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メタデータ	言語: eng 出版者: 公開日: 2013-07-03 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: 難波江, 仁美, Nabae, Hitomi メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	<a href="https://kobe-cufs.repo.nii.ac.jp/records/1514">https://kobe-cufs.repo.nii.ac.jp/records/1514</a>

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# Lafcadio Hearn's "Ghostly" Narrative: Translation and Re-telling in "Yuki-Onna"

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## 1. Introduction: Hybrid Narrative

Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904) was a life-long wanderer, a child of 19<sup>th</sup> century Western imperialistic and commercial expansionism. His wandering life started on the Greek island of Leucadia where he was born in 1850 of an Irish surgeon serving for the British Army and a Greek woman. The family returned to Ireland, but his mother was sent back home when he was four, and his father left for India with his new wife when he was seven. Moreover, his guardian aunt, because of financial reasons, sent him away to America when he was nineteen. In order to discover his path in life in America, first in Cincinnati and then New Orleans, he developed his skills as a journalist and translator. Dreaming of becoming a prose-poet someday, he also wrote numerous articles on multi-cultural issues, minorities, women and immigrants, and translated French articles and stories.<sup>1</sup> Today, despite the significant amount of writing he produced during his American period, he is better known for his books on Japan that he wrote after 1890 when he went to Japan as a reporter for *Harper's Magazine*.<sup>2</sup> He was naturally called a Japanologist who wrote about old Japanese cultural practices that were quickly fading away in times of Japan's aggressive modernization. He, however, could not have written his Japanese stories had he not been a wanderer during the heyday of the British Empire, the American Gilded Age, and, not to mention, Imperial Japan. As Beongcheon Yu defines him, he is a "translator, a discoverer" (284) of old Japan.<sup>3</sup> He, a life-long traveler, naturally became a sym-

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1 Some of the references concerning Lafcadio Hearn's life includes the following: O.W. Frost's *Young Hearn* (1958), Christopher Benfey's *The Great Wave; Gilded Age Misfits, Japanese Eccentrics, and the Opening of Old Japan* (2003), Jonathan Cott's *Wandering Ghost; the Odyssey of Lafcadio Hearn* (1991), Paul Murray's *Fantastic Journey: the Life and Literature of Lafcadio Hearn* (1993), Robert Rosenstone's *Mirror in the Shrine: American Encounters with Meiji Japan* (1998), and Elizabeth Stevenson's *The Glass Lark: a Study of Lafcadio Hearn* (1999).

2 *Lafcadio Hearn: American Writings* published as one of the American Library Series in 2009 finally established Hearn as an American writer. The editor, Christopher Benfey, "is convinced that his [Hearn's] time has come" ("The Library of America Interviews Christopher Benfey about Lafcadio Hearn").

pathetic “global soul,” to use Pico Iyer’s phrase, who was able to adapt himself to the local cultural milieu.<sup>4</sup> In Japan, he acquainted himself with numerous old Japanese stories, and “re-told” them in English. Although he could not read Japanese text, he was able to experience Japanese stories directly; his Japanese wife, who helped him collect Japanese folktales and other legendary and religious narratives, became, as it were, his own private storyteller. Her recitation in a sense was already a form of “re-telling” of Japanese folktales, which further inspired him to write them down in his mother tongue as “*saiwa*, (a ‘re-told’ story).”<sup>5</sup> His “re-told” story, therefore, is a deliberately re-worked creative piece onto which he projected his life-long multi-cultural experience.

Hearn’s “re-told” Japanese folktales were also translated into Japanese and included in collections of Japanese folktales for children in the mid twentieth century. Most of his stories, of course, were based on old texts and considered as good educational tools to teach children Japanese customs and values. They served indeed as “translations” of old stories into modern Japanese, which, otherwise, might have been scattered and forgotten in the course of history. Surprisingly, many children grew up not knowing that a foreigner had originally written these stories in English, or that what they read were “translations.” The fact that Hearn could write such stories so as to evoke nostalgia in Japanese readers is worthy of note. Hearn must have been well aware of what could be lost and found in the course of translation. With that in mind, he was also able to add or erase elements in his stories to effect. His multi-cultural background also made him seek a kind of narrative that could be shared by people of different ethnic and cultural orientations. Although he had been always enchanted by the ghostly wherever he went, in Japan especially, the ghostly elements in Japanese folktales

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3 Hearn is said to have been one of the pioneers in folklore and ethnography. For example, see “Honoring a Westerner Who Preserved Japan’s Folk Tales” (*NYT*, 20 Feb. 2007), “Insight into ‘Irish-American’ who Introduced Japan to the World” (*Irish Times*, 11 Oct. 2011); also see Simon Bronner, *Lafcadio Hearn’s America: Ethnographic Sketches*, Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 2002).

4 See Pico Iyer, *The Global Soul: Jet Lag, Shopping Malls, and the Search for Home*.

5 “*Saiwa*” is defined as a literature that retells traditional folktales and legendary narratives in modern diction. The term was first used by Teiichi Hirai to describe Hearn’s literature (1964). See “*Saiwa-bungaku*,” *Koizumi Yakumo Jiten (Koizumi Yakumo Encyclopedia)*. As to Hearn’s “*saiwa-bungaku* (literature of re-telling),” Yoko Makino has an insightful study from a point of view of story-telling as an act of connecting time through literary imagination: “*Toki o Tsunagu Kotoba: Ha-n no Saiwa-bungaku (Words to Connect “Time”; Hearn’s Literature of Re-telling)*,” 2011.

served as the source for his literary imagination. He had thus formed the idea that the "ghostly" is a common human experience that bespeaks a fundamental and most ancient human experience of fear in the face of the mysteries of life and the soul; therefore, regardless of language and culture, a good narrative, Hearn believed, always renders a sense of the "ghostly," and is not a mere fantasy of a distant fanciful dreamland. It has more to do with one's everyday life experience. In the following excerpt from a lecture he gave at Tokyo University titled "The Value of the Supernatural in Fiction," he emphasizes the significance of the ghostly in the contemporary world:

[T]he mystery of the universe is now weighing upon us, becoming heavier and heavier, more and more awful, as our knowledge expands, and it is especially a ghostly mystery. All great art reminds us in some way of this universal riddle; that is why I say that all great art has something ghostly in it.

It touches something within us which relates to infinity." (132)

Science and technology make great strides in Hearn's time; as he contends, however, the presence of something invisible, unheard, and unknown, and yet felt, is even more prevailing, although humans tend to dismiss such presence as unscientific and illusionary. He further points out that "The ghostly always represents some shadow of truth. The ghost story has always happened in our dreams and reminds us of forgotten experiences, imaginative and emotional, and hence, thrills us" (133). In ghostly stories, whose main theme is to render a "thrill" of human experience that has been stored deep inside in the unconscious since time immemorial, Hearn finds possibilities of a new literary expression that is free from the particular locality of values. Although he needs to give a specific framework of time and place to his story, in his case a Japanese setting, he tailors his story, overlaying them with stories from other sources that he has known, so that he makes his stories accessible to his fellow global trotters. Hearn's ghostly stories thus tether the world as a hybrid narrative: the "thrill" is the key to opening up the realms of what is forgotten and unnoticed, connecting here and there, and now and then, as a continuous whole in his narrative.

Hearn was charmed by Japanese folktales not only because they are exotic and unique; rather, being there in the Far East at the prime of his life as a well-traveled writer, they made him believe all the more in the universality of the ghostliness of human life and soul, be it Japanese, European, Creole or Chinese. Since Japanese legendary narratives, especially folkloric ones, were still unknown

in the West, he was able to use them as a framework within which he could work out his own language into a composite transnational ghostly narrative. “Translation,” or “re-telling,” offered Hearn the means to create something new out of old material.

In 1890, just before he went to Japan, Hearn wrote an essay titled “A Ghost” for the *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*. Its narrator is a wanderer who calls himself a “civilized nomad”: he is “civilized” because he is no more an offspring of an ancient nomadic tribe, but of a nineteenth century European/American imperialistic and commercial expansion. What he is searching for is not material necessities such as food and shelter, but spiritual ones such as a home and even a homeland.

Perhaps the man who never wanders away from the place of his birth may pass all his life without knowing ghosts: but the nomad is more than likely to make their acquaintance. I refer to the civilized nomad, whose wanderings are not prompted by hope of gain, nor determined by pleasure, but simply compelled by certain necessities of his being, —the man whose inner secret nature is totally at variance with the stable conditions of a society to which he belongs only by accident. (116)

Hearn’s “civilized nomad” then sees, or unconsciously seeks, a “ghost,” or the shadow of the “soul” of other “civilized nomads.” They are all born wanderers, who do not find a home in any specific geographical place, but are a kind of people who can find home anywhere. When passing by other “civilized nomads,” they know each other’s presence because their movements, as it were, create a sympathetic code when passing. A mobile nomadic life makes them super-sensitive; they can perceive an innermost feeling, or the ghost of an ancient memory, that all humans equally inherit but have repressed, as it were, in the subconscious. That shared memory Hearn calls ghostly. The “civilized nomads,” feeling such presence echoed within themselves, create, in turn, a sense of home, portable and mobile. That is the kind of story Hearn wants to tell. A wanderer, like Hearn himself, then becomes a fit storyteller in the new nomadic age, since he is the one who can re-create home as he travels the world in search of it in fiction.

## 2. Translation as Creative Work

Hearn’s interest in ghostly stories is not the fruit of his Japanese experience

but can instead be traced back to his apprenticeship years in America. In fact, translation, creative writing and ghostly themes are all closely related in his career as a writer and journalist. In order to polish one's language, Hearn maintained that translation is the best method; moreover, translating emotional experience, such as the ghostly, would be the most challenging and creative act of writing. Not surprisingly, his first book published in 1882 was a translation of Théophile Gautier's supernatural stories (*Out of Cleopatra's Nights, and Other Fantastic Romance*).<sup>6</sup> Later in Japan, he gave a lecture about literature and writing at Tokyo University,<sup>7</sup> and encouraged students to take advantage of translation, as it would improve their language skills not only in English but also, and most importantly, in their mother tongue, Japanese. Moreover, it would be the only means by which to enrich national literature with foreign influences.<sup>8</sup> In fact, he disciplined his language by way of translating literary works during his apprentice years in America. His interest in translation sharpened his sense of language, and he became even more careful with his words because he knew what he could and could not do with them, and what could be lost or added by translation.

In his 1879 newspaper article titled "A Translation of Edgar Allan Poe," Hearn criticizes Charles Baudelaire's French translation of Poe's poems. Hearn admired Poe for his understanding of "the color-power of words" and his "knowledge of the intrinsic properties of words in their effect upon the imagination." Baudelaire's skillful "literary mosaic-work," therefore, Hearn argues, has no equivalent in French. He thus gives examples of inaccurately translated words that do not fully express the original qualities of Poe's language: "ghostly," "hideous," "shadow," and "duskily," or such familiar Poesque terms, to mention a few. Except for "hideous," as Hearn further examines, these words are etymologically of English origin, and yet even Baudelaire's "hideux" for Poe's "hideous" is not the right word, as the French word is too strong for its English cognate. He concludes that Baudelaire's translation lacks "the power of the origi-

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6 Hearn's contemporary Henry James also called Gautier an untranslatable writer. In his 1874 review of the English translation of Gautier's "Winter in Russia," he writes that Gautier's "curl and flutter of his phrase, as he unreels it in long bright-colored ribands" and "the air of spontaneity" soon disappear in the "rigid and awkward" English version. Thus, in order to enjoy the feel of Gautier's language, a good translation must be the product of the translator's "care, and taste, and imagination" (94).

7 Hearn taught at Tokyo Imperial University between 1896 and 1902.

8 See Hearn's essays collected in *Talks to Writers*, 1967.

nal fantasy” (*American Miscellany* 63-9). What is worth pointing out in Hearn’s criticism is that he especially looks at the words that convey a sense of something mysterious, invisible and uncanny. This is because he considers ghostly feelings of fear to be the human emotions that are the most ancient and thus at the core of all other emotional experiences. Poe’s words that Hearn refers to in his article are, therefore, carriers of the ancestral emotions of the English-speaking race and thus are the most difficult, or almost impossible, elements to translate. Paul Murray points out that Hearn might have felt something congenial with Poe, who was also an orphaned child of Irish blood (31). Such affinity with Poe may have made Hearn insist on the untranslatability of certain words, even by the magic hand of Baudelaire.

In the article he wrote for the *Times Democrat* in 1892, “What a Translation of Daudet could not Henry James Give Us?” Hearn voices the significance of the role of translator. He underlines the fact that different shades of meaning must be sought and “chiselled” by the translator.

... it is by no means sufficient to reproduce the general meaning of the sentence: —it is equally necessary to obtain a just equivalent for each word in regard to force, colour, and form; —and to preserve, so far as possible, the original construction of the phrase, the peculiarity of the rhetoric, the music of the style. And there is music in every master style, —a measured flow of words in every sentence . . . there are tints, sonorities, luminosities, resonances . . . The sense, form, force, sonority, colour of every word must be studied; the shape of every phrase chiseled out, the beauty of every naked sentence polished like statuary marble. (qtd. in Tinker 159)

For Hearn, therefore, the work of translation was disciplinary training in which he tried to heighten the sense of words as rich malleable media for his writing. Moreover, he challengingly highlights the idea that the translation is an equally creative and imaginative literary practice as the original. The aim of translation is to render “the general meaning of the sentence,” but words have more than just semantic and referential signification. They are also able to create suggestive and emotional effects that directly infiltrate into the senses. Hearn endeavors to produce a work that inspires both auditory and visual imagination. A translator must hear the “music” and see the “color” of words. He must “chisel” and “polish” words to draw out the potential of their “sense, form, force, sonority, colour” in order to reproduce the impression of “the original construction of the phrase, the

peculiarity of the rhetoric, the music of the style." He must become, in other words, a performing artist of words.

In 1886, Hearn "translated" Chinese stories, *Some Chinese Ghosts*. In this case, what is interesting is that he did not read or speak Chinese, but via French translations and scholarship he presumed the essence of the stories, and "translated" them. In his "Preface," he mentions names of Chinese scholars, and says that to them "the realm of Chinese story belongs by right of discovery and conquest"; Hearn, however, makes a point that "the humbler traveler who follows wonderingly after them into the vast and mysterious pleasure-grounds of Chinese fancy may surely be permitted to cull a few of the marvelous flowers there growing . . . as souvenirs of his curious voyage" (213). The "Discovery and conquest" of the materiality of text as well as the correctness of translation he lets the academics enjoy, but as to the recreation of the essential sensory experience of the source text in the target language, he privileges his own traveler's, or "civilized nomad's" imagination, which can freely cross cultural and national boundaries, and register sensuous experience anew for his contemporary readers. In Japan, like an archeologist and folklorist, he "collected" Japanese traditional narratives. For one thing, he did so because he feared that old Japan would soon disappear as a result of rapid modernization, but for another, he believed that it was he, a traveler and "civilized nomad," who could "translate," or "re-tell," stories of disappearing Japan to his English speaking readers worldwide "as souvenirs of his curious voyage."

Hearn's "re-told" old Japanese stories, therefore, may be better called appropriations rather than translations;<sup>9</sup> however, the act of translation for Hearn, as is discussed above, first served as the means of discipline to polish his literary language, and in Japan, as he collected and researched old stories, he discovered a way to work with them in the form of "re-telling" and be creative with his own literary imagination. He incorporated his multi-cultural experience into his Japanese stories and wrote hybrid ghostly narrative.

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9 As to a creative use of "appropriations," see Takayuki Tatsumi's discussion on Hearn and Kunio, Yanagita, who, possibly influenced by Hearn, became a pioneer in folklore studies in Japan. Tatsumi argues that their purpose was to "foreground the ghostly as a representation of the other," and that "the aesthetics of their resulting renderings of the intersection of two world cultures are far more attractive as subjects of critical inquiry than the imperialist or colonialist politics of their reappropriations" (84).



### 3. Hybrid Ghostly Story: a Case of “Yuki-Onna”

“Yuki-Onna” appeared in 1904 in *Kwaidan* (*Ghostly Stories*) and the stories collected there, including “The Story of Mimi-Nashi-Hoichi” and “Mujina,” are regarded as the best of Hearn’s “re-told” ghostly stories. “Yuki-Onna” arguably is not a simple Japanese old story, although it has been cherished as the most Japanese story. It, therefore, will serve as a perfect example of his craft of “re-telling” in which he overlaid multi-cultural issues of his time—cultural contacts and miscegenation.

“Yuki-Onna” is a story about a young boy’s encounter with a frightening but beautiful “Yuki-Onna,” or “Woman of the Snow.” It begins with two woodcutters, Mosaku, an old man, and Minokichi, a young boy, going into the forest to gather wood. They are met by a snowstorm and seek shelter in a ferryman’s hut for the night. There, Yuki-Onna appears. Feeling a chill on his cheek, Minokichi, the young boy, awakens, and sees Yuki-Onna blowing her cold and lethal breath at the old man. She looks at Minokichi, pities him for his youth, and spares his life on the condition that he never tells anyone about that night. A year later, he comes across a travelling young woman, O-Yuki, on his way home from the forest. She stays with him, takes care of his aging mother and bears him ten children. One snowy and stormy night, Minokichi is suddenly reminded of the fearful night of his youth, and casually tells O-Yuki about it. In fury, she immediately turns herself into Yuki-Onna. Yet, she again spares his life, but tells him to take care of their children and vanishes.

Although it has been believed that this story comes from an original Japanese story from which Hearn translated, there seems to be no trace of origin for this story. Yoko Makino makes a point that “Yuki-Onna” was Hearn’s own creation: “In his forward to *Kwaidan* (1904), Hearn says that he developed the tale from a legend which a peasant living in the district of Musashino had once told him” but that “we cannot retrieve the original legend, despite many attempts to do so” (1991, 234)<sup>10</sup> Assuming a Japanese old story, it is very likely that Hearn took the chance to experiment with his own creative work by putting together ghostly elements drawn from his past experience. “Yuki-Onna” is the eleventh story of the eighteen stories collected in the first section in *Kwaidan*. It is as if Hearn deliberately inserted his own fiction-à-la-Japanese in the midst of other stories of

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10 See also Makino (2011) for more detailed discussion on the sources of Hearn’s “re-told” stories and the nature of his narrative. Also see “Yuki-Onna” in *Koizumi Yakumo Jiten*.

Japanese origin.<sup>11</sup> Here he even perhaps regarded himself as a Japanese storyteller.

### --Border-Crossing

In order to interpret "Yuki-Onna" as Hearn's "re-told" Japanese old ghostly story, three factors will be examined: first, the theme of border-crossing; second, the use of both Western and Oriental (Chinese) supernatural feminine images in the formation of Yuki-Onna; third, the significance of the role of father left behind with his children at the end of the story.

In the story, Minokichi, a woodcutter, daily border-crosses to go into the "forest" to gather wood. Hearn's choice of the word "forest" here is apt as it etymologically means "outside woods"; the woodcutters go "outside" the realm of human world to receive a gift (wood) from the other world. The "forest" represents nature, or an unknowable world for humans, and Yuki-Onna belongs to that world. It is also the world where nature's unpredictability governs. When Mosaku and Minokichi are caught by a snowstorm, they cannot cross back over the river and have to stay on the other side and take shelter in the ferryman's hut. The hut by the river serves as a passageway and meeting place where life and death intermingle. The windowless hut with one opening, therefore, may simultaneously stand for a coffin in which the old man will go into the other world, and also a womb in which the young man will begin a new life. The old man dies because Yuki-Onna breathes a cold breath on him, but the young one lives because Yuki-Onna pities him for his youth. Minokichi accordingly does not even tell his mother about Yuki-Onna.

Minokichi is a kind of traveler, and a year later meets another on his way home: "a girl who happened to be traveling by the same road" (11:229).<sup>12</sup> He marries her, and the story eventually reveals that the girl, O-Yuki, is Yuki-Onna incarnate. Therefore, the story carries a theme of hetelogamy between a supernatural being (or animal) and a human being. In many Japanese folktales, as Hayao Kawai points out, hetelogamy happens between an animal or inhuman being incar-

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11 The next to the last story in the first section, "Stories of Strange Things" is titled "*Hi-mawari*," a story of "Robert and I" which is obviously not based on a Japanese folktale and is said to be based on his own childhood memory. Note that the title is Japanese, meaning "Sun-flower." The stories in *Kwaidan*, therefore, are drawn from different sources and make a hodge-podge garden of hybrid narratives.

12 Quotations from *The Writings of Lafcadio Hearn* will be hereafter cited with the volume number followed by pagination in parentheses.

nated into a woman and a man (human), and the story has an unhappy ending with the woman, the supernatural being, going away; on the other hand, in Western stories, a man is turned into an animal or monstrous figure and marries a woman (human) but her love breaks the spell and the animal/monster husband is turned back into a man (human), and the story has a happy ending as in “Beauty and the Beast.” Kawai says that in Japanese stories, nature is revered and feared as something beyond human control and thus a woman incarnate, symbolizing the power of nature, disappears at the end, although leaving a mingling sense of awe, beauty, and pathos behind (171-202). Hearn voices such feelings in “Yuki-Onna,” which makes the story appeal to a Japanese sensibility. Yet, one might wonder why Hearn had to make Minokichi suddenly remember the forbidden night at the end, and Yuki-Onna leave him alone with a new promise to be kept.

As he crosses the river back home, young Minokichi has to forget what he has seen. The river thus may well serve as the Lethe of Greek mythology; by crossing it, Minokichi is metaphorically reborn with an erased memory. Yet, as can be easily imagined, the story is so structured that Minokichi at the end remembers and re-discovers the repressed part of his memory—his encounter with Yuki-Onna. Regaining a lost memory, Minokichi has to face the truth: he witnesses O-Yuki turning into Yuki-Onna, and must know whom he had married. The story thus ends, envisioning a new story to be told—a story about his children who are born out of the act of his border-crossing.

#### --Formation of the Hybrid Woman-Goddess

Is Yuki-Onna a typical Japanese Snow-Woman, or a ghostly phantom? In his 1893 letter, Hearn writes about the Japanese “snow-woman,” or “Soul of Snow,” and points out that she is very different from western one: “European art does not seem to me to have ever caught the Soul of Snow as the Japanese art has—with its fantasticalities, its wizardisms. And the Japanese Fancy has its ‘Snow-woman’ too—its white spectres and goblins, which do no harm and say nothing, only frighten and make one feel cold” (16:57). As Hearn says, “the Soul of Snow” in Japanese folk tales does “no harm” and is just glimpsed on a snowy night. It is not gendered, either. In “Yuki-Onna,” however, Hearn projects a European sensibility of positing “nature” as feminine, and makes “the Soul of Snow” into a fearful and beautiful woman who casts a spell over a young boy.

Back in 1878, Hearn wrote an article, "Nightmare and Nightmare Legends," where he introduces the Scandinavian origin of the word, "Nightmare": "It would be more properly written, Night-Mara; or Mara of the Night. . . Mara was a female spectre, not hideous or fantastic of aspect, like the hollow Ell-women or witch-wives, but fascinatingly beautiful. Nevertheless she took a malevolent pleasure in visiting sleepers and tormenting them in nameless ways . . ." (27-8). The recurrence of the image of a spell-binding "female spectre" in Western stories, Hearn assumes, has been imprinted on the Western mind. When he translated in 1882 Baudelaire's poem "*Les Bienfaits de la Lune*" ("Moon's Blessings"), he also wrote an essay titled "Spring Phantoms" and summarized what the Moon Goddess "whisper[s]" to "a newborn child": "Thou shalt love all that loves me—the water that is formless and multiform, the vast green sea, the place where thou shalt never be, the woman thou shalt never know" (2: 312). The boy baby, at birth, without knowing it, is destined to love what he can never know, which as he grows up will be perceived as a ghostly sense of the unknown.<sup>13</sup>

Trying to explain the significance of the missing memories of childhood, Hearn imagined that there must be a part of memory, especially that of childhood, that is registered but forgotten. In his 1893 letter, he calls such a blurred memory from childhood "ghostly": "It seems to me these feelings of earliest childhood--so intense and yet so vague—are the weirdest in all human experience, and that for the best of reasons *they are really ghostly*." Moreover, that ghostliness is created because one's memory is loaded with that of "the vanished generations," and "The real fear of nightmare is greater than any fear possible to experience in waking moments . . . The memories themselves are indeed gone, —only the sensations of them remain, stir into life at vague moments of sleep . . ." (16:212-4). Hearn in this way was trying to work out his own theory of the unconscious. He imagined that the sensations of the past, or the most ancient emotional experience of one's ancestors' would resonate in sympathy and "stir" up one's consciousness, which would then be perceived as an uncanny ghostly feeling. Thus, such a feeling would initiate a story told from a different perspective and create a new context.

In "Yuki-Onna," although Minokichi is an eighteen-year-old lad and not a newborn child, the ferryman's hut creates an atmosphere similar to that of a

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13 As to the comparative study of "*Les Bienfaits de la Lune*" and "Yuki-Onna," see Makino (1991).

womb or cradle. The Snow-woman speaks to him, as the Moon-Goddess in Hearn's previous story does to "a newborn child":

"I intended to treat you like the other man. But I cannot help feeling some pity for you, — because you are so young . . . . You are a pretty boy, Minokichi; and I will not hurt you now. But, if you ever tell anybody—even your own mother about what you have seen this night, I shall know it; and then I will kill you . . . . Remember what I say!" (11:227).

Minokichi is half asleep and so her words are lost, although the chill of her being there before his eyes is registered in his memory unawares. The chill of a snow stormy night, therefore, brings back the same sensation he has experienced before. Facing Yuki-Onna, Minokichi only remembers the loss of his memory, and has to be awakened to his ignorance: he has forgotten the promise and he has never known his wife. At the end of the story he is only left with her words, about which he ruminates. The fearful and beautiful Yuki-Onna, moreover, reveals another aspect: she is turned into a generous and ethical figure who strongly urges Minokichi to become a good father.

Such an ethically oriented supernatural figure was not new for Hearn. In one of his translations of Chinese ghost stories, "The Legend of Tchi-Niu (Weaver Goddess)," the Goddess Tchi-Niu in the form of his wife is sent to Tong, a young boy of filial piety, to help him. When her work is done, she reveals her identity, tells him to take care of the child, and disappears.

*"Lo! my beloved, the moment has come in which I must forsake thee; for I was never of mortal born, and the Invisible may incarnate themselves for a time only. Yet I leave with thee the pledge of our love, —this fair son, who shall ever be to thee as faithful and as fond as thou thyself hast been. Know, my beloved, that I was sent to thee even by the Master of Heaven, in reward of thy filial piety, and that I must now return to the glory of His house: I AM THE GODDESS TCHI-NIU."* (94)

The greatness and beauty of the goddess make Tong humble and aware of his responsibility as a civic person and father. His awareness, or conscious objective view of himself, is for him the sign of maturity. In Hearn's story, Yuki-Onna first appears as a European "Night-Mara" but when she comes to live with Minokichi, she is a Tchi-Niu, an ideal wife who helps her husband and bears him beautiful children. Yuki-Onna, just as Tchi-Niu is, is superhuman, representing the power of nature which humans can never take control of. When Minokichi breaks his

promise to remember not to tell, she is no more a gentle wife and furiously reveals what she is:

"... I told you then that I would kill you if you ever said one word about it! ... But for those children asleep there, I would kill you this moment! And now you had better take very, very good care of them; for if ever they have reason to complain of you, I will treat you as you deserve!" (16:231)

On hearing Minokichi start telling O-Yuki about the story of a stormy night when he was eighteen, she, who has proved herself an ideal wife and mother, transforms herself into the most fearful and beautiful Yuki-Onna. The story abruptly ends here, leaving Minokichi alone, awestruck. However, she also leaves a new commandment for Minokichi to pursue: he has to "take very, very good care" of his children. Hearn in this way overlays different views of the supernatural figure to the story of Japanese "Soul of Snow" that he possibly overheard and that had nothing to do with Baudelairean beauty or Chinese filial piety. "Yuki-Onna," with the images of the spellbinding beauty of both the Western and Eastern aesthetic and ethical ideals, becomes Minokichi's wife, but without his knowing it. Although he loses her, he remembers her because his body remembers the "thrill."<sup>14</sup> Her disappearance at the end of the story, nevertheless, is not the end of the story; rather, it creates a void to be filled in with a meaning. Minokichi must prove himself as a responsible father of his, or her, children.

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14 Hearn describes a kind of sharp vibrating experience, or the "thrill," also by using a French term "frisson." He believed that one remembers the ideal ultimate beauty existing in the immemorial past through a thrilling, or ghostly, moment: see "Frisson," *Exotics and Retrospectives* (9: 185-192). Yu states that the word "frisson" is one which Hearn fondly used all his life, its meaning drawn from his own experiences with onomatopoeia rather than from his poetic association with the Gautier-Baudelairean term, "*frisson nouveau*" (*An Ape of Gods* 267). The word is also equivalent to "inspiration" for Hearn. In his letter to Chamberlain, Matsue, 1891, he mourns his passionless and eventless life in Japan and states: "Never a fine inspiration, a deep emotion, a profound joy or a profound pain--never a thrill, or, as the French say so much better than we, a frisson" (15: 34); or to Amenomori: "I get no thrill, no frisson, no sensation. I want new experiences, perhaps; and Tokyo is no place for them. . ." (qtd. in Bisland's "Introduction" 14: 139). "Frisson" is the "thrill" of emotional and sensuous experience related to tropical experience; in *Two Years in the French West Indies* (1890), for example, he uses the word: "More finely than any term in our tongue does the French word frisson express that faint shiver—as of a ghostly touch thrilling from hair to feet—which intense pleasure sometimes gives, and which is felt most often and most strongly in childhood, when the imagination is still so sensitive and so powerful that one's whole being trembles to the vibration of a fancy" (380).

### -- Fathering a Hybrid Posterity

A new assignment for Minokichi is to remember his role in mothering and childcare. The story may appear rather odd to have the mother go away and the father left with children. It is not that Hearn slighted the role of “mother”: rather, “mother” was the most spellbinding presence for him because he himself had no clear memory of his own Greek mother. Her lullaby and smile remained a lost memory. She, like Yuki-Onna, suddenly disappeared, and he, a hybrid child, was left behind, while his father left for India with a new wife without fulfilling his responsibility to raise and take care of him. It is possible to read such biographical elements as being projected into the making of “Yuki-Onna.” Yet, the story does not end in a nostalgic tone; rather, the story is open-ended, anticipating Minokichi to begin his stories for his fellow travelers and “civilized nomads.” His new stories would be born out of his own experience-heterogametic marriage, hybrid children, and cultural and literary jumbles.

Minokichi’s awakening moment, therefore, becomes also the moment for Minokichi to start telling his own story of the forgotten past. The chilly “thrill” of the snow stormy night makes him unawares recall the snow stormy night of his past, and that sensation prompts him to speak: “To see you sewing there, with the light on your face, makes me think of a strange thing that happened when I was a lad of eighteen. I then saw somebody as beautiful and white as you are now —indeed, she was very like you” (16:230). The “thrill” shakes up his dormant memory. Memory speaks, as it were, making him a storyteller. It is as if his unconscious takes over and, like a dream, unrolls the erased past memory before his eyes. He, though unconsciously, breaks his promise. Remembrance of his unconscious memory, however, releases him from Yuki-Onna’s spell and her managing power over his life. He is left with her (and his) children. Yuki-Onna once again spares his life, but this time commands him to, not to forget, but to remember: he has to take “very, very good care” of his children who are born out of their parents’ act of border-crossing. The responsibility of the father here projected includes his role of a storyteller; he has to make a story for his children (none of his ten children are given names) so that they will know who they are and where they are from.

### 4. “Composite Photograph” and “Re-told” Story-telling

Hearn’s ghostly narrative challenges one’s modern consciousness, whether it

is of a Japanese or Western sensibility, by evoking a lost ghost, or a disinherited and denied past. And his wanderers, or "civilized nomads," are ghost finders who are destined to become storytellers for their future children. Home for them is not a geographical place to which they can return, but an imaginary home, which they can relate to and re-create in the form of a story. As discussed in this paper, Hearn's ghostly stories quicken, by way of the "thrill," one's unconscious, and urge one to make one's own story. Sociologist Avery F. Gordon theorizes on the ghostly forces that control our social life in *Ghostly Matters*. She writes:

To be haunted in the name of a will to heal is to allow the ghost to help you imagine what was lost that never even existed, really. That is its utopian grace: to encourage a steely sorrow laced with delight for what we lost that we never had; to long for the insight of that moment in which we recognize, as in Benjamin's profane illumination, that it could have been and can be otherwise. (57)

This is the kind of ghostly narrative that Hearn sought at the end of the nineteenth century. The ghost he ultimately re-created in his Japanese stories evokes a sense of the past, memory and nostalgia, by way of, to use Gordon's phrase, letting one "imagine what was lost that never even existed." In "Yuki-Onna," a sense of loss of the fearful and beautiful Yuki-Onna as a ghostly figure at the end of the story will trigger Minokichi to search for his story, complementing the loss with a new story and offering a space for his children to relate to.

"Yuki-Onna," therefore, is a composite story into which are interwoven stories from different sources. Hearn makes use of stories that he has been charmed by, and seamlessly overlays them with a new story. "Yuki-Onna" was translated into Japanese, and has been considered a very Japanese story. Hearn indeed could write stories that invite sympathy from Japanese readers; his aim, however, was to render a sense of ghostly, not necessarily "Japanese," "thrill" that he considered universal. Hearn's craft of "re-telling," therefore, is not a simple adaptation, or translation, of foreign literature, but a new folkloric narrative form to be shared by his fellow travelers in the globalizing age.

The current post-colonial and transnational age has opened up a way to tell different stories framed in a transnational setting. In Hearn's time, East and the West were considered as opposites and the latter has also been considered to be superior, technologically more advanced, and evolutionarily more developed. However, Hearn wrote against such preconceptions. In his essay, "Eternal Femi-



nine,” he insists that dichotomous values are complementary parts of the larger whole and points out that, when a Westerner learns about the “Oriental point of view,” he “may begin to doubt whether the moral ideals of the West are really the highest.” Through “comparative study” of culture, therefore, one would find “undreamed-of meanings” on top of one’s “old familiar aspects” (7:79). Such a comparative viewpoint is what he makes use of in his own narrative. In another essay, “The First Impressions,” he talks about the “weird” phenomenon of a “Composite Photograph” and associates it with the impression of a human face: “Every human face is a living composite of countless faces—generations and generations of faces superimposed upon the sensitive film of Life for the great cosmic developing process” (9:139). The “Composite Photograph” may well illustrate Hearn’s comparative narrative: a traveler’s snap-shots, as it were, are “sensitized” on top of each other to make a transnational photograph, or a narrative, in which one would find “undreamed-of meanings,” or a life story, anew. A traveler, or the “civilized nomad” to use Hearn’s term, then, is a “Composite Photographer” and storyteller of the transnational age. The “Composite” story is overwritten and re-impressed, and yet without erasing the ghostly blurs of any previous impressions.

“Yuki-Onna” is an example of such a “Composite” story. Using the framework of a Japanese story, Hearn in a dialogic manner overwrote it in order to achieve an “undreamed-of” vision of an eclectic ghostly narrative—a new folklore for the age of “civilized nomads.”

\*This paper is a part of research project funded by a 2012 research grant from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, and its original form was presented at “American Literature Association 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference,” San Francisco on 24 May 2012, under the title, “Lafcadio Hearn’s ‘Re-told’ Ghostly Narrative: Evoking Ghosts and Creating Home in a Foreign Landscape.”

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