

## Lafcadio Hearn's Legacy in Japan's Legend Climate: The Blurring of Folklore, Mass Media and Literature

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The first sentence of Richard Dorson's book, *Folk Legends of Japan*, states: "Japan possesses more legends than any country in the Western world." Although he attributed this remark to Professor Kunio Yanagita, a pioneer in folkloristic studies in Japan, Dorson continued later in the same chapter: "Every shrine and temple seems to bear its burden of ancient story. Some dark tragedy of the long ago has caused the erection of yonder Shinto shrine, and the villagers who pass it daily or honor it annually know its message" (1962:17-19). He further wrote, "It would seem that every willow tree, mound, and meadow carries its own special story" (1962:22).

One of the resources Dorson relied upon in assembling Japanese legends was the works of Lafcadio Hearn, a former newspaper man, magazine writer, and would-be novelist who arrived in Japan in 1890 and died there 14 years later, having become a naturalized citizen in 1896. Dorson is almost an apologist for Hearn as a folklore collector, mentioning Hearn's "own literary instinct and religious bent" and the fact that Hearn had not intended "any systematic description of folklore." Dorson conveys a tacit disapproval of Hearn's having turned to "educated priestly informants and to poetic treatments." Still, as Dorson acknowledged, Hearn provides "a trustworthy guide into unfamiliar corridors of Japanese folk ideas, and those who dismiss Hearn as a dewy-eyed romancer should consider his grisly and macabre legends" (1962:28-29).

If Dorson, as an academic folklorist, felt he had to apologize for Hearn's presentation of Japanese folklore as being somewhat less than rigorous by scholarly standards, the people of Japan feel no such compunction about Hearn. Hearn today is revered as a hero in all quarters of Japan. Although he died at the age of 54 in 1904, his works are still perennial best-sellers and can easily be

found in almost every book store in Japan. Among these books are *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*; *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things*; *Kokoro: Hints and Echoes of Japanese Inner Life*; *In Ghostly Japan*; and various anthologies. No doubt part of his esteem comes from the fact that after arriving in Japan in 1890, he became a Japanese citizen, married a Japanese woman, took a Japanese name (Koizumi Yakumo: Koizumi, the family name, meaning "small spring" and Yakumo meaning "eight clouds" ), and settled permanently in Japan. But he seems to have endeared himself to the Japanese citizens born generations after his death for having preserved their legends, collected them with a passion, and put a literary spin on them, and especially for having shared them with the western world. In addition to books, he wrote numerous articles about Japanese folklore for such literary magazines as *The Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's*. To the Japanese, Hearn is "almost as Japanese as haiku" (from the Tuttle's publisher's foreword to *Kwaidan*). Many Japanese today express surprise upon learning that Koizumi (Hearn) was originally a Westerner, as it is felt that his writings epitomize the spirit of "Japanese-ness." His name is celebrated in endless media coverage of exhibits, school projects, monuments, and storytelling parties, especially in the summer months.

Japan, with its legend-saturated culture, its vague, almost indistinguishable boundaries between folklore and literature, as well as its phenomenal prolificacy of mass media legend resources, provides a good opportunity for analyzing the relationships between folklore, mass media, and literature, asking the question "what is the X that crosses the boundaries of all three, and is that element not the central concern of folklorists, regardless of its medium"? A close examination will reveal that popular or mass culture (films, anime, comics) and literature do not just contain folk traditions, do not just parallel folk traditions, but are considered by many native Japanese to be the epitome of folkloric expressiveness itself. As one young Japanese woman told me, clutching Hearn's *Stories of Mystery*, "to me, this literature *is* our folklore."

## Folklore and Literature

One of the reasons for Lafcadio Hearn's success in Japan is that the

dividing line between folklore and literature in Japan is vague. Hearn has sometimes been criticized by western folklorists as being too literary, tampering with texts and not presenting them verbatim, whereas he has been criticized by western literati as being too reliant on folk stories and not exhibiting an individually artistic, literary creativity (Bronner 2002: 31). Although Hearn's folklore texts have a literary quality, his notes preceding each literary performance have the flavor of ethnographic reporting. Like a professional folklorist, he provides notes on the way he had procured the tale, as in this example from *In Ghostly Japan*:

This weird play is the dramatization of a romance by the novelist Encho, written in colloquial Japanese, and purely Japanese in local color, though inspired by a Chinese tale. I went to see the play; and Kikugoro [a famous Kabuki actor] made me familiar with a new variety of the pleasure of fear.

"Why not give English readers the ghostly part of the story?" - asked a friend who guides me betimes through the mazes of Eastern philosophy. "It would serve to explain some popular ideas of the supernatural which Western people know very little about. And I could help you with the translation."

I gladly accepted the suggestion; and we composed the following summary of the more extraordinary portion of Encho's romance. Here and there we found it necessary to condense the original narrative; and we tried to keep close to text only in the conversational passages, -- some of which happen to possess a particular quality of psychological interest. (Hearn 1971 [1899])

Hearn then proceeds with the story of the "Ghosts in the Romance of the Peony-Lantern," a story about two lovers who are separated by cruel fate but continue their affair beyond the grave. After the story concludes, Hearn continues with more notes about trying to visit the cemetery which allegedly held the graves of the historical figures. Local residents direct him to two graves at the end of the row, but he discovers they are of other people and complains to his friend.

Hearn writes:

Now, my friend protested, "you are unjust to the woman! You came here because you wanted a sensation; and she tried her very best to please you. You did not suppose that ghost-story was true, did you?"

Here his ethnographic style of reporting blends with a literary irony which leaves the reader suspended in a mystery of the vague demarcations between reality, folklore, and literature, a style very attractive to persons raised in the Japanese sense of aesthetics.

Although folklore and literature have been inextricably linked since the beginning of cultural studies, scholars of the past century have striven to separate the two into separate categories. Eric Montenyohl has outlined several viewpoints, none of which have been entirely satisfactory to folklorists: (1) folklore is literature minus the art; (2) folklore is oral, and literature is written; (3) folklore is fluid while literature is permanently fixed in print; (4) folklore is traditional while literature is creative; (5) folklore is simple while literature is complex; (6) folklore is created by groups while literature is created by individuals. Each of these viewpoints under even the most casual of examinations can be found to be invalid. As Montenyohl concludes, "In general, the attempt to create neat and simple dichotomous categories for folklore and literature has led to frustration. In fact, the boundaries between folklore and literature are neither natural nor secure" (1996:288). Most discussions of the topic are formulated as (1) folklore and literature (Brown and Rosenberg 1998; Lüthi 1967; Cohen 1968; Utley 1976; Rosenberg 1991); (2) folklore in literature (Brown 1976; Dundes 1975; Leach 1966; Hoffman 1961; Taylor 1965 [1948]; Brown and Rosenberg 1998); (3) folklore as literature (Utley 1965 [1961]; Lindahl 1987; Stahl 1989); and (4) folklore and literature as performance (Abrahams 1972).

Taking a more integrative approach in their exploration of the relationship between folklore and literature, Frank de Caro and Rosan Augusta Jordan view folklore as "a re-situated part of a great variety of twentieth-century literary and artistic works, for diverse purposes" (2004:265). As they point out, folklore

forms share many characteristics with literary ones (2004: 3); literature can become folklore (2004:4), or vice-versa, folklore can become literature (2004:5); folklore forms can shape literature, as in Eudora Welty's use of the folktale form for her novel, *The Robber Bridegroom*, to which de Caro and Jordan devote an entire chapter. They further point out that folklore in literature may be merely mimetic, transposed to an imagined cultural landscape simply because it is something that exists in the real world (2004:9); or, folklore can signal the larger, deeper meaning of a work of literature (2009:15). Conversely, they also suggest that the work of literature may then be "sucked up" by all manner of cultural processors – advertisers, journalists, politicians – and resituated in other ways in the culture (2004:272). Their focus is on the resituation of texts (as well as de-situation). They call for identification, interpretation, and an examination of "how these conceptions have influenced and determined the re-situating of folklore into purely literary contexts" (15). "Ultimately folklorists need to see how folklore is re-situated in a vast number of nonfolk contexts" for insight into the "larger process of how modern society views and integrates the folkloric" (272-3).

Other recent books which examine such relationships between folklore and literature include Cristina Bacchilega's study of the literary exploitation of fairy tales (1997), and Karen Beardslee's examination of how folklore is used in literature to help protagonists arrive at a sense of "self" (2001). Susan Stewart in an earlier work explored intertextual relationships between folklore and literature in an attempt to delineate separations between common sense and nonsense (1979). And Catherine Orenstein's book about Little Red Riding Hood shows a sampling of the countless ways that this folktale has been re-situated in popular culture and mass media to promote particular ideologies (2002).

The suggestions of de Caro and Jordan are not far removed from the "ethnography of speaking" approach of performance-school folklorists, although the latter tend to focus more on cultural performances and speech events rather than literary productions (notwithstanding discussions of ethnopoetics, the transcription of performed action into written text). As Bauman writes, "all performance, like all communication, is situated, enacted, and rendered meaningful within socially defined situational contexts" (1992:46). Although he was referring primarily to

cultural performances and other speech events, the same statement could also be applied to other cultural productions including mass media and literary performances of folk ideas.

Linda Dégh wrote in her *American Folklore and the Mass Media* that "It is not enough to recognize that mass media play a role in folklore transmission. It is closer to the truth to admit that the media have become a part of folklore." She asks a crucial question:

Can we say that printed or electronically reproduced folklore, out of the normal context of traditional spinning rooms, firesides, and wayside inns, is not folklore? It retains all the criteria by which we judge what is folklore and what is not: it is socially relevant, based on tradition, and applied to current needs. ... the phenomenon we identify as folklore permeates all society assisted by mass media; it is not ruled out as folklore simply because its bearers manipulate new instruments to fit the needs of modern consumers" (1994: 1).

The crux of Degh's examination was various forms of popular media, but literary versions of folklore might as easily have been included in her argument. In Japan, the impact of literary and media versions of legend is enormous; the sheer profundity of legends makes it one of the most fertile places for legend study in the world. And almost every oral legend seems to be accompanied by its supporting cast of historical tracts, pamphlets, newspaper articles, magazine articles, dramatically performed reenactments, television commercials, movies, school skits, parties, and Internet chat versions, all valid variants for legitimate folklore study. Some literary texts, such as the *Kojiki*, stories of gods, are revered as sacred, going back to a time when Japan's emperors were considered to be gods, a belief which was held by many until the end of World War II. The mass media which transmits folklore are often promoting literary versions of the folklore or painted versions of the folklore, as in the case of news stories which actively promote readings of Lafcadio Hearn's works or upcoming television ghost specials.

### Miminashi Hoichi ("Earless Hoichi")

As a case in point, let us look at the various manifestations in print, media and festival of just one of Hearn's stories, about a blind priest named Hoichi, a legendary figure who was said to reside at a temple in Shimonoseki, located at the very bottom tip of the main Japanese island of Honshu.

A typical news story of a ghost-storytelling event in Hearn's honor is one that appeared in the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper on August 24, 2003:

Forty students and their parents gathered at the house which Yakumo Koizumu [Hearn] lived at, on August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2003, in Kumamoto City. The party was held for the purpose of listening to "Kwaidan" which Yakumo had written. The Board of Education in Kumamoto hosted the event because they hope many visitors will come to this house. Three newscasters of the local TV station read aloud "Yuki-onna" (Snow Woman) and "Miminashi Hoichi" written by Yakumo. It was 38.4 degrees centigrade. Although there was only a fan in the room, children seemed to feel a chill from the bottom of their hearts, listening to ghost stories. The readers, however, wiped sweat off their brows saying, 'It is extremely hot.' This no doubt was because they were eager to make the children feel scared and read to them very intensively" [translated from the original Japanese by Rika Matsunaga].

The article is accompanied by a photograph of children sitting on tatami mat floors, surrounding the storyteller at a microphone. As the story shows, news media personnel themselves became part of the storytelling event which apparently was designed to promote tourism to Hearn's former home. The stories were read orally from printed text which Hearn had written more than 100 years ago.

The "Miminashi Hoichi" story is one of Hearn's most famous and is set in the city of Shimonoseki, home of the Akama Shrine which figures importantly in the legend. The background of the story is a historically famous sea battle between the Heike clan and the Genji clan, involving more than 4,000 ships in the Kanmon Straits, waters which separate the main Japanese islands of Kyushu and

Honshu, and through which more than 1,000 ships and boats pass daily. The historical battle of the Heian period took place in 1186 and is known as the Battle of Dannoura. When the emperor's grandmother saw that the Heike clan had been defeated, she plunged with her grandson, the 8-year-old "infant emperor," into the churning waters of the straits (steps leading into the sea from a commemorative shrine are still visible today.) At the shrine can be seen an elaborately carved wooden statue of Miminashi Hoichi ("earless Hoichi"). Hoichi is the legendary blind priest who played the biwa beautifully and sang the tale of the Battle of Dannoura with such emotion that he was summoned by ghosts of the drowned samurai warriors to perform by the seaside, near their watery residence at the bottom of the Kanmon Straits. The priests at the Akama Shrine realized no one can ever say no to samurai ghosts, and no one ever returns alive from such an invitation. To protect the young monk, his body was tattooed from head to foot with sacred scripture. However, a novice forgot to tattoo behind the monk's ears, and thus Hoichi's ears were lost to the ghosts, but he survived.

Eight hundred years later, each May, the Kaikyo Festival of Shimonoseki celebrates the decisive sea battle with a mock battle involving hundreds of colorfully festooned boats, and the Sentei Festival of Shimonoseki features the ritual enactment of elaborately painted dancing court ladies visiting the grave of the infant emperor at the Akama Shrine on the same day. These dancers, representing courtesans who had been forced to sell their dignity in order to survive in the Port of Shimonoseki after the emperor's defeat, first undergo purification rituals. Then, before thousands of spectators over a period of three days, they perform a sad, slow ritual dance as they solemnly cross a specially constructed bridge to pay homage to their lost master. Historically, the building of the shrine purportedly was to appease the spirit of the slain emperor.

Not only are the legends which Lafcadio Hearn wrote about kept alive by annual shrine festivals, but the Miminashi Hoichi story has been the subject of several movies, several dramas and stage plays, and countless school skits ("gekis"). The movie "Kwaidan" by Masaki Kobayashi is a perennial favorite on NHK, the national television station.

In addition, hundreds of pamphlets and tourist booklets throughout the



region describe the legend. Hearn is always given credit for the Hoichi story, as in this pamphlet description: "Near the shrine, there are the Akama Mausoleum, burial mounds of the Heike clan called Nanamorizuka, and a statue of a priest called Miminashi Hoichi (a priest with his ears cut off who appeared in a famous ghost story written by Lafcadio Hearn)." Although Hearn is credited with authorship of the story, he himself points out clearly in the introduction to his *Kwaidan* that "most of the following Kwaidan, or weird tales, have been taken from old Japanese books, -- such as the *Yaso-Kidan*, *Bukkyo-Hyakkwa-Zensho*, *Kokon-Chomonshuu*, *Tama-Sudaree*, and *Hyaku-Monogatari*" (1971 [1904]: xv). He indicates that some of the stories may be Chinese in origin. Although introductions to anthologies such as *Stories of Mystery from Lafcadio Hearn*, edited by Ichiro Nishizaki, also carefully point out that the story of Miminashi Hoichi was taken from "The Secret Tune of the Lute Makes the Ghost Bewail" in a volume of the "Gwayuu-Kidan" ("Strange Stories Compiled by Mr. Gwayuu"), the people of Japan nevertheless give Hearn all the credit and celebrate him because of his "masterly hand" and because he was the transmitter of the tale to the western world. As Nishizaki writes in his introduction, although the story was not new, Lafcadio Hearn's "pen made quite a lively work of it" (Nishizaki 1939: iv).

The legend is the most prominent local legend of Shimonoseki and is often repeated to visitors to the area. The shrine is a place where people go for various annual rituals such as *hatsumode*, the first shrine visit of New Year; or *shichi-go-san* ceremonies, held on November 15, to pray for the health and growth of children who are 7- (*shichi*), 5- (*go*) or 3- (*san*) years old; or for personal rituals such as weddings. While there, people are reminded of the story because of the statue of Miminashi Hoichi, which sits in a courtyard overlooking the seven mounded tombs of the Heike clan ancient war dead. As one young woman told me, the side section of the shrine which contains the burial site and Hoichi's statue "is a very fearful place. One of my cousins has a sixth sense. When we went to Akama Shrine, and saw that statue, he felt cold. When we arrived home, he said he saw ghosts at that place."

Lafcadio Hearn's work has also inspired a suite of 10 piano ballads by the Finnish composer, Pehr Henrik Nordgren, between 1972 and 1978, the first

entitled "Miminashi-Hoichi Op. 17." All the ballads are programmatically related to Hearn's *Kwaidan*; Nordgren was inspired while studying in Japan.

The above example of a legend complex circulating orally, in literature, and in the mass media is just one example of the ghost culture of Japan. Multiply by the number of mountains, temples and shrines to get a more accurate picture of the legend atmosphere of Japan.

### Japan's Media Legend Climate

In the summer in Japan, a proliferation of ghost stories on TV and in movies or radio appears, partly because of the heat, and partly to coincide with the Japanese holidays of O-Bon, rooted in Buddhism, when everyone goes home to honor his or her ancestral roots. O-Bon is the time when dead souls come back to this world and visit their old homes, so a strong feeling of "family reunion" exists at this time. Almost all the people in Japan return to their family homes during this three-day period in August, much as Americans return to their family homes at Thanksgiving. Living family members lay out a fire, such as candles or lanterns, to light the way for the spirits of the dead family members to return; the spirits can enjoy freshly prepared foods at the altars decorated for them (Obinata 1990); and O-Bon dancing involves the living dancing with the dead spirits in a circle around an elevated *yagura* (podium). Atop the *yagura* are drummers, singers, and musicians playing the traditional instrument the *shamisen*, similar to a lute. It is during the months leading to these rituals that newspapers and magazines abound with stories of ghost-story events; and television programming caters to the summertime interest in ghost stories. An NHK (national television) summer series in June 2003 featured *Yu-rei Kashimasu* (The Rental Ghost). The main character is an Edo period ghost stuck in limbo because she killed herself after the samurai warrior lover she was eloping with was murdered by villains. She locates him in his new incarnation as a working class oaf; the only trouble is—he cannot remember her. After she does him the favor of spooking a few of his friends for him, he gets the business idea of turning her into a rental ghost.

In the September 6, 2003 edition of the *Asahi Shimbun* (a daily newspaper), another story featuring enterprising new businesses tells of a man working at an

advertisement company who has established his own company featuring "Kaidan-ghost stories." Five years ago, in the summer, he began delivering a mass mailing of ghost stories he had collected to about 450 readers on an irregular basis. This mass mailing was entitled, "Ouma ga toki Monogatari" (Evening Stories: The Time When We Meet Evil). As a result, many more people sent him their horrid experiences, and six months later, he began delivering their mailed-in stories by e-mail every week. In 2001, he began publishing books and CD's about ghost stories, collecting many stories at his website (<http://www.e-oma.com>), with readership now in the hundreds of thousands.

Why are there so many ghost stories in the summer (July-September)? "Because summer is very hot, and listening to ghost stories, we feel cool!" one young woman explained. Horror movies make their debuts during this time; and amusement parks also feature haunted houses in the summer. A story on August 16, 2003 in the *Mainichi Shimbun* told about Japan's first haunted house located inside a department store in Nagoya, where shoppers are both "thrilled and chilled" (as Elizabeth Tucker noted in an e-mail message: "This takes the 'spine-chilling' metaphor literally").

For me, as a foreigner living in Japan, it was easy the first few year to develop the view that modern Japanese believe in no god but that they celebrate traditions associated with Buddhism, Shintoism and even Christianity at different times of the year according to tradition. After having lived in Japan for fourteen years and having observed Japanese folklore in action since 1996, though, I gradually came to realize that while no overarching deity is believed in by a majority of people, many people do believe in a host of ghosts and spirits attached to inanimate objects in their everyday lives, as well as a collective spiritual presence of the ancestors; or if they don't really believe, they at least pay homage to these ideas.

In Japanese culture, rituals are regularly held to soothe the dead and to help them safely reach a peaceful afterlife. Dead souls especially are in a wandering state for the first 49 days after death, after which their new death name, given by a priest, is inscribed on a tablet. After 33 or 50 years, the individual soul is expected to have blended into a collective cast of spirits which protect a

community (Iwasaka and Toelken 1994), and at this time their name is shaved off the commemorative table in a special celebratory and releasing ritual. However, "an exceptional individual, especially if he has died a tragic or violent death, is believed to become a vengeful god (onryo or goryo) who needs to be placated" (Kodansha 1996: 173).

My Japanese friend Rika Matsunaga explained the concept of the soul after death as she understands it: a person has his or her own spirit, which is called "tama." When someone passes way, his or her spirit leaves the body, and the tama becomes "tamashii." With a good death and ancestor worship by descendants, the soul, "tamashii" changes into "hotoke," a perfect form of the soul keeping watch over the descendants. These spirits are called "haigorei" when they appear. After 33 years or 50 years (according to which Buddhist sect ritual is followed), the "hotoke" changes into "go-senzo," a state in which souls lose their individuality and merge with the collective spirits of ancestors. This result is the ultimate goal of every spirit.

If a tamashii has a natural death but fails to receive ancestor worship, it will stay as a soul and sometimes will appear as a ghost, called *yu-rei*. Such *yu-rei* cannot become hotoke because they have not had proper ancestor worship. If a tamashii has had an unusual, bad death, it will also stay as a *yu-rei*. But it might have more capacity to cause harm to living people.

Spirits are part of dead people and living people. The spirits of dead people, as previously mentioned, can appear in human form as *yu-rei*, and these *yu-rei* can include *haigo-rei*, the spirit of someone hovering over to protect someone; and *jibakurei*, the ghost staying in a certain place such as at a tunnel, or some mountain, or bridge, unable to move away. These *jibakurei* are the spirits that might show up in a ghost photo (*shinrei shashin*). For example, a young man told me of having taken a trip to Nagasaki with his family. They had planned to take a photograph in front of Genbacku Kinenhi, a memorial tomb which commemorates people killed by the atomic bomb. The photo was taken at 8 p.m. After the trip, he developed the film, only to find the image of a strange face and hand of a woman in the photo between his father and him. He said he was very upset when he recognized the *shinrei shashin* as a spirit associated with the tomb.

Such photos are often sent in to be shown on television shows in which spiritual mediums make interpretive comments; or printed in manga (discussed later in this article).

*Yokai* is the spirit in another form, such as animal or monster. And an *ikiryo* is the spirit of a living person whose thinking or anger might be so strong that their soul, though not yet dead, can appear as a *yu-rei*. For example, the Japanese novel *Genji Monogatari*, perhaps the oldest novel of all time, written one thousand years ago by Murasaki Shikibu, refers to the *ikiryo* spirit of one of Genji's lovers who is so jealous of his wife that she possesses the wife's body during childbirth and speaks angrily to Genji, who was standing by (Shikibu 1976:168).

Akama Shrine in Shimonoseki originally was a Buddhist temple, built to placate the souls of the dead samurais at the bottom of the Kanmon waters, as well as to give solace to the defeated emperor. The following details are provided in one of many information sheets distributed at various places around Shimonoseki (no author given):

In former years the spirits of the Heike were much more restless than they are now. They would wander around ships passing the night, and at all times watch for swimmers, to pull them down into the sea and drown them. It was in order to appease those dead, and especially to console the infant Emperor, that the Buddhist temple, Amidaji, was built ……

This was the origin of Akama Jingu.

After many years the temple was changed to a shrine because of the administrative distinction between Shintoism and Buddhism made in the Meiji period from 1875. It was then called Akama Gu after the place name.

In the year 1940 Akama Gu was raised to a first-class government shrine and renamed Akama Jingu [Akama Shrine]. It was a great pity that this original shrine was burned down, together with other national treasures, by an air raid during World War II.

After the Second World War the chief priest of Akama Jingu felt that

the deities had destined him to reconstruct the shrine. He visualized it as a symbol of the people's history and the growth of their spiritual understanding. Accordingly, a new shrine was constructed in 1958 and a new outer sanctuary in 1965.

As explained to me by Rika, shrines are for praying for the future, one's health, the health of children, the crops and harvest; in short, one goes to a shrine to ensure good fortune for oneself. "Unconsciously, we want the shrine to make us healthy, rich, or long-living," Rika said. "The shrine is for ourselves." Temples, on the other hand, are for focusing on the ancestors: for memorial services, O'Bon, the fall and spring equinoxes when the dead are honored, and for "ringing out the old" on the last day of the year. "We need both the shrine and the temple to make us happy. We have to show respect for both ancestors and God" (each shrine is dedicated to one God, who might have been a living person previously).

Just a few blocks down the street from the Akama Shrine is the Eihukuji Temple, which has its own ghostly heroine, who has also been well-publicized in the mass media, especially in the summer, the season of ghosts in Japan. A news story in the *Asahi Shimbun* news story on July 18, 2003 was entitled "The Kakejiku (a hanging scroll) of a Ghost exhibited yearly at Eihukuji Temple, Kannon-Zaki cho (town) on July 17<sup>th</sup>." A translation of the story follows.

The "Yu-rei-Matsuri" (Ghost Feast) was held at Eihukuji Temple. That feast has been held for about 300 years. The Ghost Kakejiku is exhibited only once a year, so many people went there and folded their hands in prayer before the hanging scroll. The scroll is 1.5 meters long and 50 centimeters wide. According to tradition, there was a sick girl whose parents didn't get along very well together at the Edo Period. The girl passed away being worried about her parents. One day, the girl appeared in front of the priest of this temple as a ghost, hoping for her parents' reconciliation. The priest drew her appearance and showed it to her parents. He persuaded them to make up with each other. July 17<sup>th</sup> is the anniversary of her

death" [translated from the original Japanese by Rika Matsunaga].

The article is accompanied by a photograph of a girl looking at a long hanging scroll of a ghost with long black hair. Characteristically, like almost all ghosts in Japan, she has no feet. The story begins as a standard news report but then, with the words "iitsutae ni yoru to" [According to tradition]," the news report shifts to a retelling of the legend. The legend adds value to the exhibition of the painting and in fact is what makes the painting important. Iwasaka and Toelken also mention an exhibit of 50 ghost portraits which are exhibited at Zenshoan Temple in Tokyo during the summer 1994:xx. In fact, many artists have exhibited paintings of ghosts, in numbers of 36, 50 or 100. Ohkyo Maruyama (1733-1795) was an Edo period painter famous for his hanging scrolls of feminine ghosts, and many subsequent painters have followed his lead. He is the artist who popularized the idea of ghost having no feet. Today, even in TV stories, ghosts have no feet, and this criterion is often used as a plot element (e.g., "I am not a ghost because I have feet.") (For other discussions of ghosts in hanging scroll artwork as well as death customs, see Iwasaka and Toelken, *Ghosts and the Japanese*, 1994; and Addiss, *Japanese Ghosts & Demons: Art of the Supernatural*, 1985.)

### 100 Ghost Stories

Another kind of ghost story-telling party, described in both Hearn's and Dorson's books on Japanese legends, is the *hyakumonogatari*, the early 10<sup>th</sup>-century Japanese custom of lighting 100 candles in scary surroundings, such as a dark beach. "Hyaku" means 100 and "monogatari" means "story." On a very hot night, people gather and tell 100 ghost stories. Each time someone tells a story, he or she blows a candle out. Often, the party ends after the 99<sup>th</sup> story, leaving only one candle lit. It is believed that if the last candle were blown out and the room became pitch dark, something horrible would happen. In some cases, 100 stories are performed with the expectation that something strange will happen. Such storytelling sessions are sometimes still performed today, especially when the humid heat becomes unbearable. The custom has inspired literary versions of *hyakumonogatari*, including dramatic performances such as the one-woman

traveling show in America by Japanese actress Koyoko Shiraishi. Numerous literary artists have presented their volumes of *hyakumonogatari*, and artists also use the format for presentations of their paintings, especially paintings of ghosts. Recently Internet versions of *hyakumonogatari* have also popped up, with a single person or various contributors posting ghost stories with the goal of posting 100 stories. The "100 ghost story" theme is also the subject of video games, movies, and *manga* (comic books).

### Comic Book Legends

Let us examine what some might view as the crudest or most rudimentary form of written literature, the *manga* or comic book or cartoon book, and advance to other kinds of written literature. Interestingly, these *manga* are often located in the "Literature" section of bookstores and online book shop websites. Linda Dégh, had she chosen to study in contemporary Japan, would have had a field day with the current explosion of ghost comic books, called "horaa manga" - "horaa" being the Japanese pronunciation of "horror" (and coincidentally being very close to the Japanese word "hora" which means "a lie"), and "manga" meaning comics. Reminiscent of points made by Dégh in her "Magic for Sale" article as well as her *American Folklore and the Mass Media*, these ghostly comics, about the size of old Sears-Roebuck catalogs, 400 pages or so with 10 to 20 pages devoted to advertising, appear monthly and contain advertisements aimed primarily at adolescent girls, selling such items as magic charms, services by spiritual mediums, financial lending services, and other mass media products such as books, videos, and Internet websites. One example of these ghost comics, called "True Scary Stories" (*Honto Ni Atta Kowai Hanashi*) is published by Asahi Sonorama and appears in alternating months beginning with January. Another major publication of this type "Your Horror-Story Experiences" (*Anata Ga Taikenshita Kowai Hanashi*) is published by Bunkasha and appears in alternating months, with its first issue having been issued in August, 2003. This comic includes comments by mediums ("your dream about your grandmother dying is a message from heaven."). These comic books usually begin with *shinrei shashin* (spirit photos), snapshots sent in by readers. These photos purportedly show wisps of ghosts in the background.



The photos have black strips covering the eyes of the people in the photo, apparently to protect their identities. The stories contained within include encounters of adolescent girls with ghosts in corridors, attics, or bedrooms; being possessed by Japanese "Old Hag"-like creatures such as the kinds described by David Hufford (1982); and run-ins with ghosts at accident sites. At the end of the books are usually solicitations for more ghost stories to be sent in by the readers of their true experiences, as well as a request for snapshots with ghosts.

Accompanied by large cartoon illustrations, a typical script such as this one from *Your Horror-Story Experiences*, about three friends on a ghost-hunting expedition, goes like this:

*This is a story about my experience with my two friends to see a famous ghost place deep in the mountains.*

"We haven't arrived yet?"

"I don't know."

"Only you know how to get there."

"Hey, we are here."

"Really?"

"How cold."

"It's still summer now."

"Is this the right place?"

"Yes, this is the place that is famous for suicides."

"My friend's uncle did it here also."

"Around here no lights, no houses, no people."

"Let's go!"

"Just a moment."

"Don't look back while crossing the bridge."

"Absolutely!"

"Why not?"

"I don't know, it is a superstition."

"This bridge is called "The Looking-Back Bridge."

"Therefore the superstition spread."

"That's nonsense."

"Okay, we will not look back."

"Let's go!"

"What kind of ghost comes out here?"

"One with a messy hairstyle of some kind."

[She heard a slight noise.]

"What did you say?"

"Don't look back!"

"I didn't say anything."

"But..."

[Suddenly the flashlight went out.]

"What did you do?"

"Turn on the light!"

"It doesn't work."

"Hey, did you hear something?"

"I felt a strange sensation behind me."

[Someone is standing behind them]

[The light comes back on.]

"Hurry up! Let's go home."

"What's wrong?"

"I heard something."

"Yes! Me too!"

"That's enough."

"What did you hear?"

"OH NO!!"

"What's wrong?"

"I felt someone in white was chasing us!"

"You are too nervous."

"I saw something in white also!"

[A woman is floating in the air ... chasing us!]

*And our experience continued the next day.*

*One of us had a car accident and was in the hospital.*

*Another boy had a motorcycle accident and broke his leg.*

*I remember the ghost. I think the next accident will happen to me.*

*So I stay at home and don't go out!*

[The last scene shows the narrator huddling on the floor with a blanket draped around her, the ghost looming largely behind her back.]

[translated from Japanese by Yumi Kobayashi and Yasuko Manabe]

(Bunkasha 2003:291-306)

Readers are told that the story was conveyed by an anonymous person from Ehime Prefecture in Shikoku. One would be hard-pressed to distinguish this manga comic book story from the prototypical "legend trip" as described by Bill Ellis (1982), a trip which young people take to a scary place to tell scary stories to enjoy the thrill of being frightened.

In some manga stories, a cartoon character of a spiritual medium is the narrator of the entire story and dispenses important advice at the end. In the "True Scary Stories" comic book, the first few pages of the September 2003 edition is devoted to a non-comic, news-type story about two shrines and a temple along with scenic photographs of the actual sites. The sacred sites are dedicated to Kusunoki Masashige, a warrior of the Kamakura era, known for his loyalty to the emperor. A cartoon character medium named "Terao Reiko" is imposed over this realistic presentation; she reports having tried to contact Kusunoki's spirit at the sites before having finally successfully communicated with him. She reports her spiritual conversation with him. In the article, black print is used to convey factual history; red print is used to convey Terao Reiko's "sixth sense" about Kusunoki's feelings about those historical incidents. Remember, Terao Reiko is not only a spiritual medium; she is a cartoon character! But in this comic book, "reality" and animation are blended, with an almost Roger Rabbit-like effect (Asahi 2003). ("Who Framed Roger Rabbit?" was the 1988 American movie, produced by Disney Studios and Steven Spielberg, which combined real actors and animated cartoon characters in the same space to create an impression of reality.)

In most cases, the stories in ghost comic books can also be found in novellettes, videos, and movies; and advertisements for the counterpart can be found in

the corresponding media. The website for the comic book "Honto Ni Atta Kowai Hanashi" (True Scary Stories) leads to a promotion for a video based on a book of the same name.

And one shouldn't forget the 2001 Japanese animated film *Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi*, by Miyazaki Hayao, known in English as *Spirited Away*. This Academy Award-winning movie has broken all box office records in Japan. It is the story of an adolescent girl who unwittingly finds herself in an "other world" bathhouse resort with every manner of Japanese ghosts.

### Hanako the Toilet Ghost; and Sadako

One legendary character who has traveled the gamut of media transmission is Hanako the Toilet Ghost. She is not only the most popular and fearful ghost for elementary school-age children, but she also stars in video and comics. The name Hanako is a generic name to the Japanese, much like "Jane Doe" is to English speakers. Her boyfriend's name is "Taro," the equivalent of "John Doe" or "Jonathan" or "Billy." Hanako lives in school restrooms and is said to be located in the third stall and sometimes the second stall. Hanako is often described as wearing red clothes, a red skirt and white blouse, or sometimes a red vest. Elizabeth Kenney of Kansai Gaidai University has suggested that the modern Hanako "might be a reflection of school anxieties, fear of death, or girls' anxieties about menstruation" (2001), since her red clothes would suggest blood. This idea parallels Alan Dundes' discussion of the "Bloody Mary" ritual occurring in American bathrooms and its connection with pubescent girls' fears of menstrual blood (2002:84,85). In the Japanese legend-ritual, children who want to contact Hanako must knock on her door three times (sometimes 20 times) and then say, "Asobimasho?" (Do you want to play?) At this point, a number of horrible things can happen. Sometimes she murders people in the bathroom. Other times, if someone runs out of toilet paper, she appears, saying "Which do you want - red paper or blue paper?" If a person chooses red paper, the body will bleed. If a person chooses blue paper, Hanako sucks all their blood out until the body turns blue. Hanako's boyfriend, Taro, lives in the boys' restroom. At night they are presumed to be playing together. According to some variants, Hanako had been

locked up in the toilet and died by accident. There was a fire, and she had not been able to get out. In other versions, she committed suicide in the bathroom after being bullied by her schoolmates. Or, her hands rise up from the toilet to assault you. Hanako is featured in several animated (*anime*) films for adolescent girls, such as *Kindaichi Shonen no Jikenbo* (The Case Files of Young Kindachi), featuring a group of high school students who have formed a Mystery Club; *Toire no Hanako-san* (Phantom of the Toilet); *Haunted Junction: Shinsei Toilet no Hanako-san* (Rebirth of Hanako-san in the Toilet Room); and *School Mystery*.

Hanako emerged in oral legend first and then graduated to mass media versions including movies, manga, video series, and books. Hanako's mass media boom was from 1980 to 1995. However, Hanako has been succeeded in the media by Sadako, the ghostly star of "Ring" in the form of novels, movies, comics, a TV series, and DVD releases. The chronology goes like this: First the novel "Ring" by Koji Suzuki appeared in 1993 in Japan, followed by a sequel "Rasen" (the Japanese word for "spiral") in 1997. Then came the movie "Ring" directed by Hideo Nakata in 1998, breaking all box office records in Japan. Then came two more novels in the "Ring" series, also by Suzuki. Meanwhile, two comic books based on Sadako's character were released in 1999 (and one was projected for release in the U.S. on November 12, 2003). The TV series featuring Sadako also began in 1999. Both the movies and the TV series have been available on DVD since 1999 and 2000. Then *Ring 2* the movie was made in Japan, followed by a prequel in 2000, *Ring O: Birthday*, directed by Norio Tsureta. Then the rights to an English remake of the original *Ring* were bought by Dreamworks, which outbid Disney and released a version in America in 2002. Meanwhile, the story of Sadako has become an oral legend, usually performed at the same time as stories of Hanako and others. However, Hanako, though her media boom has expired, is still the more frequently heard in oral legend.

Hanako's predecessor was Kuchisakeonna (Scar-Mouthed Woman), whose face was botched during cosmetic surgery, and who flies up behind girls, asks them, "Do you think I'm beautiful?" and whether or not the girl answers yes or no, mutilates them in some way. They differ from their current media successor, Sadako, in that the latter made her first appearances in novels, movies, and

manga, before stepping into oral legend. It's as if Sadako has stepped right out of the mass media into people's lives, just as in the movie plot, the character Sadako stepped right out of the TV screen into people's lives. Even people who haven't seen the movie "Ring" yet are familiar with the plot: a videotape is haunted, and whoever watches that video will surely die because that ghost has Sadako's spirit. Her spirit possessed the video and people have copied it and spread it without knowing it to their friends. Every person who watches the video will surely be killed within one week. To prevent their death, they must show the video to two or three people. Interestingly, little girls in Japan are no longer being named Hanako (Flower Child) or Sadako.

### Mystery Novels

From the ever-present manga let us proceed to another level of literature, the mystery novel. Miyabe Miyuki, born in 1960, is one of the most famous mystery writers in Japan. Some people joke that Japanese mystery novels can be divided into two categories: (1) Miyabe Miyuke, and (2) all the others. Miyabe has written a number of novels based on the character Ohatsu-san, a woman who uses her sixth sense to help solve murders. One of her most interesting books is *Furueru iwa*, a series of Ohatsu-san stories which are based on the centuries-old *Mimibukuro*, a 10-volume amassing of folk rumor, gossip, and strange stories, collected by Yasumori Negishi, 1737-1815. Each of the 10 volumes has 100 stories, for a total of 1,000 stories. His topics were ghosts, loyalty, lessons, strange stories, memos, funny stories, heroes, public life, foxes, sad stories, wit, faith, and receptacles. Miyabe's *Furueru iwa* is based on the second story of his Volume 6, the "Strange Stories" (*Kidan*). On the first page, Miyabe opens by presenting Negishi's legend about a stone in the yard of the house of Tamura, a samurai. No one goes to that place because 100 years earlier, in 1701, a knight killed himself in that yard because he had dishonored the ruler of that period. The place of his death was marked with a big stone. At that time, relatives complained that it had been rude of the knight to kill himself in the yard and not on the tatami floor. In the yard, his restless spirit could be bothersome to others. In 1802, according to Negishi's notes, there was a strange ringing and shuddering of the

stone. This story, presented as the frontispiece of Miyabe's novel, was the inspiration for her story about an unwitting murderer whose body was possessed by just such a restless spirit. We have here in one fell swoop a classic transmission of folklore, with all the evidence conveniently placed before us by the author herself. She has presented the earlier version that inspired her story, and then continued with her variation. Some of Miyabe's other novels are about haunted kimonos, haunted lanterns, or characters with sixth-sense powers. Miyabe's two-volume book about an office worker who has ESP and pyrokinetic ability to help solve murders was made into a movie called "Crossfire" in 2000.

### Literary Memoir

From mystery novel genre we can move to a more artistic memoir, written by Kyoko Mori, a native Japanese who now lives in America and teaches creative writing in Wisconsin. Mori draws on the famous ghost story of Okiku, another famous ghost known from the kabuki play, *Bancho Sarayashiki*. Okiku was killed by being thrown into a well (it is no accident that Sadako of *Ring* had also been killed by being thrown into a well). The story of Okiku is well known, not only in oral legend but in other forms of art (such as woodblock prints) and literature with numerous variants. It is a dominant motif in Japanese folklore and art. Let us look at Mori's version of the Okiku story in an excerpt from her novel:

For the first twenty minutes, the bus keeps stopping and starting in the heavy downtown traffic. The drive is anything but smooth. My brother and I used to feel queasy here. As the traffic thins, we pass the Himeji Castle and then an old samurai mansion with a sign in front that says *sarayashiki*, "Mansion of the Plates."

My mother told us the ghost story that made this mansion famous. Okiku, a maidservant here in feudal times, broke one of her master's twenty heirloom plates and was beheaded by him. Rather than giving her a proper burial, he threw her body into a well. From then on, her ghost crawled up from the well on rainy nights. Amid the gusts of wind and rain, her master heard her counting the plates and weeping because no

matter how many times she counted, one was always missing. This story didn't make sense to me. Okiku's punishment reminded me of having to stay after school to make up some work I didn't do right—like memorizing the multiplication table or converting fractions into decimals. "Your story is unfair," I told my mother. "Poor Okiku had to count the plates even after she was dead. Her master only had to listen. I thought he was the villain. He should have had to do the counting every night." My mother laughed and said, "This was supposed to be a ghost story, not a joke."

Passing the samurai mansion this time, I think of what Keiko said—my mother should have broken some dishes, cried, and begged my father to spend more time with her, to love her. I wonder how many marriages are saved by such outbursts, held together by broken dishes. As the bus drives on, I imagine a huge empty house filled with shards of china, porcelain, stoneware. The image makes me sad for my mother, for Keiko, for all the women doomed to years of loneliness in their own houses. (1995: 153-154)

Mori's memoir is based on her personal experience, and the legend of Okiku has apparently had a profound meaning for her life. Her presentation of the legend in literary form is telling. Like anyone who repeats folklore, the message has been massaged to fit her particular situation, this time as a passage in literature.

Finally, one should consider whether the blurring of folklore, mass media and literature in Japan is a cultural entity peculiar to Japan, or whether it has universal applications. At the time that Lafcadio Hearn arrived in Japan, Japan had ended 200 years of strict isolation from the world only 37 years earlier, in 1853, when Commodore Perry's navy began the steps that would dismantle the shogunate system and lead to a restoration of the imperial system in Japan. When Hearn's works about Japanese folklore were first published in English, the Japanese were just beginning to communicate again with the western world; the timing of Hearn's works was propitious in helping Japan transmit centuries of folklore traditions to the world in a language that was just coming to be understood by the Japanese. This may in part account for his continued popularity in Japan today.



As Iwasaka and Toelken conclude in their short but excellent book about Japanese ghosts and death, looking at legends "provides us with a wonderfully sensitive barometer of deeply set Japanese values"--values which are functional and spill into every aspect of popular culture--films, comics cartoons, and popular novels (1994: 118-119). The same values have existed in literature. In attempting to answer the question first posed above, "what is the X that crosses all three boundaries of folklore, mass media, and literature," we can rule out "belief" as an answer, because many Japanese do not have strong beliefs about life after death, even though they practice all the rituals of both Shintoism and Buddhism, almost as a residue from the past. "Values" may be the answer; "folk values" or "folk ideas" may be more appropriate. Or, one could even use the term "folklore" as the essence of what crosses all three boundaries.

The Japanese view of folklore and literature is a dually encompassing one. Folklore and literature are often equated. The oldest known literature in Japan is a three-volume work known as *Kojiki*, stories about emperors and gods. The first volume consists of myths and legends about gods; the second and third volumes pertain to emperors' histories. Historically, the folk belief as well as the official belief was that the emperors were natural descendants of gods and would become gods again in the afterlife. Thus folklore and literature, myth and reality were blended and blurred.

Interestingly, in the opening *waka* poem of the *Kojiki*, the very first word is *Yakumo*, the name chosen by Lafcadio Hearn as his official Japanese name. The full context is as follows:

<i>Yakumo tatsu Izumo</i>	At Izumo with eerie layers of cloudy mist
<i>yaegaki</i>	so many hedges (surrounding my house)
<i>Tsuma gomini</i>	to put my wife in (my house)
	(to keep my wife safe)
<i>Yaegaki tsukuru</i>	I'll make so many hedges
<i>sono yaegaki o.</i>	Such hedges.

The words in the poem represent the words of the main god Susanoo after

he married the goddess Inada. The first line alludes to the eerie layers of cloudy mist that rise from mountains and surround the landscape, a sight familiar to anyone living in Japan. In this poem, the clouds resemble large tree-size hedges that can often be seen surrounding large gardens or parks. By extension, the cloudy hedges suggest mystery and dreamy imagination, and ultimately artistic creativity. Hearn must have been aware that these first words from the oldest Japanese literature known were also part of the folk mythology of Japan, and that his use of the name "Yakumo" would instantly evoke a feeling of the gods. Hearn's other name, Koizumi, was the family name of his wife. (In Japan, a person's family name is stated first.) Hearn lived for a time in Matsue City, in Shimane Prefecture, where a shrine is dedicated to Susanoo's wife, Princess Inada. By choosing the name Koizumi Yakumo, Lafcadio Hearn put the power of both folklore and literature into his name, and his name in a sense became a microcosm of his work. The blurring of folklore and literature in Hearn's work echoes the blurring of folklore and literature in Japanese culture, where lines are rarely drawn, where ambiguity is an art form, and where indirectness, mystery and vagueness are appreciated.

Linda Dégh has shown the importance of accepting mass media as an important if not the most indispensable aspect of legend transmission in modern times. In the past, mass media sources were generally thrown out as being related to folklore but not the real thing. Today, folklorists are beginning to acknowledge the legitimacy of mass media performances of folklore, and the problem has become how to deal with them, since they are, after all, so massive. Part of the answer probably lies in focusing on how mass media representations of folklore affect people individually as well as collectively, through documentation of these meanings in individual lives. By extension, the meanings of cultural/literary presentations to individuals are just as valuable; all three need to be considered when studying particular folk ideas.

The unmistakable interrelationship of folklore, mass media and literature behooves folklorists to take a more active interest in ethnographically documenting and analyzing their interrelationships and impact on society. I am currently engaged in fieldwork in Japan, investigating the effect of these blurred elements on

the daily lives of individuals. If folklorists can take a wider view of folklore, it is possible that Lafcadio Hearn will come to receive more respect in the western world than he has hence far, and a greater understanding of Japanese culture can become possible.

### Note

I am deeply indebted to Rika Matsunaga of Shimonoseki, a graduate of Hiroshima University, for her kind and patient explanations of Japanese culture, as well as for her tutorials in Japanese, her assistance in transcribing oral texts recorded in Japanese into the Japanese written language, and her assistance in translating Japanese into English. I would also like to express my gratitude to Dr. Shigehisa Yoshizu of Baiko Gakuin University for his discussions which first made me aware of the importance of Lafcadio Hearn's writings in Japan. Finally, I am grateful to Elizabeth Tucker of Binghamton University in New York and Janet Langlois of Wayne State University in Detroit for their editorial suggestions.

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