

# Postcolonialism



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On Grafting the Vernacular: The Consequences of Postcolonial Spectrology  
 Bishnupriya Ghosh  
 The literary icon Amitav Ghosh has lately acquired the status of elder statesman among South Asian writers, a political designation bestowed on him following his withdrawal of *The Glass Palace* from the Commonwealth Writers Prize Best Book nomination in 2001. In a modulated letter, Ghosh writes, "As a literary or cultural grouping however, it seems to me that the Commonwealth can only be a misnomer so long as it excludes the many languages that sustain the cultural and literary lives of these countries." His abrogation of the cultural currency of English in the postcolonial world, and his consequent focus on the vernaculars of that world, hones my perception of a certain quality in his oeuvre: the stalking of the novel in English by vernacular Indian fiction. This "other archive" a phrase I use deliberately to capture Ghosh's ongoing historiographic projects that shadows his novels generates what can only be called a hauntological literary oeuvre. Here I speak to the contours of Ghosh's literary haunting through the pursuit of a particular spectacular example, *The Calcutta Chromosome*. See "Letter to the Administrators of the Commonwealth Prize," posted on Amitav Ghosh's Web site, [www.](http://www.)

amitavghosh. com; my emphasis. boundary 2 31: 2, 2004. Copyright © 2004 by Duke University Press. 198 boundary 2 / Summer 2004(1996).

2 It is in this novel that Ghosh most elaborately deploys the tropology of the specter through his ethical spectrology (ghosting) and epistemological excavation (grafting), twin processes that can be considered, I shall argue, key postcolonial imperatives. Haunting is central to the text's interrogation of a colonial truth: Ronald Ross's discovery of the cure for malaria. Versed in medical journalism, Ghosh embarks on an arduous explanation of chromosomes and their functions.

At full speed in this breakneck romp through medical discoveries, folk rituals, murders, hallucinations, transmigrating souls, and scary panoptical computers owned by futuristic megacorporations, we encounter a syphilitic homeless woman, Mangala, an untrained genius who, in pursuit of the little-known scientific discovery that the malaria bug could be used to regenerate decaying brain tissue in the last stages of syphilis, stumbles upon a DNA conglomerate that she cannot name: the Calcutta chromosome. A chromosome only by analogy, this genetic bundle, we are told with grave objectivity, would amount to a biological correlate to the human soul (206). Residing only in non-regenerative human tissue (the brain), the Calcutta chromosome survives only through incessant mutations, recombining the traits designating the uniqueness of each individual. But the ability to cut and splice DNA is precisely one of the pernicious features of the malaria bug, as Mangala accidentally discovers; and in the process of cutting and splicing human DNA, the bug can actually digest (and thus retain) this otherwise untransmissible

genetic blueprint. An infected person's brain can thus be rewired to fit an original mold. Materials, in this novel, migrate not through but by the transmission of disease.

Hence the scientific discovery in this novel is the truth about transmigratory souls (Mangala's practice of corporeal immortality), a ghost story foisted upon the reader of a medical thriller. The Calcutta Chromosome is a medical thriller that won the prestigious Arthur C. Clarke Science Fiction Award in 1997, and the project was soon under a film contract with Gabriele Salvatores.

Yet the novel's uncovering of the facts leads us to a series of ghost stories that supposedly explain the puzzle set up in the opening pages of the mystery; these fragmentary pieces are the Lakhaan stories published in an obscure Bengal literary rag by a local writer, Phulboni. For many, the detective story ends rather abruptly, unsatisfactorily: the novel fizzles out as a medical mystery. Said one irritated reviewer for Under the Covers Book Reviews, He [Ghosh]2. Amitav Ghosh, *The Calcutta Chromosome: A Novel of Fevers, Delirium, and Discovery* (Delhi: Ravi Dayal, 1996). Subsequent references to this text are cited parenthetically by page number only. Ghosh / On Grafting the Vernacular 199 veers sharply from the detective mystery format some thirty pages from the end of the book in that he fails to deliver the promised solution.

. . . In the end he serves to only denigrate the resourcefulness of the human mind.3 But if we take seriously Ghosh's postcolonial unraveling of an established colonial truth, then the very genre of truth-telling must suffer.

Indeed, a great deal of resourcefulness is required to graft onto the body of a mystery another manner of telling more capable of visionary praxis; hence the traffic in ghosts. The Calcutta Chromosome presents us with a template for understanding the complex textual mode operative in Ghosh's work, one which explains his literature of haunting. The DNA analogy of grafting allegorizes the archival search that constitutes detection in the novel: the detective Murugan's suspicion that Ross's analyses of the Anopheles mosquito was rigged leads him to the real architects of the discovery—a group of folk medicine practitioners with immortality on their minds and no interest in the cure for malaria. But this new knowledge comes about through continuous fragmenting and grafting of hypotheses and speculations: each narrative about Ross's discovery is haunted by the probability of another truth that confounds its credibility.

Then there is the further allegory of cutting, splicing, and recombining literary genres and traditions: this is a medical thriller, a ghost story, a murder mystery, a philosophical rumination, and a historiographic project. And finally, at the metatextual level, Ghosh grafts a larger vernacular tradition of ghost fiction onto this novel in English in the fragmented Lakhaan stories, vernacular fiction written in the standardized Indian languages since the inception of colonial-modern cultural forms (the short story, the novel, the essay) in the mid-nineteenth century. The Lakhaan stories appear three times in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, variously as events experienced by Grigson (a linguist who suspects Lakhaan), Farley (a missionary who is killed by the boy ghost), and Phulboni (the writer who narrowly escapes the ghost); the details of these fragments

densely encrypt specific vernacular ghost stories. Tarrying with the Vernacular My critical practice speaks of this ghosted tradition that haunts Ghosh while writing *The Calcutta Chromosome*.

In a recent conversation, the author confessed to being in the thralls of Rabindranath Tagore's "Kshudhita Pashaan" (The Hungry Stones), a short story he had translated for the journal *Civil Lines* in 1995 before embarking on *The Calcutta Chromosome*.<sup>4</sup> This claim finds longer exposition in Ghosh's correspondence with historian Dipesh Chakrabarty, the year after Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* appeared in print.<sup>5</sup>

Disagreeing with Chakrabarty on the valence of Tagore's colonial inscription, Ghosh reads Tagore as a man in "crisis" the Bengali cosmopolitan cognizant of his Enlightenment legacies yet also "anguished" over his imbrication as a colonial subject. For Ghosh, Tagore's angst eviscerates the smoothness of his prose on occasion, with particular instantiation in "Kshudhita Pashaan," when the protagonist repeatedly cries out, "Its alla lie."

In Ghosh's reading of the tale, these recursions comprise the colonial subject's glimpse into his own alienation. Tagore tropes the divided colonial subject, argues Ghosh, in the protagonist's obsessive changing of clothes and switching of identities. And it is a trope that, in my

view, Ghosh encrypts in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, a novel replete with switched bodies, clothes, names, and identities. Speaking to the diverse transformative effects of colonialism, Ghosh criticizes Chakrabarty's emphasis on the discursive and persuasive aspects of colonialism. He insists that the postcolonial intellectual give equal weight to the record of coercion of racial violence, of population transfers, and of massive upheavals in the rural. 6 Hence, in his own writing of *The*. In February 2002, Ghosh presented a lecture on mourning and ethical mapping at the University of California, Riverside. I had the singular pleasure of spending an afternoon with the writer chatting about politics, his travels, and recent work; I took the opportunity to voice my uncanny feeling about *The Calcutta Chromosome*, the sense that the novel drew substantially on Bengali ghost fiction.

It was at this point that Ghosh mentioned the two inspirational fragments integrated in the novel: the ghost fiction of Tagore and Renu. And he confessed to be in the thralls of Kshudhita Pashaan while he was working on *The Calcutta Chromosome*. 5. This correspondence between Ghosh and Dipesh Chakrabarty (simply titled *A Correspondence on Provincializing Europe*), available on Ghosh's Web site, was published in full in *Radical History Review* 83 (Spring 2002): 146–72, just as I was revising this essay. I was immediately struck by the two scholars' interest in the vernacular idiom as a central resource for postcolonial historiographies, an insistence that has earned both the label of nativist. 6.

One of Ghosh's major criticisms of Provincializing Europe is of Chakrabarty's inattention to the question of race, that invisible category in South Asian postcolonial explorations. Ruminating on the shame and anguish of the postcolonial subject (with personal evocation of his father's experience of the colonial military regime), Ghosh returns to Tagore as the exemplar of the divided colonial subject, Tagore's self-reflexivity notwithstanding. Not a surprising preoccupation, given that race, especially in terms of military experience, had Ghosh / On Grafting the Vernacular 201 Calcutta Chromosome, Ghosh represents very different subjects of colonialism: Murugan is the cosmopolitan from the metropole who develops an ethics of representation, while the homeless Mangala and the rural migrant Lakhaan are the colonial/postcolonial subaltern subjects. In such a formulation, the inclusion of Tagore (the father of the literate Bengali postcolonial middle-class subject with aspirations to continuing cultural hegemony) is obviously not enough. So Ghosh encrypts another ghost story, *Smell of a Primeval Night* (1967), this time from an interlocutor of the postcolonial nation-state, the Hindi writer Phaniswarnath Renu.

Known for his literary depictions of some of the most economically decimated landscapes of postcolonial India, Renu gave up the Padmashree (a high national award for cultural achievement) in 1975 to protest what he saw as the dictatorship of the postcolonial state; and we know that Tagore used his literary stature in a similar fashion, renouncing his knighthood in 1919 to protest the violence of the colonial state in the infamous Jallianwalla Bagh massacre. Both Tagore and Renu saw their literary projects as crucial to the



formation of a national ethics beyond the narrow concerns of territorial governance and sovereignty; but Renu focused primarily on rural subjects, while Tagore's protagonists often inhabit a colonial metropolitan milieu. No wonder Ghosh is attracted to these two literary stalwarts in his writing of the postcolonial diasporic subject's struggle to represent the subaltern other (note, in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, both Antar, the protagonist of the novel, and Murugan work for the International Water Council [earlier, *LifeWatch*], a megacorporation). As we shall see, both the Bengali and Hindi ghost stories are tales of betrayal, and both writers use ghosts as literary devices for raising those ethical questions of exclusion and coercion that trouble the (native) colonial and postcolonial bureaucrat. By grafting these stories into *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Ghosh implies that Tagore's and Renu's ethical concerns continue into our contemporary postcolonial time, only now the progressive intellectual must guard against a forgetting facilitated by the current global hierarchies of knowledge. For Ghosh, recalling his father's shame at a racial slur encountered while in military service under the British, forgetting brings an epistemological perplexity engendering a series of fraught misrecognitions.

Both Ghosh and Chakrabarty agree that this forgetting is in part due to the postcolonial scholar/writer's failure to keep alive other critical traditions that received extended treatment in Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*, a historical novel published the same year as *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 2000). 202 boundary 2

/ Summer 2004 can be important resources for living: Chakrabarty cites philosophical and commentarial treatises, Ghosh evokes literary and religious sources. 7 In their ensuing exchange, it becomes evident that the linguistic hierarchies set in motion from the colonial-modern period are largely responsible for the relative obscurity of these critical traditions (whose texts, more often than not, are written in Indian vernaculars).

Of course, we understand vernacular not to signal authenticity; the vernacular, in the Indian context, is always a historical category for the Indian languages and literatures placed in binary opposition to colonial English since 1813 (the Education Act). 8 Nor are vernacular texts more indigenous to the colony; certainly contemporary Bengali and Hindi literature. Ghosh's two choices for *The Calcutta Chromosome* are, after all, modern traditions that wrest a new colonial cultural forms such as the novel or the essay. These vernacular texts acquire the status of an other archive supplemental in the Derridean sense because of their current global invisibility, especially in view of the enormous cultural capital of the post-1980s South Asian novel in English. Hence Ghosh's caution against forgetting: bereft of this vernacular writing, we lose entire epistemologies that raise crucial ethical questions about the past.

He dramatizes the dangers of forgetting, willful or not, in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, where we encounter multiple levels of lost epistemologies (counter-scientific discourse, folk medicine practices, Spiritualism, and Hindu popular religion, such as tantra) owned by the phantom presences in the novel (Mangala, Lakhaan, European Spiritualists, <https://assignbuster.com/postcolonialism/>

and the maverick scientists ?????? wronged??™??™ by Ronald Ross). At a metatextual level, the writer Phulboni??™'s struggle over representation, and his own ?????? silences??™??™ (the ?????? lost??™??™ Lakhaan stories), provides a *mise en abyme* for Ghosh??™'s literary project. In Ghosh??™'s letter to Sandra Vince of the Commonwealth Writers Prize Board, he implies that, in consolidating postcolonial epistemologies, some energy should be devoted to popularizing these vernacular literatures. He makes visible to a global market for non-Western literatures that ghostly body of vernacular writing eclipsed by the glamorous literary stars of his ilk??™ South Asian writers in English. His invocation hails postcolonial literary critics??™ cultural translators for a cosmopolitan audience??™ to follow that lead, to 7. Ghosh and Chakrabarty, ?????? A Correspondence,??™??™ 160.

8. I will not pursue this point any further here, for it has received extensive treatment in Gauri Viswanathan??™'s *Masks of Conquest* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989). See also Priya Joshi??™'s recent work on the vernacular fortunes of the novel in *In Another Country: Colonialism, Culture, and the English Novel in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). Ghosh / On Grafting the Vernacular 203 spend our (often North-based) resources on excavating those ?????? vernacular??™??™ and ?????? supplemental??™??™ knowledges that do not endlessly refer back to European colonial texts.

9 I take on that invocation in my critical acts in this essay, a first stab at a larger project on colonial and postcolonial spectrology. Practicing Spectrology The Calcutta Chromosome offers a part-fictive, alternative history of medicine, one that is traditionally eclipsed in the official narrative

of Ronald Ross's romance with the Anopheles mosquito. Mangala stumbles on a process that won the medical visionary Julius Wagner-Jauregg the Nobel Prize in 1927 "the process of curing syphilis with the malaria bug. Not only is Ghosh interested in unearthing these parallel histories, but he sees the colonial narrative of discovery as an exercise of power. Thus, a mediocre Englishman enters the annals of history, even though the last and arguably the most crucial stages of his research on the Anopheles were orchestrated by Mangala and her associates. But why the need for the puppet discoverer, Ross Murugan hypothesizes that these folk medicine practitioners needed specific mutations of the malaria bug to stabilize the transfer of the biological soul, but they lacked the resources to produce those mutations in a controlled (laboratory) setting. Indeed, by giving us a list of (European) scientists whose research Ross basically filches, Ghosh exposes the discoverer as a charlatan and the act of scientific discovery as a collaborative and cumulative enterprise often indebted to those on the radical edge of science. The postcolonial version of this scientific underground, the spectral corpus, is even more radical in touching upon a matter troubling to our contemporary moment "biological cloning (207). Murugan simulates the task of an archivist in reconstructing this alternative history, in part garnered from seemingly unrelated medical discoveries, in part interpreted, and in part hypothesized. Indeed, such imaginative historiography has been the mark of Ghosh's fiction and nonfiction. For one, archival reconstruction was the motor for the travelogue that shot Ghosh to 9.

Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge exemplify an earlier moment of debate in postcolonial studies that addressed the bad marriage of the postcolonial to the postmodern. These debates interrogated the market stipulations that condition the production of postcolonial knowledge, with progressives crying foul. Mishra and Hodge called for the situated study of postcolonial contexts and the subsequent consolidation of vernacular and local knowledges to supplement analyses of postcolonial literatures. See "What Is Post(-)colonialism?" *Textual Practice* 5, no. 3 (1991): 399–414. 204 *boundary 2* / Summer 2004 fame.

In *An Antique Land*, published in 1993, features the forgotten histories of Jews, Muslims, and Hindus traversing Egypt and India in the early modern period. A thinly veiled autobiographical narrator's obsessive search for a slave's story, one that would have otherwise remained a footnote in history, leads him to excavate these histories from equally forgotten archival chambers (the Geniza).<sup>10</sup> The narrator first comes across a passing allusion to the slave, Bomma, in a letter written by Madmum, a merchant in Aden, to his friend, Abraham Ben Yiju, from Mangalore; the narrator is further intrigued by the second appearance of the slave in a letter from S.

D. Gottein's collection of letters in the Bodelian Library. Curious about this recurrent trace, and convinced of the erasure of the small voice of history, the narrator follows the wazirs and the sultans, the chroniclers and the priests had the power to physically inscribe themselves upon time.<sup>11</sup> Ghosh plots looping and fragmented journeys to Lataifa, Nashawy, and Mangalore, seeking Bomma.

The narrator's geographic dispersal replicates the scattering of certain ways of knowing the world, while Ghosh powerfully brings the forces of modern knowledge—history, anthropology, philology, sociology, and religion, complete with thirty-seven pages of documentation—to bear on his reconstructive project. On other occasions, Ghosh has been an active participant in an Indian national spectrology: the obsession with forgotten national icons, a corollary to the ongoing national historical revisions of the 1980s and 1990s. In the *New Yorker* issue commemorating India's golden jubilee of independence, Ghosh chose to write an essay on the forgotten history of the Indian National Army (INA), titled *India's Untold War of Independence*.

12 A militant mobilization against the British led by Subhas Chandra Bose and repressed within statist historical narrations of the nonviolent freedom struggle, the INA story is a fiercely remembered regional (eastern Indian) struggle reconstructed in Ghosh's commemorative essay. His recounting of those glory days becomes a political intervention of sorts into the national struggle over history, the ghost of Netaji (the freedom fighter, Bose) looming over India's celebrated Gandhian nonviolent revolution. Netaji's recursive figure in the

Amitav Ghosh, *In an Antique Land* (Delhi: Ravi Dayal, 1993). 11. Ghosh, *In an Antique Land*, 17. 12. Amitav Ghosh, *India's Untold War of Independence*, *New Yorker*, June 23, 1997, 105. 21. Ghosh starts his essay by evoking popular memory—the contradictory stories about this untold war that he received from his parents motivated his historical digging.

Populargossip in Bengal has it that Bose's disappearance was actually a murder covered up by the British.

In politically troubled periods, there were repeated Netaji sightings in Bengal that record a Bengali desire for lost political national hegemony. Ghosh / On Grafting the Vernacular 205 Bengali imagination marks a desire for the Bengalis' lost centrality in nationalist politics, on the one hand; but, on the other, this ghost demands ethical redress from contemporary Indian citizen-subjects for the traumas of the INA soldiers, tried for treason by the colonial state and represented as betrayers of the nonviolent revolution in official nationalist accounts. 13 This abiding interest in historically grounded ghosts stimulates Ghosh's literary endeavor in *The Calcutta Chromosome*.

And it is a project that he shares with Dipesh Chakrabarty, who argues, in *Provincializing Europe*, for the sentience of literature in postcolonial ethnography. Chakrabarty demonstrates the difficulties of translating subaltern lifeworlds (and the entire belief systems that these narratives carry with them) into the time of rational history: how does one capture subaltern significations of supernatural and cyclical time that compel understandings of work and translate them into the rational abstraction of labor? The problem, argues Chakrabarty, is perhaps best dealt with in a kind of translation that registers the shock of the uncanny, keeping faithful to the scandal of incommensurabilities for historians do not have the license available to literary practitioners to jump the parameters of rational narration. Chakrabarty turns to songs, idioms, poems, festival rituals, and so on, to provide evidence of other times in subaltern lifeworlds,

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becoming an ethnographer of sorts; Ghosh takes on the same role somewhat differently, treating literary practice as an ethnographic and historical endeavor.

But in their actual tasks of consolidating this “other” archive, the two scholars diverge. As their exchange in *Provincializing Europe* indicates, Chakrabarty is clearly preoccupied with the “uncanny” as an effect of incommensurability; the condition of disjunctive historical discourses and the implications of loss concern him greatly. Ghosh sees in the same loss the imperative for recovery: “an imaginative project that mobilizes literary resources for its purposes. Hence ‘ghosts,’ for Ghosh, are devices that undo certain discursive (and generic, in *The Calcutta Chromosome*) limits; ghosts therefore occupy a more redemptive place in his oeuvre, in moving us to those questions of political justice and hope that Jacques Derrida asks in his elaboration of ‘hauntology and its attendant ethics’ in *Specters of Marx*.<sup>14</sup> More recently, Netaji has found literary evocation in Ruchir Joshi’s *The Last Jet-Engine Laugh* (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2001), as a man whose famous disappearance (while flying to Japan in 1942) continues to plague the regional imagination. 14. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans.

Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), xix. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as SM. 206 boundary 2 / Summer 2004 *The Calcutta Chromosome* is Ghosh’s most sustained engagement with hauntology, in both its incitement to imagine a radical postfoundationalist future (Derrida) and its overt staging of incommensurable epistemologies (Chakrabarty). Of <https://assignbuster.com/postcolonialism/>



all of Ghosh's novels, it is this novel that takes seriously the undoing of oppositions that is Derrida's figuration of the specter.

Such unraveling of literary seams makes for the unprecedented uneven narration, textual fragmentation, and generic dysfunction that, I suspect, might well account for this novel's unpopularity in Ghosh's canon. More importantly, *The Calcutta Chromosome* is a literary theater that extends the ethical implications of the Derridean specter to break new ground. Since Gayatri Spivak's *In Other Worlds* (1988), and despite her continuing critiques of Derrida, Derrida's rigorous questioning of Western foundationalism has been critical to the poststructuralist strain of the postcolonial critique. The ethical turn we witness in *The Calcutta Chromosome* shares Derrida's perception of the "haunting" as inimical to the histories of trauma and loss, precisely what is occluded in the politico-juridical discourses of wrong, repayment, and debt. In her remarks on Walter Benjamin's "angel of history" and Derrida's specters as "poignant signifiers" of the postfoundationalist predicament, Wendy Brown asks, "What kind of historical consciousness is possible and appropriate for contemporary political critique and analysis, and how can agency be derived to make a more just, emancipatory, or felicitous future order?" 15 Specters present new possibilities in undoing the opposition between life and death, presence and absence; by implication, they collapse the boundedness of present, past, and future. Specters are, Brown argues, redemptive: they are intangible sites for imagining a future beyond discredited modernist narratives of progress and a violent exclusionary metaphysics of presence. Spectrology, in this sense, is postprogressive

history relocating historical meaning to an *otherspace* and idiom?

16; it imagines political justice in a world that is *contingent*,

*unpredictable*, and *not fully knowable*.

17 Such Derridean and multivalent use of specters opens up our

reading of Ghosh's deployment of *hauntology* beyond the staging of

the *uncanny* as a figure for the incommensurable. 15. Wendy

Brown, *Futures*, in *Politics Out of History* (Princeton, N.

J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 139–40. 16. Brown, *Futures*,

144. 17.

Brown, *Futures*, 145. Ghosh / On Grafting the Vernacular

207 The Ghost That ghosts bear witness to erasures in the *living*

*present* is, of course, commonplace in the enormous literature on

mourning and memory work of the last decades. 18 Derrida pushes us

further, pitching ghosts as specters of futurity: If I am getting ready to speak

of ghosts, which is to say about certain others who are not present, nor

presently living, either to us, in us, or outside of us, it is in the name of

justice.

Of justice where it is not yet, not yet there, where it is no longer, let us

understand where it is no longer present, and where it will never be, no more

than a law, reducible to laws or rights. It is necessary to speak of the ghost,

indeed to the ghost, and with it, from the moment that no ethics, no politics,

whether revolutionary or not, seems possible and thinkable and just that does

not recognize in principle the respect for others who are no longer or for

those who are not yet there, presently living, whether they are already dead

or not yet born. (SM, 10) He reminds us of Marx's well-known sighting of Communism as a specter that haunts Europe, a phantomic possibility of a future society.

Focusing on Marx's injunction, Derrida insists that the specter here is not just in the domain of ideas (Spirit) but is already materially there in the living present. All forces of the law – the church, the family, the state in nineteenth-century Europe – girded themselves against this specter in a willful denial of those certain others whose promise preoccupies Marx; for him, the counterrevolutionaries in 1848 thus erase that strangely familiar body but continue to be haunted by its recursions. In fact, it is this disappeared body of the ghost – this someone who looks at you – that gives these forces of the law their strength and organization. Marx is therefore critical of spectralization, its evacuation of the concrete; the ethical task at hand is to bring back the body proper of the ghost. We find a precursor to The Calcutta Chromosome's spectral ethics in Ghosh's essay on the Delhi riots following the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi, *The Ghosts of Mrs.*

*Gandhi*. Published in 1995, the year following 9/11. A majority of scholars recognizes literature as the domain where these specters of embodied loss roam: for instance, in *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), Avery Gordon reads that now-famous ghost in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* as the seething presence of the absent (23). For Gordon, ghosts are entirely necessary to grasp the complexities of our social world, for they

speaking eloquently of various invisibilities and various exclusions (23).

In *boundary 2* / Summer 2004, Ghosh's *Specters of Marx* directly addresses the ethical significance of remembering violence. As the essay progresses, he jettisons chronological narration in favor of many interrupted returns to the past, a temporal idiom he explicitly describes as a haunting. Ghosh's memory of the 1984 riots while he was working for the daily *Indian Express* impels him to consider 1947 again. He starts writing *The Shadow Lines* soon after the Delhi riots, explaining that this was a book that led me backward in time, to earlier memories of riots, ones witnessed in childhood.

It became a book not about any one event but about the meaning of such events and their effects on individuals who live through them. Further along in the essay, Ghosh's account of the pamphlet *Who Are the Guilty?* a tract in which the citizens of Delhi question possible state participation in violence propels him to consider another violent scene, the Bombay riots of 1992. Moments of violence, ruptures in the unitary national polity, foreground those certain others who remain invisible and excluded from national consciousness: each riot (1947, 1984, 1992) jolts the memory of another specter, another sighting of unrestful spirits. Ghosh's looping narrative in this essay suggests that the cost of a unified nation has always accrued to those who do not count in our living present. The Calcutta Chromosome continues this project of speaking to ghosts that is vibrant in his essays on the Delhi riot and the INA (some of his material on the INA has <https://assignbuster.com/postcolonialism/>

been fictionalized recently in *The Glass Palace* [2001]). Not surprisingly, almost every character in *The Calcutta Chromosome* has commerce with ghosts. A virtual ghost, flashing on Antar's screen and demanding his investigation of Murugan, propels the mystery forward. Antar is the twenty-first-century protagonist who embarks on finding Murugan, who had disappeared from LifeWatch.

LifeWatch, a dystopian Kafkaesque panoptical North-based megacorporation with headquarters in New York but no office in Calcutta, initially employs both men. In pursuit of his Kurtz, Antar learns that Murugan's advocacy of an epistemological challenge led to his ostracism from the scholarly community and estrangement from several of his friends and associates (31). Much later in the narrative, we realize that it is not just Antar's official assignment or curiosity about the Ross story that keeps him engaged in the wild chase for Mangala and her associates but his fascination with his alter ego, Murugan's renegade status in LifeWatch. A glimpse into Antar's pre-LifeWatch existence

19. Amitav Ghosh, "The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi," *New Yorker*, July 17, 1995, 35–43. 20. Ghosh, "The Ghosts of Mrs.

Gandhi," 40. Ghosh / On Grafting the Vernacular 209 in a small village by the banks of the Nile (shades of the narrator in *In an Antique Land*) clues us in to Antar's sense of loss and his consequent nostalgia for a simpler life beyond the tentacles of a megacorporation. The virtual ghost undoes Antar's compartmentalized present, instigating personal anguish and

luring him to rebellion?" this time against his omniscient computer, Ava. Nor is Antar's haunting an anomaly. Each major character in the novel is haunted by a secret that links him or her to the vital Calcutta chromosomemystery: Mangala and Murugan are syphilitics, the glamorous Sonaliis in search of her natural father, Phulboni searches for immortality as a writer, and so on. The familiar other beckons the detective, the journalist, the writer, and the missionary to a larger ethical quest.

The Corpse While the ghost inhabits the seam between the real and the fictive, the present and the past/future, the corpse is its visible presence in rationally ordered space and time. But Mangala's practice of corporeal immortality troubles the empirical status of the corpse by insisting on a biological haunting. D. D. Cunningham, Countess Pongracz, and Murugan, among other characters, are "medically speaking" dead or literally have disappeared into obscurity. Yet they continue to trouble our pseudomedical rationality by constantly reappearing (being reincarnated) as other characters, and the novel insists that the philosophical premise of transmigration be accorded the same empirical credibility that we willingly give (even the most esoteric) medical discourse on bodies. Such epistemological leaps are necessary to speak to ghosts in our living present.

In fact, Ghosh restores the corporeal materiality of these ghosts by explaining transmigration of souls in biological terms—the lingo of chromosomes, DNA, retroviruses, and mutations well known to contemporary global cosmopolitan readers. For in Mangala's popular religious medical practice, the transfer of the human soul is accomplished by the transmission of malaria-infected blood (routed through the bodies of pigeons, which are used as agar-plates).

This drama of corporeal restoration in the story is homologous to Ghosh's (hypothetical) restoration of a corpus/corpse of indigenous knowledge troubling to the colonial medical gaze. Scientists, administrators, doctors, missionaries, computer analysts fall prey to the spectral knowledge that makes their discourse on health and cures possible but that remains inadmissible in rational discourse. There are some converts to the doctrine of corporeal immortality, as we see in D.

D. Cunningham, Ross's predecessor, who stonewalls Ross's search for the malaria bug for almost a year before disappearing into the steamy underground of soul switchers. In developing the process of spectralization, Derrida provides notes on the ghostly body proper that resonate with *The Calcutta Chromosome*, a novel about bodies in the present, past, and future. Marx, in Derrida's view, posits the process of ghosting as the de-materialization of the body – the red specter that was conjured (away) by the counter-revolutionaries (in fact, by all of Europe: the Manifesto was yesterday) (SM, 117).

This violent exclusion – dis-incarnation – of the ghost does not mean that the material conditions of the specter have disappeared; it is the work of demystification to restore the body proper to the ghost. Derrida insists on the strange corporeality of the ghost shuttling between the nonhuman (a thing) and the human (someone) in the world. In the recurrence of disappeared bodies in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, we inhabit this uncanny place, where only by partially abandoning the proportions of scientific rationalism can we recognize certain others. Ghosh deconstructs the rational premises of knowledge production in focusing our attention on the problem of

disappeared bodies: the corpus of folk and popular religious and medical knowledge becomes invisible, silent, ephemeral, only when commodified and circulated in colonial modern practices. These “subaltern” practices” if we understand “subaltern” to be a differential relation” are put to instrumental and quantifiable use in the colonial regime: the knowledge of possible corporeal immortality is transformed into the cure for malaria. Looking anew at Marx’s conception of the commodity fetish, Derrida notes that it is in the translation of things” their coding in systems of exchange” that they acquire a ghost-effect.

The table, he argues” continuing with Marx’s famous example” is, after all, an “ordinary, sensuous thing” that has use value, it is “human at the bottom” (SM, 151). In the Derridean landscape of specters, this sensuous thing acquires the mystical properties of commodity when it enters a chain of exchange: “The ghostly scheme now appears indispensable. The commodity is a “thing” without phenomenon, a thing in flight that surpasses the senses (it is invisible, intangible, inaudible, and odorless); but this transcendence is not altogether spiritual, it retains the bodiless body that we have recognized as making the difference between specter and spirit. What surpasses the senses still passes before us in the silhouette of the sensuous body that it nevertheless lacks or that remains inaccessible to us” (SM, 151). Knowledge fetishized as “medical discovery,” the conquest of the corporeal, is uncanny commodity in *The Calcutta Chromosome*.

Mangala’s insights lose their sense Ghosh/ On Grafting the Vernacular  
211 suousness in the transfer to Ronald Ross’s lab and its incumbent



colonialmystique. The use value of finding the malaria bug??™s ability to cut and pasteDNA remains mundane in Mangala??™s routine soul transfers, but the malariabug is Ross??™s ticket to fame. Hence the discovery acquires mystical value, his ?????? cure??™??™ a treasured commodity in the colonial rationale for government. Despite his critique of colonial appropriation, Ghosh can, in his fictionalmedium, imagine an ?????? outside??™??™ to these systems of exchange and commodityformation: in the secrecy of Mangala??™s rituals, the use value of thecalcutta chromosome retains its materiality, its sensuousness, its silence. SilencesThe silence of Mangala??™s occult practices poses a problem for modernpostcolonial historiography. How to speak of this counterscientific knowledgefrom the proportions of rational discourse How, indeed, to speak of, to, and with ghosts This is the classic question of communicability thathaunts all postcolonial discourse, and it is foregrounded as the key problemamong subaltern studies scholars.

Chakrabarty poses disjunctive discourse??™ uncanny speech??™ as one utopian solution; he asks us to imaginea subaltern history away from ?????? the dream of the whole called a state,??™??™ ina ?????? fragmentary and episodic??™??™ structure of democratic dialogue. 21 The historianenters a dialogue punctured by the other, respectful of the ?????? radicalpolysemy of languages and practices??™??™ that testifies to the incommensurabilityof the worlds that ?????? we??™??™ (presumably, Chakrabarty, speaking of thesecular modern subject) inhabit. 22 This is precisely the disjunctive discourse21.

See Chakrabarty, ?????? Radical Histories and the Question of Enlightened Rationalism: Some Recent Critiques of Subaltern Studies,??™??™ Economic

and Political Weekly of India, April 8, 1995, 751–59. Chakrabarty takes on formidable critiques of radical left histories from more traditional Marxist critics, such as Sumit Sarkar. Sarkar has most famously criticized subaltern studies scholars for their undermining of the legacies of Enlightenment rationalism, an underscoring of rationality that celebrates all manner of the affective, the unsaid, the lived. This includes religious understandings of community, which, in the age of chauvinistic Hindutva, seem particularly dangerous to the goals of secularism. Chakrabarty defends his critical engagement with Enlightenment rationalism, which in no way entails a wholesale rejection of the tradition of rational argumentation (752). Rather, his work rejects the hyper-rationalism of the colonial modern that would deny anything affective—pleasures, desires, emotions—as being important to the tasks of historical investigation.

22. Chakrabarty, *Radical Histories*, 751–212 boundary 2 / Summer 2004 we encounter in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, where the facts of science, requiring communication (the narrative of discovery), are indeed punctured by the counterscientific will to secrecy, improbability, and inadmissibility. In the novel, medical discourse and its attendant literary genres are contaminated with meditations on religio-philosophical truths. The reality of transmigration assumes centrality as the protagonist Antar becomes the John Malkovichian body for the grafting of other characters in the novel; transmigration is further posited as logically commensurable with our present-day experiences of living multiple and virtual cyberlives. We can account, in part, for the secrecy in the practice of

corporeal immortality if we take a closer look at the kinds of religious philosophical shenanigans dramatized in the novel. We enter an underground of rituals and cults, from meetings of spooky syphilitics in forest clearings to Spiritualist (the European take on accessing multiple souls, equally scorned by scientists) seances.

For we are in the domain not only of religion but popular religion. The nature of the performances described in the novel “rituals with a punchy charge” refers us to tantra, that Other of Brahmanical Hinduism. Always seen as a counter religion, tantra works against the Brahmanical imperative to control and prohibit desire in order to attain moksha (freedom from the cycle of death and rebirth); tantric cults deploy desire, and therefore the body, as a means to freeing the soul. The ecstatic antics of Mangala’s followers, their ease with violence and the worship of sexualized female deities, echo the tantric rites exalting the Kali (a malignant manifestation of the mother goddess venerated in Bengal).

In turn, any philosophy of transmigration is posed as the “other” of Western scientific rationalism, as many of the European characters in the novel inform us; seen from within epistemological hierarchies, the spiritual reaching toward the eternal is of secondary importance to the scientific. Tantra was most widely practiced by forest dwellers, “outlaws” who worshipped Kali and were often characterized as dacoits (bandits) in common Bengali lore. The British abolition of Thuggee in 1837 attempted to clean up these populations, driving them underground with their tantric practices. No surprise, given that tantra was always perceived as popular religion by Brahmanical Hindus. Even more

interesting, for our purposes, is the fact that these bands of thugs acquire heroic proportion as freedom fighters in the fiction of nineteenth-century novelist Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (especially enshrined in his widely circulated *Devi Chaudurani*). Ghosh is interested in Chattopadhyay because the latter wrote the first Indian novel in English, *Rajmohun's Wife*, a novel Ghosh reads as a dress rehearsal for Chattopadhyay's more celebrated Bengali fiction. See Amitav Ghosh, "The March of the Novel through History: The Testimony of My Grandfather's Bookcase," reprinted in *The Imam and the Indian* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002), 287–304.

Ghosh / On Grafting the Vernacular 213 hubris of rejuvenating mortal bodies. And from within rational discourse, spiritual will acquires the shadiness of a counterscience: the other side of mortality is inadmissible; it assumes proportion only as occult, as excess. These alternative medical and philosophical practices, therefore, rely on secrecy—the very opposite of communication and/or discovery—for their continued transmission: Silence is their religion, Murugan explains to a bewildered Antar (88). Silence is thick discourse in this novel, and it transforms those who answer to it.

Congruent with the precepts of corporeal immortality, Phulboni imagines silence to be a material thing, a creature that haunts the bowels of the city: But here our city, where all law, natural and human, is held in capricious suspension, that which is hidden has no need of words to give it life; like a creature that lives in a perverse element, it mutates to discover sustenance precisely where it appears to be most starkly withheld—in this case, silence (121). Literary Tongue As modern

subjects, if indeed we must break the silence, the literary provides a place for phantomic figurations. Phulboni, the literary visionary in the tale, is the one most tuned to stealth of the silent underground; his language eddies around its possibilities. His capable expressivity in the novel convinces us that Mangala's steamy underground cannot be spoken of in denotative descriptive language; its only tongue is the figurative, the domain of imaginative work.

The argument advances through Murugan's progression from a LifeWatch employee, to detective, to postcolonial archivist. As the novel proceeds, we are faced with a crisis in narration. The narratives of several scientists, administrators, linguists, missionaries, doctors, and Spiritualists are constantly displaced, replaced, cut and pasted. In fact, all major acts of detection in the novel involve deconstructing existing and discordant accounts from the colonial era (journal entries, diaries, logs of scientific research, partially damaged audiocassette narrations, oral memories, letters).

The main pursuers of truth in *The Calcutta Chromosome* figure out the puzzle of the counterscientific through filling in gaps, finishing log entries, or writing in the indecipherable. Soon our main fact finder Murugan's epistemological frustrations give way to an oppositional subjectivity. He rejects the institutional parameters of discovery, and he begins to supplement the fissures of the colonial story with fragments of other unconventional knowledges. For new evidence, he draws on unfinished fragments of records from other men who come in contact with Ross and his strange crew, Elijah Farley

Cunningham, both of whom traffic in ghosts. So Murugan has to turn to ghost stories published in an obscure and out-of-print vernacular magazine to finally understand what ghostly presences are doing in the narrative of Ross's discovery. 24 There are three sightings of Lakhaan's ghost in the novel's denouement, just as in Phulboni's oeuvre the Lakhaan stories circle around different mutations of the same character, Lakhaan.

Murugan's love interest and fellow investigator, Urmila, reads these mutations as a kind of allegory (93). As a journalist/literary critic, Urmila has a quest of her own, one that allegorizes Ghosh's recovery (and embedding) of vernacular antecedents to his novel in English. Urmila seeks the story behind the famous writer Phulboni's spiraling personal decline and his delirious wanderings, which she ascribes to the mystery of the Lakhaan stories. In its ability to figuratively gesture toward another story that remains silent in the text, literary practice edges closer to the truth of counterscience than scientific explanation. By the end of the novel, the vernacular literary tale is the only authoritative means through which the characters can decode the muddled and untruthful records of scientific discovery. Vernacular Sutures In terms of postcolonial literary practice, vernacular ghost fiction presents a certain native record of the colonial presence, a register of its violence upon the colonized world. Scattered encryptions of vernacular ghost stories in *The Calcutta Chromosome* exert an uncanny pressure on any reader familiar with traditions of vernacular ghost fiction, a tradition that Ghosh clearly claims as central to understanding the contemporary postcolonial scholar/writer's epistemological perplexity.

Even on first read, one is struck by the specific resonances in the three Lakhaan fragments in the novel. They seem to beckon a corpus of 24. In fact, Ghosh grants equal credence to written facts as he does to lore and hearsay. His renegade detective, Murugan, wonders if Phulboni wrote the Lakhaan story first and later heard its folk version or vice versa. This confusion of folk versions, literary manifestations, and hearsay as scientific evidence constitutes the new work of the archivist, Ghosh suggests, an insistence on subaltern knowledges—myths, folk narratives, and fiction—as the ground of rational understanding given the fallen state of knowledge in the colonial-modern world. The final truth must be experienced or performed by the investigator.

Thus, throughout the novel, written and oral traces lead us to performances: of illicit healing, of unsavory seances, of sexual fusion between bodies. Ghosh / On Grafting the Vernacular 215 writing best described by Parama Roy as the Indian bureaucratic gothic, a genre that figurally records the trauma of modernity in the postcolonial liberal state. In the case of Bengali literature, I could identify (albeit inexpertly) antecedents to this genre that date back to literature written under colonial rule, but here I focus on two memorable examples, Tagore's *Kshudhito Pashaan* and Renu's *Smells of a Primeval Night*, which were cited by Ghosh as inspirational sources for *The Calcutta Chromosome*. Numerous references to these tales find their way into *The Calcutta Chromosome*, creating a literary puzzle of sorts: the haunted station is explicitly named Renupur, and we are told it lies somewhere between Barichand Darbhanga (Barich is the setting for the Tagore story); *Kshudhito Pashaan*

™ commences with a ghost story told by a tax collector to his fellowtravelers on a train, and in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Phulboni hears the story of Lakhaan??™'s ghost also on a train (a classic Indian setting for storytelling, with the railways symbolizing the reach of the state/empire); the Tagore story is suffused with the changing and exchanging of clothes, much like the obsessive changing of bodies in *The Calcutta Chromosome*; Phulboni works for a British company when he encounters the boy ghost, and thus qualifies as a protagonist for the bureaucratic gothic; further, Phulboni chose his pseudonym??” no doubt playing with the pen name of another famous Bengali writer, Bonophul??” from the wild Phulboni region in the eastern state of Orissa, the place of Santhals, who are Karma??™'s (Renu??™'s servant-boy protagonist) people. One could go on.

But my point here is this: in Ghosh??™'s hands, this vernacular ghost genre becomes the genetic blueprint for the novel in English. The Lakhaan ghost fragments to which all trails return are mutations of original vernacular literary fare, perhaps Ghosh??™'s elaborate allegory for the primal scene of postcolonial writing in English. I would further explain this personal haunting by a quick look at the 25. Parama Roy, author of *Indian Traffic*, spoke from her new work at the Cultural Analysis Colloquium at the University of California, Santa Barbara, March 6, 2002. Her talk, titled “?????? Figures of Famine,??™??™ presented Mahasweta Devi??™'s literary and journalistic ?????? accounting??™??™ of famine, a phenomenon that troubles the postcolonial liberal state and its agents (bureaucrats).

Fiction that captures the shock of this traumatic excess within the bureaucratic imaginary is what Roy pithily transcribes as ?????? the



bureaucratic gothic.??™??™ 26. Rabindranath Tagore??™s ?????? Kshudhita Pashaan??™??™ (?????? The Hungry Stones??™??™) was published in The Hungry Stones and Other Stories (New York: Macmillan, 1916), 1??“ 15; Phaniswarnath Renu??™s tale is set in the postcolonial era, and a translation may be found in The Third Vow and Other Stories, trans.

Katherine G. Hansen (New Delhi: Chanakya Press, 1986), 133??“ 51. 216 boundary 2 / Summer 2004 subject of these two stories (metonymically the subject of the colonial and postcolonial bureaucratic gothic). The Lakhaan story in The Calcutta Chromosome is a tale of vengeance, where the boy??™s ghost takes revenge on the station master who attempts to kill him. The boy is a poor rural migrant who is violently handled by the agent of empire, the station master, who treats him as an outcast drifter of suspect parentage. Living in a railway station, he is caught in the transition between the village and the modern city. He becomes the recursive ghost of the postcolonial state??“ the specters from the hinterland vibrant in Mahasweta Devi??™s ghost fiction??“ who reminds the liberal urban postcolonial bureaucrat of an ethical failure; the rural or tribal other is that figure of excess for whom ?????? free??™??™ India cannot account and for whom there are no rights and no redress.

27 Almost all these features of the Lakhaan character are mutations of Karma, Renu??™s protagonist. In a postcolonial fable set in the most underdeveloped region of postindependent India, the migrant foundling knows that he ?????? belongs??™??™ to a list of ?????? babus??™??™ (white-collar workers under the Raj, often agents of empire) as he shuttles between railway hubs. He is traumatized by how he is perceived as a casteless and

homeless thief, and constantly dreams of being lured by a red light to the train tracks, where he dies. Karma is haunted by his own bodily disintegration when his feet and head are sundered from his torso by the carnal engine; in his delirium, and much to his amazement, Karma sees himself wearing Anthony sahib's boots (Renu equates the colonial sahib to the postcolonial babu/bureaucrat) obviously, he has been murdered for his sin of stealing the boots. Karma's nightmare finds literal encryption in Farley's and Grigson's encounters with Lakhaan in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, where a ghostly red lantern leads. Parama Roy eloquently made this point about ghosts as a record of the excess inconceivable to the liberal postcolonial subject, an excess that activists such as Mahasweta Devi catalog in their fiction. Phaniswarnath Renu presents an interesting parallel to Mahasweta Devi, since he is best known for his intellectual commitment to nonmetropolitan milieus and his critique of the postcolonial liberal state, especially in his celebrated novel *Maila Anchal* (Delhi: Soiled Border, 1954). Like Mahasweta Devi, then, he is both a chronicler of and an active interventionist in the modern violences that the nation inflicts on its own people.

28. Lakhaan is a common name with an interesting mythological referent for our particular ghost. Lakshman (the Sanskritized version of the eastern Indian variant, Lakhaan) is Ram's brother, who follows the former, the epic hero of the Ramayan, into his fourteen-year exile; Lakshman's motives are simply loyalty and love, and it is a common Indian joke to cast aspersions on Lakhaan's motives. The name Lakhaan, therefore, conjures one who Ghosh / *On Grafting the Vernacular* 217 the men to their doom on the

train tracks. Yet the tables have turned. For in Ghosh's hands the poor migrant avenges himself by turning the babu (Phulboni) and the Englishmen (Farley and Grigson) into the victims. Tagore's protagonist, a Hindu man and a theosophist kinsman, hears the ghost story from a Muslim collector of cotton duties for the British government, with whom he travels. The cosmopolitan urban Muslim fascinates the theosophist, who becomes enamored by this someone who is besieged by ghosts, a Muslim other, no less.

In turn, the tax collector recognizes his "madness" (manifested in hallucinations) through someone else who is haunted—the old man, Meher Ali, the custodian of local lore. Tagore's investment in a unified (Hindu and Muslim) national society is pervasive in his fiction following the partition (1905) and reunification (1911) of Bengal—the project of the fantasy of a Muslim past in the imaginary of a collaborator (colonial agent), a fantasy that captivates his Hindu audience. The tax collector, given to facts and figures, cannot account for his temporary madness while on assignment in Barich.

Drawn to an abandoned palace, he succumbs to its hungry stones: he plays and replays the role of a lustful Muslim pasha driven mad by his harem, and by one beauty in particular. The drama of lust, revenge, and yearning has seeped into the very walls of the mansion that now consumes any who cross its threshold. In this colonial bureaucratic gothic, Tagore's metaphoric hungry stones are the excess that drives British rulers and their Indian agents to delirium and hallucination; it is a specter that cannot be accounted for or put to rest. Both the vernacular stories register a trauma of betrayal. Ghosts are the literary devices that return us to those ethical questions of

historicalcultural and economic violence that trouble Tagore and Renu??” a violencereplayed only a little differently at our current phase of ?????? empire.??™ ??™ Lakhaanand Mangala are reminders of erasure: they demand redress from rationalhistoriography; their ghostly stories split the seam of the English-versusvernacularmodernist opposition that has hounded Indian writing in Englishfrom its inception in the 1930s. The protagonists of The Calcutta Chromosome, Antar and Murugan, are also ?????? guilty??™ ??™ of self-betrayal, of working forthe ?????? babus??™ ??™ of globalization.

No small wonder that these stories exert uncannypressure on Ghosh, a writer intent on salvaging future epistemologiesfrom the debris of the past. comes second, who follows, faithfully, but who remains partially eclipsed in the narrative??” a resoundingly good choice for the recursive Lakhaan/Lutchman (Mangala??™s assistant) inThe Calcutta Chromosome. 218 boundary 2 / Summer 2004Such a grafting of vernacular paradigms onto a literary tradition thatcharacteristically, and often problematically, references only its Anglo antecedents29is a polemical refiguring of postcolonial literary practice. Now anypostcolonial criticism of the novel in English must recuperate a vernaculararchive to make good its promise. Quite predictably, Derrida concludes hisrumination on ghosts with the injunction not only to speak to and of ghostsbut to let them speak to us: If he loves justice at least, the ?????? scholar??™ ??™ of the future, the intellectualof tomorrow should learn it and from the ghost. He should learn tolive by learning not how to make conversation with the ghost but totalk with him, with her, how to let them speak or how to give themback speech, even it is in oneself: they are always there, even if theydo not exist, even if they are no longer, even if

they are not yet. They give us time to rethink "there" as soon as we open our mouths, even at a colloquium and especially when one speaks there in a foreign tongue. (SM, 176)29.

Consider, for example, the review of *The Calcutta Chromosome* in *Science Fiction Weekly*, where John Clute pitches