

LITERATUROZNAWSTWO I PRZEKŁADOZNAWSTWO

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**ENCHANTED WITH THE CITY OF THE SOUTH
– NEW ORLEANS IN LAFCADIO HEARN'S
LITERARY NONFICTION**

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The paper discusses one of the phases in the writing career of the nineteenth-century American literary journalist **Lafcadio Hearn** (1850-1904).¹ The period embraces the decade between 1878 and 1888 when the writer resided in **New Orleans**, making the city a significant stopover preceded by Ireland, New York and Cincinnati, and followed by more exotic locations such as Martinique and Japan. According to S. Frederick Starr, Hearn actually created the image of the city as it has become popular in America and throughout the world up to this day. Starr claims that Hearn “virtually invented the notion of Louisiana, more specifically New Orleans, as idea and symbol” [Starr 2001, xii], and “it was (him) who, more than anyone else, identified the elements of what became the prevailing image of New Orleans and commanded the literary skills needed to communicate that composite to a large general readership” [xxv]. The composite highlights what the previous accounts of the city included but rather underestimated or did not manage to embrace with genuine warmth, sympathy and tolerance.

Hearn’s image of New Orleans, although permeated with compelling personal affection, “grew from the works of travel writers, novelists, poets, and other kinds of mythmakers” [Ruys Smith 2011, 4] who preceded him in the exploration and revealing the city’s charms and vices. Among those who praised New Orleans there were Washington Irving, Mark Twain and William Cullen Bryant. Irving described the city as “a mixture of America

¹ The impressive range of L. Hearn’s writings is available in e.g. *A Bibliography of Hearn’s Writings* by Percival D. Perkins.

and Europe” [78], as well as “one of the most motley and amusing places in the United States” [78] of the 1830s. More than twenty years later Mark Twain appreciated New Orleans’ power to surprise newcomers through its spectacular carnival spectacle. Bryant included the city in his 1872 piece *Picturesque America*, originally published as a series of articles in *Appleton’s Journal*. Yet Thomas Ruys Smith in his 2011 book *Southern Queen: New Orleans in the Nineteenth Century* proves that the city owes the majority of the accounts to less distinguished, and now frequently forgotten, authors whose contribution to the place’s common perception should not be ignored. As early as 1731, with the publication of *Abbé Prévost’s* novel *Manon Lescaut*, the city began to be associated with tolerance for degeneracy and the immoral pleasures of out-of-wedlock relationships. At the end of the eighteenth century, marked by an intensified exchange of goods between New Orleans and other American cities, and the influx of new settlers into Louisiana, travelers’ accounts promised adventures, riches and entertainment. At the same time, some visitors, for example the English astronomer Francis Bailey who arrived in 1797, disapproved of the city’s lack of morals as evidenced in the “gaiety and mirth of juvenile diversions” [14] such as: “singing, dancing, and all kinds of sports” [14] that could be observed in every street. The condition of New Orleans’ streets at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was also criticized by Pierre-Louis Berquin-Duvallon, an exile from Saint Dominique, who additionally complained of the citizens’ rudeness, ignorance and lack of education.

The in-depth research conducted by Thomas Ruys Smith demonstrates that the number of accounts of New Orleans increased considerably after the so called Louisiana Purchase of 1803 whereby the western region of North America, consisting of 828,000 square miles, was bought by the United States from Napoleon. Some of those accounts were especially influential in establishing the city’s reputation for the remaining part of the nineteenth century. A significant impact was exerted by Thomas Ashe’s 1808 book where he not only complimented on New Orleans’ prosperity and power but popularized it “as a city of pleasure to extraordinary lengths” [20]. In 1812 another traveler, Amos Stoddard, contributed to the above mentioned image by noting the local women’s “most beautiful forms and features” as well as the Creoles’ inclination towards gambling and dancing [23]. The combination of the beautiful and the sinful found its reflection in an 1821 letter of Rachel Jackson, president Andrew Jackson’s wife, in which she compared New Orleans to Babylon due to both places’ wickedness, idolatry, and excessive splendor [52]. Definitely, one of the most appealing descriptions of the city can be found in the journals of the architect of the Capitol, Benjamin Latrobe. The author’s ability to capture the cosmopolitan character, the developing trade and tourism, and the energy of New Orleans’ growing population in the 1830s “planted a picture of the city that would remain recognizable until

the Civil War” [73]. Among numerous travelers’ reports of the pre-war period, considered as New Orleans’ Golden Age, the account of British tourist, Adam Hodgson, shows his fascination with the city charms exemplified by the local flora and landscapes.

The period of Reconstruction after the Civil War (until 1877) witnessed the revival of Mardi Gras which “became an increasingly visible subject in post-war popular culture” [121]. The motif of the carnival, enriched by the author’s descriptions of women, gardens, and other pleasures of the city, appears in Thomas Bailey Aldrich’s 1862 account *Out of His Head*. The then editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*’s expressed his nostalgia for the pre-war era in *Story of a Bad Boy* (1870) devoted to his childhood in New Orleans. The longing for the good old times can be also traced to the 1871 novel by James Curtis Waldo, *Mardi Gras: A Tale of Antebellum Times*. The 1870s novels and other nostalgic accounts published in illustrated magazines, as well as the Americans’ post-war hope and optimism, aroused the “national passion for travel” [126], both in terms of individual experience and/or of reporting such experience to the public. In the case of Lafcadio Hearn, the individual inclination for traveling coincided with the all-American enthusiasm for exploring the United States, as well as with his journalistic profession, thus producing the idealistic image of the nineteenth-century New Orleans which has survived up to this day.

Within this image one aspect is analyzed in more depth through a close reading of the journalist’s personal manner of describing the city as “a woman, as if penning a valentine to a treasured lover” and as “a place of sensuality, frivolity, and intrigue”² [Heitman, online]. The issue is discussed using, as examples, Hearn’s texts published in the form of impressions, sketches and editorials in the *Cincinnati Commercial* and the *Daily City Item*, the former one left by Hearn in favor of the latter, a New Orleans-based newspaper where he was employed for about four years. In the selected pieces the writer’s affection towards the city is presented primarily in terms of his expectations, his perception based on the senses, and his tendency to ascribe feminine qualities to the places and objects he explored as a reporter.

Hearn, delegated by the *Cincinnati Commercial* as a political correspondent, began the process of forming an image of New Orleans only after he had set off on a journey to Louisiana. The image creation was approached on entirely new terms since “(t)he slavery to ignoble journalism, what he calls a ‘really

²This approach to New Orleans was not a novelty as “from earliest days, (the city) was oriental-ized and eroticized, particularly because of the associations with African slaves with sexuality itself (...), the infamous Storyville area of prostitution and jazz, and the city’s longstanding reputation as a place of sexual license and laissez-faire.” (see: *A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American South* by R. Gray and O. Robinson, p. 321). Moreover, the city image compared to or even equated with femininity is explored by the Russian philologist, Vladimir Toporov, in his study *Miasto i mit (City and Myth)*, pp. 33-45.

nefarious profession,' was to be resolutely renounced from the day of his arrival in New Orleans" [Gould, online]. His contemporary, the American physician and lexicographer, George M. Gould (1848-1922) declared in his book *Concerning Lafcadio Hearn* that, after covering sensational pieces, the writer "rebelled against becoming a part of the revolving machinery of a newspaper" one more time, and expressed his determination to "produce something better in point of literary execution" [Gould, online].

Hearn's first account *Memphis to New Orleans*, published in the *Cincinnati Commercial* on November 14, 1877, prepares the ground for a new experience which, no matter how risky and unpredictable, he expected to be promising and refreshing. According to George M. Gould, and other friends of Hearn's, "any place rather than Cincinnati would have been better for the happiness and success of the emigrating boy." From the notes on the writer scrupulously collected by Gould we can also learn that Hearn's development and success as a reporter increased in inverse proportion to his well-being: "(h)is body and mind longed for the congeniality of southern air and scenes (...). While his lines were hard ones in the grime and soot and trying weather of Cincinnati, from which his frail body shrank continually, his trend of thought was largely tropical" [Gould, online].

No wonder that, having been in such a state of body and mind,³ Hearn started his November article with the words "(o)ne leaves Memphis with little regret" [Starr 2001, 3], and did not even pretend any concern about Cincinnati readers' feelings – the representatives of the North he had just deserted. Moreover, he depreciated the region's major source of power and influence as "a cotton nightmare" [4], and noticed that "even the loveliness of the Ohio seemed faded, and the Northern sky-blue palely cold" [4] in comparison with his first encounter with "the splendor of the Mississippi" [4] as well as the sunrise "over the cane fields of Louisiana" [4]. As this example shows, the desire for change and hope for the better in the new place, on the one hand, idealized the South; on the other, his expectations made him even more observant, receptive and aware of what he actually had awaited and missed so far. From this introductory article the reader can infer that what impressed Hearn most on entering Louisiana was what he imagined as the attributes of the South: the tropical glow, the smell of "saccharine sweetness", the landscape abounding with "the mouths of bayous, (...), swamps, orange trees and live-oaks, pecans and (...) broad-leaved bananas" [5], as well as "the magnificent old mansions of the Southern planters" [5]. One can also argue that the very way into the South enchanted Hearn and won his heart immediately; thus, what he expected further could be taken by him at face

³ Hearn was depressed after the failure of his marriage with a mulatto woman, Alatheia Foley, which led to a scandal, and to the reporter's being fired from the *Cincinnati Enquirer* in 1875, as related by Simon J. Bronner in his *Lafcadio Hearn's America: Ethnographic Sketches and Editorials*.

value. The journey to New Orleans apparently drew the writer's attention from the original assignment he was to undertake for the *Cincinnati Commercial*; "(c)ontrary to the expectations of the *Commercial's* editors, Hearn sent back little about politics. Instead, he offered picturesque travelogues of the new sights" [Bronner 2015, 20] along the way. The pieces, usually classified as *impressions*, were accepted by the magazine as they responded to the strong market demand for "short stories set in little known locales" which developed in the United States in the last three decades of the nineteenth century [Mastran and Lowerre 1983-91, xxiv].⁴ Additionally, Hearn's character and inclinations predestined him to follow the form of the travelogue as "he loved wondering and change of scene; he disliked the monotony of staying beyond a certain time in the same place" [Kennard 2010, 100] thus putting himself into the category of those who rather practice extended stays than traveling.⁵

The variety of stimuli appealing to Hearn belongs to the sphere of senses which can be sharpened only under the appropriate circumstances. In the case of Hearn, who complained of poor vision (he seriously injured one eye in his childhood), more effort had to be put into grasping the visual aspect of the world, "which paradoxically seemed to enhance his perception" [Heitman, online]. Most probably, what others took for granted and perceived on a kind of *regular* scale, he appreciated more intensively – with more involvement, emotion, and enjoyment. Therefore, his first glimpses of Louisiana were not only conditioned by his anticipation of some better future but also by his perceptive skills which could be eventually used at full strength as they were exposed to such a plentitude of incentives. Hearn's "narratives dwelled on the sounds, smells, and textures of his settings" [Bronner 2015, 13] already in *Cincinnati* where he mostly concentrated on the gruesome, macabre, and repulsive elements of the city's underside. Arriving at his new destination, Hearn could further develop what David Howes in his *Empire of the Senses* calls "an approach that involves 'sensing cultures' (in place of 'reading') them" [Howes 2005, 4]. Out of that cornucopia of impressions caught by the reporter while on the boat to New Orleans, colors make their mark in the account *Memphis to New Orleans*.

Taking note of the most characteristic features of the Southern landscape, Hearn pays special attention to its variable greenery: "from a green so dark that it seemed tinged with blue to an emerald so bright that it seemed shot through with gold" [Starr 2001, 5], at the same time presenting to his readers

⁴The popularity of the travelogue in the United States is closely connected with the development of the railroad, the American expansion to the West, as well as with the "travel-mania" in Europe; see *Metamorphoses of Travel Writing: Across Theories, Genres, Centuries and Literary Traditions* ed. by Grzegorz Moroz and Jolanta Sztachelska. The fascination with this form is studied in *Literature on the Move* by Ottmar Ette.

⁵To explore more of the difference between sojourns and regular travels in literature, see *Louisiana Sojourns* by Frank de Caro.

the power of nature as well as the first sample of his own powers of careful observation. He also notices other colors and their subtleties as the “snowy whiteness”, “pale yellow” [5], “an auroral flush of pale gold” [4], and “the grey of the Spanish moss” [5].

Color is one of the primary aspects of the surroundings Hearn is aware of when he arrives in New Orleans on November 19, 1877. That focus on color in *At the Gate of the Tropics* as well as in *Memphis to New Orleans* may justify both pieces as examples of travel writing since, according to Ottmar Ette, “each travelogue (...) presents *visual* models of understanding that are unfolded in their spatial-temporal dimension to the reader” [Ette 2003, 19]. In the harbor Hearn remembers for instance the sight of “deep-sea ships (...) (with) their pale wings folded in motionless rest” [7], and “brightly-painted luggers” [7]; when he enters the French Quarter “its houses painted in light tints of yellow, green, and sometimes even blue” [7] are recorded in his account as the place’s first elements of interest. Soon Hearn proves his eye for detail and an ability to provide more profound insight when he distinguishes some “neutral tints” [7] and subtleties such as “walls painted chocolate color, or tinted yellow” [8] which, in his view, “have a pretty effect” [8]. The concern with the effect reflects the writer’s fascination with Edgar Allan Poe’s fundamental concepts of composition,⁶ and therefore is most often revealed precisely through the concept of beauty but also through harmony, generosity, splendor, and picturesqueness – the qualities Hearn valued in people, nature and arts, and whose presence ensured him stability and safety. At the very onset of his journalistic assignment he provided some traces of these qualities in, for instance, “generously and beautifully built” [8] public edifices, “picturesquely-peaked” [7] roofs of sugar sheds, “the harmonious relation” of some architectural elements [8], or the “splendor” of the Mississippi River [4].

While reminding us a little of a tourist guidebook with major landmarks and attractions of the city, Hearn’s first articles from New Orleans also reflect the author’s conviction that the more exploration he undertakes, the more of the desired effect will unfold before him. He expresses this belief concluding his excursion through one of the city districts with the words: “and the gardens more and more beautiful, as you proceed southwardly...” [9] in the direction where he hoped to find “a land where the air is always warm, the sea always the color of sapphire, the woods perpetually green as the plumage of a green parrot” [Gould, online]. Wandering among New Orleans’ houses and gardens gave the writer a touch of his dream of the South; what he encountered there

⁶ Although Poe’s influence on Hearn’s writings is most prominent in the Cincinnati period of the sensational pieces on the city crime (e.g. *The Tanyard Case*, 1874), “it is well known that (he) identified with Edgar Allan Poe, particularly with his famous poem, *The Raven*” [LaBarre, xix]. A conclusion can be drawn that the ideas expressed by Poe in his *Philosophy of Composition*, especially beauty and the significance of the ultimate effect, are reflected in Hearn’s dealing with the city’s women, architecture, and flora.

was not merely the abundant flora but rather a harmonious combination of well kept plants (fruit-bearing trees, thick shrubbery cunningly trimmed into fantastic forms, orange and fig trees, bananas and palms, magnolias and myrtles, cypresses and cedars) with paths, statues, fountains, antique urns and “the houses, mostly built in Renaissance style” [Starr 2001, 8]. The landscape structured in this way, partially wild, partially tamed, “this elegant, gracious architecture (...) adapted to this sky and such a sun” [8] appeared to him as an earthly paradise, almost infinite since it stretched over long miles and took hours to walk through.

The paradise-like quality of the Southern Queen, the feast to the writer's sense of sight, would not be complete without another sensual element he mentioned from time to time in his articles. According to Hitomi Nabae, Hearn was aware that “the smells certainly add to a sense of life in motion, while picturesque façades, though pleasing to the eye, can simply be dead as they fail to emit any life-giving energy” [Nabae 2014, 56]. Thus, he was not indifferent to the impression that “the air yet becomes more fragrant” [8] alongside those houses and gardens he admired, in the same manner as he recognized “the smell of saccharine sweetness” [5] floating from the Mississippi shores. What could not escape his notice was the smell of the aromatic coffee of the French Market vendors mixed with the odors of meat and “the wilted cabbage leaves” [28]. Yet the one-of-a-kind character of the city was memorized by him thanks to “the exquisite perfume of the South, the breath of orange flowers” (15) making passers-by drowsy, and “the air odorous” [15] by “the ladies who promenade Canal street of a sunny afternoon” [15]. That particular smell, or *sensuous experience*, as Paul Rodaway, the author of *Sensuous Geographies* claims, could be “grounded in (the individual's) previous experience and expectation, each dependent on sensual and sensory capacities and educational training and cultural conditioning” [Rodaway 1994, 5]. Being deeply conditioned by his ideal of the South, his half-Mediterranean origin, and the acuteness of the senses (except for that of sight), Hearn managed to detect that unique combination of odors prevailing in New Orleans. In that manner, he outlined for the readers the place's *smellscape*, its “overall smell environment” [Henshaw 2013, 5] whose mental image became a significant part of the city's total image.

Examining the features of a southern city, Hearn did not ignore the message conveyed through the sense of hearing, thus establishing the specific “sonic environment” [Saunders and Cornish 2017, 109], the idea developed in the 1970s as the *soundscape* by the Canadian composer Murray Shafer, and expanded later by Paul Rodaway. Through a detailed and vivid description, Hearn succeeded in translating that “sonic environment of which surrounds (him as) the sentient” [109] into the long-lasting and appealing feature widely accepted within the city image. In one of his sketches published in the *Daily City Item*, Hearn turned his readers' attention to the manner the life of New

Orleans manifested itself sonically at dawn. He recorded that “with the first glow of sunlight the street resounds with (...) cries” [98] of peddlers trying to sell fresh figs, lemons, tomatoes, chicken, but also fans and charcoal. The text aimed at describing these “voices of dawn” [98] in terms of “musical announcement” [98] rather than annoying noise irritating the inhabitants. He showed the readers the brighter side of this kind of wake-up call as a form of entertainment to those who lack leisure and amusement. At the same time, he optimistically and matter-of-factly observed that the morning trade of the peddlers was “an encouraging sign of prosperity and the active circulation of money” [98] in their city.

Yet the relation between economy and entertainment so evident and unavoidable in the organization of the Carnival (Mardi Gras) did not evoke in him equally positive reactions. In this case, having resided in New Orleans for about six years, Hearn assumed the perspective of a citizen, rather than a newcomer. At that stage he seemed more than certain that “the place (was) disguised by its holiday garb, (...) the native picturesqueness (was) overlaid and concealed by the artificial picturesqueness of the occasion” [47]. While recommending to tourists (originally the readers of *Harper's Bazaar*, 1883) the so-called St. Martin's summer as a more beneficial season to enjoy the city's “most natural and pleasing mood” [47], he again proved being audile and color-sensitive. Instead of the *compulsory* attractions of Mardi Gras, he focused on those he already appreciated as real ones: “tepid, vast, wine-colored” nights “vibrant with an infinite variety of insect music (...): sounds as of ghostly violins, phantom flutes, elfish bells (...)”, and “weird and wonderful pipings” of mocking birds, “invisible buzz-saws” of crickets [47], and frogs' croak. As for the musical character of the city, Hearn was convinced that visitors and especially the inhabitants were privileged since “every surface inch of land or water seems to possess a voice of its own; the water-lilies speak one unto the other, the shadows cry out” [47].

Other peculiar local sounds and odors noticed by this sensitive and acquisitive city reporter refer to the place's climatic condition – its dampness. Evidently impressed, he used a number of adjectives (including three in a row) to express its exceptionality: “phenomenal” [38], and “spectral, mysterious, inexplicable” [38]. The consequences of the dampness such as “soughy, marshy sounds under the foot” [39] in carpeted rooms, the “musty smell” [39] in the atmosphere, and the necessity of sleeping with a fire in one's bedroom are dwelled upon in the *Cincinnati Commercial's* impression *New Orleans in Wet Weather* of December, 1877, where he stresses the city's Southernness and already distances himself from the North by addressing the readers: “You do not know in the North what such dampness is” [38]. He also begins to understand the relationship between those early fogs, moisture and mildew and the city dwellers' “peculiar habit of late rising” which makes eight o'clock the time of “awakening yawn” [40] instead of brisk business. Gradually he realizes

that under the circumstances anyone will be tempted “to lose all affection for the great Northern nurse that taught you to think, to work, to aspire. Then, after a while, this nude, warm, savage, amorous Southern Nature succeeds in persuading you that labor and effort and purpose are foolish things, that life is very sweet without them” [Gould, online]. Hearn’s remark reflects his awareness of the consequences of “the classic opposition between sense and intellect (leading) to the notion that the expansion of the sensory awareness (...) entails a diminution of intellectual activity” [Howes 2005, 6].

The quality of sweetness and loveliness frequently mentioned in Hearn’s accounts also refers to another aspect of sound, namely, the Creole dialect. He not only describes it as the “sweetest of all dialects” [Starr 2001, 16] he had ever heard, but also as “the most liquid, mellow, languid language in the world” [16]. To support his description, he provides its specific linguistic features: being “voluminous with vowels” [16], and omitting the letter r in pronunciation, but most of all, he proves to have “poetry in (his) composition, music in (his) soul” [16] by defining the dialect as “pretty baby-talk”, and “a language for love-making” [16].

His sensitivity to the delicacy and smoothness of the language coincides with the special attention Hearn regularly devoted to the similar and other characteristics of the women of the South. According to Adam Rothman, “Hearn’s view of the tropics as seductively feminine made it almost inevitable that he would fixate on tropical women” [Boelhower 2010, 121] in his writings set in New Orleans and the Caribbean. Especially at the beginning of his stay in New Orleans he pictured them with unconcealed enjoyment and awe expressing these emotions with adjectives of color and quality (sun-golden, elegant, startling, dark) as well as adverbs and statements complimenting on the women’s appearance (“perfectly worn and perfectly managed”, “admirably adapted”, “I have never seen”) [15]. The feature the author frequently mentions, their grace, turns out not too obvious to grasp; in an attempt to be apt he prefers “supple shapeliness” [15]. Yet he soon concludes that the phrase should rather be replaced with the French term “*sveltess*, for which the English tongue has no word” [15], thus somehow accounting for the genuinely intangible Southern femininity. Confined to the possibilities or rather the limitations of the English vocabulary,⁷ the writer wanted to convey that the grace he meant was a “realization of the Greek ideal (...), a living Venus of flushed bronze” [15]. As a matter of fact, according to Hearn, the city’s females were privileged by having inherited ancient classical beauty. At the same time, he emphasized the features of more sensual and carnal character embodied

⁷ According to the French scholar Bernadette Lemoine’s *Lafcadio Hearn as an ambassador of French literature in the United States and Japan*, the writer showed “a strong taste for linguistic studies”; his ambition was to transpose the “exoticism and stylistic achievements” of such French authors as Gautier, Maupassant, Loti, or Flaubert into his own works to convey “the warmth, color and melodiousness of descriptive qualities” of prose.

in the local women, which completed and authenticated their image.⁸ For example, having caught a glimpse of a young woman passing by, the reporter habitually noticed her “supreme grace like a statue of bronze” [153], but as a resident of three years, he may have felt more confident with his readers to mention her “indescribable curves” [153], and her attitude towards men.⁹ He witnessed the woman’s “not seeking to conceal her admiration of the handsome youth” [153] who greeted her on the street, and recorded their unhidden mutual interest as “tropical” [153].

In this manner Hearn stressed, not for the first time in his New Orleans pieces, a connection between the place’s climatic conditions and the inhabitants’ habits, customs and behavior. Another, more humorous and slightly ironic analysis of the influence of the tropical environment on New Orleanais can be found in the 1880 sketch - - - - - *Mosquitoes !!!* published in the *Daily City Item*. There he assures the reader that without those “most cunning of all living things which fly” [108] the city would practically stop functioning as everybody “should waste (their) time snoring upon sofas or lolling in easy chairs, or gossiping about trivial things, or dreaming vain dreams, or (...) feeling dissatisfied with (their) lot” [109]. Now from the position of the insider who understands the citizens’ concerns, Hearn concludes his mosquito-praising text with somehow sermon-like teaching “Even while we curse, let us also bless the mosquitoes, for making us move about and root around, instead of dreaming our lives away” [109].

The possibility of losing oneself in dreams seems omnipresent in New Orleans and especially its whereabouts “full of flower fragrance” [83], abounding in “forlorn cypress woods (...), fields of cane (...), and orange trees holding out their yellow riches to passing boats (...)” [83]. Hearn realized that such circumstances led to a state of pastoral peacefulness, and all-embracing quietness he referred to in terms of dreaminess, and to which he did not object. On the contrary, he yielded to its power of becoming the “master of thought and speech” which “mesmerizes you, – caresses with tender treachery, – soothes with irresistible languor, – woos with unutterable sweetness...” [83]. Consequently, he identified with what he admired, and allowed that to conquer him and his

⁸ Hearn’s memory of his Greek mother, described as a woman of beautiful big eyes and tawny complexion, but also compared by the writer to the Virgin Mary holding the Child (see *The Erotic Motive in Literature* by Albert Mordell, Chapt. XVII), mixed with the availability of images of nude women and copies of classical artworks (from the middle of the 19th century), may have resulted in the somehow contradictory pictures of the women present in the analyzed pieces. See *The Beauty Myth* by Naomi Wolf. Also, S. Bronner in *Lafcadio Hearn’s America* mentions the writer’s early “pagan interests” in nude illustrations referring to some mythological creatures and gods he read about at the age of 8 or 9.

⁹ In his 1883 *Mysteries and Miseries of America’s Great Cities*, J. W. Buel observed that local women’s lack of modesty towards men was due to the climate which helped them to “develop and sensualize” to the point of emitting “flames of infectious passion.” See: Introduction to *Creating the Big Easy: New Orleans and the Emergence of Modern Tourism, 1918-1945* by Anthony J. Stanonis.

writings, which became “indeed, exquisite, and as certainly of a delicacy and beauty which must have made the reader of that time and newspaper wonder what strange sort of a correspondent the editor had secured” [Gould, online].

The above-mentioned influence of dreaminess may have lulled Hearn into some false feeling of complacency and never-ending idyll, but in his case it actually inspired him to even more fervently follow and grasp the Southern spirit. During his city strolls the traces of beauty and sweetness associated with womanhood always appeared worthy of notice. In the sketch *Home* (which appeared in the *Daily City Item* on January 8, 1881) he praised a woman's presence which “transforms and beautifies everything” [150] and adds a soul to the “furniture and brick walls” [150] of the household. While studying the local systems of the French Creoles' street-naming he discovered that many of them were “christened with the sweetest and prettiest feminine names imaginable (...): Suzette, Celeste, Estelle, Amelie, Anette, and others” [19]. Also, “some of them were christened after the favorite children of rich parents, but again not a few were named after favorite concubines” [19] – the mixture accounting for the primacy of beauty no matter its source.

Hearn's constant and successful quest for beauty in the South mirrors his attempts to define this concept. In his 1898 work *Exotics and Retrospectives* he expresses the belief that beauty embodies memory, since it “represents (...) countless fragments of prenatal remembrance crystallized into one composite image within organic memory” [Hearn 2007, 168]. In his monograph *The Spirit of No Place*, Hitomi Nabae elaborates on Hearn's understanding of beauty by adding that in Hearn's view “beauty (...) is a ‘recollection’ of the ‘antique beauty’ one must have experienced in the distant past. It is also the reflection of ‘antique beauty’ in the form of a shadow in the present” [Nabae 2014, 21]. What is more, beauty “may escape one's inattentive eye, but it is always present in the ordinary matters of life” [21], a claim which confirms Hearn's way of perceiving New Orleans and the South.

The charm of the street names was not Hearn's exclusive interest devoted to the Creole aspect of New Orleans. In his journalism this subject is explored in impressions (*The Streets, Los Criollos*), sketches (*A Creole Type, A Creole Journal*), editorials (*Latin and Anglo-Saxon*), as well as longer studies, also called reports from the field, in which he studied the cuisine, dialects and proverbs. According to Thomas Ruys Smith, the author of *The Southern Queen*, a book on the nineteenth-century New Orleans, Hearn's enchantment with the city, its spell “had been cast at least partly by George Washington Cable. As (Hearn) later remembered (...) the timing of his arrival coincided roughly with the publication of Cable's strange little tale, ‘Jean-ah Poquelin’, which (...) influenced (his) anticipation of the city and encouraged to idealize everything” [Smith 2011, 133]. It should also be mentioned that Hearn coined the new term “creolization to describe the transforming and varied practices of the hybrid culture” [Nabae 2014, 10] of the Creoles, and that he and Cable

collected folk songs to preserve them for future generations; Hearn wrote down the lyrics, and Cable recorded the music [Bronner 2015, 21].

The writer's first remarks on the Creole element concern the above-mentioned names of the streets, and the charming sound of the dialect he had heard in England. Tempted with the promise of the sensual and the beautiful present in the Creole speech, in the following pieces of his correspondence to the *Cincinnati Commercial* Hearn begins to pursue the issue with the very term 'Creole' – its interpretations and improper applications, as well as some samples of Creole songs and medicine, just to expand his scope of interest in the years to come. The Creole aspect fits into the cosmopolitanism repeatedly emphasized by the reporter thus contributing to the image of the city; the city where "man might (...) study the world" [22] due to the variety of races, faces, dresses, and languages. The presence of the Creole element simultaneously strengthens the city's Southern character through aristocratic traditions and the Spanish and French background, customs (e.g. fencing), architecture – "all the romance of the earlier days" [18] and "suggestion of a hundred years ago" [187], which was so appealing to Hearn and which he could not sense in the North.

However, apart from the fact that New Orleans "resembles no other city upon the face of the earth, yet it recalls vague memories of a hundred cities" [7], most of all, it was "its tropical beauty" [7] which enchanted Hearn through all his stay in the South. In those articles where he emphasized New Orleans' exquisite qualities he enumerated them as if in one breath ("quaint houses, its shaded streets (...), its contrasts of agreeable color (...), its general look of somnolent contentment, its verdant antiquity (...), its tropical gardens, its picturesque surprises, its warm atmosphere") [187]. The indulgence in naming virtues coincides with the moments of addressing the city as a female when the writer reveals his emotions and concerns. It is most painful for the writer to speak of "her decay" [45] which does not mean the city's disappearance but rather the destruction of the old Southern spirit – "the picturesqueness, the poetry, the traditions, the legends, the superstitions, the quaint faiths, the family prides, the luxuriousness, the splendid indolence and the splendid sins of the old social system" [45].¹⁰

The lament over the future of the city peaked in the editorial *New Orleans Letter* (1878) whose final part takes the form of a prophecy of the city's decline. Here again the author feminizes New Orleans through the pronoun 'her' but

¹⁰ The adjective *splendid* referring to New Orleans' indolence and the sins of slavery, adultery, debauchery, and tolerance for inequality may reflect the writer's conviction that "the passions still remain more powerful than the reason in man because they are incomparably older, because they were once all essential to self-preservation (...). Never can be suffered to rule (...). Only through millions of births have we been able to reach this our imperfect state; and the dark bequests of our darkest past are still strong enough to prevail over reason and ethical feeling" – see *The Erotic Motive in Literature* by Albert Mordell.

additionally intensifies his vision by means of an interchangeable employment of grammatical tenses, mostly referring to the present: “The old Southern hospitality has been starved to death” [45], “(m)any of her noblest buildings are sinking into ruin” [46], “(t)he charming French Opera-house on Bourbon Street (...) is dark and dead and silent” [46], “(t)he New South may, perhaps, become far richer than the Old South; but there will be no aristocracy, no lives of unbridled luxury, (...) no mad pursuit of costliest pleasures” [45].

However, another *Daily City Item* editorial, *The Glamour of New Orleans*, presents an entirely different opinion, although typically of its author, not deprived of a significant amount of “affectionate impressionism” [3]. The then editor of the daily firmly acclaimed that “the glamour of New Orleans” [187] in all its manifestations “cannot ever be wholly forgotten” [187]. What justifies his conviction is the historical truth that “for a hundred years and more has New Orleans been drawing hither wandering souls from all the ends of the earth” (...) and in turn “(a)ll civilized nations have sent wandering children (...) to the far-off Southern city, whose spell is so mystic, so sweet, so universal” [187]. The protest against the city’s decline becomes additionally reinforced with the text’s closing section where New Orleans is personified as a temptress seducing the world with the offer of the inconceivable “hope and content (...), eternal summer, (...), sweet breezes and sweet perfumes, bright fruits, and flowers brighter than the rainbow” [188]. The “beautiful, quaint old city” [188] lustfully murmurs assuring the visitor of its eternal impression made by beauty and charm never threatened with youth – “I am old; but thou hast never met with a younger more beautiful than I” [188].

The personified image of New Orleans created in *The Glamour of New Orleans* guarantees the readers and guests the permanence and power of their “first delicious fascination of the fairest city of the South” [188]. The whole editorial can be treated as the conclusion of the present paper since it comprises all the major assets of New Orleans as well as Hearn’s most personal expression of his enchantment touchingly conveyed by the “perfect garment of words” [Gould, online]. Particularly, adjectives and adverbs employed in enumeration, repetition, and personification, but above all the “language that, while streamlining (sensory) experience by molding it into its communicative structures, (could) give it a temporal dimension, add past and future, loss and longing, hope and despair” [Rindisbacher 1992, 4]. What must be added in the paper’s final paragraph are Hearn’s main writing concerns and aims underlying the treatment of his own journalism. First of all, he believed that “the thing created must be beautiful; it does not satisfy if the material be rich” [Gould, online] in events, accidents, or sensations as usually expected in the papers. That attitude is also supported by James Cockerill, the *Cincinnati Enquirer’s* editor, who remarked that Hearn’s “whole nature seemed attuned to the beautiful, and he wrote beautifully of things which were neither wholesome nor inspiring” [Bronner 2015, 14]. Then, stressing

his Greek-Irish origin, Hearn admitted he felt more comfortable “with the Latin race than with the Anglo-Saxon” [Gould, online] which predestined him “to create something in English fiction analogous to that warmth of color and richness of imagery hitherto peculiar to Latin literature” [Gould, online]. Also, he realized that finally “with time and study (he) may be able to create something different from the stone-grey and somewhat chilly style” [Gould, online] dominating English and American writing. Definitely, despite his reserve towards American journalism of the second half of the nineteenth century, he considerably contributed to the development of its literary variation due to “his special brand” [Bronner 2015, 1], made his name as a reporter who *invented New Orleans*, and succeeded to leave the readers enchanted with that city of the South.

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Summary

This paper is devoted to the New Orleans stage in the writings of the nineteenth-century American literary journalist, Lafcadio Hearn. The major focus is on the writer's fascination with the city's unique Southern character which was skillfully grasped and conveyed by Hearn during the decade of his residence in New Orleans. The articles published in the *Cincinnati Commercial* and the *Daily City Item* are discussed in terms of the author's sensual and emotional approach towards what he considered as the greatest assets of New Orleans: its tropicality, the Creole element, the climate, and the women. Special attention is paid to Hearn's sensitivity to feminine beauty as the crucial determinant of the city image he managed to describe for future generations.

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