

**A COMPLEX FATE: SADAKICHI HARTMANN,
JAPANESE-GERMAN IMMIGRANT
WRITER AND ARTIST**

by

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Sadakichi Hartmann's career in America is an ironic variant of the Horatio Alger "myth," in this case the story of a young man who rises through adversity to recognition as an art critic, major photography critic, and, in general, cultural entrepreneur and gadfly, village explainer,¹ raconteur and bohemian, and finally an aged Pierrot dying in obscurity, sick and forgotten. It was in his middle years, for many reasons, some of them cultural, others personal, that he began a decline into obscurity and near-oblivion. Hartmann had to endure the odd prejudices of the American public, against his youthful bumptiousness, his unrealistic expectations, his Japanese-German origins, and a pervasive provincialism in the adopted country he could never conquer.

Carl Sadakichi Hartmann (Sadakichi, roughly translates "fortunate if constant") was born about 1867 in the international trading settlement on the island of Desima in Nagasaki Harbour. He was the son of an aloof German merchant, Carl Herman Oskar Hartmann, and a Japanese mother, Osada, whose origins remain unknown and who died soon after his birth. Hartmann and an older brother, Hidetaru Oscar, were shipped home to Germany by their roving father to be raised in the wealthy Lutheran household of a Hamburg uncle, Ernst Hartmann, a man of refinement, a gourmet, and discriminating art collector. In an unfinished autobiography, Sadakichi speaks of studying French, English, Latin, and Greek, among other subjects in private schools, and from tutors, and learn-

ing as much or more by the age of twelve than any boy who goes through an American high school. His uncle expected him to chat knowledgeably on art and theatre, and to differentiate between the quality of performances by great German actors and actresses. Undoubtedly, it was this kind of discipline that, a few years later, enabled him to pursue the program of self-education, to read voluminously in Philadelphia libraries and to frequent art shops and museums where he spent long hours going through books and memorizing pictures.

When his father remarried, Sadakichi was sent to a naval academy in Kiel, where he soon rebelled against the military strictness and ran away to Paris. Enraged, his "honorable father" disinherited the 13 year old boy and shipped him off to relatives in Philadelphia. Arriving in 1882, he was dismayed by the bleak contrast to his former life. Carrying among other books, Diderot's *Paradox of a Comedian* in his luggage, Sadakichi made his way from Ellis Island to Philadelphia on a hot summer day of 1882, depressed by an alien landscape that seemed everywhere to spawn enormous signs for Dr. Schenk's Liver Pills. His aunt, a gaunt old woman in a Mother Hubbard, and his uncle, a greybearded tobacconist, were not overjoyed at the arrival of an odd youth of aristocratic mien in fancy European clothes which his uncle decried as "outrageous." Devoutly religious, goodhearted people—as Hartmann saw years later—they spent drowsy afternoons in a backyard shooing flies with palmleaf fans. They could not fathom a boy who brought home armloads of books which might put foolish ideas in his head. The uncle found Sadakichi a job sweeping floors and cleaning out spittoons for a lithographic firm. At night, alone in his room, he brooded over his lost Hamburg childhood, resolving each morning, however, to go forth, to steel himself for the menial work and prepare for a new life in art and literature.

In his massive manuscript *Esthetic Verities*, he writes retrospectively about his bitterness and disappointment, not-

ing the lack of cultural advantages and enumerating the daily routine in contrast with his former state:

1. *Over there I was well dressed; now my trowsers were fringed and my shoes full of holes in sole and vamp.*

2. *Over there I was always well provided with pocket money, often carrying as much as twenty Marks; now I often came down to the very last cent.*

3. *Over there I had the best of food; now I frequently went hungry for days.*

4. *Over there I moved among people aristocratic, at least in looks and manners; here I was confronted with proletarians who shocked me by crude taste and conduct.*

5. *Over there I had a servant, a governess, and private tutor in the evening, who took care of all my wants; now I had to clean spittoons and run errands for others.*

6. *Over there I lived the carefree life of a child of a rich family; now I had to work for my board and get up at five o'clock in the morning, if I wanted to do any studying.*

And thus his story goes on—hardships, struggles, but a determination to overcome. He worked at a succession of menial jobs, moving ever closer, it seemed, to a career in art and drama, studying nights in the Philadelphia Mercantile Library. Discovering Walt Whitman's poems through a bookseller in 1885, he paid his first visit to the old poet in Camden. Sadakichi occasionally translated letters from German correspondents and in other ways tried to help Whitman. The record of his visits is described in *Conversations with Walt Whitman* (1895), in Horace Traubel's multi-volume *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, in Whitman's own letters, and in the reminiscences of Whitman associates.

In one of his unpublished manuscripts (*1000 Happy Moments in a Lifetime, Where and How: New World Orders Analyzed*) one finds a systematic expression of his thoughts on Americanization. We might center in the second chapter, "Kultur über Alles: Germany- the U.S.A." The first two sections, "At the Crossroad" and "Americanization" are crucial

to an understanding of Hartmann's retrospective feelings about his foreigner status, and about America in general; but one is prohibited by lack of space. They indicate a close study of our political history, wide reading in economic and social theory, and express some rather cogent indictments of capitalist democracy.

In spite of bitter effusions, Hartmann at one juncture concludes that: *The United States of America attempted something that is near sublime, an ideal (although ideals are generally aspirations that cannot be attained) that actually can be carried out in this material world of ours if it were in other hands than it is at present. The greatness of our nation depends on how far we can accomplish the supreme task of Americanization.* Himself naturalized, Sadakichi concluded laconically that *Citizenship is not as accomodating as baptism.* He spoke of the immigrant's homesickness, how it strikes one with overwhelming force and *the world grows dark and you feel the "desolate isolation" as actual physical pain. Older folks may have it more frequently in milder form, as a mood of melancholy visualization of something that will never occur again. It is difficult to tear apart all ties of kin, climate and youth, environment, tradition, education habits, prejudices and superstitions.*

The remainder of this section analyzes such matters, until he states: *As a hero-worshipper of Walt Whitman, I acted a good deal as he advised, not imitating him (except in my very earliest literary efforts) but going my own way. Rather than becoming a poet in Paris, I chose to do pioneer work here. If at any time I would have regretted it I would not have stayed. If by chance I had preferred to live in Saigon, Angka Vat, or my brother's homeland I would have managed to get there. The world is still open enough. Aside from intellectual or professional considerations unmentioned, I took a liking to our American way of life, our manner of thought, our actual interest and aspirations as a nation. I am supposed to be an Eurasian and all my early amazing success and enterprise*

is due to that fact. The first Eurasian in Boston, lecturing, how interesting! All doors opened. I personally never think of myself as a German or Asiatic. Others do that for me.

He commented on many other matters, including our tolerance of "colonies" of foreigners and yet the strange pressures exerted on them. He was aware of the pluralistic, multiplicitic, nature of our society, its polarities on wealth, labor, crime, marriage, and religion. He was, understandably, interested in acclimatization of Japanese and German immigrants. In the worst sense, he saw our society filled with hucksters and con-men, operators who preyed on naive foreigners: *The Academy of Hard Knocks has a fling at all newcomers and whips them into shape with savage force. The woods in broad daylight are full of dangers. Poisonous plants and wild animals in the jungles are playthings in comparison. Showdowns, badger games, swindler tricks, wily methods of fake employment bureaus, false change and gold brick money deals, investment robbery under false pretense practices, pawnshop usury and loan enslavement, showdowns and hold-ups of foreigners It belongs to the education of the poor greenhorns from across the pond.* For these and other wrongs, he proposed solutions, one being eventual intermarriage and "intercopulation." He recounted a meeting with Max Nordau in Paris, when the German observed of his half Teuton and half Asiatic origins that he "should have married a negress or an American Indian girl, not an Anglo-Saxon. It surely would make a rare combination." Hartmann foot-noted this: *Sorry that it was too late to accommodate the doctor.* He also observed, as an aside, *I do not particularly recommend it from personal experience or the adventures of my children, but I think it is an effective means, in the nature of a biological knowledge.*

Between 1886 and 1892, Hartmann made four trips to Europe, furthering his education in literature, theater, dance, and visual arts. During these sojourns he sought out major artists and writers, and came back to promote more vigorously

various aesthetic movements long underway in Europe. Between crossing, and later, he assayed the role of Society Lion in Boston—giving receptions, readings, and hosting concerts. He even wrote a self-satirizing play about it all: *Boston Lions*. Hartmann was self-serving, but he also sought to bring new wine to America, to produce Ibsen's plays, to popularize Symbolism—and was rewarded by imprisonment for producing his drama *Christ*, on instigation by the New England Watch and Ward Society. Almost all copies were confiscated and burned. He spent Christmas week in Charles Street Jail for *Christ*. Further undaunted, he launched art journals, tried to found a Whitman Society, stimulated interest in the *avant-garde* European movements. All destined to fail. In discouragement he fled to New York, and spent several restless, hack-writing, bohemian years. He even, at one time, despaired to the point of attempting suicide.

Between 1898 and 1902, he turned out more than 350 German-language sketches of New York life, ranging from studies of the down-and-out to essays on high society, for the *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung*.² Hartmann served with Huneker on *The Criterion*, began his hundreds of articles on pictorial photography, and in 1896, the same year that Alfred Stieglitz launched *Camera Notes*, tried to revive his own art magazine under the name of *Art News*. The venture failed, but Stieglitz took on the unruly iconoclast for *Camera Notes* and later for *Camera Work*. Now he was in the front of artistic revolutions, and even at the turn of the century, as Jerome Mellquist noted, he had already “forecast the fighting lines of a decade later.”³ In the field of photography alone, between 1896 and 1915, he published more than 600 essays in the field of photographic criticism. His *Shakespeare in Art* (1900), two volume *History of American Art* (1901, revised in 1938), *Japanese Art* (1903), and *The Whistler Book* (1910), and a number of photography books under the pseudonym Sidney Allan, are indications of his productivity.⁴ Hartmann's own medium was pastels, of which he executed hundreds. Many of them survive in the

UCR Archives and many others are owned by acquaintances across the country. Eventually, he took to the open road, carrying art to backbays and hinterlands and questing for identity. "God save all wanderers," Whitman had said obliquely of the precocious youth who visited him in the 80's.⁵ Sadakichi was to be a *Wanderer*, and a *Wandler*, until he died. In 1908 he deserted his first wife, Elizabeth Blanche Walsh, and family, for a sensitive young Quaker artist Lillian Bonham. She gave him loyalty and love but was unable to temper a personality steadily becoming more quixotic and irresponsible.

Sometime before World War I, he began to emerge as the exemplification of 20th century bohemianism. In Paris as a youth, he had heard the siren's call to Henri Murger's *La Vie Bohème*, and wavered some twenty-five years in accepting it as a literal portrait of the man he was to become. He had long alternated between the bohemian stance and the role of serious scholar, — until he finally metamorphosed to the former. Around the turn of the century he was rumored incorrectly to have been the model for Frederick Locke's *The Beloved Vagabond*. However, he was in fact depicted in Gene Fowler's *Minutes of the Last Meeting*, Harry Kemp's *Tramping on Life* (as "Nichi Schwartzman"), and in J. F. Burke's *Noah*. Now an habituè of Greenwich Village ateliers in the second decade of the century, he made the bohemian pose uniquely his own, refined into a total image,—rowdy genius, rough-house opportunist, a touch of Aretino on the make and Villon laughing at the world. The publicist Guido Bruno hailed him King of Bohemia and the tourists flocked to Romany Marie's and other Village spots to hear him declaim his verse, read Poe and Whitman, hold court for young disciples, or perform his rakish, improvised dances. It has been said that he later instructed Charlie Chaplin in choreographic routines. He became a source of much legendary for his bizarre pranks, as once when masquerading as a Japanese prince with an escort of costumed companions he hoodwinked the city of New York into holding a parade down Broadway.

From 1912 to 1916, Hartmann served intermittently as ghost-writer for Elbert ("The Fra") Hubbard at his Roycroft Colony, East Aurora. In 1916, he moved to San Francisco and launched an abortive little theater movement in the house of Mystery on Russian Hill, where he produced Ibsen's *Ghosts* and gave nightly readings. He lectured at Paul Elder's Bookshop and hobnobbed with artistic and literary figures, such as George Sterling, Jack London, Ambrose Bierce. His only novel, *The Last Thirty Days of Christ* was published in 1920. In 1923, he moved to Hollywood, where he attempted to break into motion pictures in various capacities. He wrote his first script, ironically, for *Don Quixote*, but could not find a producer. He became a member of John Barrymore's circle of cronies, but also made strong friendships with serious artists and intellectuals. During this period he wrote his thousand-page *Esthetic Verities*, another work never published. Hollywood has been the end of the line for many European questers in America.

Increasingly irascible and embittered, sick with asthma and alcoholism, his work rejected by newer art magazines, and his former reputation faded, he was increasingly put down as a disreputable Gully Jimson of American art, at times an amusing and endearing entertainer, a clown in rags. He was often the butt of jibes, such as W. C. Fields' calling him "Scratchy-Krotchy" and "Hootchy-Kootchy" Hartmann. Other, more affectionate, nicknames were "Sadi" and "Kichi." His last chance at fame was probably the role of Chinese Magician in Douglas Fairbanks' film spectacular, *The Thief of Bagdad* (1923). During the filming Hartmann was uncooperative because, allegedly, Fairbanks provided him with cheap whiskey. The man who had known great writers, such as Walt Whitman, Stephane Mallarmé, and Paul Heyse, who had danced with Isadora Duncan, slummed with Richard Le Gallienne and Maxwell Bodenheim, was too often looked upon as a hoax and charlatan.

His health failing, Hartmann fled Hollywood and built

an old-age retreat on land owned by a son-in-law, Walter Linton, a Morongo Reservation cattleman of Indian descent. Here he planned to finish the autobiography begun almost forty years earlier. In rural Southern California he was an exotic, eccentric, and eventually a threat, an object of chauvinistic suspicions. For the town of Banning during World War II, this odd man living in a clapboard shack he called "Catclaw Siding" among the chaparral was a possible spy. Because Hollywood celebrities had sometimes sent limousines to fetch him, he did possess a curiosity value, but his erudition, knavish wit, and dry sarcastic laugh, enormous ego and arrogance, and shabby appearance were disquieting. He might spend an evening in the company of the town's leading figures and the next afternoon be seen carousing with a group of Cahuilla Indians in a San Geronimo Avenue bar.

Then came Pearl Harbor. Although a naturalized citizen since 1894, he was suspected, gossiped about, investigated, and harrassed by local police and the FBI. Even some Indian families at Morongo joined townspeople in exerting prejudicial pressures. When he walked the desert at night, drawing up charts of the constellations, it was rumored he was making one of his periodic climbs to the top of Mt. San Jacinto to signal Japanese bombers off the coast with a lantern. In spite of all the evidence of pioneering work in the visual arts of America, and having been a naturalized citizen since 1894, he was unconscionably badgered. In November of 1944, the 77-year-old man set out on his last journey, a trip to St. Petersburg, Florida, to gather more biographical material from a daughter, Mrs. Dorothea Gilliland. He died soon after arrival at her home and was buried in a pauper's grave surrounded by ancient magnolias heavy with Spanish moss.

That Hartmann's racial and national origins influenced his career is beyond doubt. First, he *looked* different. Then, too, his background and education made him *see* and *think* differently. Four years after their first meeting, Whitman, goaded to anger over an article in the newspaper, called his admiring

protégé that “damned Japanee.”⁶ Ironically, the poet had once remarked to Traubel: “I have more hopes of him, more faith in him, than any of the boys.”⁷ But Whitman had also discouraged him once about a projected study of Shakespeare’s fools and about Hartmann’s aspiration toward a dramatic career in America. Walt skeptically replied: *I fear that won’t go. There are so many traits, characteristics, Americanisms, inborn with us, which you would never get at. One can do a great deal of propping. After all one can’t grow roses on a peach tree.*⁸ Walt always thought of him as a foreigner, referring to Sadakichi in letters as “the German-Japanese Hartmann.”

Until recently, Hartmann has been one of those lost in the limbo of the 1890’s, one of the lost legions, a man who, in Pound’s words, had passed over Lethe. Ezra Pound reflected in Pisan Canto LXXX:

*and as for the vagaries of our friend
Mr. Hartmann,
Sadakichi a few more of him
were that conveyable, would have enriched
the life of Manhattan
or any other town or metropolis
the texts of his early stuff are probably lost
with the loss of fly-by-night periodicals*

And, in another place: *... Sadakichi has lived. Has so lived that if one hadn’t been oneself it wd. [sic] have been worth while to have been Sadakichi.* Pound added in a footnote: *Not that my constitution wd. have weathered the strain.*⁹ H. L. Mencken, with whom Hartmann had correspondence, associated him with Pound. Speaking first of Pound, he once stated: *He is perhaps the most extraordinary man that American literature has seen in our time, and, characteristically enough, he keeps as far away from America as possible. Hartmann is another exotic—half German and half Japanese by birth, but thoroughly American under it all—in fact, almost the typical aesthetic revolutionist of Greenwich Village.*¹⁰

Gorham Munson wrote in "The Limbo of American Literature,"¹¹ of the many vital talents who had for various reasons been lost to the American public. After appraising several, he turned to Sadakichi: [Blackburn] *Harte* and [Michael] *Monahan and Sadakichi Hartmann will probably always remain in limbo and be discovered only by the curious from time to time. Their talents lack momentum, but let us honor them for their level heads and true eyes and gallant spirits which, in a time of most confused provincialism, chose and fought on the intelligent side. Hartmann was early in the field for Walt Whitman, Whistler, Swinburne, Verlaine and Mallarmé: he is a delightfully picturesque vagrom, but unfortunately he writes in broken English . . .* True, Hartmann's style was often uneven, but Munson probably did not have access to his more fluent essays in obscure journals. At one juncture in the unpublished *1000 Happy Moments*, Hartmann exclaimed, ironically admonishing the immigrant in America: *Straight ahead—the directions are somewhat blurred, we spell out Americanization, the world at a new angle, Whitman's large average bulk of excellent common folks, the future American race! It is a long way to go I fear.* For Sadakichi, being an American was what Henry James called "a complex fate."

NOTES

1. For details of Hartmann's life and works, see: **The Life and Times of Sadakichi Hartmann**, Rubidoux Printing Co., Riverside, Calif., 1970; **White Chrysanthemums**, Herder & Herder, New York, 1971; **Buddha, Confucius, & Christ**, Herder & Herder, New York, 1971; **The Sadakichi Hartmann Newsletter**, formerly publ. at University of Calif., Riverside, now edited by Prof. Richard Tuerk, East Texas State University. Anyone wishing a copy of **The Life and Times of Sadakichi Hartmann** (73 page catalogue, with color prints, of an exhibit held at UCR, May 1-31, 1970), please write to George Knox, Dept. of English, Univ. of Calif., Riverside, 92502.

2. These essays being currently translated by Prof. Hans-Peter Breuer, Dept. of English, Univ. of Delaware.

3. Jerome Mellquist, **The Emergence of an American Art**, N. Y., C. Scribner's sons, 1942, pp. 232-3.

4. Two of his photography books have been edited by Dr. Peter Bunnell and republished by Arno Press in 1973: **Landscape and Figure Composition** and **Composition in Portraiture**. A volume of Hartmann's pioneer essays on photography, edited and introduced by Harry Lawton and George Knox, will be published by Morgan & Morgan. Title: **The Valiant Knights of Daguerre**.

5. **The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman**, ed. Edwin Haviland Miller, New York University Press, 1969. Vol. IV, p. 208. Ltr. to Dr. Bucke, Sept. 10, 1888.

6. In his letters and in conversations with Traubel, Whitman refers to Hartmann variously as: "The German-Japanese Hartmann," "that Japanee," "our old friend the Japanee."

7. Horace Traubel, **With Walt Whitman in Camden**, N. Y., Rowman and Littlefield, Inc.

8. Hartmann reports this in his **Conversations with Walt Whitman**, N. Y., E. P. Coby and Co., 1895. 1961 (Vol II, p. 321; entry for Fri., Sept. 14, 1888).

9. **Culture**, Norfolk, Conn., New Directions, 1938, pp. 309-10.

10. "Instigations: Books More or Less Amusing," **Smart Set**, LXII (Aug., 1920), p. 143.

11. **Broom**, II (June, 1922), pp. 250-260.

DIE LETZTE MELODIE

von

ANNA KATARINA SCHEIBE

Long Island, N. Y.

Im Schatten dunkler Tannen stand ein Greis müde an einem Baumstamm gelehnt. Sein langes Silberhaar flatterte im Wind. Er träumte von Liebe und vergangenem Schmerz. Noch einmal spielte er auf seiner Geige eine wunderbare Melodie. Aus den Zaubertönen sprach die Liebe Gottes.

Die Sonne versank im Dunkel, ringsherum der lauschige Tannenwald. Einer hat den Greis nicht verlassen, das war der liebe Mond. Doch unten am kleinen See verklang sein letztes Lied. Im fernen Osten graute schon der frühe Morgen. Dann ward alles still. Ein Engel nahm den Greis bei der Hand und führte ihn ins ewige Reich, ins Reich Gottes.