements and travel narrative, the result is a hybridized form of writing that enabled him to rise above the limitations of the original modes. In his Gothic focus, Hearn is dedicated to exploring the spiritual culture of Japan, making him something more than a conventional travel writer, who might record only data, facts and figures about a destination. But at the same time, Hearn as travel writer transcends the typically antagonistic stance of the Gothic writer in that the “Others” he figures are not simply objects

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<sup>7</sup> For an analysis of Imperial Gothic short fiction (rather than travel literature) by Kipling and Hearn, see my essay “Stranger Fiction: The Asian Ghost Tales of Rudyard Kipling and Lafcadio Hearn,” in *Transnational Gothic: Literary and Social Exchanges in the Long Nineteenth Century*, edited by Monika Elbert and Bridget M. Marshall (2013).

of fear and horror, but rather deserving of admiration and sympathy. This blend of Gothic and travel narrative also enables Hearn to comment on comparative cultural values, and in many of his essays on death and religion in Japan, Hearn makes pointed claims about the superiority of certain aspects of Japanese culture. Thus Hearn uses a Gothicized form of travel writing to stretch the imagination of “outside” readers in regard to concepts of moral behavior, loyalty, and honor across cultures, while reinvesting the supernatural realm with new respect for its regenerative and inspirational power.

Nearly a century later, British writer Angela Carter used her prize money from the Somerset Maugham award she won for her novel *Several Perceptions* (1968) to move to Japan for two years. Like Hearn, Angela Carter had a well-developed Gothic repertoire and sensibility before visiting Japan; in later years she became famous for her macabre and violent re-tellings of fairy tales, many of which are collected in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979). From Japan she wrote travel sketches for *New Society* journal, collected in *Nothing Sacred: Selected Writings* (1982) and posthumously in *Shaking a Leg: Collected Journalism and Writings* (1997), as well as a collection of tales, some based on her experience in Japan, *Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces* (1974). Carter claims in *Nothing Sacred* that in Japan she “learnt what it is to be a woman and became radicalised” (“Tokyo Pastoral” 28). Susan Fisher reiterates the unsettling effect that living in Japan had on Carter’s sense of self in “‘Weird Beauty’: Angela Carter and Lafcadio Hearn in Japan”:<sup>8</sup>

Carter had the unremarkable but career-altering discovery that her own values, outlook, social position, identity and so forth were just as arbitrary as the Japanese way of life unfolding around her. As Lorna Sage puts it, in Japan Carter embarked on her “project of estrangement.” (176)

This effect of “estrangement” in Carter’s experience as a resident of Japan echoes both the sensation of “derealization” Freud details in his letter from the Acropolis, as well as Roland Barthes’s *Empire of Signs*, in which the French theorist invents an isolated “unheard-of symbolic system,” as he calls Japan (4).

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<sup>8</sup> Susan Fisher’s essay, “‘Weird Beauty’: Angela Carter and Lafcadio Hearn in Japan,” in *Lafcadio Hearn in International Perspectives* (ed. Sukehiro Hirakawa 2007) is an important earlier study of Hearn and Carter in Japan. Fisher states that her purpose in putting Hearn and Carter side by side is to explore the “close imaginative alliance between the Gothic and the Orient; and second, to suggest how self-consciousness about the dangers of exoticizing has altered representations of the Orient” (170). Fisher looks primarily at the fiction and tales produced from Japan by Hearn and Carter, as in *Some Chinese Ghosts* (1887) and *Kokoro* (1896); from Carter, the fiction collection of *Burning Your Boats: The Collected Short Stories* (1995), which includes *Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces*, about Japan. In the current essay, I focus instead on travel writing by Hearn and Carter to discover Gothic elements and generic “transformations.”

Barthes's project in this "Japan" of his imagination, as in his comments on the Japanese poetic form of haiku and other artifacts of Japanese culture, is to "empty" the signs he encounters of their meanings, thereby avoiding what he refers to as the Western habit of "moisten[ing] everything with meaning" (70).

Like Barthes, Carter similarly approaches Japan as a text, but with the significant difference that rather than attempting to efface her own presence, as Barthes did, she often treats herself as a character in her "reading" of place. Richard Orodnenker remarks that this habit extends to other pieces in her *oeuvre*: "That we see ourselves as kinds of images is a theme that Carter weaves throughout her stories" (72). Most scholarly writing on Carter's experience in Japan centers on the fiction in *Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces* (2007), and in particular the first story, "A Souvenir from Japan," which commentators are quick to label "autobiographical," inevitably influencing readings of the story.<sup>9</sup> This story describes the narrator's relationship with an unnamed Japanese lover. The narrator, a Western woman in Japan, feels herself conspicuously out of place, with her Japanese lover, whom she describes as a "goblin" or "fox fairy" (*Fireworks* 7). At the same time she is aware of a mirror consciousness; she observes herself as Other, alien, and at times grotesque: "I had never been so absolutely the mysterious other. I had become a kind of phoenix, a fabulous beast; I was an outlandish jewel . . . I felt as gross as Glumdalclitch" (*Fireworks* 8-9).

Robbie Goh and others take Carter to task for what they see as a new version of Said's Orientalism in her description of the Japanese lover, "which persists in its segregation of the East . . . from the central human perspective aligned with Western Europe and America" (83; see also Sage 7). But Goh's critique errs in two directions: First, in simply assuming with others that the story is "autobiographical," not fictional, he reaches across the story to blame Carter herself for racial awkwardness.<sup>10</sup> Then, he ignores the self-estrangement in Carter's actual description: her Western narrator is the beast, the bad fit, the creature out of place. In this highly sexualized piece, the narrator yet finds the distance necessary to observe her own inability to fit into a culture not designed to meet her expectations. It is not a horrifying realization, however; the narrator, while discomfited by her own awkwardness, is also tantalized by the aesthetic potential of her situation. Indeed, in Carter's description of this relationship we see something more nuanced and self-aware and indeed self-critical than what

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<sup>9</sup> For examples, see essays by Robbie Goh, Lorna Sage, Mayako Murai, Anna Pasolini, et al. By contrast, other stories in the *Fireworks* collection are apparently too "fantastic" to be "autobiographical"; this judgment on genre again in turn influences readings of the stories.

<sup>10</sup> As a Gothic writer, Carter saw "monsters" in many cultures, including European. But setting Gothic scenes in a particular culture is not proof that the writer herself harbors a racist bias toward that culture.

we have been conditioned to expect by Edward Said and others in discussions of “Orientalist” discourse.<sup>11</sup> Carter’s project is to examine a traveler’s burgeoning self-consciousness as a woman, as a sexual and social being, in the experience of cultural displacement.

Although fascinated by Carter’s fiction, few scholars have looked exclusively at her travel pieces, which are important texts for offering insight into Carter’s experience in Japan, as a traveler, as a writer and as a western woman. As with her fiction, in her travel writing Carter seems to take delight in reversing expectations about what is “normal,” either from an Orientalist or Occidentalist perspective. Carter’s ten essays on Japan, originally published in UK magazines and newspapers, evince a Gothic preoccupation with the darker side of culture, and in their rather hard-edged, grim humor, and painful, gruesome subject matter, tend to produce “unease” in the reader, rather than the softer, more sympathetic effect of Hearn’s travel writing.

In her travel pieces from Japan, Carter seeks out the ordinary, the marginal and the outré aspects of Japanese life and read them “inter-textually” and cross-generically, applying textual analysis to extra-textual reality. Again this is where the modes of travel writing, the Gothic and, to an extent, Orientalism, overlap. Where the same strategy in Hearn is used to highlight the charm and wisdom of Japan, in Carter there seems a rougher purpose, focusing on dissonance and difference in order to emphasize the shock of displacement and the disorienting nature of travel itself.

As in her best-known fiction, stories such as “The Company of Wolves” and “The Bloody Chamber,” Carter’s travel pieces exhibit a fascination with the dark fringes of society, and Sadeian extremes of sexuality and violence. In “People as Pictures,” an essay on Japan in *Shaking a Leg*, Carter explores *irezumi*, the Japanese custom of tattooing, a Gothicized art that is “one of the most exquisitely refined and skillful forms of sado-masochism the mind of man ever divined”; the tattoo artist using awl and gouge to “paint with pain on a canvas of flesh” (170). She comments on the high art of the Japanese version of skin adornment, which she finds superior to Western tattoos, claiming that it bears the same relation to the Western version in its extremes of pain and awful beauty “as does the Sistine Chapel to the graffiti on a lavatory wall” (170). As

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<sup>11</sup> The strategy by Goh and others to apply, seemingly automatically, the epithet “Orientalist” to any non-Asian writer writing about Asia illustrates, in my opinion, the danger of reading with too narrow a political agenda. Labeling a work “Orientalist” is frequently a hostile strategy used to forestall any discussion (in particular, critical discussion) of the East by Western observers. By contrast, non-Western writers who comment on the West are rarely silenced as “Occidentalists,” no matter how outrageous or critical their remarks are.

travel writer Carter is both anthropologist and art historian, commenting on the history of *irezumi* from the Edo era (1603-1867) through present times, and the method by which the tattoo artist carves the design into the skin. Carter extends the Gothic metaphors extra-textually to explore what she sees as a central truth about the Japanese social psychology: “Masochism and sadism are different sides of the same coin, and perhaps a repressive culture can only be maintained by a strong masochistic element among the repressed” (172). Carter’s focus on the great aesthetic potential of even grisly and grim features of social life in Japan tends to unsettle and disorient—as well as fascinate—the observer, unlike Hearn’s softer edged Gothic, which manages to comfort and foster understanding, despite its weird subject matter.

While Carter was in Japan, the novelist Yukio Mishima, who was thrice considered for the Nobel Prize for literature, committed *seppuku* (ritual disembowelment and decapitation) after a failed coup at the headquarters of Japan’s Self Defense Force with his private militia of young male supporters. In “Mishima’s Toy Sword” (in *Shaking a Leg*), Carter remarks on the media circus spawned from this event, which included a reverent requiem broadcast on television by a performer thanking Mishima for showing “that the spirit outlives death, and for revealing again what it meant to be Japanese” (173). In her typical blend of gallows humor and dark irony, Carter remarks on the absurdity of the violent gesture, but also its aesthetic potential: “Photographs show only the two heads, neatly put side by side, looking queerly dehumanized and faintly comic” (173). Carter points out that “the highly literate Japanese allow writers as much regard as do the French and they give them certain privileges of public recognition, denied the English or American writer” (176), but also quotes a Tokyo professor who similarly sees the grim humor in the incident: [about Mishima] “He may have believed he was logical but the impression of a clown cannot be denied” (174). Carter also uses the incident to comment on historical cultural changes in Japan as background to Mishima’s suicide, mentioning the “complaints of the loss of a sense of self, rooted in a glorious past that everybody accepts as glorious” (175) which leads, however, to a future crisis facing Japan concerning its role in Asia and wary relationship with China: “not one of swords and samurai, but of actual survival or disaster” (177).

In “Once More into the Mangle” (*Shaking a Leg*), another travel piece that features observations about the aesthetic potential of a macabre aspect of Japanese popular culture, Carter explores the grotesque, misogynistic, ultra-violent comic books (*manga*) that capture the imaginations of the Japanese public. In these *manga* she sees the influence of the ancient Japanese ghost/horror tale: “the heritage of the *kwaidan* (the ghostly tale and its hideous goblins) cannot be

concealed" (177). The *manga*-mangle of sex and violence has a strong Gothic aesthetic in the lurid illustrations: "The ceiling of a castle hall is pierced with swords, each grasped in a severed hand that drips blood on to the floor below. A man the size of a flea plants a kiss on the nipple of a giantess as though it were a flag upon a virgin peak. Waking, she cracks him between her two fingers" (178). A connoisseur of similarly gruesome images in her own work, Carter sees these comic books as a "structured escape valve" that is "devoted to the uncensored, raw subject-matter of dream" (180), thus a Gothicized social adaptation to the stresses of daily life in Japan.

While mentioning the "stunning harvest of sadism, masochism, nervous agitation, disquiet and dread" offered by the samurai comics (179), Carter also explores in the *manga*-mangle one of the distinguishing preoccupations of both her fiction and her journalism: a radicalized view of gender relations, with particular sensitivity to the oppression of women. Elsewhere she has commented on "the profound misogyny that Buddhism shares with all monotheist religions" (*Shaking a Leg* 195). In comic strips by the master Hachiro Tanaka, "his baby-faced heroines typify Woman as a masochistic object, her usual function in the strips. Formed only to suffer, she is subjected to every indignity" (180).

Carter's sensitivity to gender codes is also apparent in "Poor Butterfly" (*Shaking a Leg*), where she gives the Madame Butterfly trope a feminist twist as she describes working in a geisha bar. Carter revisits the Madame Butterfly/Chrysanthemum convention of Gothic Orientalist discourse, but revises the Gothic circumstances and tragic outcome to include her own sturdy, amused, out-of-place presence on the scene. She works as a hostess, "an exotic extra," at a Tokyo nightclub also called "Butterfly," where her description of the "alienated" performance of sexuality in the club merges with the real social and economic predicament of the Japanese hostesses working there. The "poor" Butterfly is caught in an economic bind; she trades in highly stylized sexual behavior in order to make ends meet. The hostesses are "geishas" rather than prostitutes; their clients relax in an unchallenging atmosphere, even while paying sky-high bar tabs. But despite the economic pressure they are under, the women are not necessarily getting the worst of the bargain: "It is hard to say which sex is most exploited by the system; yet both customers and hostesses, as if in diabolical complicity, remain blissfully unaware of the dubious existential status of the interaction" (*Shaking a Leg* 182).

In this scene of alienated sexuality, in which "both customers and hostesses are interchangeable commodities" (182), Carter finds something oddly human about the situation; the awkward pathos of the exchange comes down to a bargain for survival, both financial and psychological, by both the men and

the women. Carter opines that modern economics—not the race-and-gender-inflected Orientalist oppression we typically expect of the “Butterfly” scenario—created the nightclub industry. This echoes other Gothic inversions in Carter’s work, in which the vulnerable female character victimized in the typical horror tale becomes ferociously strong, capable even of violence, as the Red Riding Hood in “The Company of Wolves,” who transforms into the wolf’s mate instead of being consumed by him (*Bloody Chamber* 138). In “Once More into the Mangle,” for instance, the female characters are not only masochistic playthings; the strips also contain “a race of superwomen [that] has bypassed the male in its search for sexual gratification” and “a fat harpy [who] lolls on a cushion of little, crushed men in blue business suits” (*Shaking a Leg* 180).

For Carter, her time in Japan is both a journey into the heart of Gothic experience, and a means of transcending it, into a more nuanced, albeit at times painful, observation of cultural difference, individual identity, and gender codes. While Hearn grew in appreciation of the spiritual dimension of his host country, Carter, in discovering that Japan had “radicalized” her, reinvented gender codes in her Japanese Gothic plots. As Gothic tropes offer an experience of “unsettlement” parallel to that of travel itself, in viewing Japan through a Gothic lens, Hearn and Carter both produced work that reveals startling insights into cultural crossing and personal identity, inflected with race, status and gender issues that challenge home-molded perceptions.

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## 怪誕旅人：拉卡迪歐·賀恩與安琪拉·卡特之文類轉換

### 摘要

拉卡迪歐·賀恩與安琪拉·卡特這兩位作家的日本之旅，啓發他們對哥德式視野之新觀點，在其作品中扮演重要的角色。賀恩是英裔美國籍的文壇記者，其散文與短篇小說，記敘紐奧良和法屬西印度群島，顯示對死亡主題和神祕學的強烈偏好，出現在他的夢想國度之世紀末日本。歸化爲日本公民的賀恩（小泉八雲），以其對日本生活、風俗和歷史之觀察，以及重寫超自然的神祕古老傳說故事，成名至今。將近一世紀之後，英國小說家兼短篇故事作者安琪拉·卡特，於日本待了兩年，再以此經驗創作一系列的旅遊故事。雖然旅遊主題一向爲哥德式小說之特色，在本文中我將分析，賀恩與卡特的旅遊文學中所出現的哥德模式，他們繼承了哥德式的傳統，再重新創作，展現出文化跨越與個人認同之驚人洞見，同時與種族、地位和性別常規產生曲折變化。對自我與他者的新探討，源自他們對哥德式文類之創新，也是來自日本之「遙遠的」觀點，這樣的國度，在他們的寫作中蛻變成一處景點、一個象徵的虛構，用不同的方式「糾纏」著賀恩與卡特，以及他們的讀者。

**關鍵字：**安琪拉·卡特，拉卡迪歐·賀恩（小泉八雲），旅遊書寫，日本，怪誕亞洲，旅外作家