

HAUNTING SECRETS: THE PHANTOM OF SHAME LEGACIES THAT KEEP ON GIVING

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the connections between unspoken transgenerational trauma, shame, and the concepts of hauntology and the transgenerational phantom and looks at ways writing can reveal the traces of shame-as-affect. Some transgenerational trauma narratives do not distinguish between trauma-as-event and shame-as-affect/emotion, which can lead to a conflation of the two. This paper proposes that hauntology (the encroachment of an "other") and the transgenerational phantom (the metaphysical manifestation of others' shameful secrets), as conceptual scaffolds, are relevant to deciphering and depicting shame-as-affect distinct to the traumatic event via an understanding of the way speech and writing can bear the traces of shame-as-affect. To demonstrate, this paper provides a close reading of Arundhati Roy's *The god of small things* and highlights how cryptographic writing — the fissures and distortions in language — can inform the representation of shame in trauma narratives.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Mesh Tennakoon is a writer of short stories and creative nonfiction based in Naarm. Her work has been published in *Meanjin*, *Going Down Swinging* and forthcoming in *Island Magazine*. She has degrees in Law and Psychology and previously worked in medical negligence litigation and in human resources. Mesh is currently completing an MA (Creative Writing) at Deakin University. She provides professional editing services to law firms and is working on a collection of magical realist short stories.

KEYWORDS

Shame—Derrida—Abraham and Torok—Hauntology—Transgenerational
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Introduction

My mother died from motor neurone disease in a Hong Kong hospital, far away from her beloved Sri Lanka. My family and I were living in Hong Kong, and my mother moved to Hong Kong shortly after diagnosis so she could spend the end of her life with us. For the last months of her life, she was trapped inside her wasting body, her mind lucid and cognisant, yet unable to communicate with the outside world. Knowing this would become her fate, while she still could, my mother spent time writing, documenting memories—recollections from childhood, including the death of her mother when she was a young child, motherhood, and the joy she derived from grandchildren. After my mother died, relatives spoke about my mother's childhood and revealed their version of events surrounding the death of Frances, my grandmother.

As mourners do, I began to dissect the past—notably the times when my mother reminisced about her childhood. I realised that I had not recognised then that perhaps her gestures and expressions and what she left unsaid were insights into the trauma she'd experienced and—significantly—the shame she felt. I wondered whether a perceived shame associated with my grandmother's death haunted my mother more than the obvious traumatic experience of losing her mother as a young child. Informed by literary trauma theory, the concept of shame, hauntology and the transgenerational phantom, I wanted to investigate the secret legacy left by my grandmother via fictionalised biography.

As I have discussed elsewhere (unpublished MA thesis 2022), shame, as depicted in magical realist narratives, appears to play a role in the transgenerational transmission of trauma. Specifically, my research suggests that narratives concerning unspoken transgenerational trauma can *also* be haunted by shame. However, the distinction between trauma and shame is not always apparent in transgenerational trauma narratives, and there is, in some instances, a conflation of what are two distinct components. In writing the fictionalised biographies of my mother and grandmother as short stories (unpublished MA thesis 2022), I wanted to explore how to make this distinction – between trauma-as-event and posttrauma shame – within a magical realist framework. And how creating the distinction – although subtle – produces a narrative palimpsest and, therefore, a more nuanced read.

This paper briefly reviews the connections between trauma and shame (Taylor 2015); it then introduces the hauntology scholarship of Jacques Derrida (1994) and Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok's concept of the transgenerational phantom (1994)—specifically, as a framework to analyse how Arundhati Roy's (1998) *The god of small things (TGOST)* depicts, as I'll argue, shame's haunting of the narrative. Finally, I'll suggest how the conceptual frames of hauntology and the

transgenerational phantom can inform creative writing practice and, with this, how it is relevant to deciphering and depicting shame in narratives of unspoken transgenerational trauma.

Anecdotes and Short Stories

According to my mother, my grandmother died during a stay at a sanatorium while recovering from tuberculosis. In relatives' version of events, Frances was admitted to a sanatorium because of "agitation" and, in her distress, took her life. After Frances's death, whichever way it occurred, my grandfather allowed his sister and her husband, who were childless, to adopt my mother and uncle, and he faded from their lives.

In the creative artefact, I fictionalised the experiences of my mother and grandmother across two interlinked short stories ('Poya' and 'Bōrei') to explore how shame from one narrative permeated another. I used elements of magical realism and rhetorical devices to represent and evoke shame, with the narratives intersecting in imitation of the fluidity and persistence in the consciousness of both trauma and shame.

'Poya', set in 1950s Sri Lanka, explores the hours before Frances's death as she deals with her involuntary admission to a sanatorium. She reflects on her interactions with her daughter (Shanthi) pre-admission and the events that led her to this point: her encounters with a yakka—a mythical Sri Lankan beast, and her rape by the kattadiya—an exorcist called in by her husband to vanquish the yakka. Frances's trauma remains unspoken because of her significant shame; she cannot reconcile her emotions and takes her life under the guise that she is flying away from the sanatorium with the yakka.

'Bōrei', set in 1980s Papua New Guinea, tracks several hours in adult Shanthi's life as she interacts with Yoshino—the earthbound ghost of a Japanese WW2 soldier trapped at the base of a frangipani tree in the garden. Shanthi and an employed gardener are the only ones who see Yoshino. The ghost prompts an avalanche of childhood memories and emotions, specifically shame, for Shanthi relating to her mother's death. In the end, the interactions between Yoshino and Shanthi are mutually beneficial.

Connections between Unspoken Transgenerational Trauma and Shame in Narrative

Cathy Caruth's work (1996) crystallised a psychoanalytical and poststructural approach to examining psychological trauma in literary

narrative, considering the traumatic experience so painful that it remained unassimilated in the consciousness and thus unspeakable and unrepresentable. More recently, Michelle Balaev has proposed that the unspeakability of trauma is 'one among many responses to an extreme event' (2018:360) and that there are alternative explanations, other than traumatic amnesia, as to why a traumatic experience remains unspoken. Balaev's (2012; 2014; 2018) pluralistic approach also emphasises the 'interplay of external and internal forces ... character traits and cultural factors' (2018:366), allowing for the consideration that shame associated with trauma could contribute to trauma remaining unspoken.

Clinical studies involving patients with posttrauma disorders indicate a nexus between trauma and shame, with shame determinative of clinical outcomes (Taylor 2015; Zhu et al. 2020). Terry Taylor proposes that shame is either a primary emotion during a traumatic event or a secondary emotion when there is a 'cognitive appraisal' (2015:2). Taylor posits that shame functions maladaptively in posttrauma disorders when it is unacknowledged. Silvan Tomkins (1963) is widely credited for describing shame as a negative affect. Elspeth Probyn clarifies that 'emotion refers to the cultural and social expression, whereas affects are of a biological nature' (2005:11). I do not give precedence to either affect or emotion, using both interchangeably in this paper.

Parallel to clinical findings,¹ literary scholars recognised that understanding the narrative representation of transgenerational trauma did not lie within the auspices of literary trauma theory alone. Gabrielle Schwab, a psychoanalyst and a literary trauma theorist, expands upon the Freudian idea of transference, proposing that traumatic legacies are more readily passed on transgenerationally than is historical knowledge, where 'legacies of violence reverberate through generations' (2010:1). Influenced by the work of Derrida, and Abraham and Torok, Schwab proposes that trauma transference occurs via an 'unconscious transmission of disavowed family dynamics that one generation affects another generation's unconscious' (2010:4). And that descendants "receive" histories not only through stories handed down but 'also through traces of affect' (2010:14). Meera Atkinson proposes that a 'traumatic encounter ... generates an affective charge destined to ... resonate' (2017:9). Although Atkinson draws on Caruth's idea of unassimilation, she also relies on affect theory, proposing that traumatic affect, which she defines as 'affect ... bound to, and by, trauma ... [addresses] trauma in an affective framework and affect in a trauma theory framework' (2017:10). This paper relies on the extensive work of Schwab (2010) and Richardson and Atkinson's argument that a traumatic affect is 'the mode ... though which trauma is experienced,

¹ There is a body of clinical studies evidencing the phenomenon of transgenerational trauma (Danieli 1998; Lev-Wiesel 2007; Phipps and Degges-White 2014).

transmitted, conveyed, and represented' (2013:12), such that the shame could be construed as one such traumatic affect.

Concurrent with the emergence of literary trauma theory, Derrida, credited as the father of hauntology,² sparked a spectral turn (del Pilar Blanco and Peeren 2103), with *Specters of Marx* (1994), raising the notion of a ghost as an analytical tool. Psychoanalysts Abraham and Torok's (1994) contribution to the field³ was their theory that a patient could be the unwitting bearer of the traumatic residue of others. They supported their claim by reference to two main themes—phantom and crypt—which are the 'modes of the survival of the dead in the unconscious of the living' (Davis 2077:77). Derrida (1977), in his foreword, 'Fors' to Abraham and Torok's first book, *The wolf man's magic word*⁴, augments the latter's work by proposing 'as for language, it inhabits the crypt in the form of "words buried alive", defunct words, relieved of their "communicative function"' (Derrida 1977:99⁵). Schwab highlights how for Derrida, 'cryptographic writing is fractured writing' (2010:4). She proposes that such writing 'bear[s] the traces of transgenerational memory of something never experienced first-hand by the one carrying the secret' (2010:4). I suggest that this transgenerational memory could also be the emotion/affect of shame arising from unspoken trauma. Thus, cryptographic writing could depict the memory of the trauma *and/or* the emotion/affect of shame arising from that unspoken event. In the next section, as a backgrounding to how cryptographic writing informed the depiction of shame in my short stories, I use my reading of *TGOST* to explore how shame associated with unspoken transgenerational trauma may be represented in magical realist narratives with hauntology and the transgenerational phantom as conceptual frameworks.

Lingering Ghosts and Transgenerational Phantoms

The language of hauntology has nothing to do with a belief or otherwise in ghosts but represents an approach in which the ghost is viewed as a deconstructive agent. Derrida proposed that the ghost is the encroachment of an "other" into our world and that 'it is necessary to speak of the ghost, indeed, to the ghost and with it' (Derrida 1994:xviii). He contended that the ghost lay outside the order of knowledge and, as such fractured binary thinking and called for an examination of the order of knowledge (Davis 2007). At its core, Derrida's hauntology explores how the presence of the past is felt and how it continues to shape and

² From Derrida's use of the French word, hantologie (Davis 2005).

³ Predates Derrida's scholarship. *The shell and the kernel* (1994) is composed of articles originally written in French in the 1970s, translated, edited and compiled with an introduction by Nicholas Rand.

⁴ Originally published as *Crytonymie: le vebier de l'homme au loups* (1976).

⁵ Taken from Derrida (1977) 'Fors', *The Georgia Review* 31(1):64-116.

influence the understanding of the present. The appeal of hauntology as a theoretical and interrogative tool for creative textual analysis and writing lies in the link between a theme – the other – and the 'preciseness of literature' (Davis 2005:377).

Abraham and Torok became interested in transgenerational trauma when they discovered indicators of trauma in their patients that could not be linked to the patients' own past lived experiences. This led to their psychoanalytical theory that an individual could:

unwittingly inherit the secret psychic substances of their ancestors ...
the dead do not return [but] their lives' unfinished business is
unconsciously handed down to their descendants (Rand 1994:166-7).

Their focus was on how the inherited unspoken secrets of forebears influenced the thoughts and behaviours of their descendants. Two fundamental aspects of Abraham and Torok's scholarship are the exchange between literature and psychoanalysis, with literature as a 'resource for clinical insight' (Rand 1994:11) and an underscoring of shame's role in transgenerational trauma.

Abraham and Torok propose that if trauma is not worked through, it will be transmitted to descendants as a transgenerational *phantom*. Their hypothesis is advanced upon the cornerstones of crypts, cryptonymy, secrets and phantoms, which in their work all have meanings that do not correlate with the standard definitions of those terms. They propose that a crypt is a location in a person's morphology, an 'artificial unconscious lodged in the very midst of the ego' (1994:159), preserving ancestors from being lost forever – a psychic mausoleum for dead ancestors interconnected with mourning. Crypts 'engender silence' (Schwab 2010:49), making them perfect places to conceal shameful secrets associated with unspoken trauma. Abraham and Torok are specific about the type of ancestors who haunt these crypts: those who 'were shamed during their lifetime or ... took unspeakable secrets to the grave' (Abraham 1994:171). The transgenerational phantom – the metapsychological manifestation of the 'gaps left in us by the secrets of others' (Abraham 1994:171) – shifts the focus from the experiences of an individual to the "unfinished business" of the person's ancestors. Notably, the ancestors who haunt do not speak of their secrets out of a sense of shame.

Esther Rashkin, in an extensive analysis of Abraham and Torok's work, interprets the shameful secret as 'a situation or drama that is transmitted without being stated and without the sender's or receiver's awareness of its transmission' (2014:4). The secrets are not unspoken in the sense of being unintegrated, as in Caruth's trauma model, but in the 'sense of being a subject of shame and prohibition' (Davis 2005:378).

Abraham and Torok describe the phantom as 'a formation of the unconscious that has never been conscious ... it passes — in a way yet to be determined — from the parents' unconscious into the child's ... work[ing] like a ventriloquist ...' (Abraham 1994:173-174). There have been interpretations of how this transmission occurs. Schwab (2010) proposes that the consequence of concealing shameful secrets is that elders engage in cryptic language and gestures, which their descendants unconsciously detect. Meera Lee interprets these as 'verbal expressions or pantomimed facial expressions or gestures ... [and] the crypt gradually becomes an anthropomorphic entity' (2018:13), leading to the formation of a phantom. Schwab expands Abraham and Torok's findings to posit that 'the buried ghosts of the past come to haunt the language from within (2010:49) ... find[ing] its way into speech and writing' (2010:52). Schwab interprets their work as reading the hidden gaps and proposes that the crypt and its contents are traceable via the fissures and distortions in language: 'incoherences, discontinuities, disruptions and the disintegration of meaning or grammar or semantic or rhetorical coherence' (2010:53). Schwab suggests searching for expressive traces and outlines an array of rhetorical devices that could be employed when writing these traces into narrative – 'metaphor, metonymy, homophony, homonymy, puns, semantic ambiguities, malapropisms, anagrams, and rebus and similar figures that all combine concealment and revelation' (2010:54).

In dissecting the work of Abraham and Torok, scholars (Davis 2007; Schwab 2010; Atkinson 2017; Lee 2018) highlight that a shameful secret emanating from a traumatic experience is critical to creating a transgenerational phantom, 'it is not the repressed which returns to wreck our lives, but the *shame* of others' (Davis 2007:82, emphasis added). It is this idea that grounds my exploration that shame can be represented distinctively in narratives concerning unspoken transgenerational trauma. Following on from Davis's statement, I suggest that in addition to depicting unspoken trauma, rhetorical devices may be employed to represent shame as distinct from the unspoken trauma-as-event. And that if done with an awareness of the distinction between trauma (as what happened) and shame-as-affect, it can enhance the narrative.

Schwab also proposes that literary works, through their 'experimental forms, approximate trauma' and are therefore equipped to represent trauma via 'the tracing of traumatic effects and their inscription in mind, body and language' (2010:58). As I have discussed elsewhere (unpublished MA thesis 2022), magical realism—understood as the extraordinary juxtaposed alongside the ordinary (Faris 2004)—is one such literary form.

TGOST uses elements of magical realism to represent the characters' trauma and, I suggest, to convey strong affects—namely shame, by 'recreat[ing] the real' (Arva 2008:60)—those simulacra that are otherwise challenging to portray as a 'felt reality' (2008:60). I have interpreted some of these simulacra in *TGOST* not as unspoken trauma but as the shame associated with the trauma-as-event. Roy (1998) effectively uses cryptographic writing with a magical realist scaffold to portray the "traumatic affect" (Atkinson 2014) of shame. Borrowing the term "phantom" from Abraham and Torok (1994), I suggest the phrase "phantom of shame" as a notation for this shame that transcends generations. *TGOST* explores universal themes from family relationships and religion to forbidden love. The narrative is told primarily from the viewpoint of Rahel, weaving back and forth in time, tracing the traumatic experiences and the consequences, such as shame, of the Kochamma family in Kerala. The family includes Mammachi and Pappachi, their grown-up children Ammu and Chacko, both divorced from their spouses, Ammu's twins, Rahel and Estha and Chacko's daughter, Sophie Mol. The other significant character is Velutha, a factory worker from the untouchable class associated with the Kochammas since his boyhood. At the story's centre is the brief affair between Ammu, an upper-caste Syrian-Christian, and the lower-caste Hindu, Velutha—an unimaginable union. Although fleeting, the affair haunts the novel's entirety, drastically impacting the lives of the clan, particularly the children.

Aside from the novel's acronym, *GOST*, the reader is alerted to phantoms from the beginning. 'The Loss of Sophie Mol' (Roy 1998:15) — of the twins' cousin who drowned — is established as a phantom, I'd argue, by capitalising the words. This entity, created in the language, 'stepped softly around the Ayemenem House like a quiet thing in socks' (1998:16). As a grown-up reflecting on the past, Rahel cannot fully articulate the significance of the loss. However, Rahel evokes shame as she describes how the entity 'hid in books and food ... In the scabs of the sores on Chacko's shins ...' (1998:16).

Pappachi's moth is another recurring metaphoric phantom. The "original" moth was a source of shame for Pappachi—' His life's greatest setback was not having had the moth that *he* discovered named after him' (Roy 1998:49). The moth repeatedly torments the family, in particular, Rahel as a child:

Pappachi's moth was held responsible for his black moods ... bouts of temper. Its pernicious ghost ... haunted every house that he ever lived in. It tormented him and his children and his children's children. (1998:49)

Rahel cannot wholly understand the moth's primacy, apart from how it makes her feel. It seems to emerge whenever Rahel or Estha feel or

anticipate shame. For example, when the twins witness Velutha's brutal beating at the hands of the police following the discovery of his affair with Ammu — '[it] ... spread its wings over both their hearts' (1998:315), and in that instance represents the twin's sense of shame in witnessing Velutha's beating and doing nothing — 'Screams died ... and floated belly up like dead fish' (1998:308).

There are two prominent deaths in *TGOST*—those of Velutha and Ammu. Both deaths are traumatic, share a lack of dignity and impact the children profoundly. Most significantly, there is considerable shame surrounding each passing. It is as if death itself is shameful. Ammu's passing plagues Rahel. She details Ammu's pitiful post-mortem appearance before the body's forced cremation because the Church refuses to bury Ammu, alluding to shameful reasons — Ammu's divorce and her fornication '... in the mud with a man ... a filthy coolie ... Like animals ...' (1998:257). Cremation means that Ammu's body doesn't get a Christian burial, evoking another shame:

He had her wrapped in a dirty bedsheet and laid out on a stretcher.
Over the jarring potholes ... Ammu's body jiggled and slid off the
stretcher. Her head hit an iron bolt on the floor (1998:162).

The crematorium's incinerator is symbolically crypt-like and anthropomorphic, suggesting concealment of Ammu's shame. Yet, the shame persists in Rahel because it has already been transmitted via the unconscious gestures and expressions (Schwab 2010; Lee 2018) of Ammu and others.

Velutha's condition immediately before his death is described graphically by Estha — imagery used to reproduce his shame, 'The smell of shit made him [Estha] retch ... Velutha ... was naked, his soiled mundu had come undone. Blood spilled from his skull like a secret' (Roy 1998:319-20). The ultimate shame of Velutha's death is that, as a Hindu, his body is not cremated; ironically, Ammu's body is. Velutha's body is 'dumped in the *themmady kuzhy* — the pauper's pit' (1998:321) — for this reader, another crypt.

Schwab proposes that a crypt could, in principle, also be built 'as a tomb for one's lost self' (2010:45). Estha has done this: 'Once the quietness arrived, it stayed and spread in Estha ... it stripped his thoughts of the words that described them ... Unspeakable ... entombed ... (Roy 1998:11-12)'. The metaphoric quietness, portrayed by Roy as an octopus inside Estha's mind, I propose, is another phantom of shame that haunts the narrative, shaping Estha's behaviour.

Abraham and Torok's (1994) phantom makes its presence felt; its intention is to perpetuate the silence surrounding the shameful secret.

The focus of their work is for the shameful secret to be revealed with the goal of psychoanalysis to 'exorcise it [the phantom]' (Abraham 1994:188) by 'putting its unspeakable secrets into words ... to bring the ghost back to the order of knowledge' (Davis 2007:87), leading to 'a higher wisdom about oneself and the world of humans at large' (Abraham 1994:189). Conversely, Derrida, for whom the ghost is 'an unnameable or almost unnameable thing' (1994:5), believes that the ghost should be lived with. For Derrida, only scholars have an impulse to 'inspect, stabilize, *arrest* the specter in its speech' (1994:13) or 'exclude it, to exorcize it' (1994:124). And for Derrida, the ghost's secret 'is not a puzzle to be solved ... [the secret] is not unspeakable because it is taboo but because it cannot be articulated in language available to us' (Davis 2007:13). In *TGOST*, the various phantoms are not brought into the order of knowledge. There is ongoing "unfinished business". Ammu and Velutha's affair ends abruptly, their deaths are sudden, traumatic and shrouded in shame, and much is left unspoken. Shame shapes the twins, leading them to engage in incestuous lovemaking, which creates another terrible secret and another phantom, depicted by Roy as "Emptiness". Rahel observes that she and Estha are '[s]tumbling through their parts, nursing someone else's sorrow. Grieving someone else's grief' (Roy 1998:191), and (I suggest) *unconsciously carrying someone else's shame*. Thus, in *TGOST*, the phantoms of shame cohabit much like Derrida's ghosts — 'they are always there, specters, even if they do not exist, even if they are no longer, even if they are not yet' (Derrida 1994: 221).

In my fictionalised re-interpretation of my grandmother and mother's lives, I used both aspects of Derrida's hauntology—the past shame as an "other" encroaching on the present and Abraham and Torok's idea of a transgenerational phantom — specifically a phantom of shame, as a frame. However, for the ending, I decided to reflect Abraham and Torok's idea that the gaps 'left within us' (Abraham 1994:171) can be traced back to the shameful secrets of others with 'the aim ... to cancel the secret buried in the unconscious and display it *in its initial openness* (1994:189, emphasis original). Thus, although the phantom of shame that originated with Frances's traumatic experience in 'Poya' persists and transcends Shanthi's life, influencing her self-perception and interactions with others, it is assigned to the order of knowledge at the end of my fictionalised retelling — a symbolic exorcism of sorts. Abraham deftly expresses this idea: 'Now that your shame is understood, kind ghost, and everyone knows your secret, you may take your rightful place in the company of good men' (1994:202)

Frances's companionship with the yakka — a mythical creature in Sri Lankan folklore symbolic of death — is indirectly linked to her rape, admission to a sanatorium, shame and ultimate death. The semantic ambiguities surrounding the relationship and the mystery associated

with the chronology of the yakka's appearance, and question marks over whether the creature is real, benevolent, or otherwise, are emblematic of being watched and judged. I used several of the rhetorical devices referred to by Schwab (2010) to represent the persistence of shame — disruptions in flow, metaphor, and semantic ambiguities. I also incorporated stream-of-consciousness voice, personification, imagery, symbolism, and flashbacks. Additionally, the use of non-English words, Sinhalese and Japanese, throughout both stories is intended to create a feeling of fragmentation for the reader, reflecting the metaphysical manifestation of shame.

I chose the titles 'Poya', meaning full moon and 'Bōrei', understood as ruined spirit, to evoke a sense of otherness and create an eerie and ominous tone to the overall setting of both narratives. The motif of a full moon introduced in 'Poya' continues in 'Bōrei' to suggest that even nature is judging Frances and Shanthi. The personified moon is also a metaphor for the ever-present shame.

The main characters, Frances, Yoshino and Shanthi, all experience numerous flashbacks to convey the sense that the past haunts them. Additionally, flashbacks create a climate of uneasiness and foreboding for the reader and allow the reader to gauge that the phantom of shame underscores the narrative before Shanthi is aware of the shame. As a child, Shanthi senses shame through her relatives' 'clandestine language, words or gestures' (Lee 2018:113), but she cannot verbalise it:

Her father said that Amma had fallen ... hit her head ... and passed away ... But another version was hidden in the elongated silhouettes that flickered on the veranda ... a version that involved the appearance of a yakka in the zinnia patch. A version that involved consultation of the kattadiya ... a version that explained why her amma's casket was closed instead of open (Bōrei').

Even though the shame seems sealed with Frances in the coffin, it has lodged as a transgenerational phantom in Shanthi. It is only via Shanthi's interactions with and acknowledgement of Yoshino, a metaphorical and literal ghost, that Shanthi can relegate the phantom of shame to the order of knowledge.

Conclusion

This paper has aimed to begin a discussion into how the affect/emotion of shame arising from unspoken transgenerational trauma may be deciphered or depicted in magical realist narratives, distinct from the trauma-as-event

Hauntology, as theorised by Derrida and the concept of phantom postulated by Abraham and Torok, is an elegant framework within which to consider and highlight how shame haunts, transcending generations and influencing the thoughts and behaviours of descendants, in narratives.

In distinguishing between unspoken trauma and shame, a creative writer can provide a more nuanced portrayal of characters and their experiences. It provides an opportunity to explore the complexity of narratives concerning unspoken transgenerational trauma in a subtle, open, non-didactic way. Further, the use of rhetorical devices and elements of magical realism to create the layers of such narratives, as modelled by Roy, contributes to a more evocative and thought-provoking read. One that is more reflective of the complexities of the human experience.

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