CHAPTER - III

FANTASY IN KIPLING'S SUPERNATURAL STORIES
Kipling remained keenly interested in the supernatural from the beginning of his literary career with *Plain Tales from the Hills* to its end with *Limits and Renewals*. He began his literary career with such famous tales of the supernatural as "The Phantom Rickshaw" and "The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes." Though he was in his early twenties when he wrote them, yet he received glowing tributes from his critics for these early ventures into the supernatural world. About "The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes", Andrew Lang writes: "This is a very early work; if nothing else of Kipling's existed, his memory might live by it, as does the memory of the American Irishman by 'Diamond Lens'". Neil Munro has praised "The Mark of the Beast" and "The End of the Passage" in these words: "In these stories, there is an inspiration of a much more rare and elusive kind, a quality that cannot be repeated by any other writer." 

These supernatural tales of early period are totally different from the tales of horror and mystery by Poe in two respects. Though Kipling was always willing to write stories in which rather mysterious and ghostly forces

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come into play, he was never clearly committing himself to any final decision about the real or hallucinatory quality of the vision. It was, as Martin Fido puts it, "a simple trick, which must by now be standard practice for fantasy writers, but which, in the 1880's must have seemed a change from the certainties of a Poe or a Mrs. Radcliffe, or the uncertainties of a Maturin or Monk Lewis." Moreover in these stories, Kipling has depicted superstitious India of the 1880's in a way as had never been done by any Anglo-Indian writer before him. Edmund Gosse has rightly said about these tales of the early period, "....if all record of Indian habits had been destroyed, much might be conjectured from them of the pathos, the splendour, the cruelty, and the mystery of India." For Edmund Gosse, these early tales are "the culminating point of his genius." He says: "If the remainder of his writings were swept away, posterity would be able to reconstruct its Rudyard Kipling from 'The Man who would be King', 'The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes' and 'Beyond the Pale' "

In the collections of the middle period *Traffic* and *Discoveries* and *Actions and Reactions*, we again find three famous supernatural tales of Kipling. But these tales are different from the Indian pieces, because they are not horrific or savage, but are gentle and elegiac. "The House Surgeon" is remarkable not only for evocations of malaise
but also for, so to speak, the clarity of its mystery: the reason for the haunting and the manner of its dispersal are conveyed in full without a word of overt explanation. "Wireless" is better known, but it cuts less deep. The reader's attention is directed more to the skilful counterpointing of its two themes - communication in space by telegraphy and in time by some other means - than to the pathos of the consumptive chemist's assistant whose mind becomes attuned to that of Keats.

While writing these supernatural tales of the middle and last period, Kipling was acting true to his age. While the locomotive and airplanes and steamers were beating records and binding continents, the human engine was going astray. The age of mechanical advancement was also the age of the nerve sanatorium. In his stories of the early period, the intervention of the supernatural had, as a rule, within the frame of the story itself, a little psychological interest only; but in later stories like "They" and "The Brushwood Boy", the dream and the hallucination take on a more emphatic significance. With "The House Surgeon" and "In the Same Boat", they are in process of emerging from the fairy tale; they become recognizable as psychiatric symptoms. The depression described in "The House Surgeon" has been transferred by the artifice of the story to the persons unconcerned in the tragedy through the influence from a distance of someone else; but the woman with whom the
terror originates is suffering morbidly from feelings of guilt, and the sensations are evidently based on the first hand experience of the author. And although the periodical irrational panics of the couple of "In the Same Boat" are explained as the result of prenatal shocks, the description of the man and woman themselves, with their "nerve doctors", their desperate drug-taking, their shaky and futile journeys in flight from their neurotic fears, their peculiar neurotic relationship, constitutes an accurate account of a phenomenon of contemporary life which, at the time when Kipling was writing, had hardly been described in fiction. Thus his later tales of the supernatural are different from his early tales because of Kipling's more insistence on the psychological aspect of the supernatural than on the physical one. They are more symbolic and complex than the earlier tales. That is why Edmund Wilson has said, "In 'A Madonna of the Trenches' and 'The Wish House' - gruesome stories of love and death that make 'At The End of the Passage' and 'The Mark of the Beast' look like harmless bogey tales for children - cancer serves as a symbol for rejected or frustrated love." Noel Annan has echoed Edmund Wilson's words: "Ghosts or thought transference need not be treated as titillating puzzles, nor did Kipling always so treat them; Bella Armine's ghost is as real to Sergeant Godsoe as Catherine Earnshaw's was to Heathcliff; the real curse in 'The House Surgeon' or even the extraordinary
metaphysical experiments of the astronomer or biologist in 'Unprofessional' are acceptable because, like Kipling's symbolic use of cancer and wasting disease, they are images of deeper spiritual crisis."8

II

T.R. Henn has rightly said, "It is natural that a story-teller of Kipling's temperament, origin, and early experiences in India should exploit the supernatural."9 Kipling's close association with the Masonic Lodge indirectly kindled his interest in the supernatural and the esoteric. Moreover, he was deeply involved in the supernatural atmosphere generated by the Indian tradition of fairy-tales. As a child with a precocious imagination, he heard many stories (the more enjoyed because illicit) told by the servants, of the world of ghosts and spirits. His family tradition and religious beliefs also strengthened his imaginative inclination towards the supernatural. "To one in whom the Wesleyan and Pre-Raphaelite traditions met", writes T.R. Henn, "the other world, and its potential power and mystery, combined to produce the shudders of awe."10 This interest in the spirit world moulded Kipling's literary taste for the exploration of the supernatural.

It is, thus, Kipling's Indian background that accounts for the interest in the supernatural that he shows
in his short-stories. Throughout India, death is near and quick, as it was in the Middle Ages in England. The hurried and sometimes ineffective ritual of the burning ghat gives rise to many stories about the progress of the soul. So in the prefatory rhyme to "In the House of Suddhoo", Kipling writes:

"A stone's throw out on either hand
From that well-ordered road we tread,
And all the world is wild and strange:
'Churel' and 'ghoul' and Djinn and sprite
Shall bear us company tonight,
For we have reached the Oldest Land
Wherein the Powers of Darkness range."

The 'Churel' is the ghost of a woman who has died in childbirth and she is a feature of the nightmare that Kim pretends to have had in order to find a pretext to leave the camp and tell Mahbub Ali of his danger. The Indian bearer in "The Return of Imray" accepts the presence of the uneasy spirit of the murdered man as part of the order of things, as naturally as a Scottish ballad would do. India is a place of tombs. There is a superb description in From Sea to Sea of East India Company's burial off Park Street in Calcutta. Old battlefields in India, as in Ireland, are often haunted ("The Lost Legion"). Kipling was, throughout his work, interested in abnormal states of mind. One of them was the possibility that, in sleep, the soul might be trapped beyond recall by the powers of evil as in "At the End of the
Passage", "The Phantom Rickshaw" and "In the Same Boat."
These reflect Kipling's own fear of sleeplessness, and
later, of cancer. Thus his perennial interest in the working
of the human psyche and man's abnormalities also acted as a
stimulant to the writing of ghost-stories.

III

Kipling's ghost-stories of the early period
perfectly illustrate the narrow definition of the "pure
fantastic" given by Todorov: the hesitation of the reader
must be sustained to the end. It must not be resolved,
either by a natural explanation of the supernatural events
("The Uncanny" which includes certain types of detective
stories), or by the simple acceptance of these events as
supernatural ("the marvellous"). In fact, Kipling's
treatment of the supernatural is indirect, subtle and
psychological like Coleridge's. It is not direct and
sensational like that of the Gothic Romancers. Ghosts in his
stories don't have ugly bodies, nor do they perform ignoble
actions. We just feel their presence through the reactions
of the characters of the story. We, therefore, tend to
interpret the supernatural event in two ways. On one hand we
think that the supernatural beings are actually existing in
the story. On the other hand we feel that they may be just
the creations of the character's mind. Thus we hesitate
between the natural and supernatural explanation of the
event of the ghost's or the spirit's appearance. That is why we find his ghost stories perfectly satisfying the conditions laid by Todorov for a story to belong to the genre of "pure fantastic".

We can take up a few stories to illustrate Todorov's definition of the pure fantastic. The very opening of the story "The Mark of the Beast" prepares us for some supernatural event:

"East of Suez, some hold, the direct control of Providence ceases; Man being there handed over to the power of the Gods and Devils of Asia, and the Church of England Providence only exercising an occasional and modified Supervision in the case of Englishmen. This theory accounts for some of the more unnecessary horrors of life in India: it may be stretched to explain my story." [L.H., P. 240]

The narrator, who is one of the characters of the story also, tells us how Hanuman, one of the famous Hindu Gods, punished Fleete for polluting his image by putting a mark of cigarette on it. A mysterious thing happens after Fleete had done that act of desecration. A strange mark appears on Fleete's left breast, "a mark, the perfect double of the black rosettes - the five or six irregular blotches arranged in a circle - on a leopard's hide." [L.H., P. 245]. Fleete starts walking, talking and eating like a beast. Human spirit seems to have left him completely and he becomes a real beast. He is restored to his original position only after the leper who had been instrumental in bringing that change agrees to effect the final change in him.
There are various stages through which Fleete passes before he is completely changed into a beast. At each stage we find that the narrator hesitates between the natural and the supernatural explanation of this event of change. When the narrator finds him eating too much as he had never done before, he tries to find some natural explanation for this change. "He ate his food like a beast; but that might have been the result of living alone in the hills out of the reach of society as refined and elevating as ours for instance." [L.H., PP. 247]. About the mark on Fleete's breast the narrator feels that it might have been caused by blister-flies or that it was possibly a birth-mark newly born and now visible for the first time.

Greater changes come in Fleete when the evening approaches. The narrator and Strickland observe that Fleete who was eating like a beast in the morning was now walking like a beast on his hands and knees. For the first time, the narrator feels that some supernatural power was playing some trick on Fleete. He remarks, "Then I saw that there was something excessively out of order somewhere." [L.H., PP. 249-250]. Soon another change becomes visible in Fleete. Strickland and the narrator hear from Fleete's room "the long drawn howl of a wolf" [L.H., P.250]. The narrator remarks: "People write and talk lightly of blood running cold and hair standing up, and things of that kind. Both
sensations are too horrible to be trifled with. My heart stopped as though a knife had been driven through it and Strickland turned as white as the table cloth." [L.H. PP. 250-251].

Strickland and the narrator send for a doctor who gives a natural and convincing explanation of this change. This explanation seems acceptable to the readers also. The doctor declares that it was a heart-rending case of hydrophobia, and that nothing could be done. Fleete who had a dozen dogs had been bitten by dogs twice or thrice. So the doctor could certify that Fleete was dying of hydrophobia.

But this natural explanation becomes unacceptable after some time. After the doctor had left, Strickland and the narrator hear something mewing like a she-otter outside. When they go out, they see the same leper of Hanuman temple mewing and dancing with his shadow. After a terrible struggle with the leper, Strickland and the narrator overpower him and drag him into the hall where Fleete lay. The narrator says: "When we confronted him with the beast, the scene was beyond description. The beast doubled backwards into a bow as though he had been poisoned with strychnine, and moaned in the most pitiable fashion. Several other things happened also, but they cannot be put down here" [L.H., P.255].
It now becomes clear that the leper has some mysterious power over Fleete. When the day dawns, the leper speaks. The leper crawls to the beast and lays his hand upon the left breast. Soon they see the soul of Fleete coming back into the eyes. They carry Fleete to his room and let the leper go. Next morning, when they go to wake up Fleete, they see that the black leopard rosette on his chest had disappeared.

Thus we find that the story describes the strange event of man's changing into a beast. Throughout the tale, the leading character who is the narrator himself hesitates between the natural and supernatural explanation of the event of this transformation. Sometimes he feels that Fleete is eating like a beast because he has been living among the beasts for such a long time and is even bitten twice or thrice by them. But at the same time he feels that "the affair was beyond any human and rational experience." [L.H., P.251]. He even quotes Shakespeare's famous lines: "There are more things...." [L.H., P.258]. We, the readers, share this hesitation with the narrator, and find the story belonging to the genre of the "pure fantastic."

But the story is more than a pure fantasy. In this story, Rudyard Kipling has deployed the supernatural to amplify a common Anglo-Indian anxiety, in this instance, the consequences of behaving with insensitivity towards native
religion. The narrator's concluding comment that "...it is well known to every right-minded man that the gods of the heathen are stone and brass, and any attempt to deal with them otherwise is justly condemned" [L.H., P-259] is highly ironic. The gods are not of stone and brass, as Fleete comes to discover and they have a power of their own equal to the gods of any Christian religion. The point of the story, then, seems to be less about magic than it is an object lesson for those who hold that theirs is the only true faith.

Rudyard Kipling by disposition had enormous respect for religion and sympathised deeply with any attempt in the East to find one, whether Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh or even Gurkha, as is abundantly shown not only in Kim, but in many stories told through the mouths of Indians. Even the worship of Hanuman must be respected, and in this horrifying story "The Mark of the Beast" the moral is "Don't trifle with the beliefs of other people." Kipling had, in fact, no pity for an atheist. A terrible fate in the form of a shattering nervous breakdown overtook Aurelian McGoggin whose creed, derived from the reading of Comte and Spencer, "only proved that men had no souls, and there was no God and no hereafter, and that you must worry along somehow for the good of Humanity" [P.T.H., P.81]. Hence it is unwise to call these marvellous glimpses into a strange life "Supernatural stories" in the ordinary sense of the word - they are
revelations of what men can do, of what perhaps gods may.

Another story "The Return of Imray" also describes a strange event. Imray gets murdered by his servant and his uneasy spirit continues visiting that place time and again till the murderer is found and punished. When the story starts we find that the narrator was staying in Strickland's house which was earlier occupied by Imray. Imray had suddenly disappeared from that house and people did not know whether he had died or was living.

The narrator soon realised that some invisible being was haunting that place. One evening, the servant told the narrator that someone wanted to see him. Very much against his will, he went to the drawing room, telling the servant to bring the lights. The narrator adds: "There might or might not have been a caller waiting - it seemed to me that I saw a figure by one of the windows - but when the lights came, there was nothing save the spikes of the rain without, and the smell of the drinking earth in my nostrils" [L.H., P.264]. When the narrator came back to the verandah, he found that the dog had gone to the garden as if it had seen some ghost there. Though the narrator tried to tempt it back with biscuits, yet he failed to do that. When Strickland came back he asked the narrator if someone had visited the place in his absence. It appeared as if he were aware of some ghost's visiting the place now and then.
A few happenings convinced the narrator of the fact that some invisible spirit was coming to that place time and again. First of all he found that the dog refused to sleep in his room though it rained heavily outside. It appeared as if he were conscious of the presence of some strange being in the house. The narrator too could not sleep at night. He writes:

"In the very short pauses of the thunder, I tried to sleep, but it seemed that someone wanted me very urgently. He, whoever he was, was trying to call me by name, but his voice was no more than a husky whisper. The thunder ceased, and Tietjens went into the garden and howled at the low moon. Somebody tried to open my door, walked about and about through the house, and stood breathing heavily in the verandahs, and first when I was falling asleep, I fancied that I heard a wild hammering and clamouring above my head or on the door." [L.H., P.266].

Not only the narrator and the dog, but the curtains and chairs also seem to be affected by the presence of this invisible being. The narrator adds:

"We were alone in the house, but none the less it was much too fully occupied by a tenant with whom I did not wish to interfere. I never saw him but I could see the curtains between the rooms quivering where he had just passed through. I could hear the chairs creaking as the bamboos sprung under a weight that had just quitted them; and I could feel when I went to get a book from the dining-room that somebody was waiting in the shadows of the front verandah till I should have gone away" [L.H., P.267].
But soon the mystery of Imray's sudden disappearance gets unravelled. One evening, finding two snakes hanging from the roof of his room, Strickland went up into the roof to shake the snakes down so that they might be killed by the narrator. He found something lying there, bound in a big cloth. When he struck that thing with rod, it fell down on the floor. Strickland came down and found that the cloth was wrapping nothing but Imray's dead body. Obviously Imray was murdered by somebody and his dead body hidden there. Then both Strickland and the narrator spoke out: "That's why he whispered about the house", [L.H., P. 271]. They found that Bahadur Shah, who was Imray's servant, had murdered him and hidden him there.

Whether the house is really visited by Imray's ghost or the narrator and Strickland have only hallucinations about Imray's visiting that place time and again remains a mystery. As the narrator and Strickland were both aware of the fact that Imray had suddenly disappeared and that he might have been dead long back, we can't rule out the possibility that the ghost might be the creation of their own minds. But there are other things in the story which make us think that the ghost might be really visiting that house. The curtains wave as if someone had just passed through them. The dog avoids entering its room at night and sits in the verandah even in the stormy night as if it were seeing some ghost inside the house. The narrator hears
"husky whispers" of some invisible being, requesting him to help him. He hears wild hammering and clamouring above his head or on the door. These things make us think that some invisible being must be visiting that place. Hence we hesitate between the natural and supernatural explanation of some person's haunting that place. We fail to decide whether "an invisible extra man" is really living in that house or whether this being is only the creation of the narrator's fear-stricken mind.

The story illustrates a familiar imperial theme of Kipling: the mistakes that an outsider can make when he is unfamiliar with the customs and beliefs of the local people. Imray is murdered by the bearer Bahadur Khan because he had praised Khan's child who later dies. Convinced that Imray has put the evil eye on his son, Bahadur Khan has murdered him in revenge, although the murder of Imray does not have any of the mayhem that we usually associate with homicide. Thus Kipling, through this tale, invites the imperial servant to become more familiar with the Indian community, and he argues that the fear which prevents exploration of that community is the imperialist's greatest enemy.

Other ghost stories of Kipling also deal with fantastic situations. "The Phantom Rickshaw" is a story of "horror and pure fantasy." It is the narrative of a man undergoing a weird and frightening experience and has some
affinities to Poe's "The Black Cat." But here Kipling has improved upon his models, for "The Phantom Rickshaw", instead of taking place in the vaguely gothic world of the conventional nineteenth century tale of terror is firmly based in Kipling's Simla. Just as Jukes's matter-of-fact engineer's mind makes vivid his nightmare, so the Simla milieu and the conventions of an Anglo-Indian flirtation give substance to this tale of a blackguard and his pathetic demon-lover.

It revolves round a government official from Bombay named Pansay who, in the course of a sea trip from England to India, meets an officer's wife. They fall in love, and she gives up everything for her passion. But Pansay gets tired of her, and soon becomes engaged to a young girl, Kitty. When the older woman Mrs. Wessington hears of this development, she dies of grief within a week. Jack and Kitty are madly in love and he wishes to buy for her an engagement ring. They go to Hamilton's in Simla on April 15, 1885, and he purchases a lovely ring. On the way back Jack's eye is caught by the sight of "four jhampanis in magpie livery pulling a yellow panelled cheap bazar 'rickshaw'" [W.W.W., P. 134]. He cries that they are Mrs. Wessington's jhampanis'; but kitty is unable to see them anywhere. "What? where? "she asks, "I can't see them anywhere."[W.W.W., P.135]. Jack sees Mrs. Wessington "handkerchief in hand, and golden head bowed
on her breast" [W.W.W., P.136], in the rickshaw. The phantom rickshaw appears many times and Jack consults Dr. Heatherleigh who treats him for eyes, brain and liver troubles. The phantom takes possession of him, and in spite of his attempts to regain normalcy, he continues to be haunted by it and the lady. The episode ends in frustration and break up of the engagement with Kitty Mannering. Jack tries to look into his psyche and confesses pathetically, "Yet as surely as ever a man was done to death by the Powers of Darkness, I am that man", [W.W.W., P.157] and ultimately dies.

This story, too, belongs to the genre of "pure fantastic." On the one hand, we think that Jack is only haunted by hallucinations and does not see any real ghosts. We feel confirmed in our assumption when we find that even Kitty who is with him many times is not able to see them. The doctor also thinks that his "brain, digestion and eyesight are all slightly affected, giving rise to (his) frequent and persistent delusions" [W.W.W., P.128]. At one place, the narrator himself argues, "After all, the presence of 'rickshaw is in itself enough to prove the existence of a spectral illusion. One may see ghosts of men and women, but surely never coolies and carriages. The whole thing is absurd. Fancy the ghost of a hillman!" [W.W.W., P.138]. At another place he remarks, "My mind had been full of Mrs.
Wessington; and every inch of the Jakko Road bore witness to our old-time walks and talks. The boulders were full of it; the pines sang it aloud overhead; the rain-fed torrents giggled and chuckled unseen over the shameful story; and the wind in my ears chanted the iniquity aloud" [W.W.W., P. 139]. These things make us think that the ghosts might be creations of his mind only. But at the same time, the narrator asserts that he had been seeing real ghosts. He declares: "Remember that - whatever my doctor may say to the contrary - I was then in perfect health, enjoying a well-balanced mind and an absolutely tranquil spirit." [W.W.W., P. 133].

After Mrs. Wessington had been dead, he meets her ghost, calling him: "Jack! Jack, darling!" and writes: "There was no mistake about the words this time. They rang through my brain as if they had been shouted in my ear" [W.W.W., P. 136]. He even talks to the ghost of Mrs. Wessington and is answered back. After Kitty had broken the engagement, he meets the ghost of Mrs. Wessington on the Mall. The narrator writes:

"Agnes", said I," will you put back your hood and tell me what it all means? "The hood dropped noiselessly, and I was face to face with my dead and buried mistress. [W.W.W., P. 153]."
"If my story had not already so madly overleaped the bounds of all human belief, I should apologise to you now. As I know that no one will believe me, I will go on. Mrs. Wessington spoke, and I walked with her from the Sanjaolie road to the turning below the commander-in-chief's house as I might walk by the side of any living woman's 'rickshaw, deep in conversation. The second and most tormenting of my moods of sickness had suddenly laid hold upon me, and, like the Prince in Tennyson's poem "I seemed to move among a world of ghosts" [W.W.W., P.154].

Moreover, such remarks of the narrator as "There are more things in heaven and earth...." [W.W.W., P.145] and "yet as surely as ever a man was done to death by the Power of Darkness, I am that man", [W.W.W., P.157] also force us to conclude that Jack must have seen the real ghosts. So we hesitate between the natural and supernatural explanation of the event of the ghost's appearance. Do ghosts actually appear or are they merely the creations of Jack's mind? This baffling question remains unanswered till the end and makes the story belong to the genre of pure fantastic.

But "The Phantom Rickshaw" is more than a mere fantasy. Kipling who successfully dealt with religious theme in "The Mark of the Beast" and imperial theme in "The Return on Imray" has, with equal success, dealt with a moral theme in "The Phantom Rickshaw." He has described how the flirtatious affair brings a painful end to the lives of Mrs. Wessington and Pansay. What is most striking about this
story is the completeness of Pansay's involvement with his guilt: it becomes the whole of his being and the whole of his life and even, perhaps, causes his death. The doctor Heatherleigh bases his diagnosis on physical symptoms alone; but as the narrative progresses, Pansay's condition becomes so pathological that it would seem naive to speak of a cure, and impossible to imagine a return to "reality." Pansay's imagination has created another world out of guilt, to which that imagination and his whole being belong. By his own admission, Pansay is guilty, but while the paranoid obsession "punishes" through a narrowing of vision, it also releases through an act of imaginative involvement. Pansay's conversation and his courting of the ghostly Mrs. Wessington are the "marvellously dear experience" that he mentions, but that cannot be told. Thus in one sense the guilt reinforces the self, as when Pansay tries to hold himself together, to justify his actions, to forget the past and to love Kitty. But in another sense his imagination works with that to create another mode of being, which is beyond the rational self (and dependent on its collapse) and which exists in another world in time.

"At the End of the Passage", another popular story by Kipling, borders on the supernatural, though never quite crosses over into it. Like the three stories discussed above, it also belongs to the genre of "pure fantastic". It begins with a picture of four men: Mottram of the Indian
Survey, Lowndes of the Civil Service, Spurstow, the Doctor and finally their host, Hummil, the Assistant Engineer. They are playing whist 'crossly', not for pleasure, but to kill their boredom and to save themselves from the terrible kind of depression that such remote and lonely lives are heir to. They are "not conscious of any special regard for each other" [L.H., P. 185], yet they come to meet each other, if they can, every Sunday. Hummil, the Assistant Engineer on a stretch of railway is the host; the other three come from considerable distances, over a hundred miles in two cases, simply to speak to another Englishman once a week. The boredom, the snappish ill-humour, the closeness of death, the heat, the loneliness, the dust are overpowering.

Their weekly appearance at Hummil's has an even more vital importance: "When one of them would fail to appear, he (Hummil) would send a telegram to his last address, in order that he might know whether the defaulter were dead or alive." [L.H., PP.184-185]. Each one has come from "out there", from their remote area of service having faced situations which would send an ordinary man over the brink: Spurstow, from an epidemic of black cholera; Lowndes, from an exasperating and corrupt native king; Mottram, from the effort of making "a sub-surveyor understand that an error of five degrees in an angle isn't quite so small as it looks." [L.H., P.189]. As the afternoon passes and the dust-
storm rages madly outside, each one registers the degree to which he has reached the end of his tether in the out-of-the-way place where he is in the service of the empire. The end of the passage is not only significant in place and time but in spirit as well. There is no sign of rain or respite, or hope of either physical or mental release.

Then as the talk develops, it comes out that Hummil was not sleeping - had not slept for days - and Spurstow, the doctor decides to stay during the night. Suicide was never far from their minds: Hummil's subordinate had only lately made an end of himself. When the others have gone, Hummil admits that he is nearing breaking-point; he begs for something to make him sleep—but it must be deep sleep, free from dreams. He is terrified half-asleep—he had fixed a spur in his bed so that if he nodded off it would wake him. There is a blind face that cries and cannot wipe its eyes; which chases him along corridors; unless he can get away, he knows he will die. His terror is absolute, quite beyond reason. Spurstow gives him morphia and he has one good night. But next day Spurstow has to leave him because he is looking after a camp full of coolies where there is an epidemic of cholera.

When Hummil returns to his bungalow after seeing Spurstow off, the first thing he sees standing in the verandah is the apparition of himself. As Hummil approaches:
"it slid through the house and dissolved into swimming specks with the eyeball as soon as it reached the burning light of the garden. Hummil went about his business till even. When he came in to dinner he found himself sitting at the table. The vision rose and walked out hastily except that it cast no shadow, it was in all respects real." [L.H., P.206].

To see one's own image is something that has been supposed to be a premonition of death. When the three friends come next Sunday, Hummil lies dead in his bed; he has been unable to escape from the blind face and the "double" of himself; he has been scared to death by both of these visions.

It might be assumed up to this point in the tale that Hummil's vision is a product of his own diseased mind and that what Kipling is depicting here is the psychological process by which a man comes to a parapsychic state. But the story takes another turn when after Hummil's death, the doctor photographs Hummil's face in which "in the staring eyes was written terror beyond the expression of any pen" [L.H., P.207]. He develops the film and comes out "very white indeed" refusing to say what he has seen. The assumption then that we have to make is that Hummil's vision had an external cause, a cause brought about no doubt because of his agitated state of mind, but created by powers external to Hummil. If it could be photographed at all, whatever frightened Hummil must have had the kind of reality that will reflect or intercept rays of light. But he
had seen it in his dreams, when his eyes were closed. And — even if that is overcome — to suppose that the eye retains the image reflected on it when the brain ceases to live is like thinking that a telescope will continue to record the image of what a man saw in it at the moment when he was shot dead. Thus we, the readers, find it difficult to decide whether the "apparitions" in the story were the creations of Hummil's mind or whether they had an objective existence. The hesitation which we experience in accepting this or that explanation makes the story belong to the genre of "pure fantastic."

It is interesting to note that, when Mottram sits down to play some tunes on the piano to relieve the boredom of the afternoon, he plays the "Evening Hymn" which is the opening verse frame of "The Phantom Rickshaw", another story in which, as we have seen, a character undergoes a similar experience when the delusion becomes an independent world, a reality more powerful for Pansay than the actual one. There is one thing common in these stories. Through these tales Kipling tries to emphasise that the peculiar states of mind are the effects of a strong feeling of guilt ("The Phantom Rickshaw") or moral isolation ("At the End of the Passage"). Kipling seems determined to prevent them from being explained in terms of scientific analysis, which could rationalise them in physical terms. "The Phantom Rickshaw" and "At the End of the Passage" reject the possibility that
the remedy to the mental disturbances described in these stories may be located within the jurisdiction of medical prognosis. The liver pills prescribed by Dr. Heatherlegh for Pansay and the sleeping pills which Spurstow foists upon Hummil are shown to be quite incapable of meeting the patient's real need. Their sickness indeed reveals itself "in direct outrage of Nature's ordinance", because it is a symptom of a deeper, moral, disintegration. The inappropriateness of psychology and pharmacy as means of dealing with anomic trauma is also clear in the failure of Dr. Lowndes to alleviate Tighe's terror in "Love-O'-Women." Pansay's pathetic recourse to the multiplication table to mitigate his self-destructive guilt symbolically reduces science to the level of a kind of mumbo-jumbo, impotent in the face of the moral abyss into which he has fallen: "Heatherlegh's comment would have been a short laugh and a remark that I had been 'mashing a brain-eye-and-stomach chimera." [W.W.W., P.154-155]. Spurstow, too, is chastened by the failure of the drugs that he prescribes for Hummil. He only shakenly reflects thus upon the engineer's case: "It isn't in medical science" [L.H., P.210]. His smashing of the camera is a symbolic acceptance that he is faced with a reality which is beyond his powers. Hummil's problem is social in origin, rather than the function of chemical or nervous disorder. Such anxiety is the product of moral isolation, as is suggested by "Baa Baa Black Sheep":

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"When a matured man discovers that he has been deserted by Providence, deprived of his God, and cast without help, comfort, or sympathy, upon a world which is new and strange to him, his despair, which may find expression in evil-living, the writing of his experiences, or the more satisfactory diversion of suicide is generally supposed to be impressive." [W.W.W., P.282].

Thus Kipling was convinced of the strength of man's self-destructive urges when placed in a situation of moral isolation. There can't be a better expression of it than the one given in "At the End of the Passage."

IV

One of the supernatural stories in the distinctively "late" manner is "They" and it is convenient to open the discussion of the later Kipling stories with a work so totally different from the conventional stories of the early period. It is different from his early tales of the supernatural like "The Mark of the Beast" or "At the End of the Passage." In the words of Somerset Maugham, "'They' is a fine and deeply moving effort of the imagination."¹² It is a forerunner of the best of late stories, and deserves to stand beside them. It is a delicately conceived story and the contrast between the waking world and the imaginative creation is subtler here than in the stories of the early period. It is tender and there is compassion in it like the later tales. There are subtle touches in the manner of late stories, which only reveal their meaning on a careful re-reading, and they add to the total effect.
This story, as Angus Wilson puts it, "is almost a direct fantasy of Kipling's longing to see and touch his daughter again." The narrator, motoring westward across Sussex from the weald in the east, from Bateman's infact, comes by chance, in the centre of the country, by a rough track, on to the lawn of a great Elizabethan country house, hedged with yews clipped to the shapes of great peacocks and horsemen and maids of honour. Here he sees children peeping at his intrusion from upper windows and playing and giggling by the fountain. The blind lady who owns the house accepts casually his talk of the children, to whom she devotes her life, but whom she cannot see. The narrator's conversation with the blind woman is well-organised to suggest to the reader what the children are without the narrator knowing it.

A few months later, the narrator returns and, this time, his conversation with the blind woman is interrupted by the drama of an illegitimate village child ill with meningitis. The narrator, however, brings a doctor and a nurse in his car to the dying child, and the child's life is saved. Months later, in a cold autumn, the motorist returns again. This time he learns from the village shop that the ailing child of his last visit had died and the mother Jenny is "walking in the wood." He still does not realise that it is to this house and its woods and gardens that the bereaved
parents go for comfort, because it is here that they meet the ghosts of their beloved children. The narrator gradually learns what sort of place he has found and why he is drawn there.

At last, on this cold day, in the great hall of the house, beside a great fire, while the mistress discusses estate affairs with a cheating tenant farmer, the narrator, sitting idly by, comes to know by the feel of a child's hand what these children are that he has glimpsed and heard for so long—for the kiss is the "half-reproachful signal of a waiting child not used to neglect even when grown-ups were busiest—a fragment of the mute code devised very long ago. Then I knew" [T&D, P.263]. The narrator then announces that he will return no more. "You think it is wrong then?" she (the blind woman) cried. "Not for you", he replied, "A thousand times no. For you it is right. For me it would be wrong." "Why?" she said. "Oh! I see", she went on, simply as a child, "For you it would be wrong" [T&D, P.264-265].

As we have already seen, the equivocation in Kipling's response to the psychic and the supernatural remains characteristic. The conflicting voices in his stories combine to create an uncertainty which also derives from the fact that the narrator's and the reader's imaginative and emotional responses are constantly being surprised and extended. Nowhere is this uncertainty more
subtly explored than in "They" which records the perceptions and feelings of a figure moving through a space that is both real and imagined. Elements of the narrative are concretely realized even though it is at times uncertain whether the narrator is dreaming or actually perceiving an external reality. The fairy-tale description of the first visit, in which the narrator, deeply moved, feels as if he were in an enchanted land, contrasts sharply with the second, in which a desperate search for a doctor and nurse to attend a dying child in a nearby village forces the narrative to engage with harsh reality. During his third and final visit, the narrator perceives the significance of his compulsion to come: a kiss imprinted on the palm of his upturned hand reveals the proximity of his dead child. He now comprehends that "They" are spirits, and not living children, and with this recognition comes the bitter knowledge that he can never return.

But this tale is much more than a ghost-story. It is, to quote Bonamy Dobree, "one of Kipling's early experiments towards his later manner; a main story, with layer upon layer of others implied." It is a serious fantasy embodying an emotional truth and an acknowledged prohibition. It is true that we involuntarily think of the dead in terms of the personalities they wore on earth. It is hard to think of them in any other way. The artist, to whom abstractions are of little use, accepts this necessity and
exploits it. "They" is related in its mode of imagination to "On the Gate" and the gay and moving little poem "Dinah in Heaven", where Dinah refuges under Peter's chair and waits for the master she has innocently helped to save. In much the same fashion the unreasonable, wounded mind may follow a dead child in its familiar shape into the mysterious world, and wonder what a young soul can do in such a vast world. This habit of the human imagination provides a basis for the fantasy of the earth-seeking child spirits, attracted towards the childless, blind, desiring woman with her innocent occult knowledge and to the perfect playground of the old house and garden she has made ready for them. But all this is a poetic hypothesis. It is a means for stating that the barrier between the living and the dead is not meant to be passed. Even if the road to Endor is as seductively lovely as the approach to the yew-studded lawn and the old house, even if one is brought there without intent by the natural workings of one's own mind, and the dead is very young and much beloved, one must turn one's back on that road and return to the living world to which one belongs. This is the conviction that Kipling expresses through the narrator of the story "They."

Last thing to be said about "They" is that it is a superb transmutation into art of Kipling's own sense of loss for his beloved eldest child Josephine, who died at the age
of seven. In 1899 Kipling went with his wife and children to New York, and he and his elder daughter caught cold which turned into pneumonia. He recovered, but his daughter died. It cannot be doubted that "They" was inspired by his enduring grief at her loss. Heine said, "Out of my great griefs I made these little songs." Kipling wrote an exquisite story. Randall Jarrell has rightly said: "There are few stories that seem, first of all and last of all, beautiful; 'They' is one. It is almost as if the story's extraordinary beauty of picturing, and of the style which pictures, came out of Kipling's desire to have the story a memorial to his own daughter." He adds: "Chekhov and Tolstoy and Turgenev together couldn't improve 'They' or 'Wireless', since in each a highly specialised subject has received an exactly appropriate, extraordinarily skilled and talented treatment."

The next ghost story "The House Surgeon" has some thematic affinity with Kipling's previous tale "The Return of Imray." Just as the ghost of Imray keeps visiting the house till the culprit is brought to book, similarly the spectre of Agnes keeps visiting the house till the inhabitants of the house and her sister realize that she had not committed suicide, but had died in an accident. Moreover the ghost of the girl, like Imray's ghost, remains invisible though its presence is felt by the people. Hence the readers can't rule out the possibility that the ghost is only a
creation of the people's mind and has no objective existence. Thus this story, like the five stories discussed above, belongs to the genre of the "pure fantastic" as defined by Todorov. The readers fail to decide whether the ghost was actually haunting the place or was the creation of the minds of the people who lived there.

But, being a ghost story of the later period, it also reveals that aspect of Kipling's writing which deals - in Henry James words - with "the complicated soul." It looks more like "The Dog Hervey" and "In the Same Boat" of the later period. In these stories Kipling remains preoccupied with the same kind of bizarre fantasies, distressed figures and disturbing encounters with the uncanny, but he now explores them in terms of neurosis and psychological trauma. Here interest in psychological illness and in the unexpected potentialities of the mind takes precedence over purely ghostly themes. India is no longer a motivating element in the ghost stories of the later period. The psychic force generated reveals the occult powers of the mind; it becomes a new way of experiencing the supernatural, and thus producing more convincing mode.

This story "The House Surgeon" had its origin in that inexplicable depression that the Kiplings had felt in a house near Torquay which they had leased when they first came back from Vermont. In the story, the narrator meets in
a steamship a man who has bought an expensive suburban house standing in its own grounds and has spent a good deal of money in improving it. But this house is haunted by a terrible feeling of depression, and of "something" trying to tell something. The narrator goes to stay in this house and as soon as he enters his bedroom is hit by a sensation of blackness and misery. Incidentally he does not appear to have wife, family or home, has leisure to go to stay with anyone who asks him, and gives up a good deal of time to learn golf with an early solicitor from whom he wants information. He becomes friendly with this solicitor, who is the cousin as well as the legal adviser of the previous occupant Miss Mary Moultrie. The narrator contrives to meet Miss Moultrie and learns that she believes that her younger sister Agnes had committed suicide by throwing herself from the window of the very room where he had slept. Miss Moultrie is a hard, suspicious woman and a rigid evangelical; she believes that her sister has gone to everlasting damnation. She broods constantly on the act of her sister's suicide and the house where she thought it had happened. Her sad thoughts mysteriously get transferred to the house where her sister had died, and anybody who lives in that house experiences a strange depression the cause of which he fails to understand. By a singular coincidence, she is taken ill at night with an attack of asthma, and, desperate for breath, tries to open a sash window of which
the sill is too low and almost falls out. Everyone thinks she was trying to kill herself and the narrator, whom she takes for a doctor, tries to make her see that this must be what had happened to her sister. He at last persuades her to visit the house and see the window in her sister's room. She does it and is convinced; the curse is immediately lifted. The ghost of her sister which had kept visiting the house, as if trying to say something, stops visiting it again. Once Miss Mary Moultrie's suspicion is removed and the spirit of her dead sister satisfied that all is understood, the house becomes "light, spacious, airy", "full of sense of well-being and peace" [A&R., P.296].

Though the cure and the feeling of release at the end of the story look to be structurally simple and too contrived, yet the subtle and disturbing examination of paranoid fantasy is one of Kipling's most haunting evocations of the "powers of darkness." Here the inner anguish is seen in terms of something that is known before it is experienced and from which there is no escape. As the rational mind is easily outstripped by immobilising emotions inseparable from anger and pain, any kind of self-defence becomes impossible:

"And it was just then that I was aware of a little grey shadow, as it might have been a snowflake seen against the light, floating at an immense distance in the background of my brain. It annoyed me, and I shook my head to get rid of it. Then my brain
telegraphed that it was the forerunner of a swift-striding gloom which there was yet time to escape if I would force my thoughts away from it, as a man leaping for life forces his body forward and away from the fall of a wall. But the gloom overtook me before. I could take in the meaning of the message. I moved toward the bed, every nerve already aching with the foreknowledge of the pain that was to be dealt it, and sat down, while my amazed and angry soul dropped gulf by gulf into that horror of great darkness which is spoken of in the Bible, and which, as auctioneers say, must be experienced to be appreciated. [A&R, P.269-270].

In the poem that accompanies the story, Rabbi warns: "The arrows of our anguish/Fly farther than we guess." [A&R, P.303]. The projection of hatred and misery onto the innocent is no less painful for the fact that the psychic influence is imposed unknowingly.

"The Wish House" is another famous story of the later period, which has a touch of the supernatural in it. In this story, two old women, each of them aware that one of them is stricken with cancer and condemned to death, sit and gossip about their past. Each tells the other of the central love of her life, which is, in neither case, her husband. It is promiscuous Grace Ashcroft's story that is central, and central to it is the cancer which she believes that she has taken upon herself so that Harry Mockler, the man she loves ardently, shall suffer no ills or pains. Not that she had known Harry's love for very long — only one harvesting and then, through one winter, when she had prolonged the happiness by securing him a job at a livery
stable near the house in Kensington where she was a kitchen maid. It had been clear to her even during harvesting that he wouldn't keep his love for her for long, yet she could not stop loving him. And in the end, by paying the price of cancer's terrible pain, she owns Harry, not as her lover, but as a man who, unknown to himself, stays healthy only because she has taken upon herself his mortal malady.

The supernatural means by which she secures her wish is frightening and all that a psychic story requires, and since we are only asked to believe that she believes in it, we are really to accept. By a stroke of genius, too, Kipling lays the Wish House, where "the token" dwells that gives Ashcroft her desire at such a cost. However, the Wish House is no picturesque haunted grange but a dingy villa in a suburban street, infested by a shabby, wheezing, down-at-heel, fumbling elemental, the dregs of ghosthood. It serves, and the story-teller makes his point:

"... she builded an Altar and served by the light of her Vision—

Alone, without hope of regard or reward, but Uncowed, Resolute, Selfless, divine

These things she did in Love's honour

What is a God beside Woman? Dust and derision"

[D&C, P.112]

"The Wish House", like other successful supernatural tales discussed earlier, makes the readers hesitate between the natural and supernatural explanations
of the events described in it. There are many parts in the story where the things which appear to be supernatural can be given rational explanation if we make some allowance for coincidence. Grace Ashcroft's headache stops "quick as being kicked" [D&C., P.125], after the little girl has spoken through the letter-box of the empty house and taken the pain on herself, and Mrs. Ashcroft admits that incident lay at the back of her mind. If this is coincidence, it prepares the soil for her delusion later, when she herself goes to the Wish House to take Harry Mockler's trouble on her. The manifestations there—the chair pushed back in the basement kitchen, the feet on the stairs, the breathing behind the shut door—are all such as a superstitious woman with an agitated mind might imagine.

The injury to her leg next morning and Harry's recovery during the hopping-season are then coincidental, and so is the accident that befalls him when her running sore is nearly healed, and the good news about him as soon as she has caused her sore to appear again. In the years that followed, Mrs. Ashcroft tells her friend she "took an' worked (her) pain on an' off," [D&C, P.134-135] and learnt to know "by the feel of it" when Harry was in need. This we could dismiss as delusion; but she is a practical woman who puts her impressions to the test. "Then I'd send another five shillings to Bess, or somethin' fer the chiltern, to find out if, mebbe, 'e 'd took any hurt through my neglects.
'Twas so! year in, year out, I worked it dat way, Liz, an' 'e got 'is good from me 'thout knowin' for years and years' [D&C., P.135]. At this the rational reader can only say that Mrs. Ashcroft's obsession must have obscured the plain sense of her sister's letters, or perhaps that she is lying to an old friend at their last meeting. Thus the reader, at several points in the story, hesitates between the natural and the supernatural explanations of the things described in the story.

But this tale is much more than mere "fantasy" in the Todorovian sense. It is a story of fierce, insane, possessive love, and Kipling conveys his heroine with all the love that he clearly feels for those whose will to endure is as strong as their desire. Kipling has beautifully described how Grace Ashcroft's sublime and unrewarded love endures even if the occasion on which she exercises it is illusory. She is still, in some measures, the unsanctioned Alcestis who goes down into Hell to save her lover. Thus "The Wish House" is a strange mixture of love, disease and supernatural that had an almost obsessive attraction for Kipling. The superstitious terror of cancer that is conveyed in the story has been sometimes associated with Kipling's own dread of the disease which he thought to be a family malady, especially, no doubt, in those first years of his agonies of gastritis, which even a complicated operation of
1922 had not cured. No doubt this symbolism of cancer meant something personal to Kipling. But in our impulse to psychological investigation of the author we should not forget the actual force this symbol has in this story, and the insight which leads us, not back to the author, but to ourselves and the world. And if Kipling was obsessed with cancer, is it not the characteristic obsession of modern man?

V

From our analysis of the seven stories above and from our study of the remaining ghost stories, we can observe the three facts about Kipling as the writer of ghost-stories. First, we find that he has given us a rich variety even when writing ghost-stories. His ghost-stories differ in style, subject-matter and treatment. "The Return of Imray" is an orthodox ghost story while "The Mark of the Beast" is a werewolf story, a straight-forward tale of horror and supernatural with supernatural predominant. "The Phantom Rickshaw" belongs to the domain of fictional psychiatry whereas "They" which springs from deep personal experience is almost a lyric in prose. In fact, Kipling as a ghost-story writer has neither a marked preference for one particular theme as have H.G. Wells and Algernon Blackwood, nor a style or structure that is peculiar to his ghost stories. This is due to the fact that most of his tales of the supernatural are not primarily written as such. Kipling
often uses the supernatural simply as a means of developing his favourite themes more effectively.

Second thing to be noted about his ghost-stories is that there is a kind of ambivalence prevailing in most of them. Like his own heroes, Mowgli and Kim, Kipling was torn between two sets of allegiances:

"Something I owe to the soil that grew -
More to the life that fed -
But most to Allah who gave me two
Separate sides to my head"

[Kim, P.186]

Kim was torn between the Lama's mystic way and the "game" of the British Secret Service, but Kipling's early years were more distressingly divided between India and England. In his sixth year Kipling was sent back to England to complete his education, and the warm, protected and happy life of his early childhood was replaced by harsh systems of religious self-discipline beside which the discipline of school was a comparative relief. When he returned to India, a young man of nearly seventeen, it was both as a stranger and as a native, to be alternately fascinated and appalled by its sights and sounds, beliefs and superstitions. Hence, throughout his life, while Kipling's Indian side recognised and gave due weight to the presence of the inexplicable in life, his English side often rationalized these experiences as the result of "breaking strain" of the intolerable
pressures imposed on the Whiteman in India. That is why the readers of his stories, like their writer, keep hesitating between the natural and the supernatural explanations of the events described in his stories.

Third thing to be observed is Kipling's excessive preoccupation with nervous and mental illness. The stories in which mental disease is described show an incredibly accurate intuitive knowledge of the working of the human mind, which indicates that Kipling must have had a genuine interest in mental disease. It is uncanny how, without the slightest medical knowledge of the disease, he divines a madman's reactions. Considering that "The Phantom Rickshaw" was written ten years before the turn of the century, we might think of Kipling as one of the forerunners of the psychological ghost story or rather fictional psychiatry with a touch of the supernatural. Mental and nervous diseases provide good themes for the short stories of the supernatural, the reason being that illusions and visions of mentally deranged persons are often identical in form with the traditional superstitions. It seems, therefore, that Kipling's interest in mental cases may have led him to consider the supernatural aspect of a madman's illusions.

Kipling's interest in mental disease and his taste for the supernatural because of his Indian background may account for his interest in ghosts as ghosts, but in most of
his tales of the supernatural it is clear that he is regarding them primarily as a means of producing certain effects, to aid in the development of his main theme. In fact, Kipling's ghost-stories are few, and not many rank with his best work. Peter Penzoldt is right when he says: "Most of Kipling's ghost-stories owe their fame less to their intrinsic merit than to the name of their author." Kipling is better remembered for his historical tales which appear in Puck of Pook's Hill and Rewards and Fairies and animal stories which occur in The Jungle Books and Just So Stories, which are going to be analysed and appreciated in the next two chapters.
REFERENCES


5. Ibid., P.117.

6. Ibid., P.117.


10. Ibid., P.28.


17. Ibid., P.364.


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