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Robert Rosenstone has written a wonderful historical account of the encounters of three late 19th-century Americans with Meiji Japan: William Elliot Griffis, Edward S. Morse, and Lafcadio Hearn. One was a committed minister turned teacher, another a natural scientist who became a leading expert on Japanese mollusks and pottery. The last was a journalist and romantic writer who settled in Japan, married a Japanese woman, and wrote 10 volumes which in their day were considered the best writings on Japan by an American.

This is no ordinary historical work. Rosenstone's new book deliberately questions many of the things that in the usual genres of historical representation we take for granted: Where to begin, and where to end. What words can do, and what they cannot. Why knowledge about the past, and knowledge about the present, cannot be properly separated. At times *The Mirror in the Shrine* reads more like a modernist novel than a narrative history.

Though unconventional, this is narrative history at its very best. The narrative is simultaneously gripping and unsettling in ways that depict, even embody, critical questions that a handful of historians are beginning to ask with increasing insistence and rigor. We gentle readers are not allowed to imagine an omniscient narrator who, however much the footnotes of normal histories may reveal a struggle against silences (in the historical record) and noises (in previous historical accounts), can tell us the whole story. Here we have fragments, questions, many stories. But what stories they are!

Imagine yourself one of the first

Americans to arrive in Japan, a few years after those islands had emerged out of the self-enclosed feudalism of more than two centuries of Tokugawa rule. Perhaps you have just recently finished a year of theological studies at Rutgers Seminary, started a comfortable life in a Methodist church in New York, been jilted by a young love. And you get the offer of a lifetime. You are asked to become a teacher of natural science in Fukui, Japan, at what seems an extravagant salary. Although you would rather travel as a missionary, you know that missionizing is not allowed in Meiji Japan. If you were Griffis, you would take the offer, find yourself in a part of this strange new land where you are a solitary Westerner. You might equate the teaching of Western science with the mission of Christian religion. You might even find yourself so drawn to exotic mysteries that you are tempted by your beautiful, young, Japanese servant girl, whom you suddenly and inexplicably dismiss.

If you were a historian trying to piece together a coherent account of Griffis's journey, you would feel frustrated at the reticences of the record, the limits of words. The past might seem a steadily shifting montage of images and words and questions. You endlessly rearrange the montage to fill in gaps, but gaps only get bigger. The historian stares at microfilm reels and computer screens, tempted to bring order to chaos. But then other forms of chaos intervene—memories, perhaps, of one's own landing in Japan, one's own cultural, intellectual, personal dislocation. Remembering does not end this book, but begins it on every page.

Encounters imply changes. No

change seems as dramatic as that undergone by Edward Morse. An obsessive collector of shells, he personifies the confidence of Victorian science. Without any of the aesthetic predispositions and sensitivities of a Lafcadio Hearn, Morse sees beauty in classification tables and new specimens. Initially far more resistant to change than Hearn, who went to Japan for mysterious experience, Morse in fact undergoes greater change than either Hearn or Griffis. He notes that the Japanese have in many respects worked out better ways of living than Westerners. He extends his interest from mollusks to pots, though he confines his aesthetic wanderings by familiar modes of classification, carefully (scientifically) organizing pottery by age, region, and style. Before long, Morse is studying the tea ceremony, and shortly thereafter, Japanese singing, perhaps the most foreign (for him) aesthetic of all. He writes, "It is by taking actual lessons in tea ceremony and singing that I may learn many things from the Japanese standpoint." More than a new ethnographic science is at work here. Morse has entered into radically new forms of experience.

Hearn too changes. He immediately recognizes the beauty of Japanese ways. However prefigured this recognition is by his desire to get away from the known and find the exotic instead, Matsue, where he first stays, seems magical. Soon Japan becomes steadily less exotic, and his subsequent move to the southern island of Kyushu marks the alienating familiarization of his new country. By then he has a Japanese wife, who cares for him and stays by his side, and gives him the family that is his one constant buffer against the mul-

tiplicity of worlds that increasingly challenge the harmony of his literary imagination. Hearn remains restless, content only at home and in words. But the words reveal little about the man; the biographer once again comes up against the limits of knowledge, the silence of sources.

It is ironic that a book whose words flow so well finds words so limiting. This is partly because the biographer is suspicious of surfaces, and seeks out the contradictions and reticences of his subjects, perhaps also of his own self. Partly this is because the biographer—here I should say critical historian—is all too aware of how his own words shape, frame, and give meaning to words of other texts in other times. Though it may seem to some that facts are made to look too much like fiction, and fiction too much like history, this is because the book has succeeded in drawing us in, not just to some distant past, but to present imperatives of the past as it lives on. In Rosenstone's book it lives on with special power, style, and imagination.

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