

Lafcadio Hearn. *A Transcript of Lectures at the University of Tokyo—For the Future of Japanese Literature. (Koizumi Yakumo Tōdai Kōgiroku—Nihonbungaku no Mirai no Tameni)*. Masayuki Ikeda (ed. and trans.) Tokyo: Kadokawa Bunko, 2019. 395pp. ISBN: 9784044004866

*A Transcript of Lectures at the University of Tokyo—For the Future of Japanese Literature* is a collection of Lafcadio Hearn's lectures edited and translated by Masayuki Ikeda, who researched Hearn's work for more than 30 years. The lectures in this book are selected from *Interpretations of Literature* (1915) and *Life and Literature* (1917), which were edited and published by John Erskine based on students' notes of Hearn's lectures on English literature at the University of Tokyo from 1896 to 1903.

Hearn was born in Greece, and after a career as a journalist in the United States, he moved to Japan in 1890. There he worked at educational institutions, including the University of Tokyo, while writing in English about Japanese culture and disseminating it widely to Western society.

It is Hearn's translations that have gained the most attention in Japan. Before coming to Japan, Hearn published *Stray Leaves from Strange Literature* (1884) and *Some Chinese Ghosts* (1887). The former is a collection of short stories from India, Persia, and Finland rewritten in English based on their English and French translations; the latter is a collection of six Chinese stories in English using French translations and English materials. Perhaps his most famous work in Japan is *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things*. *Kwaidan* is Hearn's English translation of an old short story from Japan and China; it is now considered one of the classics in the *Kwaidan* genre (怪談: stories about ghosts and strange things). This work has been translated into Japanese several times by various researchers and translators and is still available in bookstores today.

Ikeda, the editor of the book, says that there is still room to study Hearn's influence on the romantic literary movement in modern Japan through the lectures in this book. The editor suggests that these lectures may have influenced such famous Japanese writers as Sōseki Natsume (夏目漱石), Yonejirō Noguchi (野口米次郎), Kafū Nagai (永井荷風), Mimei Ogawa (小川未明), Sakutarō Hagiwara (萩原朔太郎), and Ryūnosuke Akutagawa (芥川龍之介). Ikeda also points out that Hearn's literary theory disclosed in the lectures conveys the mysterious world of Hearn's works, as represented in *Kwaidan*. Taking this into consideration, the lectures may be an exciting subject for analyzing the history and characteristics of the genre of 実話怪談 (Jitsuwa-Kwaidan: Kwaidan based on a true story). It is now widespread in Japan as a type of subculture and in which Hearn's name is also familiar to the fans.

Ikeda selects sixteen of Hearn's lectures and divides them into four chapters: "The Power of Literature," "The Supernatural in Fiction," "Literature in Life," and "The Spirit of Romanticism—for the Future of Japanese Literature."

Chapter 1, "The Power of Literature," contains "The Insuperable Difficulty," "The Question on the Highest Art," "Naked Poetry," "Literature and Political Opinion," and "On Romantic and Classic Literature, about Style."

Through the lectures in this chapter, Ikeda says that we can get the essence of Hearn's philosophy on art and literature. In "The Insuperable Difficulty," for example, Hearn identifies "the status of women in the Western world" as one of

the essentials that underpin Western literature and, at the same time, impedes Japanese students' understanding of it. Implicitly pointing out that in Japan, "the highest duty of the man" (9) is directed "to his father" (9), Hearn explains that in the West, it is directed "to his wife" (9).<sup>1</sup> According to Hearn, in the West, men treat women with the same attitude as they treat God. While Japanese students do not need to align with this, they do need to understand it in order to understand Western literature.

In "The Question on the Highest Art," Hearn states that the highest art is that which symbolizes ethical beauty. As an example of ethical beauty, Hearn cites "the sudden impulse to unselfishness" (20) and the willingness to die for a loved one in the experience of love and says that literary works that can fill people's hearts with such impulses symbolize ethical beauty. In "Naked Poetry," Hearn lays out the essence of his idea of poetry. According to him, there are three kinds of poetry; the best one is those in which the language or form and the emotion expressed are both excellent. The following best are those in which the emotion or sentiment takes precedence over the form. The lowest-ranking poems, Hearn complains, focus solely on form, with the emotion or sentiment as a secondary concern. As a translator, Hearn's view of literature is strongly reflected in his assessment that the poem's emotional impact on the reader takes precedence over its form. Hearn teaches his students that no matter how much you study a foreign language form, it is difficult to reproduce it in Japanese poetry. The emotions and imagination of foreign poetry should be utilized in Japanese poetry.

According to "Literature and Political Opinion," public opinion promotes mutual understanding among people across national boundaries. Hearn argues that literary works can move the general public to sympathy and understand a foreign country.

In "On Romantic and Classic Literature, about Style," British literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is used as a specific example. The characteristics of romantic and classic literature are contrasted. "The classical position" (58) is extreme conservatism, which Hearn criticizes for its emphasis on conventions (ancient rhetoric) and its tendency to standardize literature. "The romantic position" (57) is not to deny conventions but to seek and create new and better forms of literary expression based on conventions. Hearn is sympathetic to the latter, stating that the latter contributes to personality development. However, he also points out that competition has produced better classicist and romantic writers.

Chapter 2, "The Supernatural in Fiction," contains "The Value of the Supernatural in Fiction," "On Tree Spirits in Western Poetry," and "Some Fairy Literature." Here, we can see Hearn's background and methodology as a translator, says Ikeda. In "The Value of the Supernatural in Fiction," Hearn presents a reason why the supernatural being of ghosts has value in fiction across the ages. Using the example of the word Holy Ghost to describe God in the Christian lexicon, Hearn points out that, from primitive beliefs to today's religions, ghosts have been an important part of human beliefs and emotions as a supernatural element. He also argues that modern science has clarified many things. However, paradoxically, it had also proven the incomprehensibility of human existence. That is why Hearn believes that ghosts are still a good theme

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<sup>1</sup> As for quotations in this book review, I refer to the original texts. See References.

for dealing with the inexplicable existence of human beings and human nature in literature.

In “On Tree Spirits in Western Poetry,” referring to tree spirits in Greek and other myths, Hearn points out that there is a pantheistic similarity between Greek and Japanese myths and that if we take this as a clue, we may be able to use Western poetry as a source of creativity in Japanese poetry.

In “Some Fairy Literature,” fairies are discussed as the supernatural in literature. As Christianity became more influential in Europe, heretical gods and spirits came to be feared as evil. Hearn defines such heretical gods and spirits as fairies. He explains how they are dealt with in Western literature, such as the poetry of William Butler Yeats, Samuel Ferguson, Robert Williams Buchanan, and John Greenleaf Whittier.

Chapter 3, “Literature in Life,” consists of “On the Relation of Life and Character to Literature,” “On Reading about Literature,” and “On Composition. In “On the Relation of Life and Character to Literature,” Hearn recommends an attitude and lifestyle for creative literary activities. He argues that it is essential for those who aspire to literature to ask themselves whether they are suited for poetry or fiction and, if fiction, whether they are suited for romanticism or realism. He also stresses the importance of devoting even a small amount of time to literature in daily life.

“On Reading in Relation to Literature” explains the ideal way to read and how to determine which books to read. The ideal reading, Hearn says, is reading done by children. They are absorbed in a book: “he (the child) reads most thoroughly, and he thinks and thinks and thinks and thinks untiringly about what he reads; one little fairy tale will give him mental occupation for a month after he has read it” (189). When we determine which books to read, he says, we should refer to works that have survived the test of time, not to those approved by critics.

“On Composition” explains the common misconceptions about creativity, the style of literature, and the kind of language that has literary power. First, Hearn reminds us that we cannot learn to create stories and poems through education and that great works always require a great deal of effort and time. In Hearn’s opinion, literary style does not mean a rhetorical technique but a method of constructing sentences that can distinguish one writer from another. If writers pursue style as a rhetorical technique, they will lose their identities. He also says that the language of people, not the academy, is necessary if new Japanese literature influences the lives, thoughts, and national character of the people and creates a new public opinion.

In chapter 4, “The Spirit of Romanticism—for the Future of Japanese Literature,” there are “Notes on the Study of Shakespeare,” “The First English Mystic,” “Wordsworth,” “Coleridge,” and “Farewell Address,” which are mainly lectures on romantic writers.

In the study of Shakespeare, Hearn teaches, we should focus on how Shakespeare uses the human imagination, not on the techniques of its expression. Hearn emphasizes imagination in literature because he believes that the study of literature is aimed at giving students imagination as the ability to produce literary works.

For Blake, Hearn first describes his mystic nature and then gives a brief biography. Then, citing several poems, Hearn deciphers, behind Blake’s concise expression, which Hearn describes as “the language of a child,” the harsh reality

of human life, the tragic world that paradoxically establishes virtues such as mercy, pity, and self-sacrifice, and the strict values of British society.

Hearn argues that what makes Wordsworth stand out in English poetry is his philosophical rather than religious spirit of reflection on everyday life. Quoting poems from works such as “The Solitary Reaper” and “The Daffodils,” Hearn explains how Wordsworth uses his imagination and keen eye to eloquently associate common things and common life. He is with a glorious history, the workings of human imagination, and the innocent psyche of children.

Hearn assesses Coleridge as a great thinker who significantly influenced the English intellectuals. In terms of poetry, Hearn criticizes most of Coleridge’s works, except “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” “Christabel,” “Kubla Khan,” and “Love,” as not worth reading but acknowledges his achievement in inventing a new form of verse and influencing famous poets such as Walter Scott, Byron, and Tennyson. Hearn also appreciates more than the invention of form that Coleridge infuses into poetry what Hearn calls “something ghostly” in terms of “tone,” “feeling,” and “emotional expression” (373). This evaluation also shows that Hearn emphasizes “the feeling of the supernatural” (373) as a literary element more than the form of literature.

Ikeda paraphrases the title “Farewell Address” into “For the Future of Japanese Literature—the Final Lecture.” As the title suggests, in this lecture, Hearn argues that learning about Western thought, imagination, and emotion through its literature will help to enrich and strengthen the future of Japanese literature. He encourages his students who study Western literature to continue their creative activities while staying close to the people’s language in Japan, rather than just translating and imitating Western literature, to make Japanese literature excellent in the future.

As Ikeda points out, these lectures were not given by “a well-educated and renowned scholar” (394), but they can be read as a valuable documentary that shows how Western literature was received at the University of Tokyo, then the center of Western literary studies, just before the establishment of anti-naturalistic literature represented by Sōseki Natsume (夏目漱石) and Ōgai Mori (森鷗外).

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