

Between Worlds: The Haunted Babu in Rabindranath Tagore's "Kankal" and "Nishite"

By Sumangala Bhattacharya, Pitzer College(1)

<1>The Late Victorian Gothic, with its fascination for colonial and foreign contexts, can be seen as a site of cross-cultural traffic exploring the pleasures and terrors of encountering racial and cultural otherness. As scholars have noted, texts such as H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* and *She*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Rudyard Kipling's "Phantom Rickshaw," among others, utilize Gothic conventions to interrogate the colonial project and challenge the primacy of Enlightenment rationality.(2) At the same time, as scholars have also noted, the imperial Gothic thematizes anxieties about the stability and permanence of the empire, and about the loss of identity through assimilation by the Other.(3) Imperial Gothic texts conflate the foreign and the supernatural in nonhuman or monstrous figures that pose potent challenges to ideas of the normal and the familiar, and thus must be destroyed or contained. These texts thus stage a literary exorcism through which the colonizing subject consolidates his identity through confrontations with racial otherness. Yet what if exorcism is not possible? What if the narrative must contend with the irreconcilable assimilation of the other within the self?

<2>This essay considers how indigenous writers of the colonial period might appropriate the Gothic in order to illuminate the powerful tensions within the hybrid selfhood of the colonized subject.(4) For indigenous uses, the Gothic offers neither the literary exorcism of a monstrous Other nor a path back to an originary identity through such an exorcism. However, as a genre that favors narratives of fragmentation and disjunction and that emphasizes the uncanny, the Gothic is particularly suited for explorations of hybridity.(5) Two ghost stories by the Indian writer and winner of the 1913 Nobel Prize in literature, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), demonstrate how the Gothic can provide a glimpse into the violence of repression through which the colonized (male) subject learns to negotiate the everyday experience of his inevitable subordination.(6) In "Kankal" (Skeleton) written in 1892 and "Nishite" (In the Night) written in 1895, a central spectral encounter forces the primary narrator of each story, a Western-educated upper-class Indian man, to confront the contradictions fissuring his artefactual identity. For such a man, success within the structure of the colonial state involves embracing the colonizer's language and culture, even at the risk of attenuating his connection to his vernacular and his native culture. He is thus shaped by sensibilities and ideas drawn from both the foreign and the native cultures, and by his constant awareness of the subordination of the latter to the former. In each story, the psychological burden of such a state of affairs is passed on from the public sphere (where the protagonist's acquiescence to his cultural subordination is necessary for his success) to the private sphere of domesticity and affective relations. Through her silent subordination and

eventual death, the native woman pays the price of the protagonist's repression in his public life. However, the Gothic allows the rupture of the ideal of the silently suffering Indian woman, by giving the woman license to return from death in order to speak out. This spectral return forces an accounting of how the protagonist's attempt to impose a Westernized emotional ideal of romantic relations unsettles and makes intolerable the woman's world, leaving her no option but death. Through her story, she forces the male protagonist to reexamine his own attempt to live in both worlds. This essay is an investigation of Tagore's use of the Gothic to explore the ambiguities and poignancy of changing gender relations in nineteenth-century colonial Bengal.

New Bengal

<3>The nineteenth century was a period of tremendous sociocultural transformations for Bengal, so much so that it might be said that the identity of modern Bengal emerged during this period through turbulent cultural and political debates about the absorption of Western values and ideas. For the indigenous writer in colonial Bengal, the Gothic offered an intriguing opportunity in this charged cultural climate for oblique reflections on the hybrid subjectivity of the Bengali middle class. Bengal comprised Victorian imperialism's front lines in India. The civilizing mission had produced in Bengal an uncanny double of Victorian bourgeois society in the figure of the Western-educated native middle class: that is, the native (male) elites shaped by the educational directives of Macaulay's *Minute on Education* (1835) and similar initiatives. Earlier educational efforts favored by James Mill and others had attempted to diffuse Western knowledge and ideas through vernacular instruction. However, in the 1830s, educational policy took on a more actively reformist agenda with the imposition of English-language instruction and the gradual phasing out of vernacular curricula.

<4>Nineteenth-century colonial educational systems in Bengal and elsewhere in India attempted to imbue Bengali elites with Victorian ideas of morality and respectability through the curriculum and pedagogical approaches of Western-style schools.⁽⁷⁾ Macaulay's *Minute* coincided with the British government's institution of English as the official language of government. Thus native elites seeking government employment would not only have to become competent in the English language, but would also have to become proficient in Western science and literature. Earlier generations of Indian elites had shunned Western education because of the implicit association of the English language with Christianity (since earlier pedagogical reformers were often Christian missionaries). Later generations continued to worry about the moral taint of Western education, but accommodated themselves to the necessity of being Western-educated for success within the colonial state. As English replaced Urdu and Persian as the language of Bengal, the sons of wealthy families were concurrently educated in both Western and indigenous traditions. Despite difficulties in finding skilled teachers of English, many not only learned the language but also developed a taste for literature written in English. Since English was the language of higher education and of colonial authority, fluency in it and familiarity with English literature were prized as status symbols. However, Bengali literature flourished as well, and Bengal enjoyed a literary and cultural renaissance catalyzed by cultural contact with English literary forms.⁽⁸⁾

<5>Scholars have observed that the infiltration of Western culture in everyday life in India cannot be fully accounted for by the assumption that it was imposed by colonial authorities. Ruth Vanita, for instance, contends that educated Indians were accustomed to a pluralistic culture prior to British governance. They were active, self-confident, and selective in their reading of English texts, so that they "assimilated English literary texts to their own lives, no more needing to see a daffodil in order to understand Wordsworth's Ode than they needed to see a *Saki* to understand Hafiz's ghazals or a *betaal* to understand the stories of Vikramaditya" (108). This was certainly the case for elite Bengali men, who consumed both English and vernacular cultures and were shaped by this cultural plurality. Bengali writers appropriated and adapted for vernacular uses English literary forms with which, as colonial subjects, they were familiar but from which they were estranged. These writers assumed that readers would be willing and able to engage with literary innovations drawn from English traditions, as they had done with earlier texts influenced by Sanskrit and Persian traditions.

<6>Nineteenth-century Bengal prior to the establishment of British governance was already a pluralistic and hybrid culture in which Sanskrit, Persian, and Bengali had designated functions. While Bengali was the vernacular used among friends and family, and for dealings in the local community, households used Sanskrit for religious services, Persian or Urdu for commercial and political transactions, and English for dealings with colonial authorities. With the spread of British power and Western education, English rapidly replaced Persian as the language of serious business. At the same time, the Bengali language became standardized and formalized into a vehicle for the expression of the intellectual and emotional aspirations of an emerging middle class elite, the so-called *nababanga* or "New Bengali," whose growing social prominence derived from their role as intermediaries between the indigenous culture and the colonial administration. Partha Chatterjee argues that "[T]he users of the new Bengali prose not only said things in a new way, they also had new things to say" (52). The new Bengali reflected on the rapid changes in Bengali culture, from questions of aesthetic standards to issues of political, religious, and social reform. British missionaries and reformers had drawn attention to the questions of Indian domestic life and especially to what they viewed as the degraded state of Indian womanhood. As Bengali elite society assimilated ideas about Victorian domesticity and the appropriate treatment of women, debates regarding changes in gender roles became especially spirited. Even as some called for greater freedoms for women, others felt that the domestic sphere remained the only space where Bengali men could reaffirm the authority and status they had lost under colonial rule. Anxieties about loss of identity under colonial rule were manifested in the cultural idealization of the Hindu woman as the chaste and self-sacrificing guardian of the *antahpur* (interior domestic space), the only space in which traditional values could be protected from colonial influences.(9)

<7>As Tanika Sarkar shows, nineteenth-century Bengali intellectuals were engaged in "interrogating power relationships within indigenous customs and traditions--especially gender norms--within such customs" but such interrogations had to engage in a parallel interrogation of "Bengal's overall colonial connection" (23). For a Bengali *bhadralok* (a man of the self-proclaimed "respectable," implicitly Hindu middle classes), colonial rule entailed a duplication and splitting of the self.(10) Acquiring a Western education meant not only learning the colonizer's language and acquiring a taste for the colonizer's cultural objects, but also absorbing a set of values for public life that was frequently at odds with indigenous values retained for

private life. Firdous Azim observes that "[i]n colonised worlds, the public-private split has its linguistic dimensions, and language is put across this binary so that we have a public language... opposed to a private and affective language of the home" (43). To succeed within the colonial structure, the Bengali *bhadralok* learned to split his subjectivity between the two languages and the cultures they encompassed, moving from one to the other as occasion demanded. His Westernized self became the public self he engaged in at work or in official situations, especially in situations involving colonial relations. His native self became the private self, involved in familial and domestic situations. However, this coerced cultural plurality had a price. The Bengali *bhadralok* was acculturated to Victorian culture through colonialism, but also distanced from it by colonial power relations. He was alienated from his native culture despite being shaped by it and embedded in it.

<8>Since Calcutta was the commercial and political center of British rule in India from the mid-eighteenth century, Bengali men were most strongly affected by the changes in colonial culture. For both colonial authorities and indigenous patriarchal hierarchies, the "New Bengali" man constituted by these contradictions carried a destabilizing potential for existing power structures. He was therefore stigmatized in both colonial and traditional society as the despised figure of the "Babu," a term of respect that also carried connotations of effeminacy and inauthenticity. The etymology of "Babu" shows that Bengali masculinity became synonymous with subordinate, petty officialdom. According to *Hobson-Jobson*, the popular nineteenth-century dictionary of Anglo-Indian terms compiled by Col. Henry Yule and A. C. Burnell, the word used to be "[p]roperly a term of respect...and formerly in some parts of Hindustan [especially Bengal] applied to certain persons of distinction," but by the end of the century the connotations of respect had disappeared as Anglo-Indians applied it as a mock-honorific for Western-educated native subordinates. The definition in *Hobson-Jobson* makes apparent the double-bind Bengali men faced. British rule presented English-language instruction and a Western curriculum to Bengali elites as the path to a civilizing modernity for the country, as well as a career path to fit Bengali men for government and commercial employment. Simultaneously, Bengali men's willingness to assimilate Western culture, and eagerness to be employed as clerks within the colonial state, were read as signs of their emasculation. The definition of "Babu" in *Hobson-Jobson* ends with the observation that "among Anglo-Indians, it [the term] is often used with a slight savour of disparagement, as characterizing a superficially cultivated, but too often effeminate Bengali. And from the extensive employment of the class, to which the term was applied as a title, in the capacity of clerks in English offices, the word has come to signify 'a native clerk who writes English'." While Bengalis continued to use the term "Babu" as an honorific, the Anglo-Indian uses of the term tainted its application. Proficiency in English and assimilation of Western culture, while admired as conferring status, began to signal effeminacy even within Bengali society. Western-educated Bengali gentlemen, the so-called "Babus," were thus caught between two worlds and, although able to move from one to the other, they were never truly at home in either.(11)

<9>In "Kankal" and "Nishite," the irreconcilable tensions of such an identity are manifested powerfully through the domestic relations between husbands and wives. The male narrator of each story fits the profile of an upper-class, Western-educated Babu whose assimilation of English culture has become embedded in his everyday life. He is comfortable in Bengali country life, but can cite English poetry at will and uses English literature as a framework for

understanding what he experiences. Shaped by Enlightenment rationality, he is skeptical of the supernatural, yet he possesses a Romantic appreciation of melancholy. The phantom in each story is a Bengali gentlewoman (the narrator's wife or a woman who might have fulfilled that role had circumstances been different). In life, she was a traditional Hindu woman, who lived in accordance with the dictates of the customs governing Hindu womanhood. Liberated by death from her subordinate existence, the phantom returns to shatter the Babu's composure and to remind him of the fissures in his identity. Her irruption in his life reveals the Babu's identity as a tenuous construction uneasily inhabited by two entities alien to each other. To seek a rational explanation for the haunting would require him to acknowledge his own psychological instability. However, to accept the phantom as supernatural would destabilize his prized assimilation of Enlightenment rationality.

<10>According to psychologist Nicholas Abraham, a haunting "is meant to objectify...the gap produced in us by the concealment of some part of a love object's life" (171). The phantom in each story forces the Babu to confront his complicity in the patriarchal structures that denied her full personhood in life, and forces him to acknowledge his guilt in unsettling the compromise she had made with her situation. Strongly influenced by the representations of romantic love he finds in English literature, the Babu hopes to replicate such an emotional connection with the woman in his life. Yet he never considers the woman as an equal, desiring partner in the relationship. In "Kankal," a young physician engages in a supposedly harmless flirtation with his friend's sister, a widowed child-bride growing up in the solitude of her reclusive brother's home. In "Nishite," the male narrator demands his wife's compliance in his desire for a companionate and dyadic relationship between them. Neither man considers the constraints of traditional gender roles that bind these women and regulate their desires, or the high costs to the woman of transgression.

<11>In traditional Bengali Hindu society, a woman belonging to the "respectable" middle class (or *bhadrasamaj*) had no agency in arranging her romantic or sexual life.⁽¹²⁾ Traditional Indian marriages were arranged as social contracts between families, in which the woman's consent was neither expected nor required. Marriages were often arranged when both parties were children (to be consummated after the girl reached puberty). For the woman, marriage was most prominently the transfer from one family to another, and integration within the domestic hierarchy of her in-laws was of paramount importance for her future happiness. The new wife's relations with her husband were prescribed for her as one element of an intricate set of rules governing her conduct in the new household. In contrast, a widow occupied an extremely vulnerable and liminal position in the household, and was often regarded as an inauspicious and superfluous person. Custom dictated severe austerities and imposed permanent celibacy on the widow, who was thought of as someone waiting out her days until death allowed her to rejoin her husband.⁽¹³⁾ While the narrator in "Nishite" may see his wish for a romantic relationship with his wife as a liberatory gesture, his wife may deem his demand that she love him uxorious (thereby demonstrating that his Westernized sensibilities about conjugality has rendered him effeminate). The physician in "Kankal" may believe that in engaging the young widow in conversation, he is acting in an enlightened fashion that provides her with much-needed companionship and expands her intellectual horizons. However, he remains secure in his assumption that no legitimate relationship between them could be possible, and assumes that she would be content with the implicit limits of their interaction. Both men thus rely on a double standard in which they expect their appropriation of Western values to be accommodated by the

women, yet assume that the women will do so while remaining bound by the ideals of Hindu womanhood.

<12>The characters in these two stories are poised on the cusp of significant changes in gender roles in Bengali culture. In colonial Bengal, conjugal relations constituted a site of heated debates about the transformation of culture under colonialism. In calling for the improvement of Indian womanhood, Rammohan Roy, a key figure of the Bengali Renaissance and the founder of the Brahmo Samaj, a Hindu reformist organization, pointed to a host of issues such as women's seclusion, the lack of education, child marriages, *sati*, *kulin* polygamy, and the status of widows, among others.(14) Roy and reformers with similar ideas tended to be significantly influenced by contact with colonial or metropolitan society (for instance, Roy had worked for the East India Company and spent his last years in England). However, traditional members of the Bengali *bhadrasamaj* strongly resisted incursions of foreign influence into domestic life, and argued that the domestic sphere was the last bastion of sanctity for the indigenous culture. Such skepticism about gender reform was not limited to men. While men were concerned for their authority, many women worried about the impact of these reforms on domestic stability and female hierarchies.(15)

<13>Concerns about the interference of colonial authority and reform-minded Westernized Bengalis in the area of conjugal relations became particularly charged during the fierce debates over the Age of Consent Act of 1890-91, which raised the age at which sexual intercourse with girls would be legal from ten to twelve. Thus, no marriage could be legally consummated before the bride reached twelve years of age. Sarkar shows how nationalist sentiments radicalized to resist this Act, marshalling a discourse that marked the Bengali male body as "maimed" by the loss of autonomy under colonialism, while the Bengali female body was celebrated as "unmarked, loyal, and subservient to the discipline of the *shastras* [Hindu religious code] alone," a discipline that granted women "a redemptive healing strength for the community as a whole" (202-03). Set against this cultural backdrop, Tagore's stories highlight the destructive effect of inequitable gender relations within which the discourse of love is simply another instantiation of the male possession of women. The stories represent the victimization of women not only by traditional society, but also by the unthinking, self-centered desire of the "New Bengali" man to impose change on the woman to benefit his whims. Unlike the silently suffering women of Tagore's realist fiction, the women of these stories return after death to protest and avenge their treatment in life.(16) The Gothic enables them to speak through the male narrator, forcing him to work out the frailties of his identity and the consequences to them of his equivocations.

<14>It is not surprising that Tagore, highly successful in his appropriation of realist fiction to represent Bengali country life, would have turned to the Gothic to probe this delicate cultural issue in a way that grants women a degree of agency, if only as phantasmatic figures.(17) The Gothic offers a discreet yet effective avenue for exploring the links between the contradictions of colonized male subjectivity and the patriarchal repression of Indian women. While the imperial Gothic is usually associated with narratives that feature monstrous or inhuman beings, and hence raise questions about what it means to be human, spectrality and haunting are especially useful tropes for suggesting the irreversible rupture of the rational world view. Hauntings imply a

layering of history, so that past and present, unfamiliar and familiar, become indistinguishable. Ghosts show that the present is always at the mercy of the past, so that laying a ghost to rest does not restore the original state of certainty. In Tagore's stories, the male narrator's compromise with colonial power is shattered by the spectral return of the woman whose repression enables his ability to move between the two worlds of the public sphere of colonial officialdom and the private sphere of domestic Bengali life.

Poisoned Womanhood

<15>"Kankal," a narrative of the oppression of women, forbidden desire, and betrayal, is told with deep irony and occasional moments of dark humor. It is also a story about the penetration of colonial culture into Bengali domestic spaces, touching even the deep seclusion of widowhood. The story, a framed narrative of a waking dream, recounts a single night's haunting of an unnamed male narrator by a female phantom who recounts the highlights of her meager biography while keeping the male narrator terrified by references to her skeletal corpse. Married off as a child-bride, she is pronounced a *vishkanya* (literally, a "poisoned maiden") by her in-laws when her husband dies shortly after the wedding.⁽¹⁸⁾ Sent back to live with her reclusive brother, and expected to mark out the rest of her life in the celibate and ascetic rituals of Hindu widowhood, she becomes secretly infatuated with his friend, a young doctor who rents rooms in their house. The doctor, knowing that custom prohibits any legitimate liaison between them, encourages her "innocent" flirtation with him from the seclusion of the *antahpur* (a term analogous to "purdah," signifying the interior domestic space forbidden to men not in the family). When she learns by chance that the doctor had contracted a marriage in which he would receive a lucrative dowry, she poisons him and herself, thereby living up to the pronouncement made by her in-laws that she was a *vishkanya*.

<16>She is connected to the primary narrator whom she haunts in the story not by kinship or familiarity during her lifetime but through an apparently arbitrary chain of circumstances. Her skeleton was purchased some years ago for him and two other boys by a tutor hired to give them anatomy lessons. The male narrator encounters the phantom when one night, as an adult, he is forced to sleep in his childhood bedroom because he had to give up his usual room to a visitor. The phantom's ostensible reason for haunting is to look for the skeleton, which has been removed from its old place in what used to be the study. However, as her behavior and narrative show, she longs for company. She is flirtatious and garrulous towards her auditor, behaving almost as a lover (if at times an angry and rejected one). Nonetheless, she keeps tight control over the narrative and her audience—a marked contrast to her autobiography of marginalization, seclusion, silence, and powerlessness, ruptured at the end by the violence of murder and suicide.

<17>"Kankal" opens with a dizzying disjunction between the calmness of the narrative voice and the bizarreness of the fact asserted by the voice: "In the room next to the one in which we boys used to sleep, there hung a human skeleton" (31).⁽¹⁹⁾ The only reasonable explanation for this mundane presentation of a skeleton is Western medical study, a discipline introduced by colonial authorities and in competition with indigenous medicine. As the unnamed narrator recounts, his guardian decreed that the boys would alternate their study between two tutors: a pundit for Bengali literature, and a medical student from the recently established Campbell Medical School

for human anatomy.(20) The skeleton represents the narrator's conflicted connections to colonial culture. The rational discourse of Western medicine to which the narrator was subjected willy-nilly by his guardian literally and figuratively detaches the skeleton from the person and renders it into a mere pedagogical instrument. The terror evoked in the boy by the skeleton is buried, but not vanquished, under the pressure of cataloguing and categorizing human bones by their scientific names. In the adult's mind, the absent skeleton is the predominant feature of the room, and the memory of the bones rattling in the breeze at night disturbs his sleep in the present, as it did in his boyhood.

<18>The skeleton returns, so to speak, in the narrator's life when as an adult he is free to choose between the scientific objectification of it and Gothic terror inspired by it. He hovers between a rationalist *sang-froid* about sleeping in a room next to the one that had once housed a skeleton, and a Gothic *frisson* about his boyhood memories of the bones rattling in the breeze at night. When he first senses the phantom's presence, he reaches for rational and psychological explanations, dismissing the Gothic apparatus of quiet footsteps and breathing sounds as the products of a runaway imagination and a restless night. However, he is unable to ignore the physiological response of terror, or his Romantic curiosity in the past life of the skeleton. To force a return to rationality, he calls out "Who is there?" (33), an expression that issues both a challenge and an invitation. This is the extent of his efforts at resistance. He remains in bed throughout the haunting, making no attempt to investigate or confront the unseen presence.

<19>The phantom seizes this interpellation as an invitation to narrate her life. Her answer to his query, she informs him, is complicated: the "I" she represents is her present incorporeal state, the physical skeleton that is no longer in its usual place in the study, and the living person she had been. While she flirts with the narrator and solicits his appreciation, she also disrupts the conventional expectations of gender roles. She is not seeking help or rescue, but is instead determined to dominate the situation by the sole power left to her, the power of speech. She manipulates his attention with her narrative even as she expresses her anger at him and men in general, and terrorizes him from time to time by referring to her skeletal state. Even their relative physical positions emphasize her control of the situation: she is free to move around the room while he lies prone in bed. In this small way, she forces him to experience the disempowered and passive experience of her life, while giving expression to the yearnings for romantic and sexual relations she had been forced to repress during her life.

<20>As a widowed child-bride, one moreover pronounced to be a symbol of death by her in-laws, she has barely reached puberty when her life is effectively invalidated. Her everyday life is rendered miserable by the Hindu widow's ascetic regimen, which includes dietary and sumptuary constraints, strictures on conduct, and permanent celibacy. Death liberates her from these constraints and she welcomes the narrator's presence in the room as a chance to break her seclusion. Ignoring his half-hearted attempt to rebuff her, she sits down at his bedside, separated from him only by the thin gauze of mosquito netting. She thus initiates a level of verbal and physical intimacy with him that would be considered scandalously improper: "But I fancy you are lonely...I'll sit down a while and we will have a little chat. Years ago I used to sit by men and talk to them...I would talk once more with a man as in the old times" (33). In the Bengali text, the boldness of her words is more apparent when she says: "Are you alone? Then I will sit

with you" (my translation, 64). Using his solitude and sleeplessness as her excuse, she projects her desire for masculine companionship into a conventional feminine offering of solace through conversation, often regarded as a maternal or wifely duty of lulling someone to sleep with tales. Terror and desire mingle in the narrator's acceptance of her dominance of his experience. He only requests that she choose an amusing tale. Her deeply ironic response is that the "funniest thing I can think of is my own life-story" (34).

<21>Underscoring the cultural assumption that a woman's life begins with marriage (and in contrast to the male narrator's vignette of his boyhood days), she gives her girlhood no representation. Instead, her account starts with a terrifying image of her experience of marriage: "I feared one thing like death itself, and that was my husband...My feelings can be likened only to those of a fish caught with a hook" (34). This sole reference to the consummation of her wedding captures her social and physical disempowerment as a child-bride with no right of choice or refusal in conjugal life. Her deep relief at her husband's death (despite being hated and despised by her in-laws as inauspicious) is unspoken but implied. Widowhood frees her from marriage, but does not restore her girlhood. She does not return to reside with her parents (who seem even more distanced from her life than the in-laws who banish her), but with an elder brother who agrees to accept her. A Western-educated man, he is a reclusive bachelor who has distanced himself from extended family connections. While he does not seem to be unkind to her, he is oblivious to her emotional and psychological needs. The seclusion prescribed by society for her is intensified by his reclusive life. She has no female relatives or friends as companions within the *antahpur*. Required to dress only in the plainest clothes and regarded as inauspicious, she is expected to spend the rest of her natural life in a state of suspension until she dies (and is reunited with her husband). She is essentially one of the living dead.

<22>Implicitly criticizing the narrator for his complicity, as a middle-class male with a background similar to her brother's, in perpetuating gender oppression, she forces him to imagine how a girl would grow into sexual maturity under such circumstances. As she grows up in this intense isolation, she channels her longings for companionship, admiration, and love into a narcissistic appreciation of her own beauty (and even that pleasure is proscribed for her and must be kept a secret). Through this insistence on her own desirability, which conventional morality would condemn as vanity, she attempts to resist her subjugation. As a phantom, she savors her memory of finding pleasure in herself. Yet, the irony of her fate is that in death, as in life, she has no power to be seen as a whole person. As a phantom she remains as invisible to her sole audience as if she were still a secluded widow living behind the *antahpur*: "How can I ever make you believe that those two cavernous hollows [of the skeleton's eye sockets] contained the brightest of dark, languishing eyes...The mere attempt to convey to you some idea of the grace, the charm, the soft, firm, dimpled curves, which in the fullness of youth were growing and blossoming over those dry old bones makes me smile; it also makes me angry" (35). She contemplates using eroticism as an instrument of power against the hypocrisy of a patriarchal order that disavows its own desires by refusing to acknowledge a widow as a desirable and desiring person. She threatens the narrator with the thought that if she could have taken visible form, she could have truly wreaked vengeance since the sight of her beauty would have doomed him to many nights of sleepless frustration. The narrator's ironic reply acknowledges that he is aroused by this feminine sexual aggression: "If you had a body, I would touch you to vow that I have forgotten all that I learned of the discipline [of osteology]. And you need not say more--

your youthful grace and charm are already imprinted on my retina even in the dark" (my translation, 65).(21)

<23>When her brother's sole friend, a newly-minted physician named Shashishekhar, rents out some of the rooms in the mansion for his practice, she incorporates him into her secret rituals of self-validation. His presence on the margins of her life allows her to build a fantasy in which he is not so much her lover as a mirror reflecting back her love of herself. Less rigid about the boundaries of the *antahpur* than custom dictates, her brother facilitates her growing obsession with his friend. Flattered by her interest and confident that no commitment can be expected of him, Shashishekhar apparently encourages the "innocent" flirtation. He seems to remain unsuspecting even when, as she reveals, she repeatedly leads their conversations to poisons and modes of death, as if the identity of *vishkanya* conferred on her by her in-laws were indeed prescient. When, in a daringly modern move, her brother calls in his friend to examine her during a minor illness, even the banal medical move of taking her pulse becomes charged with transgressive sexual potential. In that moment of physical touch, she feels they consummated a forbidden desire: "He measured the heat of my fever, I gauged the pulse of his heart" (38). The Bengali emphasizes the risqué quality of this observation by using the word *nari*, which can mean pulse as well as entrails, and is a homophone for the Bengali word for woman.

<24>From this moment, she allows her secret rituals to become more expressive of her erotic desires. In the solitude of her garden at dusk, she dresses herself in the ornaments and brilliantly-colored saris of her married life. As she sits in the garden in her forbidden attire, as if awaiting a lover, she obsessively falls in love with herself, using the doctor as a vehicle for her autonomous desire: "I was then one and also two. I used to see myself as though I were the doctor; I gazed, I was charmed, I fell madly in love" (39). After a passage that lyrically charts her masturbatory pleasure and ends in a tableau in which she is stretched out in satiation on her favorite seat in her forbidden finery, she breaks off suddenly in what can only be described as a narrative tease. She asks her rapt auditor how he would like the story if it ended there. His response shows a dry enjoyment of this risqué moment: "It would no doubt remain a little incomplete but I could easily spend the rest of the night putting in the finishing touches" (40). However, the phantom will not allow him to objectify her by writing her role in *his* masturbatory fantasy. Furthermore, the story could not end there because the inner world she creates through her fantasies is untenable. The ending must offer her closure, and not merely satisfy the narrator's erotic fantasy. She counters, invoking both generic and narrative conventions: "But that would make the story too serious. Where would the [irony] come in? Where would be the skeleton with its grinning teeth?" (40). The story must offer an exegesis that accounts for the dual existence of the skeleton, as an artifact and the trace of a human life.

<25>Closure comes swiftly once she learns by chance and observation that Shashishekhar has agreed to a marriage that will bring him a large dowry. This betrayal cements her cynicism about men. She claims she is enraged not by the fact that he is getting married for a dowry, but because he does not tell her of his decision. However, her subsequent actions seem a disproportionate response. She had, after all, always known that no legitimate relationship between them was possible, and thus should have anticipated that he would someday marry. Her anger, then, points to some impetus more powerful than mere pique. She assumes that his

silence was an attempt to protect her feelings for him. However, this misguided sensitivity about her feelings transforms them into something guilty and tawdry. It signals to her that what she had believed to be private was visible to others. By revealing his awareness of her feelings, he unwittingly shatters the sanctity of the secret space she had created for her desiring self and leaves her no place to resist the living death of her existence.

<26>She sets the stage for her vengeance by insisting on the proper festivities for the wedding, and enjoying what she interprets as the would-be groom's dismay at her enthusiasm and good cheer. The auspicious time set for the ceremony is late at night. Her brother and his friend spend the hours sitting over a customary glass or two of alcohol. Using the knowledge of poisons she gained from Shashishekhar, she poisons the wine and watches until he realizes what she has done and, in her account, bids her farewell. As the wedding music that she had commissioned begins to play, she arrays herself in wedding finery and arranges herself on her favorite seat in the garden, just as she had done in past evenings. Opening herself to the sensuous appeals of the moonlit garden, the music, and her gorgeous attire, she awaits death, picturing to herself the beautiful and tragic tableau she has created: "When the sound of the music began to grow fainter and fainter; the light of the moon to get dimmer and dimmer; the world with its lifelong associations of home and kin to fade away from my perceptions like some illusion--then I closed my eyes, and smiled" (44). The irony she had promised the narrator is the frustration of her plans. The story does not end as she scripted it. In death she had attempted to wrest control of her life through narration, by rewriting the end society had destined for her. However, as she awakens to the afterlife, she finds three boys (the narrator and his companions in boyhood) and their tutor poking at her skeletal ribs, and years later, even her skeleton has disappeared. Invisible and exiled in life, she remains invisible and exiled in death. Only through this haunting can her desiring self find expression.

<27>The narrator's ambivalence and sensitivity make him a suitable audience for her. He does not condemn her vanity and crime, but offers himself as a sympathetic listener, one who meekly accepts her anger while acknowledging her power to attract and terrify him. The phantom does not call on him to act in any way – no redress is possible for her. Her sole demand is that he listen to her story. She makes him aware of the deep repression that women suffer in his world, and of the violence that such repression can engender. The phantom directs her sharpest scorn at the Westernized men—such as her brother, Shashishekhar, and the narrator—who understand and yet continue to perpetuate the oppression of women. Although believers in enlightenment principles of individual rights, they deny women full authenticity and personhood. However, by listening to her tale and accepting her anger, the narrator shows his willingness to change. In a small, yet significant way, he corrects a deep injustice merely by letting her tell her story, thereby reversing the negation of her existence. When she disappears at dawn, the anonymous articulation of bones that was her skeleton has been endowed with a history and reattached to its human past.

Who Is She?

<28>The hauntings in "Nishite" (In the Night) arise from recursive, failed attempts to grant a repressed guilt expression.(22) The narrator of the frame story in "Nishite" is also a newly-

graduated physician who has recently begun a country practice, signaling his implication within colonial systems of knowledge. He is woken up in the middle of the night by the local *zamindar* (large landowner) named Dakshinacharan, who has difficulty sleeping, and insists on telling the doctor his experience of hearing the voice of his deceased first wife. While Dakshinacharan readily admits how guilty he felt for having considered taking a second wife (with his wife's consent) during his wife's long illness, the guilt that motivates his haunting is something he cannot bring himself to articulate. Dakshinacharan's self-centered insistence on an idealized notion of romantic love, which he derived from his Western education, unsettled his first wife, and resulted in her death. Raised as a traditional Hindu woman, Dakshinacharan's wife fulfilled all her duties and obligations. However, she rejected his romantic gestures and insisted on observing the conventional boundaries of distanced relations between husband and wife (for instance, a wife would not openly speak with her husband during the day). When he remarries after her death (and possible suicide), he is haunted by her voice crying out "Who is she?" whenever he attempts to make love to his new wife, a younger woman who is more receptive to his Westernized ideas. The question haunting his second marriage points up the contradiction between his declarations of undying love, which he makes to both women, and the ease with which he is able to transfer his affections from one to the other. It also interrogates the role of the wife in a changing society as "modern" ideas of love and romance begin to permeate a patriarchal culture in which women's consent in marriage and conjugal relations are taken for granted.

<29>It is apparent that Dakshinacharan's late-night visit to the doctor is a frequent ritual. He begins by complaining that the medicine the doctor had previously prescribed for his sleeplessness has not worked. Thus, the *zamindar's* haunting also afflicts the doctor, who must remain awake night after night listening to the same tale. This creates a bond between them of shared confidences and complicity. The doctor's practice depends on Dakshinacharan's good will, as is shown by his diffidence in suggesting that the *zamindar's* habit of drinking might have interfered with the efficacy of the medicine. Thus, he has no choice but to entertain Dakshinacharan every night, and to offer a sympathetic ear to the repeated narration. He is also in no position to offer an alternate interpretation that forces his patient to confront the truth. He thereby becomes an accomplice in keeping hidden the secrets which emerge from Dakshinacharan's account but which the *zamindar* cannot bring himself to utter. Hence both men continue to be "haunted," one by his experience of phantasmatic phenomena, and the other by the nightly retellings of the haunting.

<30>While the woman in "Kankal" took revenge through murder for a lifetime of objectification and suppression, the woman in "Nishite" lived out her life as a good wife of her social standing should. Dakshinacharan observes that his first wife was renowned in the family as an extraordinary *grihini* (lady of the house). This accolade of feminine accomplishment proves that she not only performed to perfection all the domestic duties and religious rituals expected of her, but was also able to foster a harmonious atmosphere within the household. The role of *grihini* in a traditional household with an extended family was a social one, involving the observance of intricate rules of conduct towards family members, the distribution of labor, and participation in the communal life of the *antahpur*.⁽²³⁾ However, Dakshinacharan wants something more from his wife than the traditional ideal. His Western education had led him to hold modern views about marital love, imbibed, he claims, from reading too much literature. Working from an

idealized notion of English womanhood, Dakshinacharan expects his wife to be a lover, companion, and helpmeet. In this imported model of marriage, the husband and wife comprise a dyadic unit, with a personal and intimate bond between them that minimizes the influence and importance of the extended family on the couple's lives. In this view, marriage is a matter of the preferences and emotions of individuals, whereas in the traditional view, marriage is a social contract between families.(24)

<31>Dakshinacharan's attempts to woo his bride with poetry and endearments are met by her with incomprehension and embarrassment. He attributes her rejection of his advances to her old-fashioned upbringing and fear of social shame. It never occurs to him that she may not reciprocate his emotion, or that she may question its sincerity. The discourse of romantic love assumes individual choice and consent. However, as a bride in a traditional arranged marriage, she had not been given a choice. As a young man still under the rule of guardians, he also would have been constrained in his choice of wife. His wife seemed to understand what Dakshinacharan refuses to comprehend: that declarations of love under such circumstances were unlikely to be sincere and were probably somewhat absurd. For her, this was a contractual arrangement in which she had certain obligations, duties, and privileges--but these do not encompass the emotional investment in her husband that his romantic notions demand.

<32>Dakshinacharan's wife derives her sense of identity from being a proficient *grihini*, a role that confers power and gravitas in the domestic hierarchy of the *antahpur*. However, his romantic notions require that his wife derive her sense of self-worth from being his beloved instead. Although she fulfils all her duties towards him (including conjugal relations), she consistently resists his romancing. She laughs away his attempts, a move so devastating to his masculinity that he compares it to the demolishing of the army of Indra, the king of gods in the Hindu pantheon, in a flood raised by the goddess Ganges. He notes with subdued bitterness that "her laughter had a peculiar power" (263). Dakshinacharan's narrative hints at, but cannot bring to utterance, his resentment of the castrating power of her laughter which demolished his infantile desire to engross his wife to his sole use.

<33>When he falls desperately ill, she nurses him day and night as a good wife should. She dedicates herself to his care and recovery, sacrificing her own well-being in the process. His illness gains him the kind of engrossing intimacy he had desired: "she did not eat or sleep. *No one and nothing in this world existed for her but me*" (264, my emphasis). He revels in the fact that she was so completely focused on him that she even ignores her own needs, as well as all her other responsibilities. He does not allude to the fact that she was pregnant at this time, nor does he consider that such intensive service might injure her health. He accepts her sacrifice as his due, but, unappreciative of the deep sense of duty that motivates her, he ascribes her care to romantic love instead: "with all her love, all her heart, all her tenderness, she held on to this unworthy soul like a child at her bosom" (268). The irony of this remark is that her dedication to his care causes her to miscarry, which results in complications that ruin her health and her ability to have children. Dakshinacharan only alludes to the pregnancy to explain her subsequent invalid and dependent condition. He expresses no sentiment of mourning for the loss of the child nor any understanding of the emotional impact of her loss.

<34>His wife's weakened state suits Dakshinacharan's fantasy of a wife bound to him not only by custom and law, but by a complete emotional dependence as well. Unable to bear a child or fulfill her role of *grihini*, his wife becomes dissociated from the domestic activities in which she would have taken pride and pleasure. This leaves her at the mercy of his attentive care. However, as a Hindu wife raised to accept pain without complaint as a sign of grace, she neither expects nor wants his care.(25) She repudiates his solicitude as she had repudiated his romancing. His constant presence by her bedside dismays her: "What are you doing? What will people think? Don't fuss about in my room all day like this!" (264). Thus, even as an invalid, Dakshinacharan's wife demonstrates a fierce determination to uphold the mental and physical boundaries that prevent her identity from becoming absorbed by him. This resolve to hold firm to her traditional identity (in the face of his determined attempts to transform her into an adjunct of himself) is manifested in her private garden. In a small, fenced-in part of the larger grounds, she plants a garden whose traditional arrangements present a strong contrast to the larger gardens of the mansion. Dakshinacharan is condescending in his appreciation of this spot. In his view, the garden lacked variety or interest because it was so *dishi* (indigenous), lacking foreign plants (which would require Latin botanical names on flags) or selected groupings of perfumes and colors (264). Instead it featured aromatic flowering plants and herbs that were native to the region, and thus deemed to be sentimental and unsophisticated.

<35>The garden represents Dakshinacharan's wife's subtle defiance of her husband's Western values. In this restorative space she can regain some of her former vitality despite being an invalid. Not surprisingly, Dakshinacharan locates this garden as the space where his hauntings begin (when he repeats with his second wife a scene that had occurred with his first wife). One evening, Dakshinacharan helps his invalid wife down to her favorite seat in that garden. He observes that he would have liked to place her head on his knee, but being aware that she would be embarrassed by such an open show of affection, brings a pillow instead. His recounting of this detail draws attention to his sensitivity in placing her wishes above his desire. However, once they are settled, he quickly forgets her distaste for romance as he gives in to his feelings. Moved by the beauty of the moonlit evening, he declares: "I will never forget your love" (265). Although intended as a declaration of undying love, this remark implies that he thinks of her as already dead, and shows that he is imagining a future in which he must remind himself of her love. She responds with laughter, which he interprets as gentle irony: "My wife laughed. There was embarrassment, pleasure, and disbelief in that laugh, and the sharpness of ridicule. Through her laugh, she seemed to say 'Never forget? That is impossible and I don't expect it'" (265). What she may have actually thought is never revealed, since Dakshinacharan speaks for her by interpreting her facial expressions and body language, but does not recount her words. In this instance, he interprets her laugh as seeming both to belittle his fantasy of a love that will last forever, and to release him from having to love her forever.

<36>When it becomes obvious that she would remain an invalid for the remainder of her life, Dakshinacharan's wife pragmatically advises him to marry a second wife. Her "permission" for him to seek a polygamous marriage liberates him from the self-imposed role of devoted attendant. He acknowledges that this role was becoming increasingly onerous, especially after he meets Monorama, the youthful and unwed daughter of his wife's doctor. According to Monorama's father, Doctor Haran, she is still unwed because he is too fond a father and too particular about his choice of a potential husband for her. However, Dakshinacharan admits

hearing rumors that her astrological charts deem her unlucky, which has interfered with marriage plans. The fact that Dakshinacharan has discovered these details about Monorama implies his intention to consider her for marriage, while the doctor's modern decision to bring his daughter out of seclusion in Dakshinacharan's presence hints at matchmaking. Just fifteen years old, Monorama is more malleable than Dakshinacharan's first wife, and more receptive to his views: "She was as lovely as she was cultured. That's why occasionally when we had been chatting on many different subjects, I would lose track of time and would be late in returning home to give my wife her medicine" (264).

<37>Despite the fact that neither his first wife nor society would condemn a second marriage, Dakshinacharan cannot propose to Monorama until his current wife dies. To do otherwise would negate his declarations of love to his first wife, and would contravene his glorification of the companionate marriage. Furthermore, conventional domestic arrangements might create a bond between the two women which could interfere with the dyadic relation Dakshinacharan expects from his wife. Hence, Dakshinacharan and Doctor Haran are implicitly drawn into a sinister compact to ensure the wife's swift demise. The doctor feeds Dakshinacharan's disenchantment with his chosen role, voicing sentiments that Dakshinacharan disavowed: "From time to time, the doctor would comment that incurable invalids might be better off dead, because these unfortunate persons could take no pleasure in life, and destroyed others' happiness as well" (265). Even the wife is attuned to this idea of the uselessness of her life, and broaches the possibility of euthanasia. The stage is set for the wife's death when Dakshinacharan invites Monorama to meet his wife one evening. Yet his guilty conscience about this invitation is evident. When his wife, seeing a stranger at the door of the sickroom, asks to be introduced, Dakshinacharan's spontaneous response is to deny all knowledge of the woman. This denial insults his wife's intelligence and her tolerance. Dakshinacharan had no need to hide from her his liaison with Monorama, except a perverse desire to preserve his sense of himself as a devoted lover. As the two women converse civilly, the doctor leaves the wife two medicines, one a drug for her condition, and the other a poisonous liniment. Although he enjoins her not to confuse the two bottles, he is effectively presenting her with a choice: to continue being a barrier to her husband's remarriage or to poison herself. The wife understands and accepts this choice. When the visitors are about to depart, she asks her husband to accompany them for a walk. When Monorama asks to stay behind to care for her, Dakshinacharan, his wife, and the doctor all insist that the girl leave. Thus, the wife is left alone with her two potions on a night when her pain is especially severe.

<38>Dakshinacharan does not return until considerable time has passed. He finds her near the end, in severe pain and unable to speak. The poisonous liniment bottle is empty. When asked about it, she nods in agreement that she had made a mistake. Just before dying, she clutches his hand in a gesture that he interprets as an attempt to console him "as a mother consoles a sick child" (267). This image transfers her pain and illness to him such that even at the moment of death, she seems preoccupied with his mental state, and he seems to be the "sick child" in need of maternal comfort. In his interpretation, her facial expression suggests two contradictory admissions, both of which are convenient to him: she had *not* committed suicide (which would confer a stigma on the family), but she nonetheless welcomed death. He reads in her face a mute affirmation of love in which he imagines her saying: "Don't grieve. It's better this way. You will be happy, and knowing that I can die contentedly" (265).

<39>Dakshinacharan marries Monorama shortly after his wife's passing. However, he is no more content in this marriage than in his previous one. Although Monorama does not laugh away his romancing, her responses seem insufficient to him. He complains that the more he tried to "capture her heart," the less assured he felt of her love (270). He begins drinking heavily (which the narrator had alluded to as the source of Dakshinacharan's hallucinatory experiences). However, his real troubles begin when he attempts to reenact with Monorama the scene in the garden with his first wife. Sitting with Monorama on the same spot on a moonlit evening, he makes a very similar declaration: "Monorama, I know you don't believe me, but I love you. I will never be able to forget you" (270). As in the previous instance, his words are not a declaration of undying love but rather a disavowal that reveals his underlying wish to move on to a new love object. The atmosphere immediately becomes charged with supernatural power. He hears what he thinks is his first wife's castrating laughter as he loses consciousness. When he recovers, Monorama assures him that all she heard was a flock of migrating geese, a rational explanation that he accepts in the daytime. At night, however, Dakshinacharan cannot hold on to his rational self, and incidents of haunting multiply rapidly until he becomes a nervous wreck. Significantly, the most frightening incidents occur whenever he attempts to make love to Monorama. He hears his first wife's laughter, and her accompanying query, "*O ke? O ke?*" ("Who is she? Who is she?"). The phrase harks back to the night when his first wife had seen Monorama, a stranger hesitating in the doorway of her sickroom in the twilight, and had asked: "*O ke? O ke go?*" ("Who is she? Who is she, dear?"; 264). Although he thinks of rational and psychological explanations for all the incidents, he cannot shake off the feeling of dread that accompanies them. This state of affairs continues until he refuses to speak to Monorama after dark (in a reversal of the traditional conventions which permitted interaction between a husband and wife in the evenings), effectively renouncing her as his wife. Dakshinacharan's first wife rarely speaks in the story. The only point in which her words are directly represented occur on the night of her death, in the question she asks and the request she makes of her visitors to persuade her husband to get some fresh air. Elsewhere, her views emerge only as interpretations by her husband of non-verbal communication. Yet her voice and presence dominate his account, to compensate for the lifetime of silencing and denial that he had imposed on her.

<40>Dakshinacharan's Western education fails to make him more reflective or considerate of women. It merely makes him reluctant to appear to wield patriarchal authority over them. Notwithstanding his talk of love, Dakshinacharan did not love either of his wives. He merely expects the woman to act as a mirror reflecting back his love for himself. He is unable to tolerate the idea of his wife entertaining an independent or autonomous desire that did not include being his love object. He never considers the issue of either woman's choice. While the first marriage was arranged when both parties were both young, Dakshinacharan had complete agency in arranging the second marriage. Although he "courts" Monorama by conversing with her during his wife's illness, he does not ask for her consent. Her consent is taken for granted by him and her father. With both women, he expects a ready acceptance of his whims. His first wife maintained her integrity at the cost of her life. His second wife recedes from the narrative, renounced by him because of his terror. His muddled and egotistical thinking devastated the lives of both women, whose unhappiness he elides as he privileges his own pain. In the end, the fissures in Dakshinacharan's character become unnegotiable as he oscillates between two unbearable possibilities: the rational explanation of weak nerves, induced by drinking, to which he clings during the day; and the irrational terror of supernatural visitations at night.

Conclusion

<41>For nineteenth-century Bengali writers, the literary sphere created a space for imagining the Bengali identity emerging from the colonial encounter. Many influential figures, including some considered by Tagore as honored elders and literary mentors, believed that a renaissance should be driven by training in both Sanskrit and European literary traditions, and the appropriation of European literature into vernacular idioms.(26) Indeed, the Tagore family (or Thakur dynasty) was deeply invested, ideologically and financially, in the idea of an Indian modernity that would emerge from a partnership between Britain and India, and Tagore's milieu reflected a spirit of cultural cosmopolitanism. For these writers and intellectuals, a "New Bengali" literature would be a harmonious assimilation of East and West, rather than a recovery of an untainted nativist ideal. Thus, while also the ground of anti-colonial critique and nationalist sentiments, the literature of the period is a hybrid formation suited to representing a hybrid cultural identity. Firdous Azim observes that the new literature depends on the figure of the woman as the core of an authenticity even as it is identified as a site for progressive reform: "This emerging Bengali literature uses woman as a metaphor for home, the traditional, the precolonial and as the sphere which has somehow evaded the colonial onslaught. At the same time, women are also the objects of the modernizing reform movement" (47). The tense cultural negotiation between the private sphere of domesticity and the public sphere of colonial modernity that men experience in their day-to-day interactions is thereby projected onto the figure of the woman. As Tagore's ghost stories show, the Bengali woman thereby becomes the embodiment of the uncanny quality of colonial subjectivity.

<42>The prevalence of Gothic tropes in twentieth-century postcolonial literature is well recognized by scholars. Postcolonial texts interrogating the colonial encounter often employ the uncanny as a trope for representing confusions of identity, power, and desire. Accounts of loss and trauma emerge as narratives layered with prior histories and repressed voices whose manifestations into consciousness seem phantasmatic and apparitional. Drawing on Homi Bhabha's notion of mimicry as a form of agency for the colonized, David Punter argues that postcolonial literature turns to spectrality as a means of acknowledging an irreconcilable alterity embedded within the self.(27) Thus, for Judie Newman, the postcolonial Gothic is "Janus-faced" since it attempts to forge "a dynamic between the unspoken and the 'spoken for'" but is unable to "unbind all its historical ties to the West" (86).(28) Arguing for a layered reading of the "spectrology" of contemporary postcolonial texts that takes into account nineteenth-century vernacular traditions of ghost stories and Gothic fiction, Bishnupriya Ghosh warns that the global circulation of postcolonial fiction in English leads to the forgetting of vernacular traditions: "vernacular texts *acquire* the status of an 'other' archive--'supplemental' in the Derridean sense--because of their current global invisibility, especially in view of the enormous cultural capital of the post-1980s' South Asian novel in English" (202). Even in the nineteenth century, however, traditional and folk literature of the fantastic was disappearing, as a more rationalistic and scientific sensibility associated with colonial power began to dominate Bengali culture.(29) Tagore's use of the Gothic to probe his complex views on gender and colonial culture through an appropriation of the quintessentially Victorian form of the ghost story, is a significant attempt to initiate a vernacular Gothic tradition that is itself haunted by the other.(30)

Endnotes

(1) This project would not have been possible without the encouragement of my parents, Mrs. Gitanjali Bhattacharya and the late Professor Sushil Kumar Bhattacharya, and the help and support of my friend Dr. Sharilyn Nakata, Assistant Professor, Department of Classics, Luther College.(^)

(2) Patrick Brantlinger uses the term "imperial Gothic" to describe fin-de-siècle and Edwardian period texts that combine imperial adventure with Gothic cues in ways that encode powerful anxieties about the colonial encounter (227-54). Stephen Arata argues along similar lines that the late Victorian Gothic was deeply influenced by contemporary racial science, especially ideas about degeneration, which contributed to anxieties about the dissolution of the nation and culture, and narratives of "reverse colonization."(^)

(3) Andrew Smith and William Hughes sum up the critical consensus on this point when he observes that "[o]ne of the defining ambivalences of the Gothic is that its labeling of otherness is often employed in the service of supporting, rather than questioning, the status quo" (*Empire and the Gothic* 3). For Smith and Hughes, the "Gothic is, and always has been, *post*-colonial, and this is where, in the Gothic text, disruption accelerates into change, where the colonial encounter—or the encounter which may be read or interpreted through the colonial filter—proves a catalyst to corrupt, to confuse or to redefine the boundaries of power, knowledge and ownership" ("Introduction" 1).(^)

(4) I use the term "indigenous" to refer to these writers not to confer on them an originary authenticity but as a means of differentiating writers of native descent for whom Indian literatures and cultures represented the vernacular tradition from European writers living in the colonies. Since most indigenous writers of the colonial period were male (with some rare exceptions), I have used the masculine pronoun throughout.(^)

(5) For instance, David Punter contends that postcolonial writers have found the Gothic, with its rhetoric of haunting and monstrosity, valuable for inscribing the sense of cultural loss. This is especially the case for the loss of vernacular traditions as a consequence of the colonial imposition of English as the language of instruction in schools and the canonical status granted to English literature within imperialist pedagogy. For Punter, postcolonial writing uses the Gothic to attempt to express the inexpressible: "There is the mutual rage of incomprehension, the rage that stems from the tearing out of the tongue, the tearing out by the tongue, the 'tonguelessness' that lies behind the most sophisticated of narratives, that renders the gesture of writing in the language of the conqueror forever an activity of pollution" (55).(^)

(6) Ghost stories are sometimes regarded as only peripherally connected to the Gothic because they offer no rational explanation for events. Julia Briggs argues that "[g]host stories constitute a

special category of the Gothic and are partly characterised by the fact that their supernatural events remain unexplained” (123). However, other scholars have been reluctant to attempt strict definitions of a literary form that is characterized by excess, disjunction, and mutation. Julian Wolfreys, for instance, argues that “[t]he gothic can then no longer be figured from the 1820s onwards, as a single, identifiable *corpus*” and that the liberation of the form from its eighteenth-century conventions makes it “more terrifying because of its ability to manifest itself and variations of itself anywhere” (9).(^)

(7)Krishna Kumar observes that colonial educational policy was shaped by the underlying conflict between the British government’s practical need to produce clerks and subordinates and the larger aim of producing an India that modeled bourgeois Victorian society (49-72). Gauri Viswanathan offers a powerful analysis of the educational strategies of British rule, especially the use of English literature in Indian schools. Priya Joshi adds an important dimension to Viswanathan’s study by considering the consumption and readership of English fiction in India. (^)

(8)Sudipta Kaviraj offers a concise account of the development of a modern Bengali literature. Also instructive is Tapti Roy’s account of the development of printing in Bengali in the nineteenth century. Roy’s account makes it clear that Bengalis continued to read and write Bengali literature even as English became a part of their everyday experience.(^)

(9)For more on the influence of nationalist politics on gender roles in colonial Bengal, see Tanika Sarkar.(^)

(10)The term *bhadralok* carries the primary connotation of respectability and can refer to an entire class as well as an individual man. During the nineteenth century, the middle-class Bengali identity (especially that identified as the *bhadralok*) became increasingly identified as Hindu, leading to the cultural and political marginalization of the Muslim community. See Meredith Borthwick for a succinct description of the term *bhadralok* as it defines the Hindu middle class (3-4).(^)

(11)See Dipesh Chakrabarty. For more on the formation of male gender identity in colonial India, see Mrinalini Sinha. See Nalin Jayasena for an analysis of the trope of effeminacy especially in the figure of the Babu in Tagore's novels via Satyajit Ray's filmography of Tagore's work.(^)

(12)The Bengali term for middle-class society, “*bhadrasamaj*,” translates literally as “polite” or “respectable” society. As Partha Chatterjee and others have noted, scholars need to historicize this association of respectability with the middle classes.(^)

(13)For more on the role of the wife in conjugal relations in colonial Bengal, see Borthwick (109-150).(^)

(14)Two cultural practices that powerfully mobilized reform-minded Hindus (often uniting them with colonial authorities) were *sati* (the immolation of widows on the husband’s funeral pyre)

and the abuses of the *kulin* system (the marriage of high-status Brahmin males for purposes of status and dowry to large numbers of women, whom the husband did not see or maintain after the wedding).(^)

(15)As Borthwick points out, Bengali male reformers did not consult women when initiating reforms or consider the possibility that women might develop interests along lines different from the projected schemes for their improvement (40-47).(^)

(16)While Tagore's ghost stories have received little critical attention, the tragic heroines of his realist fiction have been the subject of a considerable body of scholarship, especially analyses of individual works. M. Sarada offers a study of the development of female characters in Tagore's realist fiction. B. B. Majumdar offers an analysis relating Tagore's treatment of female characters to changes in gender ideology. S. Selena Jamil offers an analysis of the silence of female characters in Tagore's several of his realist short fiction.(^)

(17)Tagore was well-versed in English literary and artistic traditions. Along with his brothers and their circle, he studied European literature, history, and art (primarily English and French), in addition to Sanskrit and vernacular traditions. For an excellent and accessible biography of Tagore, see Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson.(^)

(18)This term refers to the mytho-historical figure of a young girl fed on poison until she becomes immune to its effects but can kill anyone through intimate contact. Such women were supposed to have astrological charts that destined them for early widowhood. This tradition is supposed to have been the inspiration for Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Rappaccini's Daughter" (1844).(^)

(19)Page numbers refer to "The Skeleton" in *Mashi and Other Stories* (London: Macmillan, 1918). I supplement this translation when necessary by reference to the Bengali text in Rabindranath Tagore, *Galpaguccho* (63-69).(^)

(20)As English-language instruction became more common, teachers educated in vernacular literatures and traditions lost much of their traditional status. Vernacular instructors continued to be addressed by traditional signifier of erudition, "pundit." However, this term of respect was seen as distinct from the more respected modern conception of the "educated man."(^)

(21)In Bengali, a conventional expression conveying the sincerity of speaker involves a ritual touching of (or offering to touch) the addressee. The assumption is that the speaker is staking the addressee's life on his words being true, and thereby accepting that the consequences of the speaker's falsehood would be analogous to killing the addressee.(^)

(22)All translated quotations/passages from this story are mine. The page numbers refer to the Bengali text (Tagore, *Galpaguccho* 263-72).(^)

(23)For a detailed overview of the role of women within the structure of a traditional middle-class Bengali household, see Borthwick (3-25). Judith Walsh traces the reshaping of women's

roles to suit the changed dynamics of family life under British rule, as evidenced by late nineteenth-century conduct manuals for women.(^)

(24)The notion of a companionate marriage that resulted from courtship and romance was a novel concept in nineteenth-century Bengal. Traditionalists derided the idea as the foolish aping of foreignness by young and Western-educated men. For the emergence of a discourse of love in colonial Bengal, see Sambuddha Chakrabarti.(^)

(25)According to Sarkar, the idealized figure of Hindu womanhood included a "unique capacity for bearing pain" (203).(^)

(26)One of the most powerful voices of reform in nineteenth-century Bengal, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891), not only led the movement for reform of gender roles but also called for a literary renaissance of Bengali. Vidyasagar was considered an honored elder by Tagore, and his ideas were crucial to shaping Tagore's own complex views on gender and culture. His writing and activism led to the enactment of two important gender reform laws: the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856, permitting Hindu widows to remarry, and the Civil Marriage Act of 1872, curbing polygamy and child marriage. Although the Widow Remarriage Act did not significantly alter cultural attitudes towards widows, it was a vital moment of acknowledgment of injustice.(^)

(27)Punter is drawing on Bhabha's analysis of the colonial encounter as uncanny in that colonial authority requires and produces discourses of doubling, repetition, and monstrosity. These discourses are disavowals of the ambivalence generated by colonial relationships, and reveal a constitutive anxiety about the integrity and autonomy of the colonizer's identity. Bhabha develops these ideas in a number of his essays, most notably in those collected in *The Location of Culture*.(^)

(28)Newman observes that the Gothic mode's "ability to retrace the unseen and unsaid of culture renders it peculiarly well-adapted to articulating the untold stories of the colonial experience" (86).(^)

(29)Kaviraj points out that by the nineteenth century, the traditional and folk literature of the fantastic was in danger of disappearing as a more rationalistic, scientific, and "Western" sensibility dominated the literature of the period (550-51).(^)

(30)According to Julia Briggs, the ghost story is "the most characteristic form taken by the Gothic from, perhaps, 1830 to 1930" (122). The ghost story was most popular during the Victorian period, especially following Charles Dickens' *Christmas Carol* (1843), and the popularity of a series of Christmas anthologies of supernatural fiction.(^)

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