**Sadakichi Hartmann**

Joseph Lavery, June 2012.

According to a ten-page fragment composed in 1935 and called “Sadakichi’s Autobiography,” the poet, playwright and critic Carl Sadakichi Hartmann was born on the artificial island of Dejima, Japan, in the late 1860s. He spent his adolescence in Germany (“read Schiller and Goethe by the age of nine”) before moving to the United States in 1882, where he obtained citizenship in 1897. Read today primarily for his symbolist religious plays *Christ* (1891), *Buddha* (1897), *Confucius* (1923), and *Moses* (1934), Hartmann was also one of the earliest Anglophone writers of *haiku* poetry (according to **Kenneth Rexroth**, *the* first), and his writing on American painting and photography has received substantial critical exegesis, particularly in Jane Calhoun Weaver’s anthology *Sadakichi Hartmann: Critical Modernist*. Yet it is more for his extraordinary personal history than for his literary output that he has received attention. **Ezra Pound**’s remark in *Guide to Kulchur* (1938) that “if one hadn’t been oneself, it wd. have been worth while to have been Sadakichi” encapsulating a wide, intense appreciation of Hartmann from the 1880s onward – an appreciation which often intersected with an American popular-cultural enthusiasm for “things Japanese” in what Christopher Bush has called “America’s lacquered age.” Far from being an uncomplicated boon, however, Hartmann’s ethnic visibility often attracted condescension and scorn. **Walt Whitman**, for whom Hartmann served as secretary in the late 1880s, wrote to Horace Traubel that ““I wish you could meet him: his views on things Occidental, as they say, are rare, novel–should be heard. They come from one who has his roots in the other side of the planet–was raised under surprising differences of perspective.” And, when Hartmann and Whitman fell out over a bogus interview Hartmann had published in Boston, Hartmann’s race was again implicated, with Whitman publicly denouncing “that damned Japanee.” It is unclear whether they were ever personally reconciled – but the *Leaves of Grass* on display at the New York Public Library is inscribed to Hartmann in Whitman’s hand.

Hartmann recorded critical thoughts on race and ethnicity in gilded age America, alongside thoughts on aesthetics and culture, in a series of aphorisms and fragments eventually published by George Knox and Harry Lawton in 1977 under the title *White Chrysanthemums* – Hartmann’s favorite flower. As well as contributing to a Japanese substrate within American modernism, however, Hartmann claimed in his monograph *Japanese Art* (1903) that the influence of Japanese aesthetics informed the modernist emphases on parataxis and expressionism in the West: “Its influence was everywhere felt. It called forth, for instance, the short story literature, in which Anderson, Turgenjew, Verga and the modern French and Scandinavian writers are masters–a tendency toward brevity and conciseness of expression, which suggests a good deal more than it actually tells.” Less frequently studied, but important for understanding the gestural and poetic form of his plays, was Hartmann’s enthusiastic practice and teaching of Delsartean mime – a French system of physical expression developed by Francois Delsarte and his American promoters, Genevieve Stebbins and Steele Mackeye, emphasizing a formalist approach to bodily shape in theatrical performances.

Hartmann, Sadakichi, (1867? – 1944).

**Link**

Hartmann as the Court Magician in *The Thief of Bagdad*:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Sadakichi_Hartmann_in_The_Thief_of_Bagdad.jpg>

Advertisement for a class on Delsarte given by Hartmann attached in email.