



Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things

Lafcadio Hearn

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Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things Details

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Zak says

Not what I expected. This collection came across more like the author telling me ABOUT weird tales than actual storytelling. As a result, it was really hard for me to get into any of them, save for the title story.

Pelin says

These stories are quite unexpected, surely bizarre, but each of them somehow relates to our modern lives. It was a pure coincidence that I found this book in the mostly forgotten Japanese shelf of the bookstore, but I'm happy I bought it. Even if it is not so popular, I think it's a must read for anyone who is interested in Japanese history and culture.

Meghan Fidler says

I truly admire Lafcadio Hearn. An international traveler and writer, his works on Japanese ghost stories not only captures the reader, but captures the idiolect inherent in Japanese stories... (allow me, reader, the creative license to describe genre, voice, and the content for the diversity which is Japan as an idiolect. I recognize that it is a bit odd, but I also like it as a descriptive maneuver, capturing the individual narrator within the practice and knowledge of a broad region, history, and language).

There are 17 short ghost stories within the novel, and then three short sections on insect stories, poems and narratives.

For those with an anthropological bent, like myself, the description of the term *Nazoraeru* in the story "Of a Mirror and a Bell" is particularly intriguing, as it calls forth the same sympathetic magic principle behind the Trobriand Islander's safeguards when loved ones are traveling on the ocean.

To exemplify, allow me to provide an excerpt from page 57:

"Now there are queer old Japanese beliefs in the magical efficacy of a certain mental operation implied, through not described, by the verb *Nazoraeru*. The word itself cannot be adequately rended by any English word; for it is used in relation to many kinds of mimetic magic, as well as in relation to the performance of many religious acts of faith. Common meanings of *Nazoraeru*, according to dictionaries, are "to imitate," "to compare," "to liken;" but the esoteric meaning is to substitute, to imagination, one object or action for another, so as to bring about some magical or miraculous result.

For example: — you cannot afford to build a Buddhist temple; but you can easily lay a pebble before the image of the Buddha, with the same pious feeling that would prompt you to build a temple if you were rich enough to build one. The merit of so offerieng the pebble becomes equal, or almost equal, to the merit of erecting a temple..."

The book continues with delightful examples of poetry and lines, the sentiment of Japanese oral storytelling is given credit. One of my favorite examples came from the story entitled "Hi-Mawari": and its inclusion made me put down the book and go get my quote book immediately.

"As the sunflower turns on her god, when he sets, the same look that she turned when he rose." (169)

Hearn is appreciated by readers in Japan and in English speaking alike.

Teresa says

This book is divided into 2 sections, the longer one called "Kwaidan," which means 'weird tales' (there are 17 of them) and a shorter section called "Insect-Studies," which is comprised of 3 different essays about butterflies, mosquitoes and ants. All the writings are from a Japanese perspective, though Hearn points out where the tradition is even older and likely comes from an earlier Chinese telling.

In the "Kwaidan" section I was reminded of other folklorists who've done the same kind of 'archiving' for other communities. The details in the stories may be very different from other traditions, but many times the fears embodied in the stories seem the same, giving them a universal feel. Certain stories even helped explain the modern-day Japanese horror stories and movies in which the spirit cannot rest because of a grudge it held at the time of its earthly death.

I previously knew how much at peace Hearn felt in Japan, knowing that here is where he found his true home, becoming a citizen and marrying a local woman. The well-written essays with his philosophical musings show how much he had embodied the essence of Japan.

Audrey says

Kwaidan is a beautiful selection of Japanese ghost stories; some of them are horrifying, some of them are touching, and all of them provide an intricate look into the many subtleties that make up the Japanese culture. I am greatly enjoyed each and every story in this book, and each of them I enjoyed for different reasons. Some of the stories were translations of old Japanese texts wheras, for others, this book was the first place they were ever written. The author heard them while traveling through small-town Japan and enjoyed them so much that he transcribed them. Because of this, it is somewhat difficult to write a real review. The stories are not his; they aren't even retellings, but the author does an amazing job of transcribing/translateing them and making them his own. Obviously, some things are lost in translation, but the author did a great job of minimalizing this loss, and I really feel like I got the full effect of what was originally being said.

At the end of this book, there was a brief study of insects in relation to Japanese culture which I found absolutely FASCINATING. I found the sections on ants and butterflies to be especially enjoyable (though I should perhaps note that I am slightly obsessed with ants). The chosen poems and texts along with the author's observations and commentary gave me great insight as to the roles that insects played (and insects are VERY prominent in Japan) in ancient Japan.

I GREATLY enjoyed this book (and learned a lot!), and, for the first time in a very long time, I found myself so enraptured that I couldn't stop myself from staying up into the wee hours of the morning reading. I highly recommend this selection of stories to anyone who is even remotely interested in Japanese culture.

Nancy Oakes says

A much more in-depth look at this book can be found here at my online reading journal; otherwise, here's a brief look.

I'm late to the Lafcadio Hearn party, having only read two stories in this collection before picking up this book -- "The Story of Mimi-Nashi-Hoichi" and "Yuki-Onna," which have long been personal favorites. There are seventeen actual "Kwaidan" in this book, and then a section by Hearn called "Insect Studies," three compositions that in their own right are definitely worth reading. Ranging from out-and-out creepy ghost stories to monks roaming the countryside where various monsters, demons and other creatures seem to abide, there is never a bad note struck throughout the entire collection.

At seventeen stories, I'm not about to go into each one, but my favorites in this volume are "The Story of Mimi-nashi Hoichi," "Yuki-Onna," "Rukoru-Kubi," and "The Dream of Akinosuke." All are intense, and all are simply excellent.

The stories are short but their length doesn't affect their potency; by virtue of being stories that have been handed down over several centuries, the reader also gets a look at ancient Japan from different angles, from the world of the samurai on down to that of the lowliest peasant. It is a world of constant upheaval in terms of the physical world and also vis a vis the traditional social order. One major exception is "Hi-Mawari," a story that takes place in Wales, obviously penned by Hearn himself. After the kaidan section is finished, the reader moves into Hearn's "Insect Studies," where he dwells on butterflies, mosquitoes and ants. While you might be tempted to skip them, don't. They're absolutely fascinating, drawing on traditional folklore, etc. from Japan and China.

I realize that not everyone is going to admire these stories like I do, but I love all things Japanese and this collection was simply superb. It might just be a good opening into all sorts of kaidan for a novice reader, and there are several works available in English that would make for great follow-up reading.

I absolutely loved this book and I can't recommend it highly enough.

Miriam says

I came across a manga based on Yuki Onna (the Snow Woman) that reminded me that I meant to read this, someday.

Deniz Balc? says

Lafcadio Hearn, çok ayr?ks? bir ya?ama sahip bir yazar. Hayat?n?n eri?kinli?e kadar olan y?llar?n? Avrupa ve Amerika'da geçiren yazar; sonraki dura?? olan Japonya'da deyim yerindeyse büyüleniyor ve Japonya'ya yerle?menin yan?nda tam bir Japon olma yolunda kendini geli?tirip bir Japon olarak ölüyor. 1800lü y?llar?n sonunda, bu tarz göç ve adaptasyon hikayesi pek çok olan bir ?ey olmad???ndan, Hearn bir öncül oluyor ve önemli çal??malara imza at?yor.

"Kvaidan", Hearn'in Japonya'da iken dinledi?i ve derledi?i kadim Japon korku hikayelerinden olu?uyor. 20 öykü var içinde. Baz?lar? Çin kültürü men?eili olan öyküler; günümüzde korkutucu olmaktan ziyade Japon mitolojisinin izlerini sürebilece?imiz halk anlat?lar? ve efsaneleri olarak de?erlendirilebilir. Korku hikayelerinin bir kültür hazinesi oldu?unu dü?ünüyorum. Afrika'n?n mistik kabile öyküleri, Avrupa'n?n Hristiyanl?kla geli?en, Ortaça?'da güçlenen ?eytan odaklı? öyküleri, Müslüman dünyan?n Kur'an? Kerim destekli cinli büyülü öyküleri, ?skandinavlar?n mitolojilerine yaslanan epik ve rahats?z edici öyküleri vb... Japonlar?n da bu anlamda dünyan?n hiçbir yerinde göremeyece?imiz zenginlikte birikimleri var. Zaten günümüzde Japon korku sinemas?n?n bu derece popüler olmas?, modern zamanlarda gerçek bir korku edebiyat? furyas?na tan?kl?k edebilmi? olmalar? hep bundan sebep. Bunun kökenine inmek ve anlayabilmek için bu k?sa hikaye kitab? çok güzel bir kaynak. Okurken zaman zaman ismi geçen mistik canl?lar? internet üzerinden ara?t?rarak çok güzel görsellere de ula?abilirsiniz.

Kitab?n özellikle ilk çocukluk y?llar?n? atlattm?? gençlere çok güzel bir hediye olabilece?ini dü?ünüyorum. Onlar? korkutmaktan ziyade dünya kültürlerinin çe?itlili?i ve zenginli?i hakk?nda; Japonya nezdinde kafalar?nda bir fikir olu?mas?n? sa?layacakt?r diye umuyorum.

Herkese iyi okumalar!

7/10

Owlseyes says

"Buddhism finds in a dewdrop the symbol of that other microcosm which has been called the soul..."

This is a collection of weird stories taken mostly from old Japanese books. Lafcadio acknowledges that many of the stories may have a Chinese origin. Mind you, Lafcadio was a lecturer of English literature in the Imperial university of Tokyo (1896-1903) and a honorary member of the Japan society in London; and he lamented not reading Chinese.

My sensibility guided me especially to the last chapter of the book dedicated to "insect stories" (on butterflies, mosquitoes and ants). His reflections on those animals in parallel with the Buddhist beliefs will astound anyone.

"Deeper thoughts than memory may still be suggested to English poets by the sight of a butterfly and probably will be for hundreds of years to come"
in Interpretations of Literature, by Lafcadio Hearn.

Most interesting (both for me and Lafcadio) were the butterflies' stories and his presentation of several HOKKUS (17 syllables poems). Just one ahead:

OWARÉTÉ MO,
ISOGANU FURI NO;

CHOCHO KANA!

[Ah! the butterfly! The butterfly when chased it never has the air of being in a hurry].

An insect which deserves all respect, amazement, reverence...because of the Buddhist belief: if a butterfly enters your home it should be treated kindly, because it may be the soul of a dead person or of a living one.

Again Lafcadio stresses: most of these “marvelous” stories are Chinese.

As for mosquitoes, though bored at their number in the nearby Buddhist cemetery, they too deserve respect; any of them may become an incarnation of those dead.

Finally, the ants deserve a special place of evolutionary speculation on the part of Lafcadio, who exalts their practice of “horticulture and agriculture”, their skill in the “cultivation of mushrooms” and other feats.

Though a resident in the Japanese territory for 14 years, Lafcadio had a lot to learn from Japan,... an immensity ...from a different mind. The Buddhist mind.

"In one of his last essays Lafcadio Hearn said that he would like to be buried in the old Buddhist graveyard behind his garden"

in: "Lafcadio Hearn" by Edward Thomas

Marc says

A good 90% of this book deals with Hearn's retelling of classic Japanese and some Chinese tales. Almost all revolve around death and the spirit world with priests roaming the countryside being forced to settle restless souls, or lost loves returning in spirit/animal form. There is an eerie but mystical feel to most of them with strength of will often triumphing over death and dismemberment. And then the last 10% of the book is "Insect Studies" whereby Hearn examines the role of butterflies, mosquitoes, and ants in terms of symbolism and literature. And each is treated so differently to really bring out the "strange" part of the book's title. The section on ants veers off into a wonderful metaphysical discussion about ant society being a morally superior existence to human society due in large part to its physiological removal of selfish behaviors (sex and greed) in favor of behaviors that support the whole community over the individual.

Words I Learned While Reading This Book:

lancinating | faute de mieux | vestal | parthenogenesis | pellucid

Jim says

This is a collection of traditional Japanese ghost stories, followed by three charming essays about butterflies, mosquitoes, and ants in Japanese culture. The famous film of the same name by Masaki Kobayashi actually uses stories from three different Lafcadio Hearn works, two of which are from **Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things**.

Kwaidan can easily be read in about three hours and is a good introduction to Hearn's other work about Japan. He became a Japanese citizen, married a Japanese wife, and raised a family in Tokyo. I can think of no better introduction to Japanese culture than reading his essays and stories.

Nandakishore Varma says

I have started posting reviews again, at the request of my friends. If you like them, please take time to visit my blog also, where I talk about other things in addition to book reviews.

I first encountered Lafcadio Hearn in an Anthology of American stories, in a weird little story: *The Boy Who Drew Cats*. It was a creepy Japanese fairy tale about a boy whose artistic productions (which were solely of a feline persuasion) came to life and did away with a goblin rat. As a short story, it did not possess much of a literary quality (IMO), so it was filed away somewhere in the back of my mind as a curious little oddity and forgotten.

But Mr. Hearn's name being very unusual, I remembered the story immediately when I saw this book, almost thirty years after I read it. In the meantime, my interest in myths, legends and fairy tales had become something of a passion. Moreover, I still carried my adolescent love of horror stories and had relatively recently been introduced to Japanese horror, more subtle and frightening than the American variety. So this book was something of a godsend.

Lafcadio Hearn was something of an outsider in the West: his only talent, it seems, was writing gory newspaper reports. As with maverick Westerners in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, he found refuge in the mystic East; in this case Japan. It is the great fortune of all of us that Hearn decided to translate these creepy gems (which might have remained confined to Japan) for the rest of the world.

“Kwaidan” means “Ghost Stories”, which the first part of this collection contains (the second part contains “insect studies” from a “folkloric” standpoint which is not very interesting). These seventeen stories are the traditional “around-the-campfire” type, part and parcel of a people living in tune with their environment not yet spoilt by the encroaching monster of urbanisation. Being from a country full of wood-spirits and water-sprites myself, I could relate.

There is Hoichi, the blind bard who is enchanted into playing for a company of ghosts and who is protected by the Buddhist sutras written upon his body (“Mimi-Nashi-Hoichi”); people turning into trees and trees, into people (“Ubazakura”, “Aoyagi”, “Jio-Roku-Sakura”); and goblins and ghosts galore (“Jikininki”, “Yuki-Onna”, “Rokuro-Kubi” etc.). There are also a couple based on the Japanese belief (now made famous by *The Grudge*) that a person who dies in great anger leaves behind an angry ghost. I was struck by the similarity of many of these tales to the stories I heard as a child in Kerala – one (“Mujina”) is an exact copy of an urban legend (well, with a different type of ghost) prevalent during the late eighties.

In the second part, Hearn tries to compile legends, myths and beliefs about butterflies, ants and mosquitoes. These make mildly interesting reading, but lacks depth.

A fast read, and a worthwhile one for readers who are interested in the beings which inhabit the primordial depths of our psyche.

Nicole~ says

In Japanese folklore, there is the belief that a disquieted spirit, one who has died still troubled by a deep resentment or anger toward those it considered immoral and malevolent (such as enemies or murderers), will not let go of its attachment to the physical world, in a sense not having been extinguished or quelled by death; having taken such hostile feelings to the grave, will be unable to rest in peace, and therefore will re-emerge by supernatural means fueled with vengefulness.

Kwaidan or 'weird tales', is a collection of 20 gothic Japanese sketches written by Greek- born, Japanese emigrant Lafcadio Hearn. He created these stories from a mixture of Chinese and Japanese folklore retold over generations through both oral and literary traditions. Kwaidan, published in the same year of Hearn's death (1904), is set in Japan's Edo period (1603-1868) which Hearn renders expertly with vividness and authenticity.

Some of the tales are perhaps stranger and mysterious to the western reader than gruesome in content, as in the short sketch *Jikininki* - Man-eating Goblin: about a ravenous shape-shifting entity. A priest died having lived a selfish life with an appetite for material things, is reincarnated with an insatiable hunger for the morbid. His digressions in this infernal form is less than ecclesiastic, but one only hopes he says 'grace' before digging in.

Most of the stories tell of ghostly apparitions or reincarnations, of supernatural beings who have taken human form. The following are just two examples of longer pieces in Kwaidan, superbly adapted to film by Masaki Kobayashi in 1964.

The Story of Mimi-Nashi-H?ichi -

H?ichi-the-Earless is a fantastic ghost tale built on historical events that took place 700 years prior at the Straits of Shimonoséki (Battle of Dan-no-ura), the last battle between the Heiké and Genji clans where the Heiké, along with their child emperor, were completely annihilated. The sea, the shore and all its creatures had become haunted, so a temple was built to appease the Heiké ghosts.

One evening H?ichi, a blind lute player at the temple is commanded by a samurai ghost (naive Hoichi is unaware that the samurai is a spirit) to sing the ballad of the fallen Heiké. His singing so moves his supernatural audience that he is commanded daily to perform. When the temple priests hear of Hoichi's daemonic encounters, they attempt to protect him with sutras written all over his body, but plans go grotesquely wrong.

Yuki-Onna -

'The Snow-Woman' is a haunting fantasy, beautifully told: Hearn's best known and most memorable story. Two woodcutters, Mosaku and Minokichi, caught in a snowstorm, take shelter in a vacant boatman's hut. While Mosaku sleeps, Minokichi is awakened to the vision of a woman in white blowing the frosty breath of death on Mosaku, then moves her gaze to the frightened Minokichi. Yuki-Onna, in a moment of benevolence, spares his life but instructs him never to repeat what he has just witnessed or she will kill him. Many years later this threat comes back to haunt Minokichi in an eerie, chilling twist.

As a fan of Japanese goth, I heartily recommend Kwaidan - a quick, satisfying sampling both in written or

movie version, to add spookiness to the season.

Sub_zero says

Sí, lo admito. Soy de esas personas que ven un libro mínimamente relacionado con Japón y se lanzan a por él sin contemplación ninguna. A estas alturas no creo haber sorprendido a nadie, pero el que aún no me conozca ha de saber que siento una irreprimible y a veces preocupante filiación nipona. Y si a esto le añades un elemento de tipo terrorífico, la salivación se multiplica de manera exponencial. Pero a pesar de mis elevadas exigencias, he tenido la suerte de encontrar en el interior de este magnífico volumen que recopila la obra completa de Lafcadio Hearn (figura de vital importancia en la difusión internacional del folclore, mitos y cuentos populares japoneses) todo lo que buscaba. Aunque hay ciertos aspectos estéticos que no me han terminado de convencer, interpretaciones libres que hace el propio Hearn sobre la cultura oriental y el hecho de que algunos cuentos estén a medio terminar, el conjunto de la obra me ha parecido de una calidad y relevancia indudables. Entre las páginas de *Kwaidan* hallaremos infinidad de historias de carácter trágico o aleccionador protagonizadas por demonios, fantasmas, divinidades sintoístas, espíritus vengativos y otras criaturas sobrenaturales que pudieran pillar desprevenido a todo aquel que esté familiarizado con la visión occidentalizada del terror japonés que hoy día ofrece la industria del entretenimiento. Plagada de notas, referencias, explicaciones aclaratorias y rematada por una excelente introducción que resume la biografía del autor y contextualiza su obra, esta edición de los cuentos escritos por Lafcadio Hearn es una auténtica pieza de colecciónista que ningún amante del género de terror (no digamos ya de lo japonés) debería pasar por alto. Avisados estás.

Karl says

In his wonderfully informative and lengthy introduction Paul Murray states that "Kwaidan" translates as "Old Japanese ghost stories" (p.XX). Kwaidan is subtitled "Stories and Studies Of Strange Things".

Hearn was born in Greece in 1850 and spent his childhood in Dublin, while in America he was a crime reporter in Cincinnati where he remained until 1877 when he moved to New Orleans, moving to Japan in 1890.

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"Rokuro-Kubi"
"Yuki-Onno"
"Hi-Mawari"

This is a beautifully written and produced book. I want to thank Brian Showers for providing such an great piece of artful book making.

This book was published with the support of the Japan Foundation.

This is copy 83 of 500 copies published, and arrived with a pamphlet of the Lafcadio Hearn gathering In Ireland.

Hulyacln says

?ki bölümünden olu?an Kvadian özellikle Lafcadio Hearn(Koizumi Yakumo) 'ü tan?mak için etkileyici bir ba?lang?ç oldu.
?lk bölümde 17 öykü,ikinci k?s?mda ise böcekler üzerine denemeler görüyoruz.Bir blog gibi bir çok konu hakk?nda örnek okumakla beraber bu konular bir ayr?ks?l?k olu?turuyor.

Erma Odrach says

I recently joined the group "Friends of Lafcadio Hearn" here on GR's without knowing who he was. So I did my research. He was a British/Greek/American author, who moved to Japan in 1890, and was key in introducing Japanese culture to the West.

Kwaidan is a collection of 20 short, strange tales, taken from old Japanese books - a ghostly woman dressed in white appears before a young woodcutter and makes him promise never to tell, a mysterious face shows up in a cup of tea, a girl with no features has a face as smooth as an egg. And there are samurais, monsters,

floating heads and much more. Bazaar and full of the supernatural, *Kwaidan* is a look into Japan's past. It's fun and easy to read.

Here's the link for the "Friends of Lafcadio Hearn" group for anyone who might be interested.

<http://www.goodreads.com/group/show/4...>

Agnieszka says

In my country people say that fear has big eyes but in that case we can equally say that it has slanting ones as well. *Kwaidan* then is an interesting collection of Japan weird stories illustrated with drawings of ghosts, demons and other unusual creatures typical of Japan folklore and myth.

Written by Lafcadio Hearn, Japanese by choice and avocation, in times when eyes of the Japanese people were turned mainly to the West and the inhabitants of the land of the rising sun seemed to feel only contempt to own folk cultural heritage. For lovers of Japan culture and spine - chillers it is required reading. Stories are thrilling, hideous, sometimes touching but most of all highly atmospheric - just in time for a long autumn evening.

3.5/5

Brady says

Kwaidan will be a great travel guide to Japan once Cthulhu rises from the ocean and a universe of muting horrors is poured upon the world. *Everything's* a demon in these stories. Spoiler.

Lafcadio's a lot of fun, and his writing is clean and folksy and ethereal, definitely a qualified style for retelling ancient fantasy tales. He's got a lot in common with Lord Dunsany, and that's a big compliment. My version had spectacular colorful illustrations on most pages, to make the whole thing seem like a lovely dream-ride.

A section of essays on Lafcadio's insect studies, bizarrely enough, was the most thought-provoking of the set. Lafcadio sees ants as the ultimate examples of altruistic society, millions of years past humanity in their moral evolution, since each one would rather benefit the whole than itself. He wonders if humans will ever reach such a level, practicing kindness for its own sake, obsoleting law, religion and philosophy itself.

Of course, nowadays ants are thought of as creepy, mindless stimulus-response machines monomaniacally devoted to order and The Hive. You could write a fun essay on the change in the cultural perception of ants over the last century. (It probably has something to do with the Red Scare - T H White and Kurt Vonnegut both tried to write fables comparing ants to communism in the 1950s. And then there was the invention of computers, and the feastable crop of unique new fears that came out of them - their input --> output drive is not too different from the pheromone-based computations of ants. Not to mention how much of an ant's thought process has been laid bare by biology in the past hundred years - and it is creepy from our

standpoint.)

Clarice Chiu says