Chapter 6: Hauntology and Naming the “Necro”: The Poetics and Politics of Ghost Stories

“I know lots of people there [in America] who would give a hundred thousand dollars to have a grandfather, and much more than that to have a family Ghost.”

“I don’t think I should like America.”

“I suppose because we have no ruins and no curiosities.” said Virginia satirically.

— Oscar Wilde, “The Canterville Ghost”

In many oblique ways the genre of horror fictions, ghost stories and gothic romances enclose the child-reader. The nightmarish and nightmare-evoking reputation of the horror as a literary affect encloses the child’s responses—the ghost is the insubstantial substance of fear and the pleasure of fear right from the peritextual utterance. Although it is not any object [the ghost is devoid of, by definition, any materiality], it is the objective correlative to the psychoanalytic conflicts in the readers’ minds. But what intrigues my inquiry into the poetics and politics of the ghost-stories and tales of horror are the complex relations between the issues of instincts and their mimesis, and between the issues of “coming as coming back” [a definitional marker of ghost itself] and the predicament of the subjectivity of essences. These two interfaces, taken as a whole, also problematize the validity of the hierarchized structures, monoliths and homogenes of modernity and interrogate the realism, presence, humanism of the solid regulations and praxis we subscribe to in order to be. The generic closures of ghost story, therefore, dislodge the conventions of the substrative and highly institutionalized humanism, and offer us radical disclosures in poetics and politics.

Let us first sum up the closures in the poetics and politics that children’s ghost stories are anticipated to form around the engaged reader. Firstly, the language and structure of the ghost story has to be spectral itself, in the sense that its verbal tenses and narrative time-schemes present a revenance; the deployment of silence, onomatopoeia, and exclamations generate a failure at symbolization rather than completion of mimesis; the narrative techniques highlight the return of the repressed or the re-arrival of the Real. Guy the Maupassant’s “On the River” almost begins with the double poetics of memory and prolepsis, or anteriority and destiny:

He must have been born in a boat, and he would certainly die in one.

The boat on the river becomes the juncture of the French man's existence and passion on one hand and his "stories", word, language on the other:

I asked him to tell me some stories about his life upon the river; and that good man suddenly became animated, transfigured, almost poetical! In his heart there was one great passion, devouring and irresistible—the river.  

The river is the space of the haunt as well the space of the language:

"You People who live in streets, you don't know what the river is. But just listen to a fisherman simple pronouncing the word. For him it is the thing mysterious, the thing profound, unknown, the country of mirage and phantasmagoria, where one sees, at night, things which do not exist, where one hears strange noises, where one trembles causelessly, as though crossing a graveyard. And it is, indeed, the most sinister of graveyards—a graveyard where there are no tombstones."  

The occulturation of space implies that the "river" is to be "crossed" just like a graveyard is to be "crossed". And crossing the river is crossing the graveyard without tombstones, because the unruly vastness of the river is a haunt without the fixities of structures, finality of dates and proper names in the cenotaph, frozenness of particular identities. Within a ghost story, the river is a space for the encounter with the spectral stretched to limitlessness:

"To the fisherman the land seems limited, but of dark nights, when there is no moon, the river seems limitless."  

And crossing the ghost is crossing the aphasic Real, which cannot be symbolicized:

Sailors have no such feeling for the sea. Hard she often is and wicked, the great Sea, but she cries, she shouts, she deals with you fairly, while the river is silent and treacherous. It never even mutters, it flows noiselessly, and this eternal flowing movement of water terrifies me far more...  

Secondly, the schadenfreude and the cathartic effect of the ghost story, whose shudders are almost always institutionalized [such as the ghost of the accidental victim intervening in all chronotopes of accidental peril to dig the innocent human out of danger, while the murder victim is the source of pity and fear in the sense of its return for a revenge tragedy]. Castelvetro would have postulated that the horror texts expose the unprepared mind of the reader to a multiplicitous hermeneutics of memory, violence, terror and death to harden the tabula rasa of the reader adequately into a rational, stoic morality. Plato would have, perhaps, called the ghosts in the ghost story mimeo-shadows of what is already thrice away from

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2 Ibid. p. 5.  
3 Ibid. p. 5  
4 Ibid. p. 5.  
5 Ibid. p 5-6
reality, had he encountered the inter-textuality of the ghost’s mimesis. Freud would have relegated the ghosts in the ghost stories to the displacement effects of the onirous mind, formulating an uncanny. But let us for the time being do away with these mentational anchorages of the slippery [no]thing called the ghost and discover it to be a textual effect primarily, through whose figuration political and economic parameters generate equations.

At the core of the institutions of fear, be they events like the World War II or psycho-tropes like the return of the repressed, is the binary opposition between the self and the other—the ghost stories stabilize, mutate, permute, combine, unsettle, disseminate, reterritorialize this opposition. Theories as diverse as the Christological akolouthia and the gendered embodiment of insane, unruly nervousness as uterine [hysteria] have tried to anchor the “fearful” asymmetry between the self and the other. Desire for the other and dread of punishment from the Other do link the canny bildung of the child and the uncanny elements of phobia, nightmare and inhibitions. And the other is multifarious in terms of the political manifestation—the lack of the female, the prohibitive figure of the father, the hegemonic estimate of the savage as menacing, the abject that resists cryptic lock up, the babelocutionary other to the logos, the silence, the madness—the sites of asymmetry leading to fear and its stereotypization are innumerable. In this chapter, I would like to examine the narrivizations of fear, in terms of three semiotic inquiries:

1. What role does the ghost play in mapping or tracing the conflicts between the self and the other?

2. Can ghost stories offer a de-centralization, pluralization and deterritorialization of fear, or do they necessarily inscribe the uncanny within the canny correlatives through the familiarity of tropological maneuvers?

3. What is the relationship between the hauntological excesses in the horror texts and the question of the text’s reading and writing? In other words, what presents the spectrality of writing through the writing of the spectral?

Encyclopaedia Britannica writes the “ghost” as the “soul” or the “specter” of a dead person, “usually believed to inhabit the netherworld and to be capable of returning in some form to the world of the living...”6 The synonymy with the “soul”, i.e., an essence or some kind of transcendental presence, the inner core of subjectivity, would situate the ghost as a thing, a

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molarity. But if it is a "specter", the locus of ghost becomes antithetical, outside the metaphysics of presence—a lack in and of itself, an absence, a "return" in place of a "proper" and an ontic status. The "netherworld", to be precise not a space per se but a field that is conjured up or invented in order to rescue the specter from its absence and root it somewhere, is an origin that is already always a non-world—a fantasy that would fill in the void of the non-originary with a figuration of the source, core, domain, commencement—capable of explaining the is not in the semblance of an is, and forging a sense of belonging and topographical co-ordination. It is to be noted that the irreality of the netherworld is not the same as the irreality of the space of the fairy tale—the former is outside the presence of space while the latter is only an extraordinary space. The "netherworld", mostly indexed by the haunt and not by any spatial marker per se, is a construct that puts the absent into a continuum of the present: the place which is the prior fount of the ghost, and the posterior destiny and finality of many a living beings, thus annexing/disciplining the spectral into a pervert and alternative allotrope of Dasein.

The ghost thereby becomes a point of impossible but overlooked conflation, or collapse, of the memory and anticipation of the living presence. The netherworld is neither a fallen secondary of the live world, nor Yeats’s Byzantium-as-purgatorio, but a field of signification eternally void. The ways ghost stories provoke its prepositionality for the spectral are radically heterogeneous—the diabolic, infernal landscapes, the exclave of the swamp [especially inhabited by the šācumnī], the haunted castle as the domicilation of the Vampire. This is like emplacement of the nebulous and the spectral within/within a likeness of the docile and comprehensive frame of causality, community, installation, and venue—a case of attachment, a cache for the other signed by the cachet of the self. The ghost’s "place" prior to its "return" is thus a caenogenesis, a poetics of titherwardness, so to say, that disowns the uncanny from the cozy nativity of the canny and yet cannibalizes the unhinged into the chorographic ubiety of the Self.

This would mean that the politics of the ghost story is likely to enact a closure upon alterity by converting its differential energetics into a displaced identity. When Noyes’s Young Mortimer discovers the "identity" of the "dark, shadowy" figure that haunted both his storybooks and his cachodaemonic parapraxis, he undergoes a violent and unsettling anagnorisis:

It was himself—staring back at himself—as in some mocking mirror, his own eyes live in his own white face, looking into his own eyes, alive...

As Mortimer frantically attempts to escape from the discovery of the ghost as his mimicry, or rather the discovery of oneself as a hauntological and not ontic fiction, he ends up in a room, identical to his own, finds a storybook bearing the same name as his spooky book, and realizes the endless chain of signifiers without any canny allocation:

It would go on thus, forever and forever, and forever. There was no escape.8

In ghost stories like this, the hegemonic resolution of the self and its hegemony over the ghost-as-the-other are both suggested and deconstructed. The “sense of myself” of Young Mortimer and his spectral doppelganger finally conquer and concur with each other through a “death”, but only apparently, because “death” would imply the complete loss of the self eclipsed by the specter of self-semblance—to escape the haunt, Mortimer has to completely become the specter:

But Mortimer had escaped at last. Perhaps, after all, he had caught the Midnight Express.9

The Midnight Express, a train, is the vector of the out of the joint self, a self that is haunted by too much of itself, and yet an ontic not I, through the space of the haunt and finally out of it. Yet the emancipation of Mortimer’s self from the hauntological space is not at all a progression or solution—the origin [Mortimer’s book] becomes the aftermath [Mortimer’s locale of implosion], and the memory becomes a prolepsis. The fictionalization of estrangement [the self from the “other” Mortimer] and the narrative of trochilic coincidence between the finite self and the transfinite specter are launched in the story against each other, to produce and challenge the metaphysics of ipseity.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica also defines the ghost as “a nebulous likeness of the deceased”—a retarded resemblance, or a deferred reference to the ontological body that makes the ghost’s “identity” only after its recession. The phrase “nebulous likeness to the deceased” is a mimesis of that which is precisely nihilated or withdrawn. The ghost is therefore a Retrat—if “likeness” can fix meaning only by resemblance and has no ontological validity or substance in itself, and if the deceased is that which is an “is not” anymore precisely by the event of cessation, then either the ghost is a simulation of Jameinigkeit of the self written as disappearing appearing, or, the incessant imminence of

8 Ibid.335.
9 Ibid. 336.
the hitherto live self. In ghost stories, as opposed to the fairy tales, death is neither a pure tragedy/sacrifice, nor a punitive eventuality, but a tip of an arrivant instant where the solitude of the self is about to be dissolved.

In terms of this drama of conflation, the more crucial question would be: "What is a storyteller who testifies the instance of death as the event of disappearing appearing, or represents the unrepresentable delay between the imminence of death and the arrival of the ghost?" Dickens writes "The Haunted Man" with an amazing time out of joint: "The dread word, GHOST, recalls me..." The sentence is spectral in a number of ways—an initiative-excess [instead of the writer calling or recalling the ghost, the ghost re-calls the writer], the spectral signature of the author, the word-ghost making the act of writing a re-call, the conflation between the exorcism of language and the trace in language. The ghost-story is a genre with an interesting and honest poetics, then—one in which the act of signification is an act of mnemonic revenance, and the "home" has the identity of a "home" only as much it is haunted and unhomely, and the writer has the identity to himself/herself only as much he/she is permeated and haunted by the uncanny.

The past is not just an optional landscape in the ghost stories, but always mapped by the double act of memory and prolepsis. The spatiated and the mnemonized absence is made to return—to the writing table of the author, the pages of the self-reflexive ghost-story book or the unhomely home. One of the principal impacts of this generic "past" is to misremember the ineradicability of the unearned non-present. The past is partly already always gone, leaving only the indelible mark of its becoming absent [trace]—making the writing as recall an act at the vanishing point of time-pending-as/to be-bygone and of identity pending at the tip of absolute, nascent re-arrival.

The ghost is a radical shape-shifter. The equivalence between the dead and the deadly, and the difference between the deceased ante-object and the indestructible revenant are effects of this radical plurimorphicity. The ghost is that which cusps discombobulation and cessation, deremption and trace, and such antitheses should not posit before us false dialectics like the sublime/ the abject. Instead, the ambivalence of the ghost inhabits the locus of the impossibility of any mutation being reversed to an origin—the ghost is, the figure with the

compulsion to trace and “not the ghost of a chance” to retrieve. The omphalos of a ghost is a posteriority to a lack, loss or death, and hence the first ever “coming” of a ghost is already always a “coming back”. Mutations are the only existential condition of the ghost, “from away” its only hitherwardness or positionality, and “after that past” its absent history.

All ghosts, then, by this argument, would be, irrespective of their narrative rank, class or production relations, a surplus rather than a material proper, and a figural mime of capitalism. The ideology of capitalism has to demote the eternal ideal object in favour of an infinitely mutable one, and processing/re-processing gains an ontological priority rather than the eidos inherent in objects. The way the post-mortem surplus is reterritorialized into a quasi-object called the ghost also reminds us of the famous m-c-m formula of Marx regarding the rhythm of capitalism: “all that’s solid melts into the air”. Philippe Ariès in The Hour of Death chronicles the erosion of death and banishment of grief from the public spheres under the technologically bred and illusory invisibility of death and mourning. At the same time what he forgets to reflect upon is the fact that the virtual space of the commercial mass-media has also resulted in a hyperrealistic proliferation of the spectral and the phantasmatic. Technology, motivated by the logics of capitalism, has thus both suppressed the signifiers of terminality [a situation for the birth of the interminable ghost, since the complex logic of the interminable is that it does not go back but comes back] and paved the way for the return of the repressed. The absence of mourning, or of sorrow-work, of the labour of Trauerarbeit makes it impossible to capitalism to catharsize the ghost-surplus.¹¹

Dickens's The Haunted Man and The Ghost's Bargain (1848)¹² is an uncanny tale of a man called Redlaw who is compelled to face the appalling corollaries of his desire to be gratis off his past. Redlaw's spectral doppelganger appears to approve his wish that he ceases to be a mnemonic subject, provided all those who come in contact with him shall have the same amnesia. Within this demography of misremembrance, confronted with the harsh outcomes of his fugacious desire, Redlaw ultimately repents, and his punitive ghost withdraws the curse. The visual semiotics in which Redlaw's encounter with the self's essential cryptonymy in the ghost of himself is presented deserves a special mention here. The first illustrated

¹¹ In Lacanian psychoanalysis, mourning is an impossible but obligatory work performed at the level of the symbolic order to fill the hole in the Real elicited by the fact of death.

edition of The Haunted Man and The Ghost's Bargain introduced the central character Redlaw, a reclusive chemist tormented by his past, through a sequence of visual frames. These begin with John Tenniel's double frontispiece in which we see Redlaw sitting and gazing into a fire while his ghost mirrors his posture invisible to everybody but the reader. The ghost is traced, by two operations in tandem: the attempt of the self to misremember [not the same as forgetting], and, the reader's look that is working in this picture as the omniopsis, like a Big other. On the facing page, the paths to heaven and perdition are intimated by an angel and an enshrouded figure holding an innocent child between them. Pointing toward darkness, the child augurs the sense of corruption of innocence that will follow in the wake of Redlaw's submission to the dark forces that haunt his mind. The implosion of Redlaw is ironically the same moment as the incorporation of the evil into his mind, i.e., his mourning is permeated by a crypton of evil. Tenniel's third plate, which illustrates the first page of the first chapter, portrays a child reading in the foreground of another fireside scene, holding his book up to capture the illumination of the flames. This plate inaugurates the text's self-reflexive examination of representation: while the child reads, smoky shadows take shape, invoking thus the unfamiliar. Besides, the hermeneutics of reading is highlighted, to show the futility of repression: reading is, after all, the antonym to repression. The central paradox in the three pictures taken together is that in order to erase the past, Redlaw gets bound to, fastened, knotted intricately to the figural other of his past, of his self, the ghost of himself: in other words, the impossibility of the dissolution of the omphalos of the self which is nothing else but the spectral chora; the densest point[navel] of the self as opposed to its phallic fantasy of ipseity is its crypted alterity, the indissoluble point of gravity of the mourning being marked by the revenance of the spectral event:

Who that had seen him in his inner chamber, part library and part laboratory... the shadow of his shaded lamp a monstrous beetle on the wall, motionless among a crowd of spectral shapes raised there by the flickering of the fire upon the quaint objects around him; some of these phantoms (the reflection of glass vessels that held liquids), trembling at heart like things that knew his power to uncombine them, and to give back their component parts to fire and vapour,—who that had seen him then, his work done, and he pondering in his chair before the rusted grate and red flame, moving his thin mouth as if in speech, but silent as the dead, would not have said that the man seemed haunted and the chamber too? 13

In the above description of the man at work in his “inner chamber”, Dickens is doing something more than achieving the ostranenie, and the passage spills beyond the limits of

13 Ibid. 328.
descriptive language. It is the anomaly of the chemist as exorcist and the learned, scholarly, curious ego of Redwell as the domain of the haunt, as if the entire self of the scientist is constituted by an impossible contrary—the mastery of the spectral through conscious experimentation, and the possessed, obsessed subsumption of his entire being into the spectral. Science, the signifier of the will to knowledge, and the inaudible silent-speech of the ghost, the symptom of the failure of the res cogitans, are levelled against each other, so that the laboratory’s intention of radical newness [an overcoming of the past] and the library’s imperative to sustain the memory [a melancholic archive of the past] capture the “inner chamber” of Redlaw’s self and posit it as a strange diptych betwixt a mourning subject and a hauntological dijoin [ “Uncombining” the molarity of the past would therefore necessarily be uncombining the morality of the stable, independent subject into traces of possessedness, otherness, decryption]. Ironically, the instance of “his work done” is the moment of his work not done, his work’s [i.e., washing off the past and revel/revel in the newness of science] impossibility of being completed ever.

The strange meeting between Redlaw and his ghost is depicted as a trace of “something that had passed and gone already”, the already erased, the misremembered past, the belated:

As the gloom and shadow thickened behind him, in that place where it had been gathering so darkly, it took by slow degrees,—or out of it there came, by some unreal, unsubstantial process—not to be traced by any human sense,—an awful likeness of himself! Ghastly and cold, colourless in its leaden face and hands, but with his features, and his bright eyes, and his grizzled hair, and dressed in the gloomy shadow of his dress, it came into his terrible appearance of existence, motionless, without sound.

This, then, was the Something that had passed and gone already. This was the dread companion of the haunted man!14

The specter is nothing but a shadow of the “man”, but is it just a man? It is not the secure, autonomous self of the man whose fallen secondary or “shadow” the spectral other is. Rather, he is a “haunted man”, i.e., already always a selfhood with a hole through which the “dread companion”, decrypted, can return everytime—a “man” only as much as it is a “haunted man”. The effective tense of the last sentence cited above is an impossible one: the specter is the trace of the live man’s dead past, continuous companion, and the prolepsis of what he is likely to be in a foretold future. The anomaly of temporality—the violence against the self of bildung, but the truer impression of the self’s non-abolitionable eccentricity: the “I” is another.

14 Ibid.341-342
John Leech's illustration of the appearance of Redlaw's specter\textsuperscript{15} [Figure 6.1 below] shows it behind the chair, resting his head on his hand and staring at the fire, mirroring Redlaw's melancholic reverie. The only difference between them is the specter's bemused expression, signaling that it is not the ipso of Redlaw, but a different perspective. Dickens reveals the meaning of the specter’s faint smile on the facing page, where he describes Redlaw and his ghost contesting over the same memories, the former alternating between defiance and surrender to memory as the ghost re-calls Redlaw's treacherous betrayal by a friend who stole the woman he loved and, in the process, broke the heart of his now-dead sister. Redlaw exclaims that the past and the present are ruptured by the "bloodless hand" of his double.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.342.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 343.
discrepancy vis-a-vis the "alive", normal, normative self; side by side, the spectral also
creates a hole upon the placid surfaces of the self or the subject, exposing its ipseity as a
fiction and its capacity to crypt or to mourn as always inadequate. In other words, the ghost
story heightens both the disparity between the human and the supernatural, and the conflation
between the human presence and the hidden spectrality, trace and mis-remembrance at its
constituent core. Ghost stories written for children and young adults, such as the page-text of
Midnight Express or the filmic text Bhootnath use this doppell-ness for both poetic and
political ends.

Bhootnath, for example, is a children's film in Hindi with an eponymous ghost-protagonist
whose haunt in a house is itself motivated by his being already haunted by his [the ghost’s]
dead wife’s benign memory attached to that house— hauntology is stretched to its maxima by
showing the ghost as not just the agent of the haunt but a carrier of some earlier-than-the-
ghost memory. As the son of the ghost wants to sell the house, the ghost estimates himself
not just as a specter but the responsible preserver of his already deceased wife’s traces,
available now only in the space/property/architecture of the house in question. The locus of
the haunt thus becomes interesting: Death of Kailashnath’s wife haunts Kailashnath and the
benign memory is emplaced in the house, Kailashnath dies in course of preserving the benign
haunt and becomes Bhootnath, and now Bhootnath haunts the house. A child Banku, whose
point of view dominates most of the film except when the ghost recalls his own tragedy,
befriends the ghost and converts him to a moral guardian cum friend, till the concerned and
sympathetic parents arrange for a funerary-cum-mourning ritual to release the specter from its
double burden of haunt. Bhootnath is free from the compulsion to melancholia, but he returns
whenever Banku re-members him. Beneath the intriguing poetics of a tripartite haunt
[motivated by memory, possessiveness and affection respectively, Kailashnath is haunted,
haunting and hauntologized as in a sequence], the discourse of ethical social belonging, of the
joint family/nuclear family debate that has excited the moralities of the Indian family
structures recurrently is clearly discernible; also the ways in which the ghost’s haunt is
shifted, as in an optimistic comic resolution, from the hostile control of property to the
reformed hospitality to the redeemed recall of love and trust show the growth of the
ghost’s/other’s sensitivities [ as against a “frozen, static, essentially stale” stereotype of the
ghost/other]. Figure 6.2 below, a billboard poster of Bhootnath, ensembled as a condensation
of two still-images from the film, clearly demonstrates how the haunt of the ghost in effect
reinforces family-bonds.
Bhootnath offers a complex semiotics of spectrality. The poetics of the ghost-of-an-old-man protagonist and the child-as-the-perspective is not easy to achieve as both would involve a number of stereotypes not necessarily concurrent. Besides, the comedy of the intact family [Bhootnath remains the spectral grandpa of Banku inspite of being exorcized] and the melodrama of the intact loyalty/intimacy beyond death blend at the closure of the film, thus merging the homely love with the unhomely excesses of belonging. The identity of Bhootnath becomes extremely problematic as he floats among different subject-positions: the owner of the property, the bereaved father, a spectral substitute for Banku’s already deceased grandfather, a friend, a moral instructor, and finally a site of mourning. It is worthwhile to have a look at the high points in the visual semiotics, psychoanalytic symbolism and the ideological implications of these complexities:
1. As Bhootnath and Banku enter a dialogue for the first time, Boothnath claims the status of otherness, calling himself a ghost and demanding fear in the child's reaction. But the child calls him a "dost" (a friend). The utterance "friend" unsettles the ghost's identity, puts him into doubt on his otherness—whether he is actually a ghost or not. The ethics of friendship is shown to interrupt the binary exclusion between the self and the other.

2. Too often the identities of the ghost and the human have been shuffled in terms of affects, gestures and physiognomies in the film. Bhootnath fails to terrify Banku, but Banku's abrupt, noisy emergences make Bhootnath nervous. Bhootnath is also put into the teddy bear costumes that Banku wears to shock his mother, and the mother fails to demarcate as the animaloid costume masks the ghost's otherness as much as it conceals the human self. The scar on Bhootnath's forehead, linked to his death and a mark of his spectrality thereof, is also marked on Banku's forehead when he falls down the same staircase that Bhootnath fell down from. The staircase becomes the chronotope of head injuries: once when the son refused to pay heed to a father, and the next time the ghost in a mood of playful revenge upon the child fails to grip the extended hand of Banku. Both receive the scar as a mark of withdrawal of expected behavior from their dear ones; in Bhootnath's case the scar is thanatological marker while in Banku's case it is therapeutic to the relations between the ghost and the child from then onwards. It is also noteworthy that in their respective perspectives, each holds the other as an "angel" instead of a simple ghost or a child. The childishness inside the ghost as the grandpa-surrogate and the mature ethics of friendship in the child supplement each other to the point of a hybridization—neither can remain inert and indifferent to the rhizomatic instance of friendship. Banku's private life, eating habits, school experiences, even theatrical performances remain fully chiasmal to Bhootnath's spectrality. Bhootnath's supernatural re-centralizes itself around the sentiments, crises and innocence of Banku. In a number of ways, then, the text offers a semiological possibility of what Walter De La Mare's "The Listeners" could not offer—a communion, co-mingling, coalescence and co-extension between the human self and the spectral other. Figure 6.3 below shows the faces of Bhootnath and Banku, both in the same gesture and the same attempt to scare each other, semiotically so place above and arching over the house so as to designate a contestation for control, and a sameness in mutual affect.
3. The political economy of Bhootnath’s haunt is also unique. While it is not rare to find the ghost’s spectrality anchored in the protection of some conflictual property, especially stable property down the ages, in Bhootnath the discourse of property is permeated by the discourse of belonging and memory. And the central conflict is between the house as an “asset” and as a “home”; Bhootnath explains to Banku’s mother that the house had been the “home” of his family, and it became unhomely following the death of his wife, even more so when the Non-resident son and daughter-in-law wanted to barter the Real of her traces in the house for liquid, spectral capital [the “home” was to be converted into a “resort” by the would-be-purchaser] and eventually after his/Kailashnath’s death. Since then, Kailashnath’s ghost is preventing every potential buyer of the land and the house from occupying it. The “home” of the ghost—as Bhootnath claims it—is a home only as much it is Unheimlich. After Bhootnath/Kailashnath’s soul has received a funeral and mourning, arranged by Banku’s family, the discourse of belonging completely eclipses the discourse of property, as Kailashnath’s son hands over the “home” to Banku without any monetary exchange. Like the materiality and corporeality of the body is substituted by the spectral over-belonging in a ghost story, the film offers an economic parallel—the substitution of material value of the estate by the value of congenial belonging. Figure 6.4 below shows the ghost functioning as a surveillance agent on the property, but the signboard reads “Enter at no risk”, with the word “no” interpolated with the white of peace, thus marking the spectral as the hospitable.
However, there are uneasy moments in the political economy of the haunt. For a time being till Banku is smart enough to appropriate the labour of Bhootnath, while the latter also utilizes the former's diet. Banku at an early scene comically usurps the emotive surplus generated by the ghost's "work", while Anthony unwittingly usurps the financial surplus—but it is Bhootnath who is tricked into carrying out the Herculean task of rearranging and cleaning the house. At a much later scene, Bhootnath is repaid—he has a sumptuous refection as an invisible parasite as Banku's mother is serving his favorite ālo-parāthas. The political symptom of such an economy is the domestication of the spectral, and it becomes quicker than expected because essentially Bhootnath is a homely uncanny. It has not always been such an easy and comic harmony between the domestic-familiar subject and the spectral other. Anthony actually steals the other's jouissance, and even before he gets the opportunity to hide his theft and tipsiness when Banku's mother conflates or confuses his uncouth, unfamiliar acts with the notorious ghost of the neighbourhood. The conflation definitely follows a hierarchy: the spectral other is confused with the criminological other; the ghost as the thief, or the thief as the ghost is a comic but intriguing mistake-in-difference.

[Figure 6.4: The face of the Bhootnath, foregrounded and brought proximate to the perspective, seems to haunt the house at his back as forbidding sentry, but the signboard on the gate traces a benign ethics of homely and hospitable spectrality]
4. The temporal maneuvers in the text are spectral per se, constantly shuffling between the realist syntagm from the child's perspective and the hauntological reappearances from the ghost's paradigmatic axis. The sight of Banku's discovery of the phenomena called ghost and angels come first, then the ghost's revenance, followed by a flashback in the ghost's first person narration of his wounded fatherhood, his anagnorisis of death, and then the narration returns to its linearity. The spatial distance between the characters—Banku's father stays away due to his job elsewhere, Kailashnath's son stays in America—offers the most conducive time-shuffling format with multiple parallel events with mutual opacities. The disjunct between the generations—child, adult, old, spectral—also provides with frequent coming-backs. Most noteworthy is the out of joint time, the tip of the time between the imminence of Kailashnath's death and his nascent spectrality. In the film's syntagm as well as in the ghost's stream of consciousness, his spectrality is unleashed first and the narration/discovery of the death through the encounter with the corpse comes later, and the absolute moment of the ghost's appearance as ghost is forever invisible, unknowable, unsymbolizable. In the scene, as part of Bhootnath's memory, Bhootnath meets the dead-body of Kailashnath, the limits and taxonomy of the human subject and the spectral [non]object is jeopardized.

5. Another significant role of the spectral in the film lies in the function of promises of perpetuity. Ironically, the oath taken by the ghost not to let anybody sell or occupy the house because it is a haunted house, a home of unhomely memories, is swerved into an entirely different telos when Banku extracts the promise from Bhootnath that the latter will never leave the former, unlike the deceased grandfather. The spectral, as opposed to the dead, is the refusal to bid adieu, and Bhootnath comes back yet again [like all his comings as a ghost were essentially coming backs] even after his possessive soul is given a funeral release/dissolution. The lössung that mourning offers is adequate to relieve the ghost, but the uncanny excesses of the love fastens him within a densest knot of memory: "Whenever my angel [Banku] recalls me, I will resurface to be with him", assures Bhootnath. The ghost is purged through mourning, but the promise of friendship is beyond the limits and finitudities of exorcism, as the act of memory lets the return of the repressed to take place. The loneliness of the ghost, his impending reification from all material possessions, like his body, his "home", his grandson, is not reduplicated in the figure of Banku, thanks to the fact that he does not have to be alienated from the mnemonic access to the spectral's hospitality: the home becomes his, he attains a
grandfather, and finally the most revenant of friendships—an intimacy that can be re-dramatized through memory. The usual conflation between the [ghost’s] release and the [ghost’s] deletion/repression is avoided, making the film a discourse on the ethics of hospitality between the self and the other.

Like the film Bhootnath, Oscar Wilde’s ghost story “The Canterville Ghost” also addresses the poetics of the child as benign exorcist [as opposed to the cannibalistic selfhood that feeds itself upon the excluded or occluded other, and maintains rigid ego-boundaries with the spectral] at the political backdrop of the joint family/nuclear family debate; we also have the narrative of the children bullying the ghost, where the ghost appears as an endangered species and not the stereotypical dreadful other that requires termination or elimination for the comfort of the human self. The haunt, i.e., the meaning of existence for the ghost, is narrativized as a series of humourous, almost compassionate and friendly gullibilities of the three-hundred year old ghost, and not as a threatening and menacing act for the humans. However, Wilde’s text is richer in both poetics and politics: the spectral minority not only inhabits the discourse of possession and property but also offers a critique of materialism and consumerism in the context of English/American cultural comparisons and its “release” is voluntary, spiritualized, almost through an aufhebung of insomnia and “death”.

The story augurs in the discourse of land-property and its liquid capitalist instabilization/spectralization:

When Mr. Hiram B. Otis, the American Minister, bought Canterville Chase, every one told him he was doing a very foolish thing, as there was no doubt that the place was haunted [...] answered the Minister, “I will take the furniture and the ghost at a valuation. I come from a modern country, where we have everything that money can buy; and with all our spry young fellows painting the Old World red, and carrying off your best actresses and prima-donnas, I reckon that if there were such a thing as a ghost in Europe, we’d have it at home in a very short time in one of our public museums, or on the road as a show.”

The surface of the exposition is comic, but the passage is not unproblematically comic in its human defiance against the foreboding of an impending haunt. The contrast between American materialism and Europe’s superstition is all too obvious in Mr. Otis’ response to Lord Canterville’s warning, and the discourse of the superiority of the American attitude is couched within a Liberal Capitalist anthem as opposed to the feudal residual in the British attitude to a “hereditary ghost”. Mr. Otis conflates, albeit humidly, the ghost with the

commodity, because he is from the system where the best can be purchased by liquid capital. Too readily Mr. Otis can convert the ghost into “a thing” or commodity which is purchasable, consumable and can be made into a possession and spectacle for the “public” consumption. In other words, Mr. Otis is already interested in, however tongue-in-cheek his retorts have been, in reifying the Canterville ghost from his original context and package it into a commodity, or at least an object of de-contexted curiosity. The poetics of making the unhomely “at home” is different in this story, from what we have seen in our analysis of Bhootnath’s domestication. The ideological confrontation between the residual feudal English “national character” embodied in and voiced by Lord Canterville [later the Ghost carries out this representational task] and the dominant consumerist American “national character” voiced by Mr. Otis regarding the value of the ghost is interesting. Lord Canterville would rather pride of the familial historiography of the ghost, its pedigree, its acting as a synthome to the family’s thanatological histories:

“I fear that the ghost exists”, said Lord Canterville, smiling, “though it may have resisted the overtures of your enterprising impresarios. It has been well known for three centuries, since 1548 in fact, and always makes its appearances before the death of any member of our family”. 18

On the contrary, Mr. Otis satirizes the British feudal-dynastic notions of the ghost’s pedigree, with an indictment of the aristocratic privilege under the rule of law:

“Well, so does the family doctor for that matter [...] but there is no such thing, sir, as a ghost, and I guess the laws of nature are not going to be suspended for the British aristocracy.” 19

The figure of the ghost has thus become, before the spectrality comes to sight even, a site of cultural, national and ideological contestation; Mr. Otis has already appropriated the ghost into a symptom of British inferiority and out-datedness—the marking of the belated as the outmoded on the axes of national and political sentiments. The discourse of material/consumeristic derogation of the ghost continues as the Otis family erases the “ancient” trace left by the Canterville ghost on the floor of the haunted house with their homecare products from the other side of the Atlantic:

“The blood-stain has been much admired by tourists and others, and cannot be removed.” “This is all nonsense”, cried Washington Otis; “Pinkerton’s Champion Stain Remover and Paragon Detergent will clean it up in no time” [...] In a few moments no trace of blood-stain could be seen. 20

18 Ibid. 300.
19 Ibid. 300.
20 Ibid. 302.
The ghost’s trace is appropriated differentially by two different ideological structures. The Canterville family and their caretaker make a legend of the family’s importance out of the blood-stain, making it into a tourist’s object of interest. The Otis family tries to exorcize its traces by crypting and neutralizing the ghost within a discourse of brand names, commodities and capitalist fantasies of the wonder-home; it even suggests the ghost after his [re]appearance to apply “Tammany Rising Sun Lubricator” on its noisy rusty chains and manacles and praises the epithets claimed in its packaging/wrapper, like a marketing executive promoting a commodity. To heighten the spectrality of commodity fetish, as opposed to the spectrality of the Canterville figure, the author extends this humour by showing the ghost actually falling prey to the consumerist contingencies as it steals not only the bottle of the oil from the family but also Virginia Otis’s colour-box, to replace the trace of his haunt, the historic blood-mark recently erased by the Otis, with a series of simulacra made with the different paints in the box, as real blood is not available nowadays!

The ghost’s spectrality is further undermined by the representation of his haunt as a tableaux of theatrical personalities/performances and his voice as a crammed up recital of utterances from an obsolete sixteenth century archive. He is shown, by the focalizer’s secret gaze, to ponder over which performance to act in, “Red Ruben, or the Stangled Babe”, or “Gaunt Gibeon, the Blood-Sucker of Bexley Moor” or ‘Martin the Maniac, or the Masked Mystery’ and so on and so forth. In the course of disguising itself as a legendary ghost, the specter deconstructs its own singularity and presents hauntology as an excess of optional, inter-textual, unsubstrative simulations. He even fumbles while play-acting his spectrality, cannot find the costumes on time and sometimes [re]appears as an incomplete allotrope with defective weapons or incomplete dresses. The story thus refutes the haunt as a history, instead horizontalizing its diachrony into an infinite dissemination of simulacral subject-positions, all generated by the appearance-as-reappearance performativity. In a text that demonstrates the fast absorption of the spectral into and within an overarching American-consumerist ideology, such signification of the ghost as a play of different and deferred- from- itself excess of signifiers without any stable anchorage is much relevant. Historical facts [the trace of Lady Eleanore’s blood or the death-events of the family members, for example] are presented as either fake or an inductive dispersion of role-playings; haunt is permeated by textual and generic constraints, fictions, positivities rather than the singularity of purpose in the ghost. The ghost is not one who belongs excessively to the haunted house, but one who is tangled up in the world of virtualities and normative expectations; even his vengeance is less of a stable, subjective cogitation and more of the fictional conventions:
All his achievements came back to him again... With the enthusiastic egotism of the true artist he went over his most celebrated performances, and smiled bitterly... And after all this, some wretched modern Americans were to come and offer him the Rising sun Lubricator, and throw pillows at his head! It was quite unbearable. Besides, no ghosts in history had ever been treated in this manner. Accordingly, he determined to have vengeance.  

The human interactions with the ghost have been detailed in terms of the ghost’s perspective, although he is described in the third person by a superior, omniscient narrator. Interestingly, the point of view does not privilege the ghost but only renders his memory—the specter’s own re-calls—extremely comic and unconventional. The ghost is shown as incapable of successful planning of the future action, and its past is always reflected upon as a series of mock-performances. He “became a prey to violent agitation” after he “entirely broke down”, his mind is disturbed by a “wild shriek of rage”, he even feels tired in his Armours, which he once donned like a worthy hero. His nervousity and lack of rational clarity is attributed by the novel to three factors:

1. He is incapable of accommodating any synchronic comprehension of time—being a specter, his mentation is diffused over a plurality of happenings, a plurality of temporal cross-sections, which his mind and his non-body wants to accommodate and inhabit in tandem. In fact, his incapacity to arrive at a moment and his propensity, as a hauntological signifier, to be slippery and displaced and un-coordinated amongst a multiplicity of reappearances or re-arrivals upsets his temporal and gestural focus. Unanchored amongst circumfusion, his sense of time is fissured, peristrephic, dissipated and scattered, and lacks the resilience nevertheless to adapt to the epistemic cuts.

2. The ghost is also an ageing ghost [a lingering aporia instead of a chunk of forever-same ghosts who do not grow older] such as Bhootnath, between age and agelessness; he is spectral yet designated as a case of pharmakon [Mrs. Otis calls him ill and prescribes Dr. Dobell’s tincture, while he feels and gets injured, fatigued and bruised a number of times]. The other is reduced to a wreck of disease and the most severe amongst them is the three-century long insomnia [suggesting the suspension between mortality and mourning—melancholia as insomnia, the impossibility of catharsis—hence he is inept in even weeping and purgation]

21 Ibid.306.
The specter, in spite of his souvenir-like diachronic memories of many deaths caused by his shocking haunt over the three centuries, is alone, a-social, and to a certain degree, devoid of a mirror. He is easily tricked by the Otis family into an encounter with a simulacrum of a ghost, which terrifies him: "Never having seen a ghost before, he naturally was terribly frightened...". It is an interesting moment of when the specter meets his spectrality, as in the case of Bhootnath, because it is like alterity’s staring back at the face of the erstwhile ipseity, but the Canterville ghost is devoid of that opportunity too. Disguised as "Dumb Daniel, or Suicide’s Skeleton", i.e., into a simulacrum of theatrical signifiers, he meets a further simulacrum, a fire emanating hideous shape, which is made of bed-curtains, sweeping brush, kitchen cleavers and hollow turnips. The counterfeit of the spectral is composed of homely, perfectly canny domestic objects, and this mimics the specter’s unhomeliness; the very next morning, the placard on the body of the “other ghost” reads—"Ye Onlie True and Originale Spook. Beware of Ye Imitations. All others are Counterfeit." The solitude and alienation of the ghost amidst the profusion of shape-shifting is a cause of his uninitiatedness in spite of quite longevity in hauntological experience.

The story, however, ends with a spiritual sentiment and calmness. The ghost is accosted by Virginia, and he confesses:

"I have not slept for three hundred years [...] for three hundred years I have not slept, and I am so tired."

Virginia inquires of the space where the “poor ghost can sleep”—the space outside the haunt, as the hauntological space has become the specter’s own closure amongst his unrestful performatives, which he calls “my only reason for existing”. The ghost then evokes the space outside the spectral, the most poetically delineated aufhebung of death and sleep:

"Far away beyond the pine woods [...] there is a little garden. There the grass grows long and deep; there are the great white stars of the hemlock flower; there the nightingale sings all night long. All night long he sings, and the cold, crystal moon looks down, and the yew-tree spreads out its giant arms over the sleepers."

Virginia’s eyes grew dim with tears, and she hid her face in her hands.
"You mean the Garden of Death", she whispered.
"Yes, Death. Death must be so beautiful. To lie in the soft brown earth, with grasses waving above one’s head, and listen to silence. To have no yesterday, and no tomorrow. To forget time, to forget life, to be at peace."

21 Ibid. 312.
23 Ibid. 320.
21 Ibid 318.
25 Ibid. 320-21
The ghost of Simon Canterville is seeking release from his hauntological and insomniac scatterings, concentrating his sense of time and place into a condensation—the image of the Death as a Garden, as opposed to the hauntological chaos of lead coffins, doorways, staircases, hallways, secret corridors, windows and dusty gates that constitute the haunted house and the “parts”, “roles”, “shapes” and chimerical allotropes/simulacra that constituted the “events” of his diachrony. The emphasis is on slow pace, as the chiasmus in his speech would generate, and the linguistic evocation of eternity [“long and deep”, “all night long”] as opposed to his chaotized diachronic suspension—he seeks “no yesterdays” and “no tomorrows”, i.e., a celebration of presence as opposed to his incessant belatedness.

In Noyes’s “Midnight Express”, the spectral is inscribed as a cryptonymy. The cryptonymic space is generated by an impossible mourning in which the other is kept inside the self unconsciously, as if buried alive. The myth of selfhood, autonomous and intact, impermeable to the dead other, is designed to enclose, soften, and justify the initiation into the symbolic. The meta-textual encounter with the specter of one’s own acts like a reverse mirror that unsettles the neatness and the sovereignty of the self and exposes it to the radical uncertainty of traces. The text becomes also a signifier to its own disclosedness, as the function of the reader and the subjectivity of the protagonist become blurred, at the instance Young Mortimer discovers himself both outside the text as the exegetic agent and inside the text as the spectral pasticcio.

The story begins innocuously, with the description of a harmless old book, but the rupture in the name-of-the-father, or the law, is hinted at, as from “the upper shelf of his father’s library”, he took it “to his bedroom to read by the candlelight”, “against all rules”. That dismantling and displacement of the assuring symbolic order, so to say, is followed by a translocation to a space where Mortimer is exposed to the unsymbolizable and hence inexplicable “sounds” of the Real:

The ticking of the grandfather clock, in the hall below, the beating of his own heart, the long-drawn rhythmical “ah” of the sea on the distant coast—all filled him with a sense of overwhelming mystery […]

The “book” has its ambivalent effects upon the reader [Young Mortimer]—he is at once obsessed and repelled by it, as if it contains the structuration of his own cryptonymy:

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27 Ibid.331.
The battered old book had the strangest fascination for him, though he never quite grasped the thread of the story. It was called the Midnight Express, and there was one illustration on the 50th page, at which he could never bear to look. It frightened him. In fact, he “avoided the 50th page as he might have hurried past a dark corner on the stairs when he was six years old”. Along the bildung (“stairs”) of the self’s growth, the picture is a dark corner, that cannot be traversed with knowledge but has to be hurried past, an aporia in the self so to say. The ambivalence of Noyes’ description of the page is remarkable: “There was nothing in the picture—apparently—to account for this haunting dread.” Either there was nothing special, which could adequately explain his hauntedness by the 50th page, or there was only one thing—the void of nothingness, the spectral absolute of the vanished selfhood, the sense of nothing, “to account for” his repulsion. Read either way, the 50th page of the meta-textual Midnight Express posed some untranslatable hollowness and darkness:

Darkness, indeed, was almost its chief characteristic. It showed an empty railway platform—at night—lit by a single dreary lamp; an empty railway platform that suggested a deserted and lonely junction in some remote part of the country. There was only one figure of a man, standing almost directly under the lamp, with his face turned away toward the black mouth of a tunnel, which—for some strange reason—plunged the imagination of the child into a pit of horror. The picture becomes, for the child-reader, a proleptic “waking nightmare”, an epithet that fits the hauntological. Apparently, there can be two reasons for this unjustified fear: the face of the man being invisible forbids friendliness, and, his facing the unknown tunnel is transferred into a fear of the unknown in the child’s mind. The resistance of the 50th page to have been “read”—the resistance to analysis, dissolution or appropriation, so to say—is so thoroughly spectral itself that every night he had to stop there, affected by sleep, and could never pass through it forward: “And the next night he had to begin again; and again, before he came to the 50th page, he fell asleep.”

The page never appears, thus, in his readerly life, but reappears much later:

He grew up, and forgot all about the book and the picture. But halfway through his life, at that strange and critical time when Dante entered the dark wood, leaving the direct path behind him, he found himself, a little before midnight, waiting for a train at a lonely junction; and as the station-clock began to strike, he remembered; remembered like a man awakening from a long dream.

28 Ibid. p.331.
29 Ibid. p.332.
30 Ibid. p. 332.
31 Ibid., p. 332.
32 Ibid. p. 332.
The return of the repressed, after he has forgotten; the spectral revenance of the un-crossable page and the picture in the life of the homo faber: under the dreary light, the figure from the picture on page 50 of *Midnight Express* reappear in front of him, and Mortimer encounters the man face to face: “It was himself—staring back at himself—as if some mocking mirror [...]”  

Panic-stricken, Mortimer runs away from the platform, into “an indefinite distance”. The doppelganger follows, as if chasing at the same space. He seeks “shelter” and “escape” both in a cottage in the deserted countryside. The inhabitant of the house lets him in without any word, and he cannot see the face of the man because of the dimness of the candle the latter was holding. The next chain of events activates the spectral once more, as the host leaves Mortimer on an armchair beside a table, on which he finds his childhood candle and the book whose 50th page he has not been able to read hitherto:

They entered an upper room, in which there was a bright fire burning, with an armchair on either side of it, and a small oak table, on which there lay a battered old book, bound in dark red buckram. It seemed as though the guest had been long expected and all things were prepared [...]  

Mortimer looked at the candlestick. It seemed familiar [...] he picked up the book with trembling fingers. He recognized it at once, though he had long forgotten everything about the story. He remembered the ink stain on the title page, and then, with a shock of recollection, he came on the 50th page, which he had pinned down in childhood. The pins were still there. He touched them again—the very pins which his trembling childish fingers had used so long ago.  

The “pins”—the point de capiton in his self-secure insulation from the invasive other, the point of enclosing as well as the point of suspension, are hastily removed by Mortimer, a strategic mistake that would accelerate the extrorse return of the dead other, with a parallel intorsion of the self into the introrse textuation of the other; a spectral simultaneity, so to say, at the instance the pins/ the cryptonymic bolt is removed. Eagerly, he reads the book’s contents in a syntagm that only offers a vicious cycle: it is the story of a man who in childhood reads the book, finds himself in a situation identical to the content of the book, escapes to a cottage where he rediscovers the book, and this book too was the same book, and it was a story of a man who in childhood read the book, and so on and so forth, forever and forever self-reflexive.  

The spectral same-yet-other comes back to the room, sits and faces him, and shows his face to Mortimer in slow motion. Unable to bear this reverse mirror, the anagnorisis of the radical

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33 Ibid., p. 333.  
34 Ibid., p.334-35.
otherness within the fiction of the stable selfhood, Mortimer plunges forward and wants to choke the doppelganger into death; at the same instance, his own throat is gripped with the same force:

The echoes of their strangled cry were indistinguishable; and when the last confused sounds died together, the stillness of the room was so deep that you might have heard—the ticking of the old grandfather clock, and the long-drawn rhythmical “ah” of the sea, on a distant coast, 38 years ago.

The escape through the murder/suicide dyadic conflation between the spectralized self and the spectral other of Mortimer’s identity is therefore not the elimination of the haunt: time out of joint in the form of the revenance of the Real continues to encircle the narrative, and strategically the author in completes the text by a reiteration of the introductory lines.

Ghost story like the other genres of children’s literature that we have examined so far dramatizes the relationship between the self and the other in a special way: in a ghost story the other is always ahead of us and already always in retreat. The logic of the spectral disjoins stereotypical oppositions, such as visibility and invisibility or past and present. It is at the disjoin that the poetics and politics of ghost stories precisely find their locus. On the front of the poetics, the ghost story lets the other-as-apparition forge problematic relations with the representations of the self. On the front of the politics, ghost stories interrogate and de-stabilize the allocation of values, powers and norms between the privileged self and the minoritarian other. In the two texts sampled and analyzed above, the spectral opens up the self to the otherness of the specter and in both cases the haunt is idiopathic, the ghost is let into the human subject, in one by friendship and quasi-familiality, in the other text by fear. And the other cuts the self’s areality decisively in both texts, although with a different ethics.

The exorcism of Bhootnath is not an achievement but an accomplissement, i.e., it is not finite and finished as such but in the movement to completion in retrieving the home and the family as the home and the family that had been lost and had become a cause of failed mourning. That is why Bhootnath’s exorcism cannot be ended, which implies that his revenance cannot be abolished—the re-call of love and goodwill is all that is required to re-call his specter, like we have seen in the case of the quasi-spectral Phantom. The patterns of stalking or the murder/suicide conflation in Midnight Express whereby the self fails to cannibalize the other without destroying itself is its contrary—the return of the childhood’s inadequate and failed recognition of the self in the proleptic other already always anticipated this encounter, both

textually and meta-textually; finally the cathartic moment is literally suffocated, chaotizing the limits between the body and the apparition, action and being acted upon. Young Mortimer's scaffolds with the specter of himself is reminiscent of both his will and restance to his disappearing appearing into the text-as-speculum, particularly the Page 50, which is the omphalos, his spectral knot, his disclaimed place of belonging. Finally, as he cannot dissolve the grips of the specter, no dissolution is possible of this omphalos also—so the story ends not with a lack or loss, but with the undeniability and in his case, the immanence of spectrality's interruption on the surface of the narcissistic centripetality. Mortimer's tragedy is the hubristic downfall of the child who avoided the autrui who was always there, and the reader who avoided the text which was already his text—a postponement of anagnorisis complicating the hubris with a hamartia of delay. A sacrifice is what would invoke l'autre for him—he must die because his autrui is already always undead, and the spectral autrui cannot be sacrificed for the cathartic ritual of the sujet—the l'autre arrives at the instance [page 50] of the end or achèvement, of the attempts to dissolve the self's poleros with the reflection waiting in the text and pictures of Midnight Express. Failed and uncrossable is the page 50, but it remains unknown; when it is known, it is known as a thanatological place. In Bhootnath the unknown, when known, becomes a case of mourning-through-the other. The quasi-Oedipal situation of the little boy is also conducive to integrate the ghost into an eros—Bhootnath begins to be loved in language, in his pranks, in his allusions, and he unfolds a tale of wounded love for his wife, whom he must but cannot mourn and for his son whom he must punish but cannot. If in Bhootnath death begins the haunt, in Midnight Express death gives the self a false vollendung.