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Traveller's Tales

Rudyard Kipling's Gothic Short Fiction

Minna Vuohelainen City, University of London

Abstract

Between 1884 and 1936, Rudyard Kipling wrote over 300 short stories, most of which were first published in colonial and cosmopolitan periodicals before being reissued in short-story collections. This corpus contains a number of critically neglected Gothic stories that fall into four groups: stories that belong to the ghost-story tradition; stories that represent the colonial encounter through gothic tropes of horror and the uncanny but do not necessarily include any supernatural elements; stories that develop an elegiac and elliptical Gothic Modernism; and stories that make use of the First World War and its aftermath as a gothic environment. This essay evaluates Kipling's contribution to the critically neglected genre of the Gothic short story, with a focus on the stories' persistent preoccupation with spatial tropes of travel, disorientation and displacement.

Keywords:

Rudyard Kipling; Gothic; short story; modernism; spatiality

'It will always be one of the darkest mysteries to me,' wrote Rudyard Kipling to author and philanthropist Mary Ward in 1896, 'that any human being can make a beginning, end and middle to a really truly long story. I can think them by scores but I have not the hand to work out the full frieze.'¹ Although Kipling did write some 'long stories' in the course of his career, the bulk of his literary production takes the shape of short stories and poems. Between 1884 and 1936, Kipling wrote over 300 short stories, most of which were first published in colonial and cosmopolitan periodicals before being issued in short-story collections. These stories, as Andrew Rutherford notes, develop from 'sophisticated simplicity' to a 'complex, closely organized, elliptical and symbolic mode', revealing Kipling not only as an 'innovator and a virtuoso in the art of the short story' but also as an 'unexpected contributor to modernism'.²

Kipling's long 'career as a short story writer', Howard J. Booth argues, 'can be divided into four periods', consisting of Anglo-Indian stories produced in the 1880s; stories reflecting the author's widening global perspectives during the 1890s; a 'late career' that began at the turn of the century when Kipling was still in his thirties; and fiction written during and after the First World War.³ This corpus contains a number of Gothic stories that have received relatively little critical attention despite Kipling's evident enthusiasm for this 'well-established genre in Anglo-Indian fiction' that could also reach a global audience.⁴ Gothic tropes, ranging from the established conventions of the ghost story to innovative explorations of the horrors of the modern world, recur throughout Kipling's career as a short-story writer. This body of Gothic short fiction, I argue, falls into four groups closely related but not identical to Booth's classification: supernatural or seemingly supernatural tales that belong to

the ghost-story tradition; stories that represent the colonial encounter through gothic tropes of horror and the uncanny but that do not necessarily include supernatural elements; late stories that develop an elliptical and rootless Gothic Modernism; and stories that can be described as examples of War Gothic.

As a literary form, the short story is often associated with a preoccupation with temporality, while the Gothic is perceived to be obsessed with uncanny returns.⁵ However, as I have argued elsewhere, the Gothic is also a ‘spatially articulate mode’ fascinated with particular loci and spatial experiences and transgressions, which for Karen Macfarlane ‘articulates unauthorized spaces at the edges – and at the interstices – of stable cultural narratives’.⁶ Kipling’s Gothic short stories are often ‘traveller’s tale[s]’ that depict characters who are unsettled, rootless, or displaced, with the elliptical short form and gothic narrative fragmentation working together to situate the stories in giddy modern spaces characterised by spatial experiences of flux and impermanence.⁷ The Empire was one of the spaces to which fin-de-siècle Gothic repeatedly returned but, as Kipling’s short fiction demonstrates, the Gothic short story allowed him considerable freedom of manoeuvre between and even within individual stories. Indeed, John McBratney notes that Kipling’s creative imagination was ‘fundamentally spatial in character’.⁸ Living in the heyday of the New Imperialism but also witnessing the devastation of the First World War, travelling widely, fascinated with modern transport technologies, and with personal experience of displacement and intercultural encounters, Kipling, as Daniel C. Strack observes, ‘straddl[ed] two cultures’ and was ‘[f]rom either direction [...] viewed as an inhabitant of the other’.⁹ Kipling’s ‘cultural vertigo’ and ‘anxiety of belonging’, as Robert Fraser puts it, illustrate Robert T. Tally Jr’s contention that the ‘displaced person is [...] attuned to matters of place’.¹⁰ This article evaluates Kipling’s contribution to the critically neglected genre of the Gothic short story, with a focus on his persistent preoccupation with place, space and absence, and on his representation of encounters with gothic others through spatial tropes of travel, disorientation and displacement.

The Gothic Short Story

Kipling’s production of Gothic short fiction was enabled by important developments in the print industry, including the rise of popular magazines promoting short fiction, the development of the short story as a commercially viable and artistically versatile literary form, and a break with literary realism, which helped to generate a significant revival in literary Gothic. Non-mimetic, elliptical and seemingly ephemeral, the Gothic short story mounted a challenge to late-Victorian cultural and literary orthodoxies by enabling the introduction of the transgressive and the unspeakable through narrative fragmentation and open-endedness, anticipating later modernist narrative experimentation.¹¹ The culturally hybrid Kipling, supposedly a staunch supporter of the Empire, was able to articulate cultural ambivalence through this ‘polyphonic’ form which, in his hands, as Gustavo Generani notes, ‘simultaneously promotes and defies imperial discourse’.¹²

Kipling’s long career spans the development of the short story from magazine fillers to a literary form that the American writer and educator Brander Matthews described as ‘a definite species, having possibilities of its own and also rigorous limitations’.¹³ Matthews

described the ‘Short-story’ (deliberately capitalised and hyphenated) as a distinct genre, defined by its ‘essential unity of impression’ and ‘deal[ing] with a single event, a single emotion, or the series of emotions called forth by a single situation’.¹⁴ Of its three possible foci – ‘the plot, the character, and the setting’ – it could, for Matthews, only realise one.¹⁵ In Kipling’s Gothic tales the focus often falls on setting as the source of gothic unease. While critics such as Matthews attempted to define the short story as an elite form, it was also a convenient commercial vehicle for popular authors. Indeed, as Valerie Shaw notes, the association of short fiction with journalism has played an ambivalent role in simultaneously damaging the genre’s long-term critical prospects *and* ensuring it a wide if transient audience.¹⁶ In Kipling’s case, this ambivalence is further complicated by the ‘close contact’ noted by Andrew Griffiths ‘between fiction, New Journalism and New Imperialism’, which has damaged the author’s posthumous reputation by foregrounding his imperialist views.¹⁷ Indeed, Kipling’s short fiction demonstrates how periodical publication moulded the evolving short-story form. Often first-person, journalistic and elliptical in style and narrative technique, his stories were shaped by their original publication within the severely curtailed, intertextual, fragmented and ideologically charged space of the periodical press. Their sometimes startling brevity is a result of the author’s ruthless journalistic pruning, mirrored in his characters’ gothically inflected recognition that certain developments are, as the narrator of ‘The Mark of the Beast’ declares, ‘not to be printed’.¹⁸ The spatial and house-style constraints of Kipling’s journalistic practice thus supported not only his evolution as a short-story writer of exceptional concision but also the development of his stories’ gothic modalities.¹⁹

Kipling’s first stories were published in the *Civil and Military Gazette (CMG)*, a Lahore daily that employed him as an assistant editor between 1882 and 1887, and provided him with a variety of journalistic experience, important contacts, his first opportunities at fiction-writing, and the constant pressure to “‘write short”” for daily “‘turnover[s]” [...] of one column and a quarter’.²⁰ The majority of *Plain Tales from the Hills* first found publication ‘when and as padding was needed’ in the *CMG*, a periodical that Kipling later celebrated in his autobiography as his ‘first mistress and most true love’ (68, 76). Aimed primarily at an Anglo-Indian readership, these turnovers offer vivid, cynical, knowing vignettes of colonial life that juxtapose the imperial mission with glimpses of futility, frustration and, occasionally, horror.

Kipling continued to produce unsettling periodical stories after his 1887 move to the *CMG*’s Allahabad sister-paper the *Pioneer*, whose weekly edition, the *Week’s News*, could accommodate longer tales. ‘Henceforth’, Kipling reflected in *Something of Myself*, this meant ‘no mere twelve-hundred Plain Tales jammed into rigid frames, but three- or five-thousand-word cartoons once a week’ (71). From 1889, however, he was also beginning to broaden his readership beyond the Anglo-Indian community by reaching out to cosmopolitan fiction papers such as *Harper’s Magazine*, *Strand Magazine*, *Windsor Magazine* and *Scribner’s Magazine*; all leading operators within the thriving magazine market that offered better pay and illustration, and could accommodate stories of 9000 words. Nonetheless, Kipling’s journalistic habits persisted, and he continued to prune his stories ruthlessly. He also roved between different magazines, demonstrating in his periodical contacts something of the

restlessness typical of his characters. Given that none of these periodicals was primarily associated with Gothic or supernatural fiction, the significance of which has perhaps been downplayed in scholarly analyses of them, Kipling's persistent Gothic streak is particularly striking.²¹ As the following sections evince, the Gothic mode with its characteristic spatialities permeates Kipling's short fiction from his earliest Indian ghost stories, published in colonial newspapers, to late modernist War Gothic appearing in cosmopolitan illustrated monthlies.

'The dead travel fast': Colonial Ghost Stories

In *Something of Myself*, Kipling depicts the Indian landscape, with its intercultural encounters and constant reminders about the precarity of life, as haunted:

The dead of all times were about us – in the vast forgotten Muslim cemeteries round the Station, where one's horse's hoof of a morning might break through to the corpse below; skulls and bones tumbled out of our mud garden walls, and were turned up among the flowers by the Rains; and at every point were tombs of the dead. Our chief picnic rendezvous and some of our public offices had been memorials to desired dead women; and Fort Lahore, where Runjit Singh's wives lay, was a mausoleum of ghosts. (42)

The landscape oozes stories of the past, the climate exposing layers of history and the very architecture commemorating the forgotten or vaguely remembered dead. And yet, as Michel de Certeau writes, '[h]aunted places are the only ones people can live in'.²² In Kipling's Anglo-Indian stories, India's hauntedness inspires both narrative and fear. Tales such as 'My Own True Ghost Story', published in the *Week's News* on 25 February 1888, and 'The Lost Legion', Kipling's first story to appear in the *Strand* in May 1892, make use of such historical hauntings by drawing attention to the 'placemindedness' or '*topophrenia*', to use Tally's turn, of Anglo-India's colonial ghosts.²³ 'My Own True Ghost Story' catalogues 'cold, pobby [bloated] corpses' who 'hide in trees near the roadside', 'ghosts of women who have died in childbed' and 'wander along the pathways at dusk, or hide in the crops near a village', and 'ghosts of little children who have been thrown into wells' and 'haunt well-kerbs and the fringes of jungles'.²⁴ The story is, however, above all concerned with haunted colonial spaces such as *dâk*-bungalows, government guesthouses that host 'a fair proportion of the tragedy of our lives out here' (34), are 'generally very old, always dirty', and have 'handy little cemeteries in their compound' (33) to remind guests of the precarity of colonial existence. While the haunting witnessed by the narrator in this story is rationally explained, the 'bleak, unadulterated misery' (35) of the *dâk*-bungalow emerges as a microcosm for the comfortlessness of Anglo-India, projecting the narrator's colonial anxiety onto his ramshackle temporary lodging.

'The Lost Legion' also makes use of ghost-story conventions to address barely concealed colonial fears of native betrayal by recalling the Indian Rebellion, which, as Lizzy Welby notes, remained 'a continued source of great fear and distrust amongst the Anglo-Indian community'.²⁵ In this story, the trauma of 1857 permeates the very landscape that a British squadron of cavalry traverse on a dangerous mission into a hostile, 'inaccessible' frontier region that could turn out to be a 'death-trap'.²⁶ The Britons' strategy of silent night-time approach fails when they find themselves 'stalked' (479) by a ghostly battalion consisting of

the spirits of an 'officerless, rebel' 'regiment of Native irregular Horse' (476) betrayed and slaughtered in 1857 by the Afghan tribespeople whose leader the British have come to capture. The surrounding landscape is now a 'very graveyard of little cairns' (480), 'full of the dead' (482) seeking to take revenge on the hillspeople who massacred them, a historical betrayal that conveniently leads the ghostly battalion to side with the British. Despite this neat twist, the *Strand* illustrations by 'A. P.' blur the boundaries between the past and the present, for example with an image of an Afghan elder pointing to the past as if to a place (476), suggesting the significance of 1857 as a traumatic chronotope in the Anglo-Indian imaginary that the Gothic short story could simultaneously acknowledge and relieve.

As these two tales demonstrate, many of Kipling's earliest Gothic stories follow the conventions of the ghost story, a subgenre that, for Julia Briggs, was 'the most characteristic form taken by the Gothic from, perhaps, 1830 to 1930'.²⁷ The ghost story offered professional writers an established and recognisable formula that appealed to magazine readers while, as Andrew Smith observes, also accommodating 'political debates about economics, national and colonial identities, gender, and the workings of the literary imagination'.²⁸ Kipling's supernatural stories typically place their characters in well-known but transitory colonial settings, simultaneously acknowledging and subverting Henry James's contention that ghost stories 'must be connected at a hundred points with the common objects of life' so that, as Briggs puts it, a 'tension' is created 'between the cosy familiar world of life [...] and the mysterious and unknowable world of death'.²⁹ In keeping with established genre conventions, Kipling often problematises the presence of the supernatural through references to the effects of heat, overwork or anxiety on the coloniser's mind and body. However, the colonial setting complicates James's insistence on familiarity.

'The Phantom 'Rickshaw', published in December 1885 in the Kipling family's Christmas *Quartette* produced by the *CMG*, was explicitly a Christmas tale. Knowingly acknowledging its generic debts by describing protagonist Jack Pansay's fevered voice as 'blood and thunder magazine diction', the story details Pansay's ill-fated flirtation with Mrs Keith-Wessington, a married woman who dies broken-hearted following Pansay's growing indifference, only to return to haunt him from a spectral 'yellow-panelled 'rickshaw' pulled by four ghostly 'jhampanis' [rickshaw bearers] wearing 'black and white liveries'.³⁰ As Smith notes, the haunting leaves Pansay liminally 'trapped between two worlds':³¹ the 'very, very kind and helpful' 'small world' (26) of '[e]veryday, ordinary Simla' (45) and a gothic encounter with spectrality. The story locates Pansay's haunting very precisely in a 'workaday Anglo-Indian world' (45) familiar to its Anglo-Indian audience but exotic to British readers. The phantom 'rickshaw' intercepts Pansay at 'the Reading-room and Peliti's veranda' and 'Hamilton's shop' (32), at the 'Theatre', 'the Club veranda' and the 'Birthday Ball', 'down the Mall' (47) and on the 'Jakko road' (35) for, as Pansay reflects, the 'dead travel fast, and by short cuts unknown to ordinary coolies' (37). These well-known locations act as memory sites that retain and recall traces of Pansay's guilty flirtation: 'every inch of the Jakko road bore witness to our old-time walks and talks' (35), Pansay acknowledges. Meanwhile, the fragile colonial world recedes into a 'world of shadows' (44) in comparison to the spectral. Even in this early story, Pansay's entrapment in 'dark labyrinths of doubt, misery, and utter despair' (43) and his consciousness of his impending demise gesture towards the 'horror' of

Anglo-Indian colonial life that Kipling would explore in his Imperial Gothic tales of the 1890s.

'The Return of Imray', published in *Life's Handicap: Being Stories of Mine Own People* in 1891, develops this spatially articulated colonial anxiety further. Colonial administrator Imray has 'disappear[ed] from [...] the little Indian station where he lived', and is soon forgotten, until Strickland of the Indian Police, a recurring character 'to whom unpleasantnesses arrived as do dinners to ordinary people', takes possession of Imray's 'desirable bungalow'.³² The defining feature of this spacious dwelling is its superb, 'heavily thatched' (227) roof which appears to give shelter but in fact 'harbour[s] all manner of rats, bats, ants, and foul things' (228), concealed by a 'neat', newly 'repainted' (227) ceiling-cloth. This deceptive architecture also masks the precarity of colonial life, for the narrator's conviction that the bungalow is 'too fully occupied' (231) by 'a fluttering, whispering, bolt-fumbling, lurking, loitering Someone' (230) is proven justified when the decaying corpse of Imray, murdered by an Indian servant who superstitiously blames Imray for his son's death, is found hidden in the 'dark three-cornered cavern' (228) of the roof. While this discovery macabrely conflates the possible haunting of the bungalow with the swarming of vermin on Imray's corpse, the story reduces the coloniser to 'a ghost – insubstantial and speechless'.³³ Rebellion and mental breakdown haunt the Anglo-Indian imagination, imbuing familiar colonial spaces – sites of leisure, *dâk*-bungalows, the Anglo-Indian home, the very landscape – with anxieties that the ghost story is well-placed to articulate. As demonstrated in the next section, this spatial unease is developed more fully in Kipling's overtly Gothic tales.

'A house of torment': Gothic Spaces

If Kipling's ghost stories articulate colonial anxiety, his Gothic tales develop 'darker, more cynical visions of Empire' by depicting India as 'a house of torment' that destroys the coloniser.³⁴ Kipling uses gothically inflected spatial imagery from his earliest stories in ways that convey both his ambivalence towards the imperial project and his fascination with Indian life. As he explains in *Something of Myself*, on 'hot-weather nights' (54) 'the night got into [his] head' and he 'would wander till dawn in all manner of odd places [...] for the sheer sake of looking' (53). His very first published story, 'The Gate of the Hundred Sorrows', which appeared in the *CMG* on 26 September 1884, describes 'half-caste' Gabral Misquitta's visions of fighting dragons caused by his consumption of the 'Black Smoke' at an opium den that Misquitta defies anyone to find, 'however well he may think he knows the City'.³⁵ In another early tale, 'Beyond the Pale', published in *Plain Tales* in 1888, young Indian widow Bisesa longs for life beyond her prison of a room, which 'looked out through the grated window into the narrow dark Gully where the sun never came and where the buffaloes wallowed in the blue slime'.³⁶ Her unwise cross-cultural flirtation with the Englishman Trejago is literally cut short, as evinced by the mutilated arms she holds out into the moonlight '[f]rom the black dark' (131) of her cage in a scene of horror hidden in the unfathomable 'City where each man's house is as guarded and as unknowable as the grave' (132).

As these early stories suggest, Kipling's Anglo-Indian Gothic does not necessarily require the presence of the supernatural to achieve its effect, but instead addresses the

'anxieties about the ease with which civilization can revert to barbarism or savagery and thus about the weakening of Britain's imperial hegemony' that Patrick Brantlinger associates with the Imperial Gothic.³⁷ In Kipling's work, encounters with gothic others trigger an experience of horror expressed through tropes of backsliding, contagion and monstrous metamorphosis and set in an Anglo-India that Welby refers to as 'a hellish abyss' and Generani a 'chaotic, confusing, irrational, corrupted, unhealthy, and unjust' 'Dantesque nightmare'.³⁸ As B. J. Moore-Gilbert notes, Anglo-Indian Gothic articulates a 'sense of estrangement [...] characteristic of the exiled community' for whom 'the metropolitan homeland [...] acts as an ideal which can' both 'inspire' and 'exacerbate [the exile's] sense of deprivation', charting psychological journeys that challenge colonisers' expectations of superiority and security of possession.³⁹ Yet at the same time, Kipling's depiction of India as unnerving, unknowable and unhealthy carries echoes of contemporaneous Urban Gothic, a genre more commonly associated with London-based long-form fiction in which the imperial metropolis is found to be an antagonistic, alien space. This generic echo with its shared themes of transgressive boundary-crossing, mental fragmentation and atavism in hostile, claustrophobic spaces positions Kipling's Imperial Gothic as Urban Gothic's colonial cousin and perhaps explains the author's growing global appeal.

As Welby and Smith have noted, 'The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes', published in the *Quartette* in December 1885 alongside 'The Phantom Rickshaw' and carefully set at Christmas time, dethrones the coloniser by 'engulf[ing]' him in a limbo between 'the living and the dead, and the colonialist and the subaltern'.⁴⁰ Feeling 'a little feverish' (4), the eponymous Englishman Morrowbie Jukes embarks on a mad gallop across 'a desolate sandy stretch of country' (3) that ends when he is pitched into a 'horseshoe-shaped crater of sand with steeply-graded sand walls' (5) from which there is 'no way of getting out' (10). Jukes finds himself trapped in a liminal village 'where the Dead who did not die, but may not live' (3), eke out a meagre existence. As Moore-Gilbert observes, Jukes, a practically minded engineer, carefully records his experience 'in temporal and spatial terms', describing his new home's modest dimensions and diabolical design, the construction of the grave-like sleeping burrows, and the riverfront guarded by a gunboat and quicksand.⁴¹ Like Britain's mission in India, the sandpit represents a life sentence, for 'no one had ever been known to escape' (12). Although the story's title references Jukes's mad gallop, the real journey is psychological as Jukes adjusts to his status within the heterotopic community of the living dead, no longer a master but the object of derision and indifference.⁴² In his 'den [...] nearly as narrow as a coffin', Jukes is both dead to the world and part of a continuum of liminal residents whose 'naked bodies' have worn the sides of the cave 'smooth and greasy' (16). Jukes's 'terror', 'nausea' and 'agony' (13) mirror the futility and frustrations of the colonial mission, the story's '[m]otifs of imprisonment [...] call[ing] to mind both the claustrophobia and sense of exile so prominent in Anglo-Indian literature'.⁴³

The prime scene of horror in Kipling's Gothic tales is, however, the Anglo-Indian home, stifling, uncomfortable and decidedly unhomey. 'At the End of the Passage' was published in the *Boston Herald* on 20 July 1890 and then in August 1890 in *Lippincott's Magazine*, which had recently printed two gothically inflected London-based novellas, Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of the Four* (February 1890) and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

(July 1890). Kipling's story brings together a group of professional men to chart the colonial engineer Hummil's descent into madness and death as a result of 'overwork and the strain of the hot weather' (341). Its reference to Hummil's 'terror beyond the expression of any pen' (342) anticipates not only the 'horror' recognised by Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) but also Edward Said's contention that intercultural encounters could provoke 'a frightening self-discovery'.⁴⁴ Kipling represents this gothic self-discovery spatially through the 'passage' of the story's title. As Roger Luckhurst points out, 'there is actually no passage in "At the End of the Passage"'; the story's title instead implies an equation between the labyrinths of Hummil's overworked brain, the 'Gothic unease and dread' of his nightmares, and the 'monotonous bureaucratic uniformity' of the colonial administration, a combination that threatens to bring about the 'annihilation of the self'.⁴⁵

Hummil's disintegration takes place within his home. Rather than the refuge extolled by the Victorians, Hummil's bachelor bungalow emerges as a site of unbearable heat, unhealthy habits, loneliness, homesickness, and mental disintegration, its very unhomeliness symbolised by the presence of a 'worn and battered little camp-piano – wreckage of a married household that had once held the bungalow' (333). In *Something of Myself*, Kipling reflects on surviving the 'horror of a great darkness' of his 'empty house' 'thanks to the pressure of work, a capacity for being able to read, and the pleasure of writing what my head was filled with' (64–5). Wrapped 'in the choking darkness of midnight' and buffeted by a 'dense dust-storm' (334) and 'the brown purple haze of heat [...] as though the earth were dying of apoplexy' (328), Hummil by contrast is unable to ward off terrifying nightmares of 'a place down there' where he is 'nearly caught' (339) by 'a blind face that chases him down corridors' (340), his only companion a sinister double who foreshadows his disintegration. While the story suggests that photographs of the dead man's staring eyes may capture these terrifying visions, the story, mindful of its elliptical Gothic form, refuses to divulge the details of Hummil's passage to death.

'The Mark of the Beast', published in the *Pioneer* on 12 July 1890 and collected in *Life's Handicap* alongside 'The Return of Imray', further develops these Imperial Gothic tropes of 'individual regression or going native'.⁴⁶ According to Paul Battles, this story articulates 'one of [Kipling's] most forceful critiques of Empire' by suggesting that colonisers' cultural ignorance turns them into monsters.⁴⁷ In its complex negotiation of the colonial encounter, the story problematises the native proverb that acts as the collection's spatially themed epigraph, 'I met a hundred men on the road to Delhi and they were all my brothers.'⁴⁸ After a 'wet' night, the repulsive colonialist Fleete, whose 'knowledge of natives was, of course, limited' (84), desecrates the temple of the Hindu god Hanuman and is bitten by the temple's 'Silver Man', a leper priest with 'no face' (86). Soon Fleete, quartered with Strickland, begins to transform into a 'beast' (91), troublingly 'los[ing] his connection with [India's] anglicized spaces' and 'racial and cultural positions'.⁴⁹ While the *Pioneer* could afford Kipling 5000 words for this story, the narrative technique relies heavily on 'silences and omissions'.⁵⁰ As the narrator and Strickland torture the leper to save Fleete, Strickland's 'suspicions [...] so wildly improbable that he dared not say them aloud' (92), Fleete's metamorphosis, the details of which 'cannot be put down here' (93), and the torture itself, which 'is not to be printed' (94), leave the reader to fill the narrative gaps. The events may be concealed behind colonial

hierarchies and the walls of Strickland's bungalow, but this domestic space, supposedly the cornerstone of Anglo-Indian society, is nonetheless tainted by the memory of actions that have 'disgraced' the narrator and Strickland 'as Englishmen for ever' (95). If Imray had been reduced to a ghostly presence haunting his former home, 'The Mark of the Beast' goes further in its questioning of the Imperial mission by branding the narrator and Strickland with the eponymous mark of the beast.

'Utterly lost': Modernist Wanderings

In Kipling's early twentieth-century Gothic stories, fascination with monstrosity gives way to modernist tropes of alienation, rootless flux and a pervasive sense of dislocation. Distinguished by 'less regular' publication and longer gestation periods, 'a new level of complexity', 'older characters' and 'social groups other than the family', and 'themes of technological change and the possible proximity of other worlds', these 'late' stories range far and wide geographically, reflecting the author's expanding global horizons.⁵¹ They also offer a significantly innovative amalgamation of the popular Gothic tale and the emerging modernist short-story form. "'Wireless'" (*Scribner's Magazine*, August 1902), for example, offers a playful take on the traditional ghost story, likening a wireless experiment in an atmospheric chemist's store lit by 'kaleidoscopic lights' and filled with the 'flavours of cardamoms and chloric-ether' to a 'spiritualistic séance' during which the consumptive druggist Mr Shaynor apparently achieves a 'machine-like' connection with the dead poet John Keats.⁵²

Despite such complex modernist themes and techniques, Kipling's short fiction continued to appear in popular periodicals which also 'experimented with the possibilities of the genre', introducing middlebrow readers to proto-modernist literary devices.⁵³ Described by Kipling-biographer Harry Ricketts as the 'first modernist text in English', 'Mrs Bathurst' is a notoriously elliptical narrative characterised by 'all the defining qualities of modernism', including '[d]eliberate obliqueness, formal fragmentation, the absence of a privileged authorial point of view, intense literary self-consciousness, [and] lack of closure'.⁵⁴ To this list might be added the story's atmosphere of transitory wandering. Kipling himself described this 6800-word story, published in September 1904 in the middlebrow British *Windsor Magazine* and in the American *Metropolitan Magazine*, as a 'rather ghostly tragedy'.⁵⁵ Not unlike the earlier 'By Word of Mouth' (1887) or 'A Madonna of the Trenches' (1924), discussed below, 'Mrs Bathurst' can be read as a ghost story about reunion in death, the details of which must be pieced together from the disjointed conversation between four men at a loose end in South Africa: the 'stranded, lunchless' narrator; railway inspector Hooper, recently back from a 'trip up-country' with a gruesome souvenir in his pocket; and Petty Officer Pyecroft and Marine Sergeant Pritchard, unoccupied while their ship is at a dockyard.⁵⁶ The desultory conversation, which takes place in the transitory, interstitial setting of a railway 'brake-van chalked for repair' 'a couple of miles up the line' at the 'edge of the surf' (259), keeps returning to the haunting memory of Mrs Bathurst, a widow who kept 'a little hotel at Hauraki – near Auckland' (264) across the ocean. It is implied that naval warrant officer Vickery has deserted after seeing film footage showing her leaving a train at Paddington Station in London, while Hooper is in possession of macabre evidence of

Vickery's recent death from a lightning strike 'on the way to the Zambesi – beyond Bulawayo' on a 'curious' railway line running through a 'solid teak forest' in an area much frequented by 'tramps [...] since the war' (273). As Alicia Rix observes, the railway and the cinema represent 'technologies of mobility', which emerge for Sylvia Pamboukian 'as conduits for supernatural phenomena', not unlike the telegraph in "Wireless" or the motorcar in "They" (1904).⁵⁷ Nicholas Daly, meanwhile, connects Vickery's 'excessive annihilation' with the 'war dead' whom 'the story has elided', gesturing towards Kipling's later War Gothic.⁵⁸ While the story's meaning has confounded readers, its aura of menacing unease and its transitory rootlessness gesture towards gothic spatialities, with Victor Prout's geographically dispersed *Windsor* illustrations set in South Africa, New Zealand and 'up-country' emphasising the narrative's lack of a steady centre.

In August 1904, Kipling had published "They" in *Scribner's Magazine*. A long story of over 8000 words, "They" similarly explores the boundaries between life and death through modern technology, in this case the motorcar. In a letter published in the motoring magazine the *Complete Motorist* that same year, Kipling describes the car as a heterotopic 'time-machine on which one can slide from one century to another' during explorations of England's haunted landscape, where 'the dead, twelve coffin deep, clutch hold of my wheels at every turn, till I sometimes wonder that the very road does not bleed'.⁵⁹ Like India in the earlier stories but unlike Africa where Kipling did not feel the same sense of spectral history, England emerges as a haunted landscape that generates its own gothic narrative. The story's narrator, repeatedly characterised as coming 'from the other side of the country', spends much of the story in transit motoring through the countryside on three fairy-tale visits to the 'House Beautiful' that is the heart of the story.⁶⁰ On his first visit, the narrator 'run[s] [him]self clean out of [his] known marks' (239) to find himself 'utterly lost' (243) in an archaic landscape of 'hidden villages', 'Norman churches', 'stone bridges built for heavier traffic than would ever vex them again' and 'a mile of Roman road' (239). Far from the 'utter disaster' that Kevin Lynch associates with the 'word "lost"', however, the narrator is charmed to stumble upon 'an ancient house of lichen and weather-worn stone [...] flanked by semi-circular walls' and guarded by 'horsemen ten feet high with levelled lances [...] all of clipped yew' (240).⁶¹ These defences suggest that the house, 'so out of the world' (241), may be a forbidden, liminal space, but the narrator feels immediately drawn to it, its blind owner and the resident troop of shy children, whose presence pervades the house and its surroundings. It is not until his third visit when sunshine gives way to a 'chill grey' day of thick 'sea-fog' and he is finally following a 'known road' (250) that he comes to realise that the children 'deep in the shadow [...] perfectly hidden' (253) are in fact spirits of dead children, including, it is implied, his own, lingering in 'this place [...] made for children' (243). This enchanted shadow world, though calling those who 'have borne [and] lost' (256), is nonetheless not for the living, and the story concludes with the narrator deciding that he 'must never' (257) visit again because the barrier between the dead and the living should not be transgressed. As with other stories of this period, the hesitant and elliptical short Gothic form obliquely hints at forbidden boundaries, forcing the reader to piece together fragmented, disjointed narratives concealing deep grief and punctuated by bouts of technologically advanced travel.

‘Further into the nightmare’: War Gothic

Although the themes of absence, loss and mourning are also characteristic of Kipling’s other early twentieth-century Gothic short fiction, his stories about the First World War develop a distinctive War Gothic.⁶² This mode of writing explores the twin settings of the trench landscape and the home front with, as Amna Haider observes, ‘landscapes of war overlap[ping] and coloniz[ing] the landscapes of the mind’.⁶³ Bluntly matter-in-fact in tone, Kipling’s War Gothic conveys the author’s bitter disillusionment and ideological shift from a supporter of the Empire (a position more ambivalent than often acknowledged) to a disillusioned critic of Britain’s war effort. This shift in tone is apparent as early as ‘Mary Postgate’, which was published in *Nash’s and Pall Mall Magazine* and the *Century* in September 1915 and explores the home front experience. The ‘thoroughly conscientious, tidy, companionable, and ladylike’ title character, a lady’s companion who ‘pride[s] herself on a trained mind’, finds her orderly world left ‘whirling’ by ‘a war which, unlike all wars that Mary could remember, did not stay decently outside England and in the newspapers, but intruded on the lives of people whom she knew’.⁶⁴ The psychological toll of the community’s losses is revealed when, after a series of shocks, Mary discovers an injured airman who may only exist in her imagination but whom she takes for an enemy soldier and cruelly leaves to die in agony. Channelling her failure ‘to make a happy home’ (313) into this desire to facilitate death, Mary appears to find a certain fulfilment – described erotically as a ‘glow’ (312), a ‘secret thrill’, an ‘increasing rapture’, a ‘long pleasure’ and a ‘shive[r]’ (313) – in her ability to refuse help while sacrificially consigning memories of the past to a roaring garden fire. Although the story was published only a year into the war, Kipling suggests that the conflict and its mounting losses had already effected a monstrous transformation in previously mundane lives.

The appearance of Kipling’s war stories years after the end of the war signals not only the continuing significance of the conflict but also a growing understanding of its psychological impact in the post-war period.⁶⁵ ‘A Madonna of the Trenches’, published in the Canadian *MacLean’s Magazine* in August 1924 and in the American *Hearst’s International* and the British *Nash’s and Pall Mall Magazine* in September 1924, explores the emotional landscape of shellshock. At a Masonic Lodge of Instruction frequented by ‘unstable ex-soldiers’ suffering from ‘hysteria’ and ‘shock’, the narrator listens to the disjointed story of traumatised former soldier Strangwick, who demands to know ‘where [he’s] at!’⁶⁶ Like other soldiers serving in the ‘wet, cold, smelly, and thoroughly squalid’ trenches of the Western Front, Strangwick, a runner required to make excursions into no man’s land, has ‘experience[d] an unreal, unforgettable enclosure and constraint, as well as a sense of being disoriented and lost’ in the confusing, ever-changing landscape torn by shellfire.⁶⁷ In an echo of the haunted landscapes of India and England in Kipling’s earlier stories, Strangwick’s war service has taken place in trenches ‘faced [...] with dead to keep the mud back’ (371), and his post-traumatic visions include images of the ‘frozen dead who creak in the frost’ (370). Allyson Booth explains that the trenches were ‘worlds constructed, literally, of corpses’ that would ‘confuse the boundary between life and death’.⁶⁸ These harrowing, overtly gothic ‘corpscapes’ are not, however, the reason for Strangwick’s trauma.⁶⁹ Instead, he has lost his bearings after witnessing a seemingly supernatural encounter between his dead aunt Bella

Armine, the madonna of the story's title, and his uncle, platoon sergeant John Godsoe, who has subsequently committed suicide. In an echo of 'Mrs Bathurst', the piecemeal details of events preceding the ghostly encounter suggest that the aunt and uncle were in fact Strangwick's parents, the revelation of his provenance leaving the young veteran without 'anything to hold *on to*' (379; original emphasis). The churned, fragmented trench landscape with its shell craters and creaking corpses mirrors the collapse of Strangwick's world, the trenches' 'chronic conditions of fear, tension, horror, disgust, and grief' augmenting his emotional shock.⁷⁰

'The Gardener', published in *McCall's Magazine* in April 1926 and in the *Strand Magazine* the following month, develops these themes of wartime horrors, post-war mourning and ambivalent redemption with a specific focus on remembrance, a theme Kipling was well-placed to address because of his involvement with the War Graves Commission. Like 'Mary Postgate' and 'A Madonna', 'The Gardener' explores the emotional impact of the war on a population trained to repress strong feelings. With an echo of the unconventional family structures of these earlier stories, protagonist Helen Turrell lovingly brings up her illegitimate son Michael as an 'unfortunate' nephew, only for him to perish in 'the first holocaust of public-school boys who threw themselves into the Line', one example of what Trudi Tate calls 'the terror and sorrow of the frail human body facing the machinery of war'.⁷¹ The story poignantly suggests that Michael's illegitimacy was 'public property' (404) and Helen's pretence perhaps unnecessary, and the efficiency and neatness of Michael's death – he is killed 'at once' by a 'shell-splinter' (407) and tidily buried under a collapsed wall – amplify its horror and wastefulness. When Michael's body is eventually 'found, identified, and re-interred in Hagenzeele Third Military Cemetery' (408), Helen, like many grieving relatives, travels 'further into the nightmare' (409) to visit the grave. At the end of a vulgarly touristic and embarrassingly convenient journey that, as Paul Fussell emphasises, was 'a mere matter of seventy miles' from home, Helen is confronted by the cemetery's 'merciless sea of black crosses' in which she can 'distinguish no order or arrangement [...]; nothing but a waist-high wilderness as of weeds stricken dead, rushing at her' (412).⁷² Amidst this spatial confusion saturated with death, Helen is helped to Michael's grave by a Christ-like figure she supposes to be 'a gardener [...] firming a young plant in the soft earth', who 'with infinite compassion' guides her to the grave of her '*son*' (412; my emphasis).

The convenient visit allows Helen for the first time to acknowledge her identity as Michael's mother and join a community of mourners 'fac[ing] together the emptiness, the nothingness of loss in war' at a modern, heterotopic memory site that uneasily mirrors the blood-soaked soil of India and England of Kipling's earlier Gothic tales.⁷³ For Steven Trout, the cemetery therefore becomes a 'place of spiritual rebirth' that facilitates Helen's 'release from the crushing weight of her secret' and serves to 'clear away the chaos left behind by war [...] and to replace it with a consoling sense of order and neatness'.⁷⁴ Trout's reading is undermined, however, by the story's depiction of the vulgarity of the journey, the disturbing conflation of the compassionate gardener with an apparently uncaring god, and the suggestion of the waste not only of young lives but also of the exertions of the grieving relatives who have tellingly come to visit 'one's grave' (408) or 'your grave' (409). Like Strangwick's trench experience, Helen's epiphany at the cemetery leaves her adrift, the

sublime vastness of the cemetery mocking her previous dutiful efforts to maintain appearances. The concision and laconic tone of this story of under 4000 words powerfully suggest the stunted lives of Michael and Helen, one dead in the earth, the other reduced to frequenting such memory sites.

Conclusions

Kipling's career as a short-story writer demonstrates the continued appeal and creative potential of the Gothic short form over a transitional period from the Victorian to modernism. During this half-century, the Gothic short story – elliptical, fragmented and spatially articulate – was peculiarly well-placed to articulate repressed emotion and devastating epiphany, and to capture the unsettling sensations of flux, displacement and impermanence that would come to characterise the twentieth-century experience. For Franco Moretti, '[e]ach genre possesses its own space [...] and each space its own genre'.⁷⁵ In Kipling's traveller's tales, the Gothic short story develops symbiotically with settings that articulate colonial anxiety, the terrors of displacement and homesickness, the agony of loss and absence, and the horrors of modern warfare. This spatial trajectory reveals the Gothic short story as modernity's counter-narrative, capable of challenging and subverting widely accepted orthodoxies about progress and permanence. Yet despite these disconcerting critiques of the modern world, Kipling was also an author with a global audience whose body of Gothic short fiction encompassed popular genre conventions, commercial appeal and pervasive literary experimentation – an unusual combination that helped the Gothic short story develop from a genre designed to provide pleasurable thrills to one capable of nuanced commentary on the dislocations of modernity.

Notes on contributor

Dr Minna Vuohelainen is Reader in English at City, University of London. Her current research focuses on fin-de-siècle print culture, genre (Gothic and crime fiction), London literatures and spatial theory, and Thomas Hardy. Her publications include the monograph *Richard Marsh* (University of Wales Press, 2015), the coedited essay collections *Interpreting Primo Levi: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Palgrave, 2015, with Arthur Chapman) and *Richard Marsh, Popular Fiction and Literary Culture, 1890–1915: Rereading the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester University Press, 2018, with Victoria Margree and Daniel Orrells), and special issues of *Victorian Periodicals Review* on the *Strand Magazine* (with Emma Liggins, 2019) and of *Victorian Popular Fictions Journal* on ‘Mapping Victorian Popular Fictions’ (2019).

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⁵ See, for example, Ailsa Cox, *Writing Short Stories: A Routledge Writer’s Guide*, 2nd edn (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2016); Fred Botting, *Gothic*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2014); David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*, 2 vols, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

⁶ Minna Vuohelainen, *Richard Marsh* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2015), p. 16; Karen E. MacFarlane, ‘Here Be Monsters: Imperialism, Knowledge and the Limits of Empire’, *Text Matters*, 6:6 (2016), 74–95 (p. 76).

⁷ Rudyard Kipling, ‘The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes’, in *The Man Who Would Be King and Other Stories*, ed. by Louis Cornell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 3–25 (p. 9); further references are to this edition and page numbers will be given in brackets in the text

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- ¹⁴ Brander Matthews, *The Philosophy of the Short-Story* (New York, London and Bombay: Longmans, Green, 1901), pp. 15–16.
- ¹⁵ Matthews, *The Short-Story*, p. 391.
- ¹⁶ Valerie Shaw, *The Short Story: A Critical Introduction* (London and New York: Longman, 1983), p. 7.
- ¹⁷ Andrew Griffiths, *The New Journalism, the New Imperialism and the Fiction of Empire, 1870–1900* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 187.
- ¹⁸ Rudyard Kipling, 'The Mark of the Beast', in *Late Victorian Gothic Tales*, ed. by Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 84–95 (p. 94); further references are to this edition and page numbers will be given in brackets in the text.
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- ²⁶ Rudyard Kipling, 'The Lost Legion', *Strand Magazine*, 3 (May 1892), 476–83 (p. 478); further references are to this edition and page numbers will be given in brackets in the text.
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- ²⁸ Andrew Smith, *The Ghost Story, 1840–1920: A Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 2.
- ²⁹ Henry James, 'from an unsigned review, "Miss Braddon"', *Nation*, 9 November 1865, i, 593–5', in Norman Page (ed.), *Wilkie Collins: The Critical Heritage* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 119–20 (p. 119); Briggs, p. 126.
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- ⁴² See Moore-Gilbert, p. 193; Smith, p. 159; Welby, p. 150. On heterotopias as counter-sites that comment on the ‘real world’, see Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics*, 16:1 (Spring 1986), 22–7.
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- ⁵⁰ Macfarlane, p. 89.
- ⁵¹ Booth, ‘Later Short Fiction’, p. 144.
- ⁵² Rudyard Kipling, “‘Wireless’”, in *The Wish House and Other Stories*, ed. by Craig Raine (New York: Modern Library, 2002), pp. 222–37 (pp. 227, 237, 231).
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- ⁵⁵ Rudyard Kipling, ‘To Leslie Cope Cornford, 24 February 1904. Text: Copy, Library of Congress’, in *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling, Volume 3: 1900–10*, ed. by Thomas Pinney (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2004), pp. 146–8 (p. 147).
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