

CREOLIZATION

in Lafcadio Hearn's New Orleans and Martinique Writings

In 1877, Lafcadio Hearn (1850–1904) left Cincinnati and steamed down the Mississippi to New Orleans. In an article he sent to the *Cincinnati Commercial*, he wrote about his fascination with the changing landscape: ‘even the loveliness of the Ohio seemed faded, and the Northern sky-blue palely cold, like the tint of iceberg pinnacles, when I beheld for the first time the splendor of the Mississippi [...] [the sun] rose with a splendor [...] and auroral flush of pale gold and pale green bloomed over the long fringe of cotton wood and cypress trees and broadened and lengthened half way round the brightening world’ (Hearn, 1925: 1, 160). The landscape expanded, the sunlight shone brighter, and Hearn felt his view broadened. No doubt, New Orleans lured him with its iridescent lights and colorful lifestyle. He was charmed by the cosmopolitan milieu and its varieties of Creole culture. Being an open port, the city welcomed wanderers like him. Hearn called it ‘the Gate of the Tropics’, a magnetic place where he found people of different skin colors, languages, and ethnicity, as well as various merchandise such as tropical fruit (1, 169). If Hearn’s Cincinnati journalism, which dealt with crimes, abortions, and the underground world, were figuratively called monochrome, his New Orleans writings would be multicolored. Here, he discovers the rich soil of Creole culture that is various, multifaceted, and fluid. The open port and the sea beyond also gave Hearn a sense of freedom to write about different aspects of cultural hybridization that was going on in reality in the course of modern history. Hearn in fact became one

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of the first serious writers to research and record the Creole life and language in New Orleans as well as in Martinique. This paper aims to examine Hearn's portrayal of Creole culture and how it develops from his writings in New Orleans to those in Martinique. In his first fiction, *Chita: A Memory of Last Island* (1889), he envisioned a multi-lingual and -cultural Creole society as an ideal environment to nurture the next hybrid generation. In his next novella, *Youma: the Story of an West Indian Slave* (1890), which he wrote after his experience in Martinique, however, such a happy future for a Creole society is nonexistent, as he feared that creolization would propagate more conflicts over 'racial supremacy' than generate multi-racial and hybrid harmony (Hearn, 2001b: 73).

ETHNOGRAPHIC OBSERVATIONS OF CREOLE CULTURE

Trained journalist as he was, Hearn was well aware of America's racial, ethnic, and linguistic realities. He started out as a reporter in Cincinnati in 1872, explored diverse racial and national characters, and made himself famous in Cincinnati for a series of articles on a gruesome crime known as the Tanyard Murder. Yet he left Cincinnati for New Orleans and shifted his focus from journalism to fiction in order to realize his youthful dream of becoming a prose-poet. He polished his linguistic skills by writing articles and book reviews and translating French stories and articles. In so doing, he ended up accumulating what we now would refer to as first-hand ethnographic material, especially those writings concerning Creole culture in New Orleans and Louisiana. Old legends, folklore, songs, proverbs, and voodoo superstitions, moreover, provided him with literary inspiration.

The late nineteenth century abounded with 'local color' journalists and writers. *Literary New Orleans* (1999), an anthology of writers inspired by New Orleans, includes Hearn along with Mark Twain, George Washington Cable, Kate Chopin, and Bret Hart. What makes Hearn unique among these writers is that he was an outsider in the true sense of the word. He was a child of an Irish father and Greek mother, and he held a British passport. It probably did not matter for Hearn that he was not American; rather, his alien status allowed him to identify

with other marginalized people in society. He was by no means obsessed with the idea of American identity. In his writings, his narrators themselves identify with fellow New Orleanians as 'us': 'The season has come at last when strangers may visit us without fear, and experience with unalloyed pleasure the first picturesque old city in North America' (Long, 1999: 89). Hearn's perspective captures more than the map of the US: he demarcates New Orleans not in the American South but squarely in 'North America'. He in this way addresses his cosmopolitan readers and asks them to place New Orleans in a larger world context. Although other writers in the collection are similarly fascinated by New Orleans' exotic cosmopolitanism, they are more or less occupied with questions of American identity, local color, race, and gender. Moreover, Hearn's detachment comes from his anthropological and ethnographical perspective, or, as he himself asserted, a more scientific viewpoint. Simon J. Bronner points out in his introduction to Lafcadio Hearn's *America: Ethnographic Sketches and Editorials* (2002) that Hearn was well read in ethnology and folklore, and '[m]uch of his journalism was ethnographic because he drew symbolic significance from the communicative behavior he directly observed in these cultural scenes' (Hearn, 2002: 1). Collecting old Creole words and phrases together, George Washington Cable (1844–1925) called him a skillful 'French translator and natural adept in research' (Turner, 1969: 228). Keen collector as he was, Hearn ultimately used what he had gathered in his writings. So it was in New Orleans that he discovered his literary theme—the reality of colorful Creole life.

In the introduction to *Inventing New Orleans* (2001), a collection of Hearn's New Orleans writings, Frederic Starr regards Hearn as one of the severest judges of the US, and labels him 'an outsider's outsider' (Hearn, 2001a: xviii). Hearn was critical of self-complaisant and materialistic white 'America', and his point of view as a non-American made him give a sympathetic look at other groups that were repressed in American society—African Americans, Creoles, and European and Asian immigrants. What he was interested in was their rich traditional culture that was different and various. Starr points out:

The late nineteenth century was the age par excellence of archaeology and anthropology. It was the time when Heinrich Schliemann could stun the world with his discoveries at Troy, and a painter like Gauguin could introduce his public to remote and primitive peoples. Hearn was fully part of this pan-European movement in the social sciences and arts. (Hearn, 2001a: xix)

In America, however, such anthropological spirit had not yet impressed many, and Hearn's curiosity was considered freaky and grotesque. In *Concerning Lafcadio Hearn* (1906), George Gould, an ophthalmologist and Hearn's one-time friend, made a case study of Hearn's myopic vision, applying Maxime du Camp's theory of literary myopia (Murray, 1993: 311). Hypothesizing that 'intellect and especially aesthetics are almost wholly the product of vision', Gould assumes correspondences between Hearn's disabled eyesight and his lack of moral sense, or 'the morbidities of vision', and asserts that Hearn 'had no mind, or character, to be possessed of loyalty or disloyalty', and so 'created and invented nothing; his stories were always told him by others; at first they were gruesome tales even to horror and disgust' (Gould, 1908: xi-xiii). Gould indeed had little respect for Hearn's intellect, because he assumed that Hearn's weak eyesight was the cause of his abnormality, and thus his tendency to look at 'the lurid, the monstrous, the enormous, only hot crime, and sexual passion'. Hearn's lack of education, according to Gould, is apparent as Hearn hints of no familiarity with great literature such as 'the Greek dramatists, Dante, Goethe, Shakespeare' (Gould, 1908: 70). A Harvard graduate and medical doctor, Gould was exemplary of white American intellectuals of the North with a rigid puritanical morality. The only originality in Hearn, he adds, is his ability to 'color' the echoes he captures, and rightly calls him a 'chameleon' of 'a chromatic voice, a multicoloured echo' (Gould, 1908: 13). Ironically, a 'chameleon' is an apt name for Hearn, who ambitiously dreamed of becoming a writer of 'all trades' and to write everything in his philosophical prose-poetry.

Hearn was not only interested in Creole culture but also in keeping a record of it, as he feared that some traditional ways were disappearing. Before the founding of the American Folklore Society or any like organization, Hearn worked alone and compiled a Creole dictionary of proverbs and songs published

as *Gombo Zhébes*. In the introduction, he expresses his wish that his book would inspire a 'society of folklorists' to organize in order to pursue systematically the problems he presented (Hearn, 2013: 5). Taking this as a pioneering act in the development of folklore studies, Simon Bronner states that Hearn's 'ethnographic style', or the mode of his narrative, directs readers' attention to 'both linguistic creolization and cultural hybridization' and, most significantly, points out that 'folklore in its essence represents hybridization, and that this process mounts to a racial and cultural development or improvement' (Hearn, 2002: 144). An 'ethnographic style' then was the most appropriate style for Hearn in order to write a hybrid 'multicolored' cultural reality in the changing modern world he witnessed.

THE BIRTH OF A CREOLE STORY: *CHITA* (1889)

In the summer 1884, Hearn, weary of city life, took his first vacation and visited Grande Isle. Grande Isle was then an emerging bathing resort for wealthy New Orleanians. Nevertheless, it still attracted Hearn as a 'romantic' place with islanders whose ancestors were said to have been pirates of Baratavia. Life on the island was in contrast to that of New Orleans, which was fast becoming a prosaic modern city. Hearn was inspired and started taking notes, talking to the islanders who soon grew to like him. He visited Grande Isle a few more times, and in the spring of 1886, he decided what to do with the material he gathered on the island. He remembered a story he had heard from George Washington Cable one evening in 1883. It was a story of a small girl who was discovered alive in her mother's dead arms after the seismic coastal tide that hit Last Island on August 10, 1856. Elizabeth Stevenson tells Cable's story as follows:

[Cable] fell to talking of the hurricanes which regularly ravaged the Louisiana coast. He told them of the disaster of 1856 and the horror which seized New Orleans when news came that Ile Dernière, the favorite vacation place of the day, had been swept clean by a storm. Out of a group of summer visitors assembled late and recklessly to dance in the hall of a wooden hotel near the beach, ignoring the accelerating storm, hoping it would pass them by, only one human soul survived. The storm had smashed the hotel and washed the dancers out to sea. The survivor was a child, a little girl. She was found by a fisherman and brought home

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to his wife. The two lonely, childless people kept her as their own. It was only years later that a Creole hunter recognized the girl from some trinket she was wearing. She was brought back to her proper place in New Orleans society, but she did not love the civilization that had reclaimed her. She rebelled, returned to the coast, married a fisherman and, as far as Hearn knew, lived there still. (Stevenson, 1961: 151)

The sea and the airy atmosphere of the story inspired and excited Hearn to the point that he felt that he could write something original. He wrote to a friend in New Orleans: 'So I wait for the poet's pentecost, –the inspiration of nature, the descent of the Tongues of Fire. And I think they will come, when the wild skies brighten, and the sun of the Mexican gulf reappears for his worshippers, –with hymns of wind and sea, and the prayers of birds' (Hearn, 1956: 87). Although Hearn's novella is titled after the name of the child, the only survivor of the catastrophe, she does not emerge as the sole heroine, for he also perceives leading actors to be what he calls 'hymns of the wind and the sea' and 'the prayers of birds'. They constantly act on the lives of people regardless of their race and occupation, causing humans to come together or to part, depending on weather changes and even epidemics. In the actual episode, the child's identity was discovered because of a trinket, and she was returned to her family in New Orleans, although she never readjusted to her former place in wealthy white Creole society. In Hearn's story, she never returns to her former life in the city and is adopted by a Spanish fisherman, Viosca, and his wife, Carmen, and named Chita. Had she stayed in the city, she would have been confined in a nursery room and given a discipline suitable for a future Southern Belle, but, in the fishing village by the sea, she grows up as a nature's child who can run in the fields and swim in the sea. Such an environment creates an ideal multi-lingual and -cultural society where men and women, fishermen, doctor, and lawyer all speak different languages on equal terms. Trying to talk to Chita at first, for example, the villagers tried Spanish, English, Italian, and German. Then, lastly, she responded to a Creole from New Orleans who could talk 'gumbo', or Creole French, which she had learned from her black Creole nurse (Hearn, 2003: 53–57). Chita already talks gumbo, or a hybrid language,

and easily acquires another one, 'garagouin', or the crude French of the fishing villages (Hearn, 2003: 100).

Chita also receives a moral education through her village life. Although she was raised multi-lingual, she was not without a racial prejudice when she first came to the village. She had once contemptuously called her foster mother's black Virgin 'a negra!' Yet, her 'eccentricities', as such racially biased behaviors are objectively termed in the story, were 'gradually eliminated from her developing life and thought' (Hearn, 2003: 72). Growing up in the multi-lingual and -cultural environment of the village, she learns to feel affinity with other human beings regardless of different linguistic and ethical backgrounds. Wild nature also makes her learn to revere its mighty power in the face of which all humans are equally helpless. She becomes a physically healthy and morally sensitive child.

Chita never knows about her biological parents. Toward the end of the story, however, Hearn brings her biological father, Julien, to the island as he is making his doctor's rounds. Yet, the story does not result in a family reunion in the manner of a Shakespearean romance such as *The Tempest* in which the sea change brings about the discovery of a lost child, recognition and reconciliation, and, subsequently, the restoration of order in society. In Hearn's case, the separated family members will not reunite and are only left to live separately. They, however, seem to be always united unawares, as it were: at the end of the novella, they are mysteriously brought together like ghosts in Julien's deranged mind. He contracts yellow fever and Carmen and Chita attend him. In his half-conscious state of mind, he discerns a birthmark below Chita's right ear, which reminds him of his own lost daughter who had a birthmark exactly at the same spot, but he is so feverish that he is unable to think clearly. A romantic reunion is thus denied, but the narrator describes how the lost memory of his wife and daughter all at once flood in and how different languages echo in his delirious mind: he 'talked wildly at intervals in French, in English, in Spanish [...] "¡Mentira!" [...] "Qui ça" [...] "Quick!—quick!—hold fast to the table [...] "' His wife, of Scandinavian and New Orleans white Creole descent, surprises him as she speaks in Spanish, and he is with her at sea, drown-

ing together in the great waves. The novella ends with another voice, Carmen's prayer for the dying man in Spanish: '¡O Jesus misericordioso! –¡tened compasión de él!' (Hearn, 2003: 107–110). The Spanish Julien hears may be Carmen's prayer; nonetheless, the last human voice he hears merges with that of his dead wife in his hallucinating mind which may well be called a linguistic gumbo in the unconscious. His multi-lingual mind may also be said to be bequeathed to his daughter, a speaker of 'garagouin', or a hybrid vernacular language. In *Chita*, Hearn in this way focused on the linguistic hybridization as a natural development of civilization and portrayed it as the core characteristic of a Creole life. When he finished writing *Chita*, which had taken him more than a year, Hearn wrote to his friend and musicologist Henry E. Krehbiel (1854–1923):

I have sent on my completed novelette,—an attempt at treatment of modern Southern life in the same spirit of philosophic romance as the 'Ghosts' attempted to exemplify,—an effort to reach that something in the reader which they call Soul, God, or the Unknowable, according as the thought harmonizes with Christian, Pantheistic or Spenserian ideas, without conflicting with any. (Hearn, 1988: 14, 28–29)

Hearn called his 'novelette' a 'philosophic romance' because he wanted to write a story that expressed life's universal laws which he believed to be based on the evolutionary theory advocated by Herbert Spencer (1820–1903). In New Orleans, he read Spencer with fascination, and was convinced that life's mysteries were sensibly explained by the Spencerean idea of the Unknown. In *Chita*, or his 'philosophical romance', therefore, he wanted to render a sense of the unpredictable and unknown as a real life experience. The great hurricane in *Chita* completely destroys the summer resort of the wealthy white New Orleanians and, miraculously, a little girl survives. Nature, as Hearn interprets Spencer, is indifferent, and her mother dies, but the catastrophe it causes does not only result in malicious annihilation; it opens up life's possibilities in an unexpected way. The child is saved and grows up in a new environment where people of different backgrounds are thrown together on equal terms in order to survive in the severe natural world.

At the time of its publication, *Chita* was criticized for the lack of structural coherence in both its characterization and plot development. One favorable review of the time barely pointed out his poetic language and slighted his descriptions of Creole life: 'Half descriptive essay half short story [...] a work remarkable for the beauty of the poetical prose, a work only superficially a study of Creole life' (Frost, 1958: 210). It was only after the rise of postcolonial criticism and Caribbean studies in the 1980s that the novel was remembered, appreciated and reprinted.

In the preface to the 2003 edition of *Chita*, Delia LaBarre calls readers' attention to Hearn's 'insights of regeneration, represented by the blending of languages and culture in South Louisiana—the 'creolization' that Hearn experienced himself during his Louisiana decade'. She also refers to Hearn's 1878 article, 'Los Criollos', as 'the most reliable place to begin', as it defines the word 'Creole' always as a 'relative' term. *Chita*, she finds, reflects 'Hearn's further views on the meaning of this mysterious word that shifts and changes shape in language according to internal and external forces', and declares:

Chita is the culmination of all Hearn's studies and writings while in Louisiana and is indeed the quintessential Creole novel, even in its demi-novel form, like the Crescent City shaping itself around a curve of the Mississippi, or a tiny barrier island that bears the brunt of the sea's wrath, with a stunning tale to relate—if it survives. (Hearn, 2003: X)

If Hearn's use of the word 'Creole' varies in definition every time it appears, as in *Chita*, the novel then certainly lacks coherence. However, what he aims to create, as mentioned in his letter quoted above, is a new 'philosophical romance' in which the transient quality of human life is projected which is best represented by the notion of the Creole. The word 'creolization' is Hearn's coinage that he used to describe the phenomena of constant transformations caused by hybridization of language, culture, and, not to mention, race. In *Chita*, the girl grows up healthy and happy in a fishing village, and the story can be read as an innocuous story where nature plays the role of a healing power and the foundling is in the hands of good country people. Such an idealized hybrid community, however,

would be unacceptable for Hearn's contemporary American readers if he had portrayed 'black' Creole elements, the result of miscegenation. Carmen's black Virgin is an exception, although it can be interpreted as an exotic tool to test Chita's Christian faith and not her racist upbringing. In this way, Hearn carefully constructed his story in order to render his notion that creolization works unawares as the driving force in the evolutionary process of modern civilization.

CREOLIZATION AND EVOLUTIONARY NARRATIVE

Although he had witnessed miscegenation between blacks and whites in Cincinnati, Hearn recognized that this racial intermixing was also deeply embedded in Creole culture in New Orleans. Yet, this culture grew not only from racial mixing, but also from the mixing of language and other cultural components, such as music, songs, stories, and food. Hearn's interest in Creole culture made him curious about its origins. About a year after his arrival in New Orleans in 1887, in a letter to Henry E. Krehbiel, music editor of the *New York Tribune* whom he had befriended in Cincinnati, Hearn referred to 'a charming writer', George Washington Cable, and wrote in 1878 that he was helping Cable collect Creole songs for his book (Hearn, 1988: 13, 164). Working with Cable, Hearn became more interested in Creole dialects, songs, and stories. In his pioneering study of American dialect literature, *Strange Talk: the Politics of Dialect Literature in Gilded Age America* (1999), Gavin Jones points out the power of black language inherent in Creole language and culture:

Black language was a powerfully disruptive force because its relation to white English was both generative and undermining. Mixed with white language, black language had produced a distinctive, hybrid southern accent yet had still retained the power of resistance in its ambiguous rhetorical rituals that lay partially beyond white comprehension. (Jones, 1999: 108)

Cable's first novel, *The Grandissimes* (1880), a story of an early nineteenth-century aristocratic French Creole family, depicts white characters who mix New Orleans black Creole language into their speech, which, Jones argues, despite the novel's idyllic and 'local

color' setting, turns out to be particularly unsettling for white Creoles who believed in racial purity. Jones states that some words and pronunciations a white Creole uses are transcribed in Cable's novel exactly the same way as those of a black Creole, such as in the phrases, 'pilgrim fathers of the Mississippi Delta' took 'wives and moot-wives from the ill specimens of three races' or 'a Creole is a person of mixed blood' (Jones, 1999: 122–3). In this way, Cable makes allusions in his novel to the reality of linguistic as well as racial intermixing with African blood in white Louisiana culture, or 'white' Creole culture.

Hearn had already pointed out in 'Los Criollos' (1877), whose publication preceded Cable's 'Creoles of Louisiana' (1883), that New Orleanians call themselves 'Creoles', whether their ancestors were French, Spanish, or African (Hearn, 1925: 195). In other words the term Creole is always fraught with double meaning, suggesting that it contains African, or black, elements. The boundary between the white Creole and the black Creole is thus ambiguous. The same can be said of their racial identity; as their languages are hybridized, so are their racial identities. As Jones points out in the above-mentioned essay, Cable observes that the white Creole, despite the fact that he believes in his racial and linguistic purity, is 'probably seldom aware that his English sparkles with the same pretty corruptions' as the 'African-Creole dialect' of French (Hearn, 1925: 124). In 'Creole Patois' (1885), Hearn terms such a phenomenon 'linguistic miscegenation' (Hearn, 2009: 746). The languages Creoles speak, be they English, French, Spanish, or an African language, have mutually influenced one another and have been irreversibly transformed. The African pitch or spirit, as both Hearn and Cable assert, is already internalized in the white Creole language. These writers considered that the 'African-Creole' influence was not a contaminating element but one of creative power, which could be directly felt in orally transmitted literature such as in folktales and songs. Hearn, in fact, researched and collected Creole songs for Cable, who called Hearn a skillful 'French translator and natural adept in research'. (Turner, 1969: 228). However, Hearn was disappointed when he came to know that most songs he collected ultimately were not included in Cable's book. He wrote to Krehbiel:

I was a little disappointed, although I was also much delighted, with parts of Cable's 'Grandissimes'. He did not follow out his first plan,—as he told me he was going to do,—viz., to scatter about fifty Creole songs through the work, with the music in the shape of notes at the end. There are only a few ditties published; and as the Creole music deals in fractions of tones, Mr. Cable failed to write it properly. He is not enough of a musician, I fancy, for that. (Hearn, 1988: 13, 220)

Beyond Hearn's assessment, Cable used African-Creole songs without explanation or translation, signifying them as part of an alien culture. He was also keenly aware that these songs could refer to or insinuate the rebellious desire of the ex-slave African-Creoles. A native of Louisiana, who fought the Civil War on the Confederate side, Cable knew the mentality of the white Creole. He was, therefore, 'forced to avoid explicit reference to the threat of black insurrection that had dominated Louisiana society since colonial times—a censorship that continued throughout his career' (Jones, 1999: 129). While Hearn was upset that Cable did not make use of the songs he had collected for him, this might have been because he was a stranger in the South who did not share Cable's reservation and anxiety. Hearn was simply fascinated with the power and beauty of the sounds of African origin for what they were.

Hearn's fascination in sounds can be traced back to his Cincinnati days in early 1870s. Although he suffered from an extreme myopia with one nearly one blind eye, he had a keen ear for sounds, especially for foreign phonetic sounds. While in Cincinnati, he was introduced into the realm of world music by a fellow journalist and musicologist Krehbiel. Hearn wrote not only about African American music, but also of Chinese, or Oriental, music. He was fascinated by foreign languages and tended to use the original language in his translations and articles in order to create exotic and alien acoustic effects, as he later did in *Chita*. In *Some Chinese Ghosts* (1887). Foreignness in the text unsettles and stimulates the sensory experience in the act of reading, and Hearn thought that it reminded him of something long lost, the original state of mind—Hearn's birthplace, or 'Orient'.

Hearn followed the mid-nineteenth-century fad for 'Oriental studies' and read Egyptian, Islamic, and Talmudic stories in French translation. Fascinated by these stories, he re-translated

them into English and published a small book, *Stray Leaves from Strange Literature* (1884), in which he included stories gathered from 'the anvari-soheili, Baitál pachísf, mahabharata, pantchatantra, Gulistan, Talmud, and Kalevala'. Stories from areas surrounding Western Europe in all directions are included in his collection of 'strange' stories, serving as his examples of 'Orientalism'. In his letter to Krehbiel in 1886, Hearn infers that there could be a common denominator among these foreign stories, or some essential factor that had originally influenced Western civilization. Moreover, his belief in the original source, or the first cause in literature parallels his understanding of Spencer. These 'strange' stories for Hearn were not merely 'fantastic metaphysics' originating in the 'Orient', but they were the very means to access the origin, or what Spencerian evolutionary theory calls the ultimate 'eternal reopening of the Great Doubt' (Hearn, 1988: 13, 371).

The 'Orient' for Hearn, who was born in a Greek island, generated an image full of light and tropical air. He wrote to Gould from Martinique in 1888: 'When you think of tropical Nature as cruel and splendid, like a leopard, I fancy the Orient, which is tropical largely, dominates the idea'. Hearn's 'tropics' is not devoid of the dark powers of 'the mysterious Nature' but is 'rich in death as in life' (Hearn, 1988: 14, 62). The 'Orient', therefore, lies where the life-source springs, and there the power of 'Nature' is both 'cruel and splendid'. Hearn in his writings overlays his concept of 'Orient-tropics' with the image of a primordial wholeness of nature, which is constantly in flux, ever creating and recreating different patterns of colors and shapes. In New Orleans, he came to believe that in the transformative quality of creolization could be seen the very proof of the evolutionary theory that was conceptualized by Spencer. As Hearn witnessed the varieties of Creole culture, racially mixed colors of people's skins, their languages, and their lifestyles, he came to believe that creolization, or the miscegenation and hybridization of race and language, would further trigger the advancement in the process of human evolution. Both Cable and Hearn saw that African traits, which white purists had rejected as a sign of contamination, were in fact the essential source of creative power in Creole culture.

Chita, Hearn's Spencerean 'philosophical romance', lyrically foregrounds such creative power and describes the Creole life, or that of the multi-lingual mix-breeds, in the fierce natural climate. The ever-changing modes of the sea reflect the transiency of life that is all in flux and ever changing. In this natural setting, Hearn provides *Chita*, the girl who survived the hurricane, with both moral and physical education that is very different from what she would have had in New Orleans. In his letter to Gould from Martinique in 1888, Hearn states that Western civilization has drawn 'a sharp distinction between moral and physical sensibilities' and 'plac[ed] mind and reason over body and feelings', and that such a civilization will prove to counter development. He opines: 'When one's physical sensibilities are fully developed and properly balanced, I do not think wickedness to others possible. The cruel and the selfish are capable of doing what is called wrong, because they are ignorant of the suffering inflicted' (Hearn, 1988: 14, 60). Further, he believes the happy turn of the evolutionary process if both moral and physical sensibilities are equally valued: 'Evolutionally, egotism must precede altruism;—altruism itself begin only a sort of double reflex action of egotism' (14, 61). Spencerian evolutionary theory, as Hearn interprets it, is ultimately directed towards a selfless state of civilization. In *Chita*, therefore, Hearn plays out this theory by letting a white Creole girl suffer the loss of her city-bred white parents but adjust herself in a rural and wild environment. There, she grows up as a morally compassionate and physically healthy girl. In *Chita* is thus represented Hearn's 'romance', his wishful future vision of creolization evolving into an ultimate ideal of an altruistic society.

A CREOLE VISION MISFIRED

Hearn begins his 1885 essay 'The Creole Patois' by stating that 'the pure Creole element is disappearing from the Vié faubon', an area on the margins of New Orleans, known as an exotic place where rich white Creoles lived in villas with their colored mistresses. From here emerged a mixed Creole language that white children learned from their black nurses. Hearn regrets that such a hybrid speech is fading away:

It will be sufficient, therefore, to state that the creole patois is the offspring of linguistic miscegenation, an offspring which exhibits but a very faint shade of African color, and nevertheless possesses a strangely supple comeliness by virtue of the very intercrossing which created it, like a beautiful octoroon. (Hearn, 2009: 746)

Hearn's language is subtle. He focuses on the language and describes how 'the creole patois' reveals 'a very faint shade of African color' and concludes that the 'intercrossing' of languages creates 'comeliness'. Then he shifts his focus to the 'beautiful octoroon'. His point of the beautiful sound effect of the 'linguistic miscegenation' deftly refers to the racial miscegenation that produces the 'beautiful octoroon'. Then, instead of describing the 'beautiful octoroon' and the *fait accompli* of racial miscegenation, he, in the manner of a philologist, traces the social history of the Creole language. The 'linguistic miscegenation', therefore, is a phenomenon that has evolved side by side with racial miscegenation. In *Chita*, however, he only deals with 'linguistic miscegenation' of European languages and no black Creole language is referred to, not to mention racial miscegenation. Hearn knew that, if he wanted to write more about the reality of Creole life and of the 'beautiful octoroon', he had to depart New Orleans, so he did. He left for Martinique, where he expected that he could more freely write about it.

The essays Hearn wrote in Martinique were compiled into a book titled *Two Years in French West Indies* (1890). He colorfully described Creole culture, women, and their exotic coiffures and observed religious and supernatural practices. He also subtly made references to historical upheavals of the African slaves of the past. The book attracted those who were seeking for an exotic reading experience, and received good reviews, but Hearn in a letter self-effacingly wrote: 'What they admired, I do not know, for I have no originality. I am but an echo of other people's stories and experiences, but if I can color this echo with the iridescence of the soap bubble [...] I shall be satisfied' (Murray, 1993: 313). Although his response sounds modest, he does refer to his strength in expressing 'the iridescence of the soap bubble' in words. Hearn ambitiously used the Creole language and local dialects in his text in order to represent the varieties of culture

he witnessed. In 'Midsummer Trip to the Tropics', the first essay in *The Two Years in the French West Indies*, for example, he hears 'the creole street cries, a sonorous far-reaching high key', calling "'Çé moune-là, ça qui lé bel mango?'" He sees a pastry-seller, who is 'black as ebony, but dressed all in white', and 'chants half in French, half in creole, with a voice like a clarinet: "C'est louvouier de la pâttisserie qui passé [...]"' (Hearn, 2001b: 21-22). The musicality of the local Creole language as well as the beautiful 'ebony' color of the skin equally captivated Hearn. However, he found his confidence in human intellect, or the belief in moral evolution, challenged. In short, as he wandered into the tropical woods in Martinique, he was dumbfounded by the mightiness of nature's destructive and, at the same time, procreative and transformative power. He could only regard himself frail and unfit to survive in the harsh tropical climate:

[...] that splendid and terrible Nature of the tropics [...] consumes the energies of the races of the North' and 'devours all that has been accomplished by their heroism or their crimes,—effacing their cities, rejecting their civilization. To those peoples physiologically in harmony with this Nature belong all the chances of victory in the contest—already begun—for the racial supremacy. (Hearn, 2001b: 73)

What Hearn means by 'the racial supremacy' is not only the question between the whites and the blacks; it is a matter of survival of the fittest for all, including the Creole. Therefore, he concludes that 'the true black element, more numerically powerful, more fertile, more cunning, better adapted to pyrogenic climate and tropical environment [...] would win', and mourns because 'all these beautiful fruit-colored populations seem doomed to extinction' (Hearn, 2001b: 73). It must be emphasized here that Hearn, who is a hybrid himself and was once married to a mulatto, is not making a racist comment, positing 'black element' as an evil factor. Rather, it is Nature's unknown and indifferent life-mover. Hearn tries to argue objectively from an evolutionary point of view, and refers to 'the black element' of the tropical 'Nature' as the representation of a devastating power against which the locals, whose skin color happens to be 'black', are environmentally only fit for survival. He does not fail to add a point that the seed of such struggles has been originally

planted by the original white colonists: 'Everywhere the sins of the past have borne the same fruit, have furnished the colonies with social enigmas that mock the wisdom of legislators, –a dragon-crop of problems that no modern political sense has yet proved competent to deal with' (Hearn, 2001b: 74). His dream of a happy Creole society becomes indeed just 'the iridescence of the soap bubble' and he, in a way, rewrote his Creole story by setting it in the historical context of colonization. In *Youma* (1890) he wrote a new 'philosophical romance' based on the 1840 slave riot that he learned in Martinique.

At the end of *Youma*, angry black slaves set fire to the white master's mansion, and Youma, a black Creole nurse, dies in there, embracing her charge, a white Creole child. The story speaks for Hearn's ambivalent feelings about the future of race conflicts and creolization. In *Chita*, the child in her dead mother's arms survives and finds the arms of a foster mother. In *Youma* a white child is entrusted to the arms of her faithful 'da', but they both die. A *New York Times* book review at the time noted that Hearn 'is not of the Abolitionist breed, but makes one feel that slavery of some kind is good for the men and women of African descent, assuring himself thereby incidentally of sympathy on the part of his fellows in Louisiana who have not forgiven Mr. Cable his Northern heresies' (1 June 1890). As the reviewer notes, Hearn leaves 'moral questions to be decided by his readers', and the ending of the story is ambiguous. Does the black nurse sacrifice herself for the white child? Is she morally whitewashed and good? Is the violence inflicted by the black rioters good because their cry for freedom is justified? Is Hearn on the side of the blacks, or the whites? Hearn seems to seem to suggest that taking sides does not resolve the racial conflict. Youma, a black Creole, dies with the white child, despite the fact that her lover, a black slave, pleads with her to abandon the child and join him. The last scene does not determine morally whether she should belong the white side or the black side. Hearn perhaps could only portray the fact that white and black elements are related so that neither can be taken apart. The nurse embracing the child, or the image of the mother and child, symbolizes such truth. Their bond, Hearn seems to emphasize, is the very

fruit of creolization. It is not possible to differentiate the white element from the black ones in a Creole society. Modern history made them close-knit, be it biological or metaphorical.

Hearn dreamed of writing a 'philosophical romance' of creolization, but as seen in *Youma*, he found it impossible to portray a happy future life as he once did in *Chita*. The race issue, he was aware, was deeply rooted in the history of Western colonization, and *Youma* demonstrated how unrealistic a peaceful ending for a Creole story would be. After Martinique in 1890, Hearn left the US for Japan. There, he married a Japanese woman and became a hybrid father to three hybrid children. With an ethnologist spirit, he collected old Japanese stories and wrote about them. His bitter American memory, however, was never forgotten. While living in Kobe from 1894 to 1896, he worked as a journalist for the *Kobe Chronicle*. He once again had to face reality. One of his articles was titled 'The Race-Problem in America':

The old prediction that miscegenation would settle the problem, –that the race would be 'bleached out of existence'–would never be ventured to-day [...] it is sadly evident that the worst ultimate consequences of slavery are yet to come; and that the enormous error of it will furnish legislators yet unborn with a host of Sphinx-riddles to solve. (Hearn, 2002: 216)

It is apparent that race is still a part of his concern and is still an unanswered question. In an earthquake-prone Japan, he must have thought about life's unpredictability and human frailty. In 1896, Hearn heard about an earthquake and tsunami disaster that happened in north Japan, and immediately wrote a survival story based on an old Japanese legend, 'A Living God'. This time, he ventured to write a hybrid religious story which envisions people sharing the same faith in the goodness of human heart. Faced with Nature's power, he knew, humans, regardless of race or class, are equally powerless. And in the aftermath of such a cataclysmic event, Hearn did not fail to observe how a society's vulnerabilities could surface like debris floating atop waves. For Hearn's America, it was the question of race.

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