

## Postcolonial Gothic and *The God of Small Things*: The Haunting of India's Past

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*The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy is an intricate postcolonial novel that utilizes Gothic conventions to create a compelling sense of angst and disorder. Roy employs the Gothic conventions of dark imagery, the supernatural, the haunted house, the ancestral curse, a threatening atmosphere, doubling, and incest to personalize larger cultural horrors of India as experienced by one family in Kerala. The small things—a special child-sized coffin, a cold moth with dense tufts, a buried toy wristwatch, a disappearing footprint—pervade the novel to show the ghosts of oppression, colonial devastation, political uprisings, and historical tragedies of India. The Gothic elements and ghosts that haunt the narrative, however, are portrayed by Roy in a fascinatingly distinct form. This paper interprets *The God of Small Things* as a postcolonial Gothic hybrid, asserting that Roy both adopts and challenges Western Gothic conventions to illustrate the haunting of India's colonial past upon its present as the country struggles with its modern-day identity.

Scholars agree that the literature of the postcolonial and the Gothic share similar foundations. William Hughes and Andrew Smith contend, "The Gothic is, and always has been, postcolonial" (1). Gena Wisker declares, "Postcolonial spaces...are inevitably Gothic, since they, like the geographies of place and of history, are haunted by the ghosts of those who were hidden and silenced in the colonial and imperial past" (402). Wisker further notes that the postcolonial and the Gothic are similar because "each defamiliarizes, destabilizes, and to some extent otherizes the strange, finding this other both attractive, fascinating, and also dangerous, repulsive, abject" (423). Gothic scholar David Punter describes postcolonial literature as "the uncanny, the haunted and haunting...which conjures phantoms, which banishes phantoms, and which always leaves us uncertain whether or not we are alone" (*Postcolonial* 5-6). Given the inherent similarities between postcolonial and Gothic literature—challenges to boundaries of power and ownership, haunting of a repressed past, and embodiment of the frightening—writers from colonized countries are increasingly finding the Gothic a fitting literary form to challenge dominant historical narratives and illustrate the anxieties of a country struggling for a postcolonial identity. Philip Holden contends that in the postcolonial Gothic, the Gothic elements are "seen as directly

addressing and calling into question colonialism, imperialism, humanism, and legacies of the Enlightenment” (354). Roy skillfully employs the Gothic in *The God of Small Things* to challenge historical narratives of India and convey the anxieties of India’s struggle with its colonial past and modern postcolonial identities.

With its haunting elements, the novel underscores the larger issues of nationalism and modernity in India. In the global debate on nationalism, Partha Chatterjee calls attention to the many paradoxes inherent in attempting to define the history of nationalism and the modern identity of postcolonial nations. Chatterjee’s viewpoint rings particularly true with regard to India, as it is indeed a nation of paradox. India is a democratic country rooted in caste structure, patriarchal family hierarchies, class divisions, and diverse religions. It is a country, as Chatterjee notes, with a modern culture based on native tradition that has been influenced by its colonial period. This modern culture contains conflicts and contradictions that create an unsettling ambiguity in India’s national identity—a theme Roy effectively conveys through her use of the Gothic in *The God of Small Things*.

In India, according to Chatterjee, “politics has drifted from one contentious principle to another (bourgeois equality, caste-class correlation, discriminatory privileges for low castes through state intervention, etc.) without finding adequate ground on which it can be superseded by a new universal form of community” (198-199). In *The God of Small Things*, Roy portrays the private (small) struggles of the Ipe family as a mirror of the public (large) identity struggles of the nation. The characters of the twins, Rahel and Estha, portray Chatterjee’s contention as they drift through life failing to find adequate ground, much like the nation of India. The twins are caught in the internal struggle of the nation as caste, discrimination, and politics converge on one night during their childhood and forever change their lives. Anuradha Dingwaney Needham argues that the novel illustrates history as “a dominating, oppressive force that saturates virtually all social and cultural space, including familial, intimate, and affective relationships” (372). Needham further observes:

In as much as *Small Things* mobilizes ‘History’ explicitly as the trope through which the existing repressive social and political arrangements are figured forth, re-envisioning and re-writing history is part and parcel of transforming these repressive conditions, and is, arguably, what the novel’s retrieval of ‘small things’ enacts. (382)

The small things are personal to the Ipe family, but remain symbolic of the larger historic struggles of the people of Kerala and in some cases, the entire nation of India.

The novel tells the story of the Ipe family, an upper caste, Syrian Christian family in the Ayemenem village of Kerala. Kerala also serves as a representation of culture and history in a larger international context. Janet Thormann observes how international culture and Kerala’s local environment converge in Roy’s narrative:

The novel dramatizes the unequal effects of the laws of international culture, imposed in a master discourse entering the local environment through the entertainment industry, consumerism, and international migration and travel; the laws of caste that traditionally govern social relations in India in complicity with class inequality in the global economy; and the regulation of women that founds patriarchal power. (300)

In the novel, Thormann argues, the oppressive forces of both national and international culture filter into Kerala's society. The national influences—caste division, religious diversity, class, and patriarchal family hierarchy—and the international influences—colonialism, communism, global travel, and commerce—all reveal themselves in the cultural objects, traditions, beliefs, and the actions of the characters in the novel. Roy intensifies these forces by utilizing Gothic tropes.

While it may appear paradoxical for Roy and other writers of colonized countries to utilize a Western narrative form to explore postcolonial issues, this paper will argue that it functions as a form of empowerment. Wisker contends that the Gothic provides these writers with the opportunity to give a voice to the marginalized through a reinvention of the genre. She states that postcolonial Gothic “reinhabits and reconfigures, it reinstates and newly imagines ways of being, seeing, and expressing from the points of view of and using some of the forms of people whose experiences and expressions have...largely been unheard of and even discredited” (401-402). Indeed, Roy brings a voice to the marginalized people of India as she illustrates the haunting effects of the nation's struggles through a sympathetic point of view of the oppressed.

A Western narrative form also enables the colonized to engage in a dialogue with their colonizers. Many Caribbean writers, according to Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, look for British models of the Gothic to engage in “an ideological/textual dialogue” (248). She notes that the Gothic in Caribbean literature provides a “continuing dialogue through which Caribbean writers seek to reformulate their connections to and severance from European language and tradition” (248). Dean Rader refers to this method as “engaged resistance” in his discussion of contemporary American Indian writers and their use of English and the lyric poem (149). According to Rader, these writers “resist the imperial colonizing thrust of contemporary culture through their participation in it” (149). For Roy, the unique way that the Western Gothic trope and the English language are applied in *The God of Small Things* provides a way to create a dialogue with the West even as she questions the consequences of colonization in India. Paravisini-Gebert points out that traditional English Gothic introduces the colonized as the disturbing agent, or Other, while the Caribbean challenges this Western convention by portraying the colonizer, or England, as the Other (249). In *The God of Small Things*, Roy employs a similar practice by reversing the identity of the Other. She depicts the postcolonial Other in newer forms of cultural, patriarchal, and political oppression that result from colonization.

The reversal of the Other is one way in which the postcolonial Gothic presents itself as a hybrid. Wisker observes hybridity in works where the

protagonist struggles to achieve her own version of being British, Asian, or Caribbean (413). Viewed in a broader context, this hybridity often expands to the entire text in postcolonial Gothic fiction. The writer, in applying a Western narrative form, creates a Gothic hybrid in which the East and West combine, paralleling the struggle of a national identity. It is this form of Gothic hybrid, in which the East and West combine, that emerges in *The God of Small Things*. Roy utilizes many traditional Western Gothic conventions in her novel, yet she also challenges and inverts these conventions, creating a Gothic hybrid. In doing so, she creates a postcolonial Gothic text that is uniquely her own and uniquely Indian. Her creation of a hybrid Gothic form resonates with Wisker's contention of Gothic reinvention. Wisker argues that the postcolonial Gothic "doubly destabilizes" in that, "unlike the conventional Gothic, which disturbs but frequently restores order, the postcolonial Gothic shifts what could be seen as order" (411). Roy's use of the Gothic doubly destabilizes the world of her narrative and the novel ends not in a restoration of order, but in a state of shifted order. Roy does, as Wisker contends, reinvent the Gothic through a postcolonial trope. For Roy, this reinvention is a form of empowerment. Through her Gothic reinvention, Roy recreates a Western narrative trope on her own terms and gives a voice to the marginalized people of India by illustrating their experiences and sufferings in a format that the West can understand. As Paravisini-Gebert contends, Roy establishes a continuing dialogue with the West and reformulates India's connections to and severance from the West (248).

Told mainly from the point of view of Rahel Kochamma, the story takes place during thirteen days in December 1969 and one day in June 1992. Rahel and Estha are forever haunted by a tragedy resulting from their mother's affair with a lower caste man. Rahel relives the history of the Night of Terror—a night depicting the severe consequences that result when cultural laws are broken. In the ghosts of a family and a nation, Roy creates her Gothic world. It is a world where the screams of children die in shattered kneecaps (Roy 292). A world where blood spills from an innocent man's skull like a secret (8); where the ghost of a moth torments a man and his children and his children's children (48); where a young girl shreds satin with her teeth inside a coffin (9); where "Anything can happen to Anyone" (186); where the word "yes" brings not death but the end of living (303-304). It too is a world of haunted history. When Chacko, Ammu's brother, instructs the twins about history, he tells them they are a family of Anglophiles: "Pointed in the wrong direction, trapped outside their own history and unable to retrace their steps because their footprints had been swept away" (51). He compares history to an old house at night: "With all the lamps lit. And ancestors whispering inside. 'To understand history,' Chacko said, 'we have to go inside and listen to what they're saying. And look at the books and the pictures on the wall. And smell the smells'" (51). It is in the disappearing footprints, the haunted houses, the whispers, the smells, and the shadows where the Gothic materializes to reveal the haunting of a family and a nation's past.

Now, let us examine how Roy utilizes specific Gothic elements to create a compelling Gothic hybrid.

### Dark Imagery

Dark imagery, a staple characteristic of the Gothic, emerges immediately at the start of the novel and pervades it until the end, establishing an unrelenting sense of anxiety and dread. The dark tone of the novel underscores the torment of the Ipe family, and also mirrors the torment of the nation of India. Hints of the supernatural appear almost immediately with the description of Sophie Mol in her coffin: “Only Rahel noticed Sophie Mol’s secret cartwheel in her coffin...Rahel knew she still wasn’t dead...Inside the earth Sophie Mol screamed, and shredded satin with her teeth” (8-9). The supernatural effect intensifies the sense of uncertainty within the narrative and the frightening Gothic image foreshadows the horror and violence to come. As Fred Botting contends, imagery of darkness and ghosts emerge in the Gothic “to evoke intense feelings” (35). Roy achieves this effect as her dark imagery evokes strong emotion throughout the novel.

Gothic imagery also conveys dramatic impulses. Elizabeth MacAndrew asserts that the imagery of Gothic fiction is a “symbolism of spiritual states, in which the highest spiritual aspirations bring with them the greatest evils. It shows within the outwardly everyday figures of ordinary people, strange, frightening, half-understood, but dramatically-sensed impulses” (45). Roy displays the haunting evil of impulses in everyday figures of the ordinary and often combines good with evil, the beautiful with the terrifying. Combining such opposites deepens the sense of uncertainty: as MacAndrew observes, “When good and evil are intermingled they have a slippery tendency to change places and this undermines moral values and makes life seem uncertain and directionless” (157). Roy presents the opposites of good and evil in her imagery to underscore the ambivalence of the narrative as a larger reflection of India. She utilizes dark imagery in the vein of traditional Western Gothic, yet she also reinvents it with a unique lyrical quality in specific portrayals of Indian life and turmoil.

Roy skillfully combines the good with evil and the innocent with terror in her dark imagery to illustrate the horror of oppression in India’s culture. The innocent and pleasant name of the Orangedrink Lemondrink man takes on haunting qualities when the man abuses young Estha and threatens to come after him again (Roy 98-99, 104). Rahel’s toy watch is lost during Velutha’s beating and is buried with the terror in the ground (295). Elaborate wedding ceremonies possess ghoulish qualities (43). Brass flower vases symbolize a lifetime of domestic abuse (47). The monstrous wink of a glass eye signifies a father willing to kill his own son when the son breaks the caste laws (241). The child’s word of “LayTer” hints of the terror to come (139). The Gothic imagery, with its combination of innocent and evil, serves to underscore the narrative’s dark

emotional tone, display evil impulses, and incite intense feelings—all signaling the undercurrent of horrific oppression.

Gothic imagery also emerges in nature to reflect the emotion of the characters. When the adult Rahel returns to the river, it greets her with a “ghastly skull’s smile” (118). The river remains a ghastly reminder of Sophie Mol’s death, a tragedy that forever haunts Rahel. When Ammu dreams of Velutha, she awakens and comprehends the consequences that will come of her affair. Ammu realizes “That the air, the sky, the trees, the sun, the rain, the light and darkness were all slowly turning to sand. That sand would...pull her down” (212). Ammu knows she is spiraling, giving in to her desire to love a lower caste man, but she is powerless to stop herself. The Gothic imagery in nature also illustrates the history and emotion of the nation. A sparrow lays dead on the backseat of the old Plymouth: “She had found her way in through a hole in the windscreen...She never found her way out” (280). Like the sparrow, Rahel, Estha, Ammu, and the nation of India remain imprisoned, unable to find a way out, trapped by history. The dark imagery intensifies the horror of a repressed past as it haunts the present through the characters, culture, and nature. The Gothic images—skillfully crafted in lyrical brilliance and specific to India—insulate the narrative with an uncanny sense of dread and anxiety.

### Ghosts and the Supernatural

The element of the supernatural intensifies the effect of the Gothic imagery throughout the novel, particularly in the image of Pappachi’s moth. Punter contends the supernatural becomes “a symbol of our past rising against us, whether it be the psychological past—the realm of those primitive desires repressed by the demands of closely organized society—or the historical past, the realm of a social order characterized by absolute power and servitude” (*Literature* 53). MacAndrew notes that in the Gothic “when figures of the grotesque appear as non-human, supernatural beings, they still make the sense of human evil darker and less optimistic” (166). She states that such dark imagery also draws the reader into “sympathetic understanding” (156). Pappachi’s moth haunts the child Rahel, evoking sympathy as it surfaces when the reader is made aware of her misplaced guilt. The moth symbolizes the haunting effect of a culture and history one does not fully understand and the subsequent guilt that can result.

It is noteworthy that the moth is not simply a moth, but Pappachi’s moth. Botting notes that a common theme of the Gothic is that sins of the father are visited on the offspring (129). Pappachi, the patriarch of the Ipe family and classic Gothic villain, represents the oppressive patriarchal figure. He beats Mammachi for years, and when he is finally stopped by his son, he never again speaks to his wife (Roy 47). Pappachi sits on the verandah and sews buttons onto his shirt to make it appear that Mammachi neglects him, succeeding in “further corroding Ayemenem’s view of working wives” (47). He does not allow anyone in the family to sit in his

Plymouth: “The Plymouth was Pappachi’s revenge” (47). Pappachi’s torment stems from his greatest setback in life: “not having had the moth that *he* had discovered named after him” (48). The moth embodies the family curse and haunts its offspring. As the narrator notes, “Pappachi’s Moth was held responsible for his black moods and sudden bouts of temper. Its pernicious ghost—gray, furry and with unusual dense dorsal tufts—haunted every house that he ever lived in. It tormented him and his children and his children’s children” (48).

The ghost of the moth repeatedly haunts Rahel as a child. At the Abhilash Talkies Movie Theatre, when Ammu compliments the Orangedrink Lemondrink man, Rahel snaps, “So why don’t you marry him then?” (106). Ammu tells Rahel, “When you hurt people, they begin to love you less” (107). It is then that a “cold moth with unusually dense dorsal tufts” lands on Rahel’s heart (107). Pappachi’s moth torments Rahel. The guilt of one generation carries on to the next. As Rahel’s guilt over hurting her mother grows, the moth on her heart “spread its silver wings, and the chill crept into her bones” (108). The moth gnaws on Rahel’s heart, as the guilt gnaws on her soul. The moth appears again on the Night of Terror. When the children are on the boat, it collides with a log and tips over. Rahel calls out to Sophie Mol and when Sophie does not respond, “On Rahel’s heart Pappachi’s moth snapped open its somber wings” (277). The guilt resurfaces because Rahel knows she has done wrong by disobeying Ammu. When Sophie Mol does not respond to Rahel’s calls, Rahel feels the haunting fear of what is to come.

The moth emerges again at the police station when Baby Kochamma frightens Rahel and Estha into betraying Velutha in order to save their mother. The narrator states: “Inside the Inspector’s room, Pappachi’s Moth was on the move” (300). The children know they are about to do something wrong, yet they do not fully understand it. Roy effectively portrays the moth as Gothic-like with its supernatural qualities to signify the family curse and guilt and their effects upon a small child. Punter places images of the Gothic in broader cultural terms: “Gothic fiction becomes a process of cultural self-analysis, and the images which it throws up become the dream-figures of a troubled social group” (*Literature* 425). The Ipe family is troubled, just as India is troubled. The guilt of a violent and oppressive past, like Pappachi’s moth, haunts future generations.

### Haunted Houses

The Gothic convention of the haunted house surfaces in the Ayemenem House. The old house or castle, according to MacAndrew, is one of the most stable characteristics of the Gothic (48). Anne Williams contends the haunted house is “marked, haunted by ‘history’—the events of its own development” (45). Williams explains, “The ghosts—whether real or imaginary—derive from the past passions, past deeds, past crimes of the family identified with this structure” (45). The Ayemenem House

represents the Ipe family. Its ghosts arise from the Ipe family's past passions and crimes—Ammu's passion and crime in breaking the Love Laws and the family's involvement in Velutha's death. The family's crimes mirror the Indian nation and the ghosts of its oppressive past. Botting connects threats to domestic structures with political metaphors: "In Gothic images of violence and excessive passion, in villainous threats to proper domestic structures, there is a significant overlap in literary and political metaphors of fear and anxiety: metaphors that imply how much a culture, like the heroine and the family, sensed itself to be under attack" (63). The Ipe family, like the Ayemenem House, is full of fear and anxiety, and in a sense, under attack. Botting notes that as the Gothic setting transforms from foreign settings to the domestic and the home, the family home becomes a "place rendered threatening and uncanny by the haunting return of past transgressions and attendant guilt on an everyday world shrouded in strangeness" (11). When Rahel returns home, twenty three years after the tragedy of Sophie Mol's death, she finds the present day house strange—it is filled with ghosts, secrets, and death.

The loss of Sophie Mol steps "softly around the Ayemenem House like a quiet thing in socks. It hid in books and food. In Mammachi's violin case" (Roy 17). In Ammu's room, "The terrible ghosts of impossible-to-forget toys clustered on the blades of the ceiling fan" (87). The family ghosts live within the walls of the Ayemenem House as haunting reminders of the Night of Terror. Through the ghosts, the uncanny returns to the Ayemenem House. As Freud states, "the uncanny ['the unhomely'] is something familiar ['homely,' 'homey'] that has been repressed and then reappears, and that everything uncanny satisfies this condition" (152). The ghosts will not let Rahel or Estha forget Sophie Mol's death or their involvement in Velutha's death. When Rahel returns, the house is full of death and decay. As Rahel notes, strange insects burn themselves on forty-watt bulbs and their corpses litter the floor and window sills (Roy 11). The abandoned garden is overgrown with weeds and only the vines keep growing "like toe-nails on a corpse" (27). Filth clots "every crevice and clung to the windowpanes" (84). The family, like the house, has decomposed.

Botting suggests that the decaying family house utilizes Gothic elements that "signify darker forces of individual passion, natural energy and social restriction" (129). In the novel, the dark forces of the past haunt every room. In Pappachi's study, "rank with fungus and disuse," Rahel finds hidden things—an orange pipette, Baby Kochamma's rosary, tattered notebooks—the dark ghosts of individual memories (Roy 148-149). The ghosts lead Rahel to the memory of the last time she saw Ammu. Rahel did not say good-bye: "She hated her mother then. *Hated* her" (153). Ammu died alone. The Ayemenem House is haunted by death, grief, and guilt. The family has kept its secrets and like Ammu's room, "It gave nothing away... Silence hung in the air like secret loss" (87). The family home has become uncanny, as Botting notes, by the haunting of past transgressions and guilt.

The Ayemenem House of 1969 is haunted by the cruelty and abuse of Pappachi, symbolizing the oppressiveness of a patriarchal society. Pappachi haunts the Ayemenem House with his presence. A photograph of Pappachi in Vienna hangs in the drawing room: “There was a watchful stillness to the photograph that lent an underlying chill to the warm room in which it hung” (50). The evil of Pappachi pervades the room as the evil of oppression pervades the nation. The Ayemenem House of the past, as the present-day house, is uninviting. When Ammu divorces her husband, she returns to the Ayemenem House “unwelcomed” by her parents (42). Baby Kochamma often reminds the twins that they live on “sufferance” in the Ayemenem House, “where they really had no right to be” (44). Culture has taken away the sense of home for Ammu, Rahel, and Estha and turned the house into a prison. When Mammachi discovers Ammu’s relationship with Velutha, she locks Ammu in her bedroom. The narrator states, “Ammu was incoherent with rage and disbelief at what was happening to her—at being locked away like the family lunatic in a medieval household” (239). Ammu is a prisoner in her own home, much like the oppressed people of India are prisoners in their own country.

The Ayemenem House of the past is also one of death. It is on the chaise lounge in the drawing room where Sophie Mol’s body is laid out (238). The narrator presents a haunting description, “Even from a distance, it was obvious that she was dead. Not ill or asleep. It was something to do with the way she lay... Something to do with Death’s authority. Its terrible stillness” (238). The house of the past holds Sophie Mol’s corpse, while its ghost haunts the present-day house. As Rahel notes, it is a house where “only the Small Things were said. The Big Things lurked unsaid inside” (165). The gruesome qualities of the patriarchal culture and its oppression haunt the Ayemenem House of the past and return in uncanny form to haunt the present-day house. Roy effectively utilizes the Gothic trope of the haunted house to manifest the horrors of a patriarchal society and its effects upon the Ipe family, symbolizing the haunting of an oppressive history upon the nation of India. She employs the Western Gothic convention in traditional ways, but also creates hauntings that are specific to the members of the Ipe family.

As personal ghosts disturb the Ayemenem House, societal ghosts haunt the History House. It is in the History House where caste, culture, and politics transform into violence and terror. Of the History House, Chacko tells the twins, “when we look in through the windows, all we see are shadows. And when we try and listen, all we hear is a whispering. And we cannot understand the whispering, because our minds have been invaded by a war” (52). Chacko describes the war as “A war that we have won and lost. The very worst sort of war. A war that captures dreams and re-dreams them. A war that has made us adore our conquerors and despise ourselves” (52). The shadows and whispers of the History House represent India’s colonial past and the consequent political uprisings. For the twins, it is a past they cannot understand, but even still, they feel its haunting. The History House is the house of Kari Saipu, the “Englishman who had

‘gone native’” and shot himself in the head when his lover’s parents took the boy from him and sent him away to school (51). The narrator says that Vellya Paapen tells the twins he encountered Kari Saipu’s ghost and pinned the ghost to the trunk of a rubber tree, where the pedophile ghost remains (189). Roy gives the History House a haunting history of sexual crime and suicide, foreshadowing more evil to come.

The evil comes on the Night of Terror. The Touchable Policemen arrive “Deadlypurposed” searching for Velutha after Sophie Mol’s body is found (289). Rahel and Estha, hiding at the History House, awake to screams as they watch the police beat Velutha nearly to death “mesmerized by something that they sensed but didn’t understand: the absence of caprice in what the policemen did” (292). The horror comes alive in the absence of caprice, and the twins mirror the anxiety of the people of India as they struggle with horrors they cannot understand. The police, with their batons, beat Velutha nearly to death: “a clinical demonstration in controlled conditions of human nature’s pursuit of ascendancy...human history, masquerading as God’s Purpose” (292-293). In Rahel’s view, the police are living out history; their socially and culturally conditioned minds take control of their wills. Rahel describes their actions as efficient and economic: “After all they were not battling an epidemic. They were merely inoculating a community against an outbreak” (293). The police’s actions illustrate the power of the culture over its participants and the culture’s rule over their actions. The police are following history’s orders. It is this history, and the history of the Night of Terror, that haunts Rahel and Estha into adulthood. The History House shows the powerful effects of war and colonialism. Roy creates a sense of disturbing anxiety in the confusion between a culturally oppressive past and a modern national identity.

When the adult Rahel returns, the History House has been invaded by Western culture as the terror that occurred there buries itself in commerce and tourism. In 1992, the History House has become a five-star hotel and the terror remains concealed “under the happy humming of hotel cooks” (290). For Rahel and Estha, the tragic history will always live on in the History House. But the hotel people have recreated history as a tourist attraction of “toy histories,” manufactured wooden houses, and truncated kathakali performances (120-121). At the History House, tourism and commerce erase the true ancestral history and instead employ a new cultural history to impress the rich tourists. The threat of erasure takes on a Gothic tone as Rahel’s toy watch remains buried in the ground, “A small forgotten thing. Nothing that the world would miss” (121). Roy utilizes the Gothic to underscore the terror and dangers of history’s erasure. The history of an entire nation can become a small forgotten thing.

### Doppelganger

The threat of erasure carries on in the novel through the motif of the double. The double motif, a traditional Gothic trope, emerges in the twins

of Rahel and Estha and illustrates the larger issue of India's struggle with identity. The double, or doppelganger, according to Freud, serves as a prominent motif that produces an uncanny effect where, "a person may identify himself with another and so become unsure of his true self; or he may substitute the other's self for his own" (142). Freud asserts that the double motif involves a "harking back to single phases in evolution of the sense of self, a regression to times when the ego had not yet clearly set itself off against the world and from others" (143). From the Gothic viewpoint, MacAndrew refers to doubles as "reflecting devices" (213). She asserts that the double signifies moral confusion and doubt (107). Notably, MacAndrew points out that the Gothic double typically portrays the polar opposites of good and evil.

In employing the doubling motif, Roy utilizes the Gothic convention, but at the same time, reinvents it. Rahel and Estha closely identify with each other and in Freud's words, often substitute the other's self for his own. However, Roy inverts this convention by not creating the twins as polar opposites of good and evil. They are portrayed as so closely connected, they even communicate with their thoughts. As children, "Esthappen and Rahel thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually as We or Us" (Roy 4). Roy also creates ambiguity in their identity, mirroring the national identity of India, reflecting Chatterjee's theory with regard to the paradoxes and difficulties in India's struggle with identity. The narrator says, "Edges, Borders, Boundaries, Brinks and Limits have appeared like a team of trolls on their separate horizons. Short creature with long shadows, patrolling the Blurry End" (5). The identities of Rahel and her brother have become blurred as their history continues to haunt their present and future. They cannot reconcile the demons of their oppressive past—the drowning of their cousin, the policemen's murder of an innocent Untouchable, and their involvement in the cover-up. For Rahel and Estha, edges, borders, and boundaries have all been crossed and history's shadows blur their identities, much like they blur the identity of India.

The despair becomes personal. For Rahel, the despair lives in her eyes: "In the country that she came from, poised forever between the terror of war and the horror of peace, Worse Things kept happening" (22). For Estha, the despair lives in his silence: "It wasn't an accusing, protesting silence as much as a sort of estivation, a dormancy" (12). Both are struggling with identity, lost in grief and guilt, their suffering reflected in each other. As the narrator states, "the emptiness in one twin was only a version of the quietness in the other" (21). They are not opposites, but instead complement each other in pain. Rahel brings the past back to Estha: "It had been quiet in Estha's head until Rahel came... The world, locked out for years, suddenly flooded in, and now Estha couldn't hear himself for the noise" (16). For Estha, the past resurfaces with Rahel, along with the other part of himself. Rahel views Estha as a part of herself as well. When Ammu dies, Rahel does not write to Estha: "There are things that you can't do—like writing letters to a part of yourself. To your

feet or hair. Or heart” (156). They are forever joined as twins, as doubles, as accomplices in tragedy.

The influence of Western ideals upon India and its identity also emerges through the twins. The twins believe the English are superior and that they are not as good the Von Trapp children in *The Sound of Music* or their English cousin Sophie Mol. After Estha is molested by the Orangedrink Lemondrink man, he returns to the theatre and compares himself with the “clean” Von Trapp children (100). Estha poses silent questions at the screen: “Oh Baron von Trapp...could you love the little fellow with the organ in the smelly auditorium?...And his twin sister?” (101). He imagines Von Trapp asking: “*Are they clean white children?*” with Estha answering, “No. (But Sophie Mol is)” (101). In Estha’s mind, heightened by the trauma of the molestation, he believes Captain Von Trapp could not love him or his sister. They are not clean, not English, not good enough. Rahel also feels inferior to Sophie Mol. When their cousin arrives, Rahel compares herself and Estha with Sophie Mol: “Littleangels were beach-colored and wore bell-bottoms. Littledemons were mudbrown in Airport-Fairy frocks with forehead bumps that might turn into horns...And if you cared to look, you could see Satan in their eyes” (170). Rahel’s comparison represents the societal beliefs she has learned from adults. She and Estha are the Littledemons. They are less than Sophie Mol. The thoughts of both Estha and Rahel represent the cultural ideology ingrained in the Kerala children in 1969, an ideology that deems them inferior to the English, a consequence of colonialism.

In the twins, Roy also employs the Gothic convention of incest but with another challenge to the Western narrative. In traditional Gothic fiction, MacAndrew explains that incest introduces a major theme: “the quality of innocence that is based on ignorance of the world and the paradoxical involvement of virtuous characters in the causes of evil” (71). MacAndrew states that explorations of human nature and sexuality represent “continued explorations of the self” (248). The incest between the twins does represent a continued exploration of the self. However, in traditional Gothic convention, incest emerges as much more unsettling and horrific. While the incest between the twins is taboo, Roy does not depict the act as deplorable or appalling. Instead, she portrays it as a gentle and loving act. When Rahel turns to Estha in the dark, “She whispers. She moves her mouth” (Roy 310). Estha “takes his fingers to it. To touch the words it makes. To keep the whisper” (310). The descriptive language is lyrical and delicate, conveying tenderness and love. The narrator states that the act is nothing that would “separate Sex from Love. Or Needs from Feelings” (311). The twins have merged in an act of loving desperation.

The narrator describes a mood of heartbreaking grief: “Only that there were tears. Only that Quietness and Emptiness fitted together like stacked spoons...Only that they held each other close, long after it was over. Only that what they shared that night was not happiness, but hideous grief” (311). The incest transpires as an inevitable act; the twins have only each other in their grief. It is, as Ammu has explained to them, “people

always loved best what they Identified most with” (94). Rahel and Estha identify most with each other and love each other best. Roy’s portrayal of incest is not violent and disturbing, but gentle, loving, inevitable. It is a result of the twins’ grief over the death of Sophie Mol, their betrayal of Velutha, and their desperation to escape the pain. It is the consequence of the guilt of a country’s haunted past. Significantly, this scene appears near the end of the novel, further supporting the notion that Roy presents a reinvention of the Gothic. The ending, with the act of incest, results not in a restoration of order, but in Wisker’s words, in a shifted order.

### Haunting Narrative

The structure of the narrative—the disjointed chronology, shifts in narration, unusual characterization and wording—also creates a sense of disorder and uncertainty throughout the novel. With this structure, Roy at once engages and challenges the Gothic narrative convention. The chronology of the novel jumps from present to past and past to present repeatedly throughout the novel, at times even on the same page. As Punter points out, the code of Gothic is “not a simple one in which past is encoded in present or vice versa, but dialectical, past and present intertwined, each distorting each other with the sheer effort of coming to grips” (*Literature* 419). Indeed, Roy’s chronological jumps effectively represent a past and present intertwined, with each distorting the other. The nonlinear chronology symbolizes the larger issue of India’s colonial past intertwined with its present, again with one distorting the other. Thormann expands upon Punter’s notion, asserting that the breaks in the novel’s narrative chronology present an unsettling continuity and illustrate an undercurrent of violence (300). The disruptive chronology does unsettle the reader and provide an undertone of violence, which points to the undercurrent of violence in the nation of India as a result of colonialism. Speaking of the Gothic in general terms, Botting notes that the uncanny movement of a narrative structure between past and present signals “an untamed and wild invasion of the home rather than the comfortable domestication” (129). The disjointed narrative does produce a wild, untamed effect underscoring the possibility that India is not a country of comfortable domestication.

The novel is told loosely from the point of view of Rahel, as both a child and adult. At times, the narration switches to a third-person omniscient view. Again, this produces an unsettling effect and heightens the sense of disorder in the novel. The reader is unsure of who is telling the story. This uncertainty symbolizes the larger narrative question of nationality. Roy utilizes this technique to question dominant historical narratives and at the same time, present her version of the suffering and oppression in postcolonial India. Botting notes that disruptive narratives challenge the legitimacy and unity of modernity: “Part of the challenge to modernity’s assumptions, meanings, exclusions and suppressions has emerged in fictions that juxtapose, and thereby reorganize, narrative styles

and traditions” (169). In reorganizing the narrative style, Roy empowers her work with a challenge to dominant narratives of colonial and postcolonial India.

Roy’s use of the English language to tell her story is noteworthy as it allows Roy to engage with the West by using its own language. However, Roy also challenges Standard English with her use of unique capitalization, short sentences, unusual word pairings, and repetition. In effect, she creates a language form of her own—engaging with but also disengaging from the English. Roy’s language presents a childlike, sympathetic perspective to intensify the horror of the suffering of her characters and the people of India. Even the title of the novel works to this effect as the first letters of each word spell out “gost,” a hybrid—or childlike—spelling of the English “ghost.” In challenging the English language, Roy employs what Rader terms “engaged resistance” and enacts the “ideological/textual dialogue” noted by Paravisini-Gebert. She also creates a revolt in that the Gothic emphasizes “a disrupted language that signals a revolution within the established system” (Williams 66). The bitter tone of irony in the narrative, in Thormann’s view, presents ideology as a “rationalization of the suffering of the powerless, of children, women, and lower castes” (304). Roy challenges this ideology of rationalization by showing its horror. Similarly, Elleke Boehmer argues: “In paragraph after paragraph of Roy’s dense experimental writing, we see the English language—the language bequeathed by the British colonizer, as she recognized—expanded, distorted, excavated, disconcerted. There is . . . no question about the energy and oppositionality of this writing” (67). Through her creative use of language, Roy establishes a unique and powerful narrative that works on many levels. It engages in a dialogue with the West, challenges dominant narratives of India’s history, revolts against oppressive ideologies, and illustrates the disorder, violence, and anxiety of a nation grappling with its colonial past.

In *The God of Small Things*, Roy adopts traditional Gothic elements yet at the same time, she challenges these conventions to effectively illustrate the haunting of India’s colonial past upon its present. By creating a Gothic hybrid, Roy establishes a form of empowerment. In her utilization of intricate complexities of the Gothic tropes, she gives a voice to the marginalized people of India. Roy’s empowering Gothic hybrid underscores the haunting of a colonial, culturally oppressive, and politically violent past upon a postcolonial nation. Mirroring the theories of Chatterjee, Roy’s use of the Gothic conveys the anxiety and disorder of a nation struggling with a modern-day identity. Punter connects global modernity to the supernatural:

As the great globalising project of modernity, which has its own controlling relation to the postcolonial, rolls on, one of its more curious current effects is that, perhaps against expectation, we live increasingly in a world of ghosts, spirits, phantoms.  
(*Postcolonial* 61)

In *The God of Small Things*, Roy creates a world of ghosts that promise to

continue haunting.

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