Preface

Afterwards, he was a story still told, set
Firmly as rocks in a Zen garden.

SEAN DUNNE

It is a tribute to the particular genius and literary achievements of Lafcadio Hearn (Koizumi Yakumo, 1850-1904) that his works are read, analyzed and appreciated a century after his time. In fact, no writer on Japan is receiving more attention these days than Hearn. By the time of his death he had achieved an international reputation as a foremost interpreter of the emerging Japan for the West. He remains one of the most quoted writers on Japan to this day.

His reputation declined after World War II, particularly in America, when he was perceived to have been too
sympathetic to all aspects of Japanese life although his relationship with that country was somewhat troubled.

In Japan, his enthusiasm for the Old Japan was at variance with modernization policies but he was embraced again by other generations when Japanese interest in their inherited cultural values revived. His interpretation of Japan was focused on a sympathetic view of the *kokoro* or heart and inner life of the country.

The 1980s and 90s have seen a revival of interest in Hearn and a re-evaluation by both Japanese and Western scholars of his life and work which reached a watershed at the Matsue centennial celebrations in 1990, marking Hearn’s arrival in Japan. Hearn is now more widely recognized as a multi-dimensional figure whose fascinating life and work demand serious recognition and whose career is by no means limited to his writings on Japan.

There are a number of purposes for the present anthology, bearing in mind the above background, viz.-

a) to honour and commemorate Lafcadio Hearn by the land where he spent his formative years, as well as those Irish authors who have written about him;
b) to give a perception of the knowledge and written coverage of Hearn by Irish authors over the years;
c) to promote more information about Hearn and his work in Ireland and abroad;
d) to focus attention in the re-evaluation of Hearn of the importance of his Irish background;
e) to make an Irish contribution to current Hearn scholarship, including publication of new primary source material, and
f) to ensure that Hearn’s Irish dimension is fully acknowledged and analyzed.

The anthology includes most of the known articles about Hearn written by Irish authors at home or abroad or published in Ireland. In addition, it includes a summary of a
Talk on Hearn given in Dublin in 1993 by his grandson, Toki Koizumi, which shows the extent of Lafcadio's memories of his childhood in Ireland and the effects of Irish folklore, culture and customs on his Japanese stories of spirits, fairies and ghosts.

Toki Koizumi and his son, Bon, and their families have been assiduous in researching and promoting the life and works of their distinguished forebear in Japan and elsewhere. They have visited most places outside Japan associated with Hearn and come to Ireland regularly to meet their relatives here.

The papers in this collection are in general in chronological order except where considerations of presentation or subject matter would indicate a different placement. Some articles are more of historic interest and biographical details in them may differ in some respects, reflecting the fact that research on Hearn has improved, especially in recent years. I hope therefore, that the reader will accept these various accounts for their historiographical merits in the context of this collection and refer to modern bibliographies as required. I should add that because of his nomadic tendencies most writers will see a need to explain Hearn's wanderings. The Wandering Irish (scotti peregrini) theme continues to be popular in Ireland.

Since 1990, however, there has been much less emphasis on biographical aspects and more on analyses and interpretation of Hearn's personality and work. The anthology includes some new Hearn material generously contributed by Paul Murray, his most recent biographer. Murray's comments on the letters which Lafcadio wrote to his half-sister, Minnie Atkinson, should be of great interest to Hearn scholars, also other letters and material made available from family sources and archives.

The following extract is from a letter to Paul Murray from Toki Koizumi, dated 23 May 1997:
Your work contains some material quite new even to the Hearn family in Tokyo including myself. For us such material is not just academic but is 'significant to our understanding of Lafcadio', as you said. New material, especially relating to Lafcadio’s younger days, always calls forth something emotional both in me and in my son, Bon.

Just to make sure, please take this letter as proof of my permission to publish, insofar as the copyright of some of the material under my control is concerned.

I enclose short comments on the new material which you kindly invited me to prepare (see p. 256ff). While I am a lineal descendant of Lafcadio, English is not my native tongue, so I hope that you will make allowance for that in what I have written.

Bon joins me in expressing our warmest thanks to you for the fruit of your hard labour and in hoping that all goes well with the forthcoming publication.

The appendices also include some lesser-known material, such as Hearn’s term marks at Ushaw College and copy of a manuscript of term tests set by Hearn at the Fifth Higher School in Kumamoto in 1893.

An emerging theme in the re-evaluation of Hearn is the importance of his Irish background. His contacts during his formative years with relatives, tutors, countryfolk and fishermen in Dublin, Cong and Tramore familiarized him with Irish folktales, ghost stories, legends and songs which enabled him to enter easily into the world of Japanese fantasy.

He grew up in Dublin in the atmosphere that nurtured Charles Maturin, Sheridan Le Fanu and Bram Stoker, who was a contemporary. Indeed, genealogical relationships have been traced between Hearn and Le Fanu, Stoker and Synge. He was interested in the Irish literary revival and the old Celtic tales and fairy literature of W.B. Yeats and Samuel Ferguson. These traditions and the strong sense of the supernatural in everyday life were of great significance for Hearn when he came to Japan.

Irish people who are aware of the Lafcadio Hearn literary connection with Japan are surprised when they come to Japan to learn that he was almost universally regarded not
only as British but specifically as English and that this extended to Japanese encyclopaedias and reference books. His Irish background was either unknown, ignored or regarded as unimportant.

Another reason for the neglect of Hearn’s Irish background may have been his own tendency of trying to distance himself from the unhappy part of his childhood and forge a new identity for himself by fabricating details of his past. This attempt might well be a key to his complex personality. This lacuna in Hearn studies requires further research.

Hearn did not belong exclusively to any of the societies in which he lived. There can be no question of any country laying claim to Hearn as he was truly a citizen of the world. However, there is no reason why he should not be honoured by each of the countries in which he lived and wrote. More than most he established a bridge of understanding between East and West, specifically between Europe, America and Japan.

Defining his own life and the consequences of its nomadic course, Hearn considers himself to be

... the civilized nomad whose wanderings are not prompted by the hope of gain, or determined by pleasure, but simply controlled by certain necessities of his inner 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.

("A Ghost" by Lafcadio Hearn, Harper's Magazine, 1889)

Nevertheless, that part of Hearn that was Irish is now more widely recognized and researched. His formative years were spent in Ireland so that, in any event, his Irish background had an important influence on his character and attitudes to life and contributed significantly to his literary interests and achievements.

The nature and extent of Irish interest in Hearn is also worth recording. The United States where his work was
published was always the principal outlet for his writings. To a much lesser degree they were read in Britain; they were also translated into some European languages, notably French and German. Inevitably, therefore, his work was not so widely known in Europe as in the United States and Japan.

While no obituaries of Hearn have been traced in Irish newspapers or magazines, a review of a *Japanese Nightingale* by Onoto Watanna (Constable & Co., London), in *The Irish Times* of 4 November 1904 says:

Lafcadio Hearn has given us some delightful books on Japan, its people and its folklore as seen by the eyes of the Western world, but the fiction written by Japanese authors for Japanese readers is worthy of attention especially as it seems likely enough that fifty years hence the ways of life and modes of thought they treat of will be as obsolete and foreign to the Japanese of the day as our seventeenth century is to our twentieth.

Austin Stack, who had been Irish Volunteer Commandant in Tralee, Co. Kerry, in 1916, was interested in Asian literature including books by Lafcadio Hearn. In 1923 he presented a copy of *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* to Ernie O’Malley, Southern Commander in the War of Independence and author of *On Another Man’s Wound*, who was also interested in Eastern literature. O’Malley wrote in one of his letters that Hearn’s book had given him much pleasure.

Those early references to Hearn would indicate some general knowledge of his status as a writer and of his writings in Ireland in the first quarter of the century.

On books by Irish writers about Hearn, it should be mentioned that Nina Kennard (1844-1926), who wrote *Lafcadio Hearn* (Kennikat Press Inc., New York, 1912), was born in Belair, Kings Co. (now Offaly), the eleventh of fifteen children of Frances Sophia (Berry) and Thomas Homan-Mullock. In 1886 she married Arthur Challis Kennard, of Eaton Place, London. Her life of Lafcadio Hearn sprang from her friendship with Hearn’s half-sister, Minnie Atkinson, with whom she visited Japan in 1909 and
met Hearn’s widow, Setsu, and family. Her book on Hearn is a valuable primary source.

In 1991, as a contribution to the centenary celebrations of Hearn’s arrival in Japan, the Ireland Japan Association in Dublin published *Lafcadio Hearn (Koizumi Yakumo) His Life, Work and Irish Background* by Sean G. Ronan and Toki Koizumi. This was the first book on Hearn published in Ireland. Its third revised edition was issued in 1996.

*A Fantastic Journey: The Life and Literature of Lafcadio Hearn*, by Paul Murray, was published by the Japan Library, Folkestone, Kent, in 1993 with a Foreword by Professor Roy Foster, Carroll Professor of Irish History at Oxford, and an Introduction by Professor Sukehiro Hirakawa, Professor Emeritus, Tokyo University. Paul Murray, through his profession as an Irish diplomat, was by chance able to follow in Hearn’s footsteps, particularly in Japan, where he was posted, and knew its language and culture well. His book is undoubtedly the best researched of all the Hearn biographies and the most definitive.

The present volume is a further step in honouring Lafcadio Hearn in Ireland where we have been slow at times in the past in honouring our writers and creative people. It is also an Irish contribution to Hearn studies. Scholars and researchers may find it useful to have in one volume most of the Irish written views and analyses of Hearn and his work.

The anthology does not contain a bibliography but rather notes after each article. Readers interested in a bibliography are referred to those in the biographies of Hearn, particularly in Paul Murray’s book referred to above.

I wish to thank all the contributors to the anthology for their cooperation and generosity in agreeing to the inclusion of their articles or papers. They or their estates own the copyright and have sole responsibility for what they wrote. I am most grateful to the President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, for agreeing to the inclusion of her tribute to Hearn in Matsue during her State Visit to Japan in February 1995. I am
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grateful to other contributors for their reminiscences of places associated with Hearn and to George Hughes, Peter MCMillan, Paul Murray and Ulick O'Connor for their extended treatises.

I am also glad that the publication of this volume affords an opportunity of honouring some writers on Hearn who are no longer with us – Sean Dunne, Barbara Hayley, Roger McHugh and Lilo Stephens. *Ar dheis Dé go raibh a n-anamnacha.* It has not been possible to identify Sherley McEgill or Allen E. Tuttle. Although they published articles on Hearn in Ireland the names they penned must have been pseudonyms.

I should like to thank my publisher, Mr Paul Norbury, for his patient and constructive guidance and to wish him success with his new series on Lafcadio Hearn which commenced with publications by Professor Sukehiro Hirakawa, Mr Yoji Hasegawa and Mr Paul Murray.

I wish also to express appreciation to The Ireland Funds for their financial grant which made the publication possible. I am also very grateful to Dr Tony O'Reilly for contributing the Foreword and a chapter to the book as further tributes on his part to the memory of Lafcadio Hearn and the promotion of understanding and culture between Ireland and Japan.

Finally, I should like to quote from an address given by Dr Rudolph Matas, a close friend of Hearn, delivered at the dedication of the Lafcadio Hearn Room of the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library in Tulane University, New Orleans, on 17 March 1941:

In closing, we may claim for him the crowning title of the greatest prose poet of his time, with a marvellous capacity for choosing harmonious words with which to convey imponderable niceties of meaning; of all modern writers in English the exponent of the most polished, beautiful and lyrical prose, and, from this viewpoint alone, worthy of a niche in the pantheon of the immortals.