

Lafcadio Hearn

Today, I'll introduce Lafcadio Hearn. He wrote books that focused on the narrative of Japanese life and custom that is handed down from generation to generation. It was then sent out to foreign countries while the Japanese people wanted to catch up Europe and America and they did not think that the old Japanese culture was as important as the cultures of Europe and America

Lafcadio Hearn was born in Greece. His father is British and his mother is Greek. When he was 2 years old, Lafcadio and his mother moved to England and lived in his father's house. Unfortunately, his mother could not acclimate to the different religion and customs so she went back to Greece without Hearn. His paternal great-aunt took him in and raised him. She was a pious Catholic, and at the age of 13, Hearn was sent to a Catholic seminary. There, he rebelled against the strict religious education and had an interest in the culture of the Celts.

Hearn learned about the Celtic oral tradition through his nurse who was employed by his aunt and told him the story about the fairy and the ghost. The Celtic mythology is famous for the legend of the fairy and it affected his interest later on. In Ireland, the animistic Celtic folk religion of the Druids is fused with Christianity. Originally, the Celts did not have any written languages that's why traditions were passed down orally.

The stories he heard fuelled his imaginations, fascination and awe that he developed for the spirit world can be seen in his works. Some of his stories shows similarities with Celtic myths, folktales and fairytales.

After he studies in France and England, he went to the United States and worked as a journalist. In 1884, he went to the international exhibition in New Orleans and was interviewed in a Japanese pavilion where his eyes were opened to Japanese culture.

In 1890, he went to Japan as a correspondent of the newspaper company. But when he arrived in Japan, he cancelled the contract and became an English teacher in Shimane in the countryside where the old Japanese culture remained. He was fascinated with Shinto culture and the divine from Izumo. He was absorbed in his search for truth latent in the public spiritual culture.

He introduced Japan to Europe and America in the perspective of a man living a Japanese life. He travelled to some places in Japan and presented Japanese climates and minds in his writings of "Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan", "Kokoro", "Gleanings in Buddha-Fields".

When he started living in Shimane, there was only a few foreign people, and the locals were afraid of them, and Hearn was not an exception. So people didn't want to be his helper. However, there was a woman who stayed at his house as a helper. Her name is Setsu Koizumo and later she became his wife. She is a daughter of the Samurai and she had to support her family because they were very poor. Setsu was clever and really liked listening to the tales of old Japan from her grandparents. They were attracted to each other and got married. Hearn decided to become a Japanese citizen in 1896 and named himself "Yagumo Koizumo"

He wrote stories based on the tales of old Japan that Setsu told him. These tales were passed down to posterity among Japanese people for a long time. He published "Kwaidan" in 1904. It retold the legends and stories that were passed down in various regions in Japan. He added his interpretation to them and revived them as literary works.

His last book is "Japan: An Attempt at Interpretation" was published in 1904. Many Europeans and Americans read the book. MacArthur, who commanded Japan in WW2, his assistant paid attention to Hearn's explanation of Japanese psychohistory in this book, and it affected the birth of a new system in Japan after WW2, which made him one of the important people in Japan.

In 1904, he died in Japan. His funeral service was held with Buddhist rites. Actually, I'm not sure if I can introduce him as a Japanese writer or not because he wasn't born in Japan and he wrote his books not for the Japanese people but for the foreigners and it is written in English. But, he became Japanese and told the tales of Old Japan and Japanese Culture and mind. So I think his books are Japanese literature.