Hauntology and Spectres of Personal Trauma in Ruskin Bond's "Topaz" and "The Woman on Platform No. 8"

PRIYANK JAIN
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities,
The National University of Malaysia, Malaysia

ANITA HARRIS SATKUNANANTHAN *
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities,
The National University of Malaysia, Malaysia
aharris@ukm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

The article deploys Jacques Derrida's hauntological contextualising of spectres in tandem with Dominick LaCapra's (2004) and E. Ann Kaplan's (2005) contextualising of trauma to unearth the roles which women are made to play within the societies in Ruskin Bond's narratives. Utilising a hauntological treatment of trauma, two short stories by Bond, "Topaz" and "The Woman on Platform No. 8," will be analysed in this article. In particular, this article aims to interrogate the impact of personal trauma contained within the texts as experienced by the women spectres inhabiting both of the aforementioned short stories and their male interlocutors. An analysis of both texts from a hauntological perspective incorporates both spatial and temporal considerations, from the architecture of the enfolding spaces to the connection between past, present and future. The different environments determined the different forms taken by spectres within Ruskin's texts take; therefore, their significance will be examined in this article. In so doing, the article will problematise the notion of revisiting and re-contextualise it from a hauntological perspective. The findings will unearth the ways in which the feminine spectres in these tales are equated with the spaces they inhabit, both in nature and in the ties to architecture.

Keywords: Hauntology; Revisitations; postcolonial Gothic; Spectres; Trauma

INTRODUCTION

Spectres, both living and dead, inhabit Ruskin Bond's fiction in myriad forms. Accordingly, this article aims to interrogate the manifestations of these supernatural entities in Bond's works from a postcolonial hauntological perspective, which is connected to the spectral lineaments of trauma. Trauma, according to Cathy Caruth (1996), is "always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (p. 4). Caruth (1996) asserts that the truth of trauma has a "delayed appearance" and a "belated address" that "cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language" (Caruth, 1996, p.4). Caruth's (1996) landmark distillation of the notion of trauma remains relevant today and is particularly apt in describing the spectral lineaments of trauma in Bond's works. Trauma is connected to hauntology in this article; this article's hauntological interrogation of Bond's works will therefore explore the manner in which protagonists encounter spectres and how this becomes a catalyst towards a reconciliation of the present with past trauma. The short stories selected for analysis in this article are "Topaz" and "The Woman on Platform No. 8." In both of these short stories by Bond, the characters that may be coded as spectres are women with implied or explicit traumatic pasts. Connected to these

questions are the spatial components of hauntology, which may be found in both of these short stories. 'Topaz' is located in the Doon Valley and is suffused with the imagery of nature, particularly of trees and of parks. Arup Chatterjee (2021), in writing about the Doon Valley where Bond grew up, comments on the haunted spatial lineaments of that region, which remains a salient feature of some of Bond's works. Chatterjee's (2021) hauntological exploration of Bond's architecture informs the hauntological construct deployed in this article. According to Chatterjee, "traces of ghostly retreats—in a dual sense of 'retreat' as a last resort and deferred departures—underlie Bond's spectral architectonics" (Chatterjee, 2021, p.11). Bond's Doon Valley is both identical and different, including the ephemerality of his community's past (Chatterjee, 2021, p.12). However, this article contends that Bond's hauntology extends well beyond ghostly manifestations and otherworldly experiences. It is important to connect hauntology to both the spatial and temporal considerations of Bond's texts. For example, the importance of railways in both the social history and geography of India cannot be underestimated. Likewise, the significance of railway stations in the works of Indian and Anglo-Indian authors from the subcontinent. Aruna Awasthi (2011) writes that the poetic "representations of railways in various vernacular languages portray how the Indians viewed and responded to the economic, political and social impact of the mechanised transport system", which Awasthi avers became a way to connect Indian society and cause them to interact further (p. 956). Awasthi's paper on the impact of railway stations on Indian and Anglo-Indian poetry is significant because it highlights the geographical and cultural importance of these edifices.

Bond's haunted meadows and spectral faces appear as displaced entities yearning for a place to call home in the present or, at most, seek disruptions in assumed temporal and spatial linearity vectors by engaging with living entities. This communication between the spectres and the living interlocutors connects to the reconciliation and resolution aspect of trauma theory, as delineated by Dominick LaCapra. LaCapra (2004) writes that there is a distinction to be made between "the traumatic (or traumatising) event (or events) and the traumatic experience" (p.55). For LaCapra, the inciting event in the case of historical trauma is "punctual and datable" because it is "situated in the past" (2004, p.55). This remains true even though the experience itself is not considered punctual, and it subsequently has "an elusive aspect;" it "relates to a past that has not passed away" (LaCapra, 2004, p.55). The historical event, then, is inherently temporal, and it "intrusively invades the present and may block or obviate possibilities in the future" (LaCapra, p.55). The nature of trauma and the return to the site of trauma takes on spectral meaning when it is enunciated from the mouths of those who no longer exist and those who, for one reason or another, have become spectral. For LaCapra, the temporal aspect of trauma is elusive – what is past never fully disappears. Derived from LaCapra's conceptualising of temporality, this article reads the past from a hauntological and temporal perspective. For instance, both "Topaz" and "The Woman on Platform No. 8" are concerned with past events colliding with the present.

This article also deploys E. Ann Kaplan's notion of 'writing over the trauma' (2005) to examine the ways in which these texts revisit sites of past trauma in order to reconcile the past with the present. It is as though by transmitting their past experiences to the narrators in "Topaz" and "The Woman on Platform No. 8", these spectres are transmitting their own identities. Kaplan's (2005) work is a visual account of witnessing trauma during and after the fact – it also has hauntological elements as it palimpsests photographs of memorial sites over the recollection of the trauma experienced by 9/11 survivors and family members. The notion of revisiting trauma becomes the connection between the hauntological and trauma studies treatments utilised in analysing both short stories in this article.

LITERATURE REVIEW

INDIAN GOTHIC AND HAUNTOLOGY

Hauntology as a field itself is suited for the study of the Gothic from an Indian perspective in which the work of Bond is deeply rooted. According to Bond, '[T]he hotel, the cottages, the winding footpaths, the hill station itself, were all survivors of the Raj… India will always be haunted by its history (Bond, 2018, p.72). Tabish Khair (2008), in a discussion of genre and pulp fiction in India's literary and cultural history, notes that considering the "long and rich oral tradition of horror/ghost stories in India, it is no surprise to find this genre represented in twentieth-century Indian English fiction" (p. 65). Khair (2008) cites "Satyajit Ray's stories of the supernatural in Bangla and English and Ruskin Bond's 'A Season of Ghosts'" as examples of Indian English ghost stories in the twentieth-century (p. 65). Furthermore, Khair (2008) avers that while Ray and Bond's works cannot be considered pulp fiction, both exemplify "excellent genre fiction, employing elements from the larger genre tradition in English but locating the stories in a particular Indian ethos and ambience" (p.65). Certainly, the melding of elements of the supernatural from both the Indian and British points of view may be read in Bond's texts.

The Indian view of Ghosts is hardly homogenised. There exists a plethora of Ghosts, demons, monsters, spirits, phantoms, spectres, fiends, undead and other creatures of the night in Indian folklore, catalogued in different works based on different regions of India. One of the main reasons for each of these creatures not being known throughout the Indian regions is the multilingual and multicultural nature of India, hampering their spread. Bhairav and Khanna (2020) have compiled 'Ghosts, Monsters, and Demons of India; an anthology" comprising the various ghosts, monsters, spirits and other regionally known mythical figures. In the opening note, they discuss the 'astounding diversity of mythological fiends' who are, according to them, little known outside their own cultural and regional sphere (Bhairav and Khanna 2020, p.v). The book aptly showcases the fact that the Gothic tradition from an Indian perspective is not a homogenised affair and differs greatly from region to region. They also note that many of the traditions extend beyond national boundaries. The traditions are influenced by neighbouring countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Bangladesh, Nepal, Tibet, Myanmar, and Maldives (Bhairav and Khanna 2020, p.vi). Bhairav and Khanna (2020) compilation sheds much-needed light upon the sheer diversity in the various manifestations of Ghosts and Spectres in the Indian subcontinent; therefore, it contributes to the discussion of hauntology in this article.

PAST STUDIES ON RUSKIN BOND'S WORK

Ruskin Bond is one of India's most celebrated short story authors, and therefore, there is a considerable amount of academic work done on him. However, a very slim amount of these may be considered directly relevant to our inquiry into hauntology and trauma. The environmental and ecocritical turn in Bond's fiction has been examined by Jain and Harris Satkunananthan (2021) from a pedagogical perspective, while Parashar et al. (2023) connect the ecocritical aspects of Bond's short fiction through the Sustainable Development Goals, identifying different aspects of sustainability in Bond's fictive environmentalism (p.5). Parashar et al. (2023) note that Bond's fiction "emphasises the importance of individual and collective action to achieve the SDGs and create a sustainable future" (p.4). Parashar et al.'s (2023) study highlights the importance of Bond's texts in relation to environmental activism. Bond's spatial consciousness is evident in his emotive

imagery, and this is related to his strong ties to the landscape and architecture of his childhood and adulthood. Arvindar Singh (2020) provides an extensive write-up on Bond in a review article detailing his life in India and his emotional connection to Dehradun (p. 240). Singh writes that an "instinctive love for nature, the flora and fauna of the places he describes in his writing" has become a "thread which runs continuously through his work"(p. 242). Singh avers that the fact that Bond lived "in the mountains for the major part of his life" has led to the "love for nature in his writings" (p. 242). Singh also notes the environmental activism in Bond's oeuvre.

In this article, the spatial connection exhibited by Bond and described by other academic writers is connected to a temporal and hauntological perspective. Within the context of the temporal, Debashis Bandyopadhyay (2010) examined Bond's writings as a semi-autobiographical negotiation between liminalities as an Anglo-Indian author. Bandyopadhyay (2010) writes that throughout Bond's "literary life," he has "followed a psychological course of dialogic relationship between his British and Indian inheritances" (p. 398). This creates a double-bind that results in the "metaphor of the multiple temporal positionalities of the subject taken up by virtue of his location at the crossroads" (p. 403). In an article analysing "The Woman on Platform No. 8", Nidhi Malik (2017) writes that the short story represents Bond's "unfulfilled childhood" and notes that this semi-autobiographical tale is connected to his own childhood and an act of empathy by a woman towards him (p. 466). Taking this into consideration, this article examines the encounter as relived through Bond's texts as being hauntological in nature, as additional components have been included in the retelling.

Bond is at his best when working within the short story mode. His intricately structured stories concentrate on a single event that either puts the protagonist in an enlightening situation or helps him to confront a personal issue. His sophisticated writing style inspires readers to reflect on universal truths and offers a deep exploration of the challenges that concern his characters. Jain and Harris Satkunananthan (2021) highlighted the benefits of reading Bond's ecoGothic tales from a pedagogical perspective, aiming to set them up as a starting point for a further inter-disciplinary approach towards an ecocritical conversation p. 258). As more of Bond's Gothic anthologies have been brought to light, he has started to gain traction as the proponent of the ecoGothic.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

AN OVERVIEW OF HAUNTOLOGY

Jacques Derrida's hauntology has been debated since the publication of *Specters of Marx* (Original French title: *Spectres de Marx*, published in 1993). Of the spectre, Derrida writes, is a "paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit" (p.5). Derrida avers that the spectre becomes an entity or "thing" that "remains difficult to name; neither soul nor body, and both one and the other" (p.5). Naming and assigning meaning to any given spectre in a text or in any other hauntological situation becomes imperative to understand the underlying currents of those situations and the past traumas that inform them. Sadeq Rahimi (2021) writes that hauntology "may be understood as an act of reading informed by the fact that the word is the death of the thing", as emphasised by Hegel (p.4). Rahimi's (2021) approach to hauntology is, therefore, interpretative and connected to the act of reading and the production of meaning of "the hauntogenic event" (pp. 10-11). The notion of the spectre then may be read as a hauntogenic event which enfolds both corporeal and incorporeal realms, as may be observed also in the two short stories by Bond analysed in this paper. According to Colin Davis (2005), hauntology

supersedes its ideological relative (ontology) by replacing the being and presence with the spectral figure, something which is neither here nor there, neither present nor absent, neither alive nor fully dead in that it still interacts with the living beings (p.373). Pimpawan Chaipanit (2022) observes that hauntology "can be applied as a critical lens to disengage from the present time and being and to make present the alternative future and self that are thwarted by the former" (p. 56). According to Chaipanit (2022), a hauntological reading which is aimed at unearthing "the haunting meaning and subjectivity" therefore contains a "deconstructionist agenda to uncover temporal and ontological aporias and ellipses and to question the status quo" (p. 56). Encountering these ghosts, not just meeting them through jump-scares but actually attending to them, interacting, listening, and trying to understand, becomes an ethical obligation of the living.

From a postcolonial Gothic perspective, Harris Satkunananthan (2018) proposes a postcolonial feminist slant to traditional Derridean hauntology, reading the relationship the spectator has with the spectre as also being between daughter and parent, as opposed to the logosian treatment of Father and Son found in Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*. Within the two Bond works studied in this article, however, the relationship between the spectator and the spectre is different: the spectator is always a young male, and the spectre or suggestion of one is feminine. Harris Satkunananthan (2018) constructs in that research a "postcolonial feminine treatment of Derridean hauntology against Marianne Hirsch's writings on the interlaced subjects of post-memory and transgenerational haunting" (p.186). Harris Satkunananthan (2018) writes of her construction of a postcolonial feminine hauntology that it is a hauntology in which one "grapples with loyalties and decisions whether or not to invite in the Derridean ghost" and that it is "a hauntology caught up in Spivakian struggles between the subject and the object" (p.195). This postcolonial feminine treatment is partially applicable in this article when considering the ways in which the spectre that speaks to the male protagonists in both of Bond's short stories is female. Harris Satkunananthan (2022) further explored the postcolonial female Gothic by connecting it to the postcolonial ecogothic primarily because there is "an additional layer of liminality" in relation to "fractured narratives due to fractured historicities" (p. 237). These fractured historicities, then, may be connected to the active work of revisiting carried out by the spectres in the two texts by Bond analysed in this article.

AN OVERVIEW OF TRAUMA THEORY

As one of the anchoring theorists for trauma theory, it is important to return to Caruth's elucidations on the nature and components of trauma. Caruth (1996) defines trauma as an "overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events" (p.11). Caruth continues by explaining that the inevitable response to the event "occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth, 1996, p.11). These repetitive hallucinatory images may be coded as spectres, as we have chosen to do in this article. Another important theorist whose works are directly relevant to the theoretical framework of this article is LaCapra. LaCapra (2004) links trauma to disorientation and disempowerment, asserting that "trauma may bring radical disorientation, confusion, a fixation of the past, and out-of-context experiences (such as flashbacks, startle(d) reactions, or other forms of intrusive behaviour)" (p.45). LaCapra also notes that a symptom of trauma is the "out-of-context" experience (2004, p.45), which may be linked to the hauntological and spectral component of trauma in fictive narratives. Significantly, LaCapra notes that the act of working "through trauma involves gaining critical distance on those experiences and re-contextualising them in ways that

permit a re-engagement with ongoing concerns and future possibilities" (p.45). The process of working through trauma through LaCapra's lens may be connected to the idea of revisiting and writing over trauma as espoused by Kaplan (2005), which will be explained in the next subsection. LaCapra (2004) avers that,

> So-called traumatic memory carries the experience into the present and future in that the events are compulsively relived or reexperienced as if there were no distance or difference between the past and present.
>
> (pp. 55-56)

In relation to traumatic memory, LaCapra (2004) concludes that "the past is not simply history as over and done with" (p.56). Rather, it "lives on experientially and haunts or possesses the self or the community (in the case of shared traumatic events)", and this must need to be "worked through in order for it to be remembered with some degree of conscious control and critical perspective that enables survival" (LaCapra, 2004. p. 56). It is, therefore, important to connect LaCapra's temporal reading of trauma with the spectres that inhabit both of the studied texts. According to Katie Shaw (2018), time is central to the concept of Hauntology. It points towards the legacy of the past and makes the 'absences' in the present apparent by introducing an anachronism and de-synchronisation. This creates a two-fold reality or an overlapping of reality (p.7). The temporal nature of trauma, then, speaks to the connection between the interlocutor and the spectres who approach them.

TRAUMA AND THE NOTION OF REVISITING

Kaplan's (2005) chapter titled '9/11 and the Disturbing Remains' deals with her inquiry into the process of trauma that America went through immediately after the Twin Towers attack. She recollects photographs that she took and tried to weave a narrative, juxtaposing what was happening on the streets and what was being shown in the media. In one section, she notices that the huge gap that was left where the Twin Towers previously stood, though initially reminded people of the tragic loss, gradually became the site of heroic endeavours and reconciliation. Every year since then, several people have visited the place, along with the 9/11 Memorial Museum (Kaplan, 2005, p.12). The site of loss then also became the site of reconciliation, of people coming to terms with the loss and finding solace. Kaplan's (2005) exploration of the idea of revisiting the collective trauma that occurred post-9/11 event throughout the U.S. and parts of the world bears important hallmarks of reconciliation. According to Kaplan (2005), the 'gap where the Twin Towers had stood in the weeks that followed became a space full of horror but also of heroism. Their visual absence was traumatic'(p.12). From newspaper front pages with the Twin Towers silhouette in black to shops decorating their front windows with framed images of the towers, TV Show discussions and other remembrances of the incident. Kaplan (2005) writes that this 'writing over hauntings' by the masses was a positive step towards coming to terms with what happened (p.13). In this same manner, by bringing the past to the present of narratives via spectral means, Bond allows the reader to understand fully the nature of personal traumas and injustices that afflict women characters in his vision of India.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology for this article is based on literary analysis, and deploys a blended theoretical framework. The framework consists of Derridean hauntology and the postcolonial Gothic slant of hauntology, as well as key aspects of trauma theory. The method of engagement is as follows: firstly, the texts that had manifestations of spectres that were women or girls were identified. Secondly, revisitation was identified as a connecting theme in the two selected tales. A link between hauntology and trauma became evident, and the conceptual framework marrying both trauma studies and hauntology was devised. Careful attention to the undercurrents evidenced in both trauma studies and hauntology was considered in the creation of the theoretical framework. Subsequently, the framework was applied to the analysis of both texts in order to answer the research question of how hauntology could be connected to Kaplan's notion of revisiting in this research.

DISCUSSION

LIVING SPECTRES AND TRICKSTERS

In each of the two stories, the different types of hauntology represented may be discerned. In 'Topaz', Hameeda is secretly a spirit, a ghost wandering on the plane of the living and interacts with the narrator under false pretences. Hameeda claims to be the dead girl's sister but she is, in fact, the dead girl herself. There is, therefore a trickster-like quality to the apparition who names herself "Hameeda". Hameeda was pining to be with the boy that she loved in life who belonged to a different community. Considering the time in which the story was set, the implications clearly point out that the boy is from a Hindu community. Owing to the communal strife that was rampant in those times, any matrimony between the people from these communities was simply out of the question. Hameeda bore the brunt of it when it was decided that she would marry someone else, someone from her own community. 'It's an old story, and the end is always sad, isn't it?', Hameeda says to the narrator (2001b, p. 51). After committing suicide, Hameeda's spirit roams the plane of the living, eventually appearing to the narrator. Hameeda never states her exact motives for luring the narrator into a friendship, but it is strongly suggested that all she wanted was a witness to what had occurred to her, and this was her way of rewriting the trauma experienced in her life.

Hameeda is a trickster, but only in the sense of the word that she deceived the narrator only to extract a few days of camaraderie. Hameeda even gifts the titular topaz to the narrator as a token of her affection. The topaz, then, represents this connection between the past and the present, a way in which Hameeda revisits past terrain. Hameeda worked her way into the life of the narrator through conversation and they quickly became companions. It is worth noting that Hameeda only manifested into existence when the narrator approached the place where her corpse was supposedly hung from the tree. The connection between the trickster spectre and the tree is significant as it is the site of the culmination of the trauma experienced by this trickster spectre when she was alive. Through this spectre, the knowledge of the sister was relayed to the narrator, as well as Hameeda's own character and her own history. The gap in the knowledge of the narrator was filled, though a gap not needed but very much desired by him.

When the living become haunted by spectres of the past, as seen in "The Woman on Platform No. 8," they can become spectres themselves. "The Woman on Platform No. 8" is a living spectre, a suggested ghost of her former self who navigates a train station as though haunted by

the memory and the trauma of a lost child. Her very form is defined by the confines of the train station where the protagonist, Arun, encounters her as a child. There is a kind of manifold spectrality within "The Woman on Platform No.8"; the woman is implied to be haunted by the ghost of a lost child, and she, in turn, haunts the living. She is someone who is living on the fringes and carries within herself a deep traumatic secret that is not divulged but merely hinted subtly. The Derridean spectre is 'a deconstructive figure hovering between life and death, presence and absence, and making established certainties vacillate'(Davis, 2005, p.376). In other words, the spectre lives on the periphery of being and non-being, its presence hardly noticed unless paid special attention to, and when this attention is paid, the spectre destabilises the current sphere of knowledge. At the beginning of the story, the narrator is waiting on a rather crowded platform, with a plethora of people exiting and entering with each train's arrival and departure. It may very well have been the case that the woman in question was among the crowd, and the narrator simply failed to notice her, as can be interpreted from the line 'I have been watching you for some time' uttered by the woman approaching the narrator named Arun. The woman was on the platform for quite some time, but her unadorned appearance, a plain white saree, lent to her anonymity. It is significant that in the Hindu religion, white sarees are generally worn by widows or women in mourning. The link with mourning thence established, the narration pinpoints the connection between the woman's enigmatic actions and the spectre of past trauma.

The spectre is a figure of anonymity until it is noticed, encountered, and engaged with. According to Davis (2005), Derrida appeals to the readers to the endeavour to 'speak and listen to the spectre'(p.376); even if such an act goes against the basic and intellectual instincts of the listener, the traditions they have acquired and the challenges they think it might pose to them. In this regard, the narrator, being a young boy of about twelve years of age, is perhaps the perfect interlocutor, as they have less of the apprehensions and cautions of an adult to converse with a total stranger while being alone on a platform.

This caution is later reinforced by the mother of the friend of Arun, whom he runs into later in the story named Satish. Satish's mother, a woman of wealthy disposition, cautions Arun to be wary of strangers in a rather very patronising tone, casting a belittling eye on the woman in white whom she thinks is Arun's mother. But Arun, in a flippant tone, dismisses Satish's mother's cautionary advice. The clash of traditional knowledge and the Derridean interlocutor of the spectre is one of the key points of the text. Satish's mother is taken aback by Arun's remark and tries to reassert her position rather unsuccessfully. Arun's willingness to open up to complete strangers is essential in the process of understanding past events, according to Derrida (p.377), who espouses hospitality towards spectres in order to understand what it is they are trying to tell the interlocutor.

'*IT ISN'T TIME THAT'S PASSING BY, MY FRIEND. IT IS YOU AND I...*': THE LINEARITY OF TIME AND ABILITY TO REVISIT BY SPECTRES

Bond uses the phrase 'dark sweet song' to describe his poem, which is referred to in "Topaz" (p.53). The phrase is a synecdoche of the entire story. The story is both dark and sweet in nature at the same time. The poem's lyrics are contained in "Topaz" as an echo to emphasise the supernatural nature of the bond between the narrator and the spectre. Bond comments on the eternal nature of time and the temporary nature of both human life and its experience. Time is fixed, according to the narrator, initially, and it is the humans that pass by on the temporal plane, a notion that is challenged by the theory of hauntology. Derrida spends much time in his *Spectres of Marx* contemplating on the phrase and its multiple meanings and inferences, all of which generally point towards that 'something in the present is not going well, it is not going as it ought to go', referring

to the Shakespearean quote, the "time is out of joint" (Derrida et al., 2006, p.27). Bond's narrator, from the very first paragraph, was contemplating upon the harmony of things that exists at two distant points of the temporal plane of existence. He is listening to old records, to the strains of Blue Danube on a new record player. The old records relayed the coded data they held inside them to a new device that took it and decoded it. This act foreshadows what happens later in the story. Hameeda's ghost may be coded as an old record, and the author, as the narrator of events, becomes a record player who took in what Hameeda conversed with him and now holds all that happened inside his memories. After the initial introduction, both the narrator and Hameeda move away from the site of trauma -- the tree from which the spectre committed suicide. They move to a disused tennis court built during colonial times, which had become a relic of the past. The stone bench on which they both sat down inside the tennis court and the court as a whole acts as a liminal space in the story. According to Bhabha, these interstitial spaces are a ''…passage [liminality] between fixed identifications [that] opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy'(Bhabha, 1994, p. 4). It is here that the narrator and Hameeda introduce themselves to each other and recount their lives. It is within this space that they both start opening up to each other. It was a space that was unaffected by the flow of time, existing outside of it and became a symbol of the past.

After a few more encounters and the subsequent love scene, the narrator comes to realise that Hameeda is actually a ghost. The narrative ends with the same words from the song that were repeated during the sensual scene, now with an eerie connotation. It is then that the reader is presented with the dual meaning of the words. The words 'passing by' were generally understood to be unidirectional in nature, that people pass by on the spatiotemporal plane from past to present. But the story subverts this common understanding and instead forces the reader to look at the other meaning of the words. The people, consisting of both living and dead, can pass by in either direction. The ghost of Hameeda came from the past to the present to meet the narrator, and the narrator moved from the present to experience the past when Hameeda was still alive. This notion is in line with the precepts of hauntology wherein time is disjointed, allowing subjects to move freely from the present to the past and vice versa, and experiencing things of a time bygone and listening to the voices of the dead. In the story, Hameeda's reality overlaps with the narrator's reality through the means of de-synchronisation and past (re)visiting the present. Hameeda presents a distorted past to the narrator, misinforming him that it was her (non-existent) sister who had committed suicide and now haunts the site. 'She spoke matter-of-factly; whatever had happened seemed very remote to her' (Bond, 2001b, p. 50). Hameeda's misinformation leads to further deceit in the story.

In the second story, there is a similar absence of information, which creates a false relationship between the narrator and the woman in the white saree in the eyes of the friend's mother. In 'The Woman on Platform No. 8', Arun is waiting on the platform for the train, where the story takes place. The railway platform is another great example of Bhabha's liminal spaces, as it acts as a junction, not only in the physical sense but also in the metaphorical sense. It is on the platform that Arun meets the woman, and they share a peculiar companionship. Railways and platforms have been heavily featured in many of Bond's stories because of the historical fact that the Anglo-Indian community has been a major stakeholder in the Indian Railways, holding major positions of office. It is in this transitional sphere that the past of the woman meets the present. The woman, who is a spectral figure, informs the other lady that she is the mother of the narrator, lest she judge her as a stranger and raises alarms. 'I looked quickly up at the woman, but she did not appear to be at all embarrassed, and was smiling at Satish's mother'(Bond, 2016, p. 27). The

effect of deceit is similar, although the intentions might be different in both stories. Nevertheless, both deceptions operated to create a false reality in the narrative and proved to be central to the plot of both stories.

Shaw (2018) reflects that the study of hauntology focuses more on the 'Haunted Subject' rather than the Spectre. Shaw (2018) avers that according to the Derridean perspective we should learn to live with ghosts, and that it is the obligation of the living to accommodate and understand the dead (p. 9). In that sense, the haunted subject is responsible for greeting and communicating with the spectre. As it is evident in both stories where the haunted subject is the narrator, they are tasked with the responsibility of understanding the spectres, unearthing their secrets throughout the narrative and accommodating them accordingly. 'He was all right,' I said, feeling that it was she who needed reassurance' (Bond, 2016, p. 27). The narrator extending reassurance to a distressed woman marks a Derridean haunted subject who is ready to communicate with the spectre. Such subjects, who are Bond's narrators, then aid the spectres in facing their trauma by revisiting it with them, offering them an avenue where the spectres can reconcile with their traumatic past.

REVISITING SITES OF TRAUMA: A HAUNTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

In the short stories examined, different dimensions of reconciliation are present. As a more personal account of trauma, the narrator in "Topaz" meets the ghost of a girl named 'Hameeda' under the same tree she committed suicide, though the reconciliation is not quite as complete as it could be. But in "The Woman on Platform No. 8", the traumatised character of the woman in a white sari is well on her way to reconciliation by watching out for others. This aspect of trauma is part and parcel of Kaplan's notion of revisiting the traumatic sites and filling the vacant gaps with positive healing. Seen in one way, Bond's female spectres rewrite the ground of their past traumas, creating a new dialogue between themselves and their subjects in order to revisit the past. They are voiced through their spectral manifestations, and they have been given agency by the author even though their experience of them is filtered through a masculine lens.

It is in the first story that the narrator encounters Hameeda's ghost, who suffered trauma after her family's decision prevented her from marrying the boy she loved, who was from another community. This shock led Hameeda to take her own life by hanging from a tree. However, her ghost now seeks companionship to reconcile and keeps being tethered to the mortal plane. By encountering the narrator and interacting with him, Hameeda's ghost attempted to bond over with the narrator concerning the same trauma from which it wanted to escape. As Kaplan (2005, p.12) posited concerning the fact that trauma has a high affinity to be visual in nature, Hameeda first presented the image of a girl hanging from the tree to the narrator; in turn, the narrator approached the tree where he encountered Hameeda.

Similarly, in the second story, when the narrator and the woman were returning from the dining room, they saw a startling visual. A boy had leapt across the train tracks to take a shortcut to the next platform. This was an everyday scene around the railway platform, but for the woman, this scene was very traumatic, as evident by her reaction to it:

> "…but as he leapt across the rails, the woman clutched my arm. Her fingers dug into my flesh, and I winced with pain. I caught her fingers and looked up at her, and I saw a spasm of pain and fear and sadness pass across her face".
>
> (Bond, 2016, pp.26–27)

Although neither character commented on this any further, it can be extrapolated from the clues that the woman had seen a similar visual in the past, one where someone was hurt by the train tracks in some sort of accident (Bond, 2016, p. 27); her response is indicative of some past trauma. According to Shaw, the spectre, through the mode of a haunting return, demands justice from the haunted subject, or at the very least, a justified response by acknowledging the past, and in this way, the possibility of amending the future (Shaw, 2018, p. 107). Where the second story provides a satisfactory closure to both the narrator and the woman in a white saree by elevating their relationship from strangers to acquaintances to pretend family, such was not attained in the first story. According to Kaplan, Ulrich Baer, an anthologist, argues that the literature has an inherent tendency to resist the call for any kind of closure to the trauma, whether personal or public (Kaplan, 2005, p. 137). Baer and Kaplan agree that the literature revisits the site of trauma and interrogates the vacant gap again and again since no single attempt is capable of dealing with the trauma in itself. And with each revisitation, a new facet of trauma is uncovered (Kaplan, 2005, p. 137). Thus, these revisitations are crucial if any acceptable resolution of the trauma might be achieved.

The first story contains multiple illustrations of revisitation. In the opening paragraph, the weather is pleasant, with the breeze and clear skies, but the ending brings with it tumultuous thunderstorms and strong winds, causing the windows to bang. When the narrator sees the corpse from the tree at first, he is unaware and curious, and the corpse seems to dance with the music of the waltz. But in the end, the narrator now knew everything, and the corpse was shaking violently, with the head of the corpse hung low, as if saddened by the revelation. When Hameeda first presented the topaz ring to the narrator, it was glinting brightly, flickering just like Hameeda herself. But in the end, it was glowing softly, having lost all its lustre. The song itself, when uttered during the lovemaking scene, was sensual; at the story's end, the song was hummed, whispered from the forest in an ominous tone. In a sense, the repetition of the song is emblematic of the revisitation happening in the narrative.

These revisitations and contrasts lend the story an entirely different tone from start to finish, displaying the many facets of trauma. The narrative starts and ends with the same physical positions, with the narrator looking out from the window, watching the corpse hanging from the tree and listening to a song, but every other detail is now vastly altered. The fact that even though the suicide happened years ago and that the brother was still overwhelmed with the emotions indicates that there are underlying trauma-related issues which have not been addressed properly (2001b, p.54). Bond's narrative feat is thus accomplished by employing this strategy, which works to leave the readers in awe, sympathising with both the haunting and the haunted subject equally and understanding the underlying trauma of all characters, including the brother.

"The Woman on Platform No. 8" starts and ends with the narrator watching the crowd on the platform. Although at the beginning of the story, the narrator is lonely, now in the end, he finds comradery, even if fleeting and temporary, but a bond nonetheless. This satisfying ending for both the characters and a possible resolution for the trauma of the woman is in direct contrast with the first story, but it is effective in the resolution of a narrative of trauma. The woman in the white saree was definitely carrying some trauma within herself, but instead of dwelling on it, she chose to take positive steps by watching over other unaccompanied minors on the platform, the very site of the trauma. Although the readers were hardly given any details about the woman, she nonetheless was the central character of the narrative and a brilliant example of how to reconcile with one's trauma.

CONCLUSION

Bond narrates the tale dealing with the trauma of the characters and their journey towards reconciliation. Bond achieves this impact by deploying hauntological effects through the narrative act of visiting the spectres of the past, thereby allowing readers a glimpse into the human psyche and how it is important for the living to accommodate the dead and for the present to accommodate the past. Bond argues that by actively listening to those who have suffered, by creating a possible mode of communication and developing possibly a new language, we can not only try to learn the buried secrets of the past but, in doing so, make amends so we can protect the present and the future. Bond's characters, both the haunting and the haunted subject, work towards exploring the trauma, knowingly or unknowingly and provide a possible pathway for reconciliation. However, this pathway is not straightforward and thus requires frequent visitations. In so doing, one may learn new ways to deal with the trauma with each attempt. Both short stories emphasise the importance of revisiting the sites of trauma in a powerful manner while at the same time exploring the nature of secrets of the past buried within the spectres. This article also examined the ways in which Bond made use of this haunted subject as his ideal, albeit semi-autobiographical, narrator. With reconciliation as his ultimate aim, Bond's stories work to provide readers with a pathway of positive steps towards the resolution of one's own trauma, validating the merit of the study in question and encouraging future studies.

REFERENCES

Abraham, N. (1994). Notes on the phantom. In Abraham & Torok (Eds.), *The shell and the kernel:renewals of psychoanalysis* (pp. 171–176). University of Chicago Press.

Awasthi, A. (2011). Railways and cultural history: a study of poetic representations. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, *72*(1), 955-967.

Baid, M. (2016). *Matrix of ecology myths and mystery in the works of Ruskin Bond*. Devi Ahilya Vishwavidyalaya.

Bandyopadhyay, D. (2010). Ruskin Bond's "Whispering in the Dark": a fantastic quest for identity. *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, *21*(3), 394 - 412.

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. London: Routledge.

Bhairav, J. F., & Khanna, R. (2020). *Ghosts, monsters and demons of India*. Chennai: Blaft Publications Private Limited.

Bond, R. (2001a). Introduction. In R. Bond (Ed.), *When darkness falls and other stories* (pp. vii–xi). Penguin Books India.

Bond, R. (2001b). Topaz. In R. Bond (Ed.), *When darkness falls and other stories* (pp. 49–55). Penguin Books India.

Bond, R. (2016). The woman on platform no. 8. In R. Bond (Ed.), *Collected short stories* (pp. 25–29). New Delhi: Penguin Random House India.

Bond, R. (2018). *Death under the deodars*. Penguin Random House India Private Limited.

Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed experience: trauma, narrative, and history*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Chaipanit, P. (2022). Haunting memories and haunted landscapes: reading the EcoGothic in Apichatpong's *Cemetery of Splendour* and Pitchaya's *Bangkok Wakes to Rain*. *SARE: Southeast Asian Review of English 59*(1), 51-69.

Chatterjee, A. K. (2021). Ruskin Bond's haunted architecture: Anglo-Saxon archetypes of the Doon Valley. *Anglo Saxonica*, *19*(1), 1–13.

Davis, C. (2005). Hauntology, spectres and phantoms. *French Studies*, *59*(3), 373–379.

Derrida, J., Kamuf, P., Magnus, B., & Cullenberg, S. (2006). *Specters of Marx: the state of the debt, the work of mourning and the new international*. New York and London: Routledge Classics.

Harris Satkunananthan, A. (2018). Haunts and specters in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Biafran (re)visitations. *3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature*, *24*(4), 185-198.

Harris Satkunananthan, A. (2020). Transnational hauntings, hungry ghosts: Malaysian Chinese domestic gothic fiction. *SARE: Southeast Asian Review of English*, *51*(1), 37-54.

Harris Satkunananthan, A. (2022). Plantationocene systems and communal disruptions in N.K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth*

trilogy: an EcoGothic perspective. *3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature*, *28*(3), 232-244.

Jain, P., & Harris Satkunananthan, A. (2021). Pedagogical aspects of EcoGothic elements in Ruskin Bond's novellas. *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, *21*(4), 258–270.

Kaplan, E. A. (2005). *Trauma culture: the politics of terror and loss in media and literature*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Khair, T. (2008). Indian pulp fiction in English: a preliminary overview from Dutt to Dé. *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, *43*(3), 59-74.

LaCapra, D. (2004). *History in transit: experience, identity, critical theory*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Malik, Nidhi. (2017). Motherhood as reflected in Ruskin Bond's Story: The Woman on Platform 8. *International Journal of Academic Research and Development*, 2*(*6), 466-468.

Parashar, A., Baid, M., & Chavda, M. (2023). Creating awareness for sustainable goals: reading Ruskin Bond's short stories through bioregionalism lenses. *IIM Kozhikode Society and Management Review*, 1-12.

Rahimi, S. (2021). *The hauntology of everyday life*. Cham: Springer.

Shaw, K. (2018). *Hauntology: the presence of the past in twenty-first century English literature*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Singh, A. (2020). The name is Bond...Ruskin Bond. *India International Centre Quarterly*, *47*(1), 239-249.