SANJAY SIRCAR
*Canberra, Australia*

# Shashthi's Land

## Folk Nursery Rhyme in Abanindranath Tagore's *The Condensed-Milk Doll*

**Abstract**

*Kunstmärchen* (art fairytales) are everybody's business, and so no one's, for *Kunstmärchen* studies fall uneasily between the areas of folklore and folktale, on the one hand, and fantasy fiction and children's literature on the other. The classic Bengali *Kunstmärchen, Kheer-er putul* or "The Condensed-Milk Doll"(1896), by Abanindranath Tagore, uses traditional folk nursery rhymes. This article considers the generic implications of drawing upon these rhymes, their part in providing a mise-en-scène, their thematic resonances with the new text, the formal play involved in deploying them, the possible influence of Lewis Carroll for the technique of using them in a new text, and their use in a companion text by Tagore.

**Key words:** Bengal—nursery rhyme—folk rhyme—intertextuality—märchen—Carroll—art fairytale—children's literature

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THE FOLK DO NOT transcribe their own rhymes (or tales) nor disseminate them widely in a modern urban world, and thus the reception, recording, and propagation of the rhymes takes many forms. Antiquarian scholars record and comment on the rhymes, publishers print them for children, and–in a different sort of writing–authors include them in new fictional texts. This article is not about folk rhymes themselves, but about how one original text, a *Kunstmärchen* (art fairytale), uses, and thus records and disseminates, rhymes. This article is also meant to show how rhymes contribute to the text's intergeneric intertextuality, and how they are part of the text's network of romantic imagery. The text I focus on in this article is the Bengali classic by Abanindranath[a] TAGORE/Thakur[a] (1871–1951) *K[s]heer-er putul[a]/Kheer-er putul*, or "The Condensed-Milk Doll" (1974a); (hereafter referred to as *Doll)*. This text is part of the rich nineteenth-century heritage of Bengali children's literature and fantasy fiction (see DEY 1978, DATTA 1986, BANDYOPADHYAYA 1991).

The basic story of *Doll* is as follows. A king gives his beloved younger queen gorgeous jewelry and a sari that, as it turns out, do not fit her. To his neglected elder queen the king gives a monkey, which soon comes to love his adoptive mother. The monkey arranges to have the impoverished living conditions of the neglected elder queen improved when he gulls the king into believing that she will bear a son. The younger queen attempts to poison the elder queen but fails. After the supposed birth, the monkey continues to gull the king by saying that seeing the child will be so inauspicious that it will make the king blind, and thereby is able to keep the king from wanting to see the putative son until the child is ready to be married.

Ten years later, when the boy is supposed to be ready for marriage, the elder queen wishes to confess the fraud. The monkey, however, sends the king off to the bride's father's kingdom to await the arrival of the young, little groom, and then orders the elder queen to mold a doll out of condensed milk. The party of the supposed bridegroom pitches their camp at Dignagar, near the templeground of Shashthi, the goddess of childbirth and children.

The monkey has the guards chase away the village girls so that they cannot make their daily offerings. Shashthi becomes hungry, but because there are no offerings to eat, she eats the doll instead. After Shashthi eats the doll the monkey blackmails her into giving him one of her own boys in exchange. As a result, the king has an heir, the elder queen has a son and daughter-in-law, the prince inherits the kingdom, the monkey becomes his prime minister, the daughter-in-law wears the gifts that did not fit the younger queen, and the younger queen dies of spite.

Abanindranath was always interested in Bengal folklife, including crafts and toys, as well as Bengali customs in general; he wrote on women's ritual designs and on women's religious vows (TAGORE 1960; 1948). Though many have taken *Doll* to be a wholly original work, he claimed that it was taken from a book of tales collected by his aunt Mrinalini Devi that was never published and is now lost (DAS[A]GUPTA 1992, 23-24; SEN[A] 1992, 98). The basic plot of *Doll* directly derives from one version of a märchen-like women's ritual tale, the *Aranya shashthi bratakatha*.[1] At present it is listed outside the group of "Religious Tales" as Tale Type 459, "The Make-Believe Son/Daughter" (THOMPSON AND ROBERTS 1991, 65-66). Five versions in English of this type are listed, all of which seem to have a clever maidservant as the child-bringer, and three of which involve a male child and an image (rather than a sought-for daughter and an animal in the palanquin) from eastern India. Abanindranath's substitution of a clever monkey-helper for the maid results in *Doll*'s affinities with another traditional folk märchen, "Princess Kalavati."[2] His comment on his pen portrait of the crone-goddess, Shashthi, seems to indicate that it was taken from a real crone figure (SEN[A] 1992, 184).

As the founder of the so-called "Bengal school" of art, which pioneered a new and eclectic national vocabulary in painting, Abanindranath also blended various European, Indian (Moghul, Rajput), and other Asian (Japanese) styles in his work. The relation of modern Western influences and material to traditional Indian and Asian culture in his work is complex (AALL 1971, DAS[A]GUPTA 1992). This article tries to show how one of his literary works for children is also playfully grounded in folk material other than the märchen and probably naturalizes an earlier Western literary technique.

The whole of *Doll* may be read as an intertextual pastiche and adaptation of material from various sorts of folk märchen, the prototype and progenitor genre of the *Kunstmärchen*. But, when the monkey enters the Land of Children at Shashthi's templeground, this land, presented in a discrete section that is the climax of the narrative, is an intertextual and more obviously intergeneric literary pastiche that uses material from a quite different

folk genre. Shashthi's Land, which is described in one long (one and a half pages) and one short paragraph (TAGORE 1974a: 46–48), is presented as a land of living traditional folk nursery rhyme through literary allusion and virtual (rather than actual) quotation. Such quotation is relatively subtle, as it is not marked by inverted commas or set off from the rest of the text.

Even though Abanindranath uses either initial (and thus more easily remembered) lines from a rhyme or most of a given rhyme, it is not at the outset apparent that Shashthi's Land is a land of folk nursery rhyme even to the most sophisticated of native speakers of Bengali (Indians or Bangladeshis). After it does become apparent in and after the act of reading for pleasure, it is not clear exactly how many nursery rhymes there are, which ones they are, or the pattern they form.[3] Their presence and function would pass totally unnoticed by non-Bengali South Asians and Westerners alike, and even the most skilled straight translation of this section of *Doll* (and only this section) into a Western or South Asian language could not do justice to its cultural specificity (TAGORE 1945a; 1945b; 1946; 1949a; 1949b; 1960; 1978; 1994). One of the Hindi sentence-by-sentence translations with a few additional gracenotes(TAGORE 1994) simply follows the original prose diction and syntax, and irons out one of the intergeneric signals (a rhyming sentence at the end of the first long paragraph). Such translations do not affect the plot and do make some sense, but in general they only give a sequence of disconnected, possibly bewildering, and often pointless, images of childhood and animal revelry, without any inkling of the literary play in what is *Doll*'s most sophisticated contribution to the Indian *Kunstmärchen*. The French translation (from which the Swedish one is derived) is better than this Hindi one, and it was done two decades earlier. Though it appears to add additional material to the text, including unnecessary gracenotes like an "Om" in Devanagari script at the end, it provides useful footnotes that explain proverbial expressions and culturally specific words such as sari, *kantha* (quilt) *baran* (ritual welcome). Also, because it divides the text into thirty-eight short chapters with additional titles of their own, the chapter titles relating to this section ("Le Royaume des Enfants" and "Au Pays des Berceuses et des Contes de Fées") skilfully signal its nature.

Shashthi's Land appears in a self-contained section, but the reader is artfully oriented toward the presence of the folk rhymes in it as it is subtly foreshadowed by Shashthi's first act, before she steals the doll. From the land of sleep she sends for the sleep-bringing maternal and paternal aunts to put the humans in Dignagar to sleep in the daytime so that she can eat the doll without being seen. The Hindi translation renders these aunts into the "devis of sleep," goddesses (TAGORE 1994, 23), when they are nothing of the kind (the French translation stays with "the aunts of sleep"). They are fig-

ures from folk rhyme lullaby (rhyme 1), and they are used to prepare for the climax of *Doll* by another intense, but more conventional sort of intertextuality, as they turn Dignagar into a place of sleep in a process reminiscent of the falling asleep sequence at the court of Sleeping Beauty, a sequence that possibly draws upon a similar Bengali rhyme sequence set near a shrine of Shashthi's (rhyme 20). A little earlier, so we realize in retrospect, the halt at Dignagar has also subtly prepared the reader for folk rhyme in Shashthi's Land, for the innocent-sounding Dignagar is a place name from rhyme 15 that is evoked again within Shashthi's Land.

The monkey, as an animal, remains awake while the sleep-bringing aunts do their job; he waits till Shashthi and her attendants have eaten, then blackmails Shashthi into giving him a child. At first he sees no children, so he asks for "insight"; she passes her hands over his eyes to bless him with it, and then he sees her land. The creamy thickness of Shashthi's Land cannot be conveyed by commentary alone, so a full literal translation follows below.

In the translation I have divided up the first long, one-and-a-half-page paragraph into four paragraphs according to what seem to me the most natural breaks, and I have made the second short paragraph of the original into the fifth paragraph.[4] I have italicized and marked off the allusions to the rhymes. My earlier article in this journal (SIRCAR 1997, 79–108)[5] provides translations of the rhymes, which move from one grammatical tense to another. In this translation of Abanindranath's text I sometimes retain the tense of the original lines so as to signal their presence. The stylistic discordance–which is almost as apparent in the original as it is in English–replicates one of the features of the folk rhyme genre.

## SHASHTHI'S LAND

|The templeground| The monkey saw: Shashthi's templeground was a kingdom of children, there were only children there, children inside, children outside, in the water and on the ground, on the roads and on the riverbanks and in the branches of the trees, on the green grass in whichever direction he looks there are bands of boys, groups of girls. Some black, some beautiful, some dark-skinned. Anklets on the feet of some, swaying waist-chains on the waists of some, gold-beaded necklaces on the necks of some. Some are playing flutes, some rattling rattles; some again, jingling their anklets and // *turning their delicate (fresh little) hands around, are dancing about* |cf. rhyme 19, ll. 1–3|. // *On the feet of some are red shoon,* on the heads of some colored caps, *on the bodies of some flower-embroidered priceless mull-mull shawls* |cf. rhymes 6a, ll. 4-5 and 8, ll. 2–4|. // Some of the boys are of the thin sort, some chubby and sturdy,

some obstreperous, some saintly-obedient. One group is hallooing on wooden horses, one group is fishing in the waters of the pond, // *one group has gone down to bathe* |cf. rhymes 15, l. 3 and 16, l. 2| // into the waters of the bounded area of the pond, some are plucking flowers, some are picking fruits from the branches, in all directions there is play and sport, rough horseplay, laughter and tears. That is a new country, a kingdom of dreams! There, there is only running about, only play and sport; there, there is no schoolhouse, nor in the schoolhouse a schoolmaster, // *nor in the schoolmaster's hand a cane* |cf. rhyme 9, ll. 3,7|. // There, on the banks of the dark waters of the pond are groves of long grasses, boundless fields, and after them // *orchards of mangoes and jack-fruit* |cf. rhyme 7, l. 3|, // on the trees // *dangle-tailed parrots* |cf. rhyme 3, l. 1|, // in the waters of the river round-eyed catfish, and in the taro *(kachu)* groves the drone of mosquitoes.

|On the edges of the wood| And there are // *on the edges of the wood, the forest-village-dwelling maternal and paternal aunts, who make round sweetmeats out of puffed rice* |cf. rhyme 4, ll. 2–4|, //and outside their dwelling, // *the pomegranate tree, neath which the Lord dances* |cf. rhyme 11, l. 1|. // *On the riverbank is the janti-tree on which ripen the janti-fruits* |cf rhyme 18, l. 1|, // *there the blue horse is grazing in the fields, the golden peacock of Bengal cavorting on the byways. Taking that blue horse and that golden peacock* |cf. rhyme 4, ll. 10–12| // *splendidly arraying the horses, playing the drums and the cymbals, mounting the palanquin (on their shoulders), the boys are going to the land of Kamalapuli* |cf. rhyme 14, ll. 1–4| // *to give Puturani in marriage* |cf. rhyme 7, second version, l. 1|.

|Kamalapuli| The monkey went to // *Kamalapuli* |cf. rhyme 14, ll. 4-5|. // That is a land of parrots, there in all the bushes are parrots, they sit swinging and pick at the paddy, on the trees they sit and squawk, and // *they play with the boys* |cf. rhyme 3, l. 4, alternative version| // of that country. There // *the people grow cows and bullocks, and brush their teeth with diamonds!* |cf. rhyme 10, ll. 2–3|. // That is a new land—there in a moment it is morning, in the twinkling of an eye it is evening, the doings of that country are very singular indeed! In the middle of // *fine-sifted sand flow glistening waters* |cf. rhyme no. 16, second part of the longer version, l. 15 (?)|, // on their banks // *a band of boys sit in a palanquin and, counting a myriad cowrie shells as they go, have come to catch fish; the feet of some are pierced with fishbones, the moon-faces of some have become sunburnt* |cf. rhyme 17, ll. 1–3, 6–7|. // *The fisher boys, covered with their nets, are sleeping* |cf. rhyme 2, ll. 3–4| // and just then // *drip-drippetty-drop the rain poured down, in the rivers the high tides rose* |cf. rhyme 13, l. 1|; // and immediately the // *band of boys throwing down that wooden palanquin, those myriad cowrie-shells* |cf. rhyme 17, ll. 1–3|, // returned to the corner of some

house in some locality. As they went // *their fish were grabbed away by the hawk, the toad dragged away their rods and lines* |cf. rhyme 6, ll. 3–4|, // *the little lads, enraged, came home, mother cooled boiling milk and gave it to them to drink* |cf. rhymes 6a, ll. 4, 1, 2–3|. // And on the edge of those // *glistening waters in the banks of fine-sifted sand* |cf. rhyme 16, longer version, l. 15 again (?)|, // *Lord Shiva* came and anchored his boat, and with him were his *three young girl-brides—the first maid cooked and served |dainties|, the second maid ate them, and the third one, getting none, went off to her father's house* |cf. rhyme 13, ll. 2–4|. //

|The Land of Father's House| The monkey went with her to the Land of Father's House. There, on the riverbanks // *the girls have gone down to bathe, and have started to spread out their glossy black tresses. On each side of the river two large carp floated up, one Venerable Teacher took, and the next was taken by the popinjay* |cf. rhyme 15, ll. 3–4, 7–8; elements also found in other rhymes| // *who was coming with a full boat. Seeing this, an otter* took the popinjay in one hand and the fish in the other and *began to dance,* and at the door of the dwelling a little boy's mother took the little boy and as she danced him |up and down| she said—*Oh otter, turn and look—Just see the dancing of my little boy* |cf. rhyme 5|. //

|The templeground again| The monkey saw—the boy was very beautiful, // *a veritable golden-moon* |cf. rhyme 21) quickly he snatched the boy away! And immediately, the country of dreams at the templeground of Shashthi melted away, // *the long-tailed parrot* |cf. rhyme 3, l. 1; rhyme 5, l. 1 (?)|, // greening the skies, flew away, // *Lord Shiva's* |cf. rhyme 13, l. 1| // boat to some unknown land floated away. // *The young girls at the riverside drew their checkered saris around them* |cf. rhyme 15 again, l. 6| // and went away. In the land of Shashthi, // *the she-cat girded her waist, took the mother-in-law-delighting special sweet puffed rice, took four bearer-churls and four serving-wenches, went through the orchard of mangoes and jackfruit, as she took Punturani to her father-in-law's house, and faded away into the darkness of the orchard* |cf. rhyme 7 second version, ll. 2, 4, 6, 2, 1). // *The dancing otters* |cf rhyme 5, l. 4| // at the tamarind tree melted into the leaves—it was as if the country sank beneath the ground.

(TAGORE |1896| 1974a, 46-48)

I have translated the rhymes from published sources. In one case I have separated one rhyme that seems like two rhymes joined together, and in another case I put a rhyme as a likely third stanza of another. In order of appearance, the rhymes in Abanindranath's story include two in the section leading up to Shashthi's Land–the sleep-bringing aunts and the sleep at Shashths's shrine and then eighteen rhymes (if I have not missed any!) in the section about Shashthi's Land: 1) the dancing little lord; 2) the boy in

red shoon; 3) the schoolmaster; 4) the dangle-tailed parrot; 5) the forest-village aunts; 6) the dancing lord under the pomegranate tree; 7) the Janti-tree; 8) the drums of Kamalapuli; 9) the wedding-journey of Puturani to her in-laws; 10) Little Jewel's wedding in the land of the tooth-brushing Hattamals; 11) possibly the longer version of the Noton doves; 12) the band of boys; 13) the sleeping fisher-boys; 14) Lord Shiva's wives; 15) the little boy going fishing and his petulance; 16) the girls of Dignagar on the way to the little boy's wedding;[6] 17) the popinjay and the otter; 18) finding a golden-moon child at Shashthi's shrine.

The halt at Dignagar, the sleep-bringing aunts, and the falling-asleep sequence foreshadow the rhymes of Shashthi's Land itself. Here, the vista broadens through the five segments as the monkey moves from sphere to sphere within Shashthi's Land, seeing the children's revelry at Shashthi's templeground itself, moving outward over the fields to the fabulous animals and wedding revelry at the edges of the forest, to the boys fishing at the rivers of Kamalapuli, then to the girls bathing in the Land of Father's House, and there finally to the "golden moon" danced by his mother. Corresponding to the broadening vista, the initial subtle, innocent-seeming allusions give way to obvious allusions. The description builds up gradually, then increases in intensity to a crescendo of allusions through virtual quotation, culminating in an actual rhyming quotation unchanged in syntax. Finally, the section winds down with a recapitulative coda.

## The Generic Function of Folk Rhyme

The rendering by *Doll* of Shashthi's Land of childhood as a land of traditional folk nursery rhyme highlights both the reliance of the fake-lore genre of the *Kunstmärchen* on traditional naive folklore materials (Sircar 1995), and the self-definition of the *Kunstmärchen* as a relatively sophisticated genre that incorporates, recontextualizes, and goes beyond the traditional materials upon which it draws.

Modern fantasy draws its sustenance from traditional fantasy. The traditional nursery rhyme and the *Kunstmärchen* are genres characterized by fantasy (depicting the supernatural, the magical, or the physically impossible) and, often, by humor. Both are also thought suitable for children. Thus, in *Doll*, the homely absurd fantasy images of the folk rhymes, the blue horse and the golden peacock as well as the nonsensical extravagance of diamond toothbrushes, are the traditional equivalents in Shashthi's Land of elements invented by the author in his sophisticated new fantasy fiction (e.g., the king's gifts of costly jewelry and clothing, made by a serpent princess and a godling's daughter, that not just anyone can wear).

Similarly, the way in which the macrocosm of the new text as a whole

introduces fantasy elements is replicated by the way the microcosm of the folk-rhyme-derived section introduces them: slowly, gradually, and not at the beginning. The first part of *Doll*—the king's voyage—has no actual fantasy, though the things the king buys are fabulously expensive and mysterious. The monkey and Shashthi, the primary fantasy figures, are tactfully introduced in the second and third parts, and by the time we read of Shashthi's Land we take them for granted. Likewise, the description of that land starts ordinarily enough at the templeground, where there is no actual fantasy, and only introduces fantasy elements at the edges of the forest with the dancing lord.

The nursery rhyme, however, is traditional, variable, oral, "spontaneous," communal, and rural, and is recited to and by infants who cannot follow the narrative of a *Kunstmärchen*. The *Kunstmärchen* genre is modern, has a fixed form, is written by an individual who is usually urban, is often self-consciously literary, and is told or read out to (or read by) older and more sophisticated children who can enjoy rhymes, märchen, and *Kunstmärchen* alike. The older children know traditional material and can appreciate its recontextualization. The folk rhymes that are all told to, and recited by, very young children are a generic signal of the *Kunstmärchen* genre's own general audience. The *Kunstmärchen* genre, however, can self-consciously build on the nursery rhyme, but the opposite is not true. The newer, longer narrative genre subsumes and overtakes the genre of older shorter lyric just as childhood subsumes infancy. The birth of the child-prince out of the land of nursery rhyme and the simultaneity of the lyric and into the land of the main plot and fairytale diachronicity, is a birth into narrative and into linear time. It signals a literary movement from a naive folk lyric genre to a relatively sophisticated urban narrative one.

### Folk Rhyme as Mise-en-Scène

As part of the mise-en-scène of *Doll*, the traditional folk literary components of Shashthi's Land, including the rhyme phrases and images, evoke an implicit context that is as important as the elements that the text actually incorporates. The rhymes are rhymes by and of the folk, depicting their rural milieu. *Doll* was written by a city-dweller in a city for middle-class urban children, and nostalgia for the peasantry, the countryside, and folk culture often characterizes the sensibilities of the Bengal literati (Bandyopadhyaya 1991, 38–77). The rural focus in the third part of *Doll* stands in sharp contrast both to the rich bazaar-lands of jewellery and saris across the seas, and the indoor palace and hovel of the two queens in the first and second parts. So Dignagar, outside Shashthi's Land, and Shashthi's Land itself, at a time when ethnic cultural nationalism was a strong reaction to British colonial-

ism, constitute a celebration of the Bengal countrypeople, and their customs of bathing, making sweetmeats, celebrating marriages, and fishing. Both are also a celebration of the Bengal countryside with its fields, groves, riverbanks, trees, and animals. As a stylized literary pastiche of folk poetry, Shashthi's Land is invested with the mana of both the folk and the countryside of Bengal—a mana that is spread throughout the whole of the ersatz text in a most remarkable way.

The association of the divine Shashthi with cats and children is traditional, and her giving of a son is the Bengali equivalent of "Tom Thumb," "Der-Angule," as well as many women's ritual tales (cf. rhyme 21). However, what appears to be a purely literary invention of Abanindranath is Shashthi's holy land of children, dreams, animals, nature, and the Bengal countryside. Abanindranath is also responsible for extending Shashthi's traditional association with sleep (cf. rhyme 20) to insight, visions, and dreams, and should also be credited with associating Shashthi with traditional folk nursery rhyme, which thus becomes part of a whole network of romantic imagery dealing with the divine, childhood, nature, special states of consciousness, and folk culture.

## Folk Rhyme: Thematic Resonances

Thematically, the traditional folk rhymes relate Shashthi's Land to the wider *Kunstmärchen* new world of *Doll*, as they bring into focus sleep, weddings, animals, folk-religion, water/fishing, and, most important, mother-love.

Rhymes 1, 2, 3 and 20 are sleep rhymes. The sleep-bringing aunts who appear just outside Shashthi's Land bring sleep to Dignagar; in a sleep-sequence like that of a rhyme the fisher-lads within Shashthi's Land appear sleeping, and the dangle-tailed birds in the trees there do not appear within the text as a harbinger of sleep, but evoke it. On the one hand, these sleep rhymes relate Shashthi's Land both to sleeping Dignagar and to the larger outside world of *Doll,* in which the elder queen coaxes the monkey to sleep nestled against her breast (Tagore 1974a, 45, 32). On the other hand, the sleep rhymes also underscore the nature of Shashthi's Land as a "country of dreams" where there is running about, play, and sport with no schoolhouse. Shashthi's Land is presented to the monkey in a waking dream (a vision of "insight"). The place is dreamlike, with its extraordinary categories of oxymoronic biology, instantaneous time, and ease of movement through telescoped space. The rhyme-associated sleep, and the resultant pleasant dreams of Shashthi's Land, correspond both to the monkey's earlier dream in which he says he saw that a brother of his would be born, and to the elder queen's later dream of Shashthi telling her that her son has returned to her.

About seven of these rhymes are about weddings, wedding revelry, and

journeys to and from in-laws in far-off places (nos. 4, 7, 10, 11, 13, 15, and, slightly, in 14). The text only actually mentions three of these weddings with the drums of Kamalapuli, Lord Shiva's brides, and the journey to the in-laws. It evokes, however, all of them in order to refract the immediate situation of the monkey and his charge in the sections before and after Dignagar. The rhymes about beating drums, wedding processions going to and from weddings in far-off places in palanquins, the son and daughter-in-law journeying to the in-laws' house, and the petulant bride returning to her house, all refract the procession and the wedding of *Doll* itself: the doll in bridegroom's finery, the palanquin and its bearers, the gaily arrayed attendant, the flags, the drums, the lights, the torchbearers, the horses, the fluteplaying on the groom's way to the marriage; the parents, the wondering bride, the eager servants, the flutes and horses and lights as the party arrives; the welcomings, the conch-blowings, the ululations at the wedding and the returning procession and welcomings at home (TAGORE 1974a, 43, 48–49).

About eight of the rhymes depict lively birds and animals (nos. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 15, 16, 19), all of which mirror the monkey himself: he is caring and playful like the dangle-tailed lulling bird (rhyme 3);[7] fabulous like the blue horse and the golden peacock of Bengal (rhyme 4); somewhat predatory like the snatching toad and hawk (rhyme 6); like the cat he is an attendant on a journey (rhyme 7); and like the popinjay, thieving catfish, gleefully dancing otter, and the evoked but unmentioned dancing animals who dance with the lordling, he is energetic and playfully mischievous (rhymes 5, 19). Because the monkey is an animal, when Shashthi's traditional attendant cats, the squirrels, the forest cats, the otters, the domestic cats, etc. remain awake at Dignagar, the monkey too is able to stay awake during Shashthi's theft and bring events to a happy conclusion (TAGORE 1974a, 45).

There are traces of folk religion in about seven of the rhymes (nos. 10, 11, 13, 15, 17, 20, 21). The text mentions the mysterious lord dancing beneath the branches of the tree, Lord Shiva and his three brides (who appear only in this rhyme and not in ordinary mythology), and the venerable teacher who takes the fish and who may or may not be Brihaspati (Jupiter), the preceptor of the deities (nos. 11, 13, 15). The text evokes but leaves unquoted the lines about Shashthi herself (nos. 20, 21), the evil eye in the rhyme about the Hattamals and their diamond toothbrushes, the mysterious conch-shell bangles, and red paste in the rhyme about the band of boys (nos. 10, 17).

These elements resonate with all the elements of folk religion in *Doll*, which uses them for literary purposes and does not evince any belief in them. Hence the elder queen's belief that the younger queen's witchcraft took the king away from her, and that her barrenness is the result of a curse

caused by many sins in many past lives. Hence the poison charmed by a black-magic mantra from a serpent's mouth by the younger queen's friend, the Brahmin witch (a human being, but with overtones of a supernatural one). Hence the conch-blowings, the ululations, and the forms of welcoming the bride and groom. Hence too the monkey's (fraudulent) astrological calculations, inauspicious times, and going blind at the sight of inauspicious things. And hence the possibility of divine intervention in conception, the offerings of the village-women to Shashthi, and the affectionate use of the figure of this Hindu goddess as a fairy-tale figure rather than a dignified mythical one (TAGORE 1974a, 31-32, 43, 49, 41, 42, 43, 44). Shashthi, like humans, needs food and water, so when the monkey blackmails her by saying that he will let the whole world know of her theft, and threatens her by saying he will throw her idol into the pond to punish her, she trembles and is quick to strike a bargain with him.

Three of the rhymes are about fishing (nos. 2, 6, 17), three have fish in them (nos. 5, 15, 16), one mentions a boat (rhyme no. 8), one is about the tides near Shashthi's shrine (no. 21), and one is about a pond (no. 19).[8] Thus a river, be it the same one or a different one, appears all through Shashthi's Land—water is its main element and bathing, fishing, and boating are its quintessential activities (along with going to a wedding). There is a pond, a bathing area and a river at the templeground. The river has catfish amidst the fields and groves. There is a river (perhaps the same one) at the edge of the forest with the janti-tree on its banks. There is another river in Kamalapuli with glistening water amidst gleaming sands where the band of boys go fishing and in which the tides rise. Finally there is a riverbank in the "Land of Father's House" at which the girls bathe, the fish float up, and the otter dances.

Perhaps the Bengal countryside is simply one of rivers and streams and these are reflected in the rhymes of Bengal. But equally perhaps Abanindranath's choice of these particular rhymes, and the consequent insistence on the wetness of the homely rivers in Shashthi's Land, counterpoint the wetness of the exotic seas of the king's initial journey to buy the gifts for the younger queen. Perhaps the wetness is also an objective correlative for the flow of the monkey's vision. Or, indeed, perhaps the omnipresent water and fish in *Doll* are (unconsciously used?) images for the process of a fantasy birth, for which Shashthi's Land is the visionary womb.

If so, this would accord with the fact that the greatest number of these rhymes—about fifteen—convey motherly love (nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6a, 7, 8, 10, 11, 17, 19, 20, 21, and possibly 13). All evoke, depict, or imply a normative Bengali image of loving motherhood, of peasant mothers lulling, feeding, and playing with their infants and children. All these mothers are images for

the elder queen. The putative speakers of the sleep rhymes cradle their children as they call the sleep-bearing aunts, the sleep of the sleep-sequence, the sleep that comes to the fisher-lads, and the dangle-tailed harbinger of sleep (nos. 1, 2, 3, 20). The inhospitable aunts of forest-village, who make sweetmeats but never ask the child to eat them, contrast with the mother in that rhyme itself (no. 4), the caring sleep-bearing aunts (no. 1), and all the other mothers of the rhymes. The mother watches her little boy dance (no. 19), she provides food for little boy after a disappointing fishing trip (rhyme no. 6a), and provides for his comfort during his journey to his in-laws (no. 7). She takes pride in dressing him up in his red shoes, takes note of his sunburn, and celebrates having him (nos. 8, and the last part of no. 17, 21). The mothers of the daughters similarly arrange for their marriages in fabulous lands (nos. 7, 10), comfort them, and provide a refuge when they are ill-treated (nos. 11, 13). Similarly, the elder queen has exemplified motherly concern and love in numerous instances: when she cries and searches for the monkey after he disappears while on his errands to the king; when she sweetly reproaches him after he fibs to the king; when she takes him in her lap; when she coaxes him to go to sleep; when she hand-feeds him and gives him water and fruit (which are all she has); and when she does nothing about his shenanigans (TAGORE 1974a, 33–34, 36, 32, 35, 43).

Only the mother feeding the little boy milk and the mother dandling her son appear in the text of *Doll*. The others do not directly appear, but it is no coincidence that the climax of this section, the end of the actual first paragraph (my fourth segment), uses the charming and unusual formal device of incarnating the putative mother speaker in rhyme no. 5. This proudly loving mother calls the parrot in the boat, observes the catfish taking it away and the otter dancing, and then calls the otter to look at her little son dancing as well. But she does not appear in the original rhyme and *Doll* gives her flesh and blood, then makes her actually speak the last lines of the rhyme, which are the only obvious rhyming words in the whole of Shashthi's Land, directly replicating those of the original rhyme.

This mother figure functions as only a literary folk-rhyme-derived image of generic motherhood—a platonic image of the Mother and Child in a heavenly realm. There is no sense that the monkey kidnaps the boy from his mother in Shashthi's Land, nor that the boy is some sort of changeling. The monkey bringing the elder queen her son from the mother goddess's land serves only as a form of the conceit that the unborn child exists in some heavenly realm. It is comparable to the conceit in "Diamond's Song" in George MACDONALD's *At the Back of the North Wind*, "'Where did you come from, baby dear?'/ 'Out of the everywhere, into here'" (1871, ch. 33), or Rabindranath Tagore's poem, "Janmakatha" ("The Birth Tale," the first

poem in his collection *Shishu,* or "The Child"), in which the mother answers the child's question about where he was before he was born by saying that he existed as desire in her mind. This story later appeared as the folk wisdom of a simple old rustic woman in an immensely popular Bengali film, *Apanjan* (c. 1967–68).

From beginning to end, *Doll* is about cultural images of motherhood and sonship. It counterpoises the favored bad mother (rival co-wife) who makes molded condensed-milk sweetmeats of death (with the help of a witch), with the good, neglected, sweet, passive and obedient mother, who molds a condensed-milk image of the child as delicious food. Her adopted son (the monkey) helps her by drawing upon the power of a benevolent divinity. The divinity, a mother goddess who needs to be pushed into action, together with her attendant aunt figures, takes the child image to eat (i.e., as an offering) and provides an actual child replacement to fulfill the desire of the real mother. This image of the ideal heavenly mother and child is appropriated by the *Kunstmärchen* from folk rhyme, an appropriation that is signaled by the author as the story proceeds.

## Folk Rhyme: Formal Play

Formally, the authorial art in depicting the Land of Shashthi consists primarily in conflations of rhymes. As they are recited, these rhymes shift their content (e.g., no. 7 in two differently gendered versions) and blend into each other as they share motifs and lines (e.g., the numbers of children in red shoon, going to be married, going down to bathe, and the number of carp floating up in different rhymes;[9] thus in written prose literature Abanindranath consciously replicates or refracts a phenomenon of folk orality. Most of the extended children's revelry in the first segment is Abanindranath's own. So also is Kamalapuli as a land of parrots, the band of boys going home in the rain, Lord Shiva's boat in the third segment, the otter dancing with the parrot in one hand and the fish in the other in the fourth segment, and the fading away of the whole of the enchanted land in the recapitulative fifth segment. But Abanindranath's actual authorial additions, the glue that joins the pastiche of the various scraps of Shashthi's Land together into a seamless whole, continuously decrease as the section proceeds.

Most of the rhymes contain unnamed generic figures. *Doll* uses these figures and their actions as a series of images, conflating similar generic material to assimilate figures from separate rhymes to each other, and collocating (juxtaposing) separate rhymes in quick succession, while the syntax of all the rhymes becomes prose syntax that is sometimes convoluted. The filtering of a rhyme through the section, so that it appears in between other

(new and traditional) material, rather than en bloc, and the repetition of certain rhyme elements also unify the description of Shashthi's Land. When the allusions go beyond a phrase and move to virtual quotation, often the sequence of elements in the rhymes is maintained. This can be seen in the revelry on the way to Kamalapuli, Lord Shiva's wives, the girls going down to bathe, and the dancing otter. But sometimes the order of the elements seems to be inverted (although we cannot say this with certainty, since the rhymes have no fixed forms and since we do not know Abanindranath's own versions) as with the band of boys going fishing, the toad and hawk stealing the rod and the fish, the little boy's petulance, and the journey with the cat. These devices enhance the awareness that Shashthi's Land is constructed by a modern hand out of traditional folk material.

At the templeground this process starts by generalizing or multiplying a rhyme figure, so that one particular delicate-handed dancing child (rhyme 19) and one particular little boy wearing red shoon and a priceless shawl (rhymes 8, 6a) become an unspecified part (one or many) of a crowd, and this second boy's priceless mull (finespun) raiment, and the flowered or golden shawl (at least in this version) is telescoped into one priceless flowered mull shawl. At the edges of the forest, the forest village dwelling aunts (no. 4) are juxtaposed with the pomegranate tree that grows outside their house and beneath which the lord dances (no. 11). Thus one sentence conflates at least four rhymes: the janti-tree (no. 18), and the blue horse and golden peacock (no. 4), that become part of the boys' revelry on the way to Kamalapuli (no. 14), which is in turn joined to Puturani's wedding-journey (no. 7).

In the next segment, Kamalapuli (no. 14) is assimilated to the extravagantly evoked, but not directly named Land of the Hattamals, where they brush their teeth with diamonds, and where Little Jewel will go to marry (no. 10). Juxtaposition makes the band of boys who go fishing (no. 17) pass the sleeping fisher lads (no. 2), as the rain and high tides come (no. 13). Then the band of boys is made to include a single boy going fishing, and being petulant from another rhyme or rhymes (nos. 6, 6a), as, here again, assimilation takes place by generalizing and by multiplying him.

The Land of Father-in-Law's House (rhyme 13) is assimilated to the place where the girls go down to bathe, Dignagar, unmentioned here but named in the source (no. 15). The third sentence about the bathing girls assimulate the parrot who took the carp from the same rhyme (no. 15) to the boating popinjay of another, which uses the same word for the bird, and adds its predatory catfish who took away the boat, and its dancing otter (no. 5). The otter dancing with the parrot in one hand and the fish in the other conflates the two rhymes (nos. 15 and 5). Finally, in the recapitulations of

segment 5, the one dancing otter is multiplied into many.

The spacing out of elements and repetitions appear for the sake of euphony, as they do not contribute to the plot. They do underscore the allusions and create a cadenced hypnotic effect. The reference to the blue horse and golden peacock immediately recurs as part of the revelry on the way to Kamalapuli for Puturani's wedding. The band of boys, their palanquin, and their cowrie shells are similarly repeated in the sentence after they first appear as they throw the palanquin and shells away and go home. Lord Shiva is first evoked with the rain and high tides of his rhyme, then after a gap, most of the rest of his rhyme is reproduced. The girls bathing and the parrot are mentioned. Then, as the whole country vanishes, the parrot, Lord Shiva and his boat, the same girls with their checkered saris (in another line of no. 15), Puturani, and the dancing otter(s), appear again together with numerous allusions to the rhyme about the journey to the in-laws (no. 7, second version). And just as the story spaces a particular rhyme through the text and repeats certain elements, it also repeats to the same effect an authorial phrase about the fine sand and the glistening waters.[10]

Similarly, though the main text is consistently in the epic preterite, this section in general uses various forms of the present tense to convey the immediacy of the lyric present of poetry, sometimes reverting to its ordinary mode of the epic preterite of prose narrative. It also inconsistently mixes verb tenses in the prose just as the rhymes themselves do. The text sometimes retains the original tense, or a mixture of tenses (rhymes 17, 6, 15), and at other times changes them to the present tense or to the epic preterite (as with rhyme 13).

Because of all the conflations, assimilations, generalizations, multiplications, collocations, juxtapositions, spacings out, intercalations, and repetitions of rhyme elements, Shashthi's Land prompts the question of whether it comprises one or many lands. The outside world of *Doll* has many separate fantasy lands that are on different levels of fantasy but that also have elements in common, a feature that characterizes self-conscious *Kunstmärchen* literariness and is simply not an issue in the märchen. Similarly, there seem to be four distinct spheres of folk revelry within Shashthi's Land itself: the templeground, the edges of the forest (these two that may be the same sphere), Kamalapuli, and the Land of Father's House. Certainly the monkey makes three distinct movements between them. The spheres, however, are not clearly demarcated, nor is it clear what belongs within each, since the same or similar features appear in more than one sphere in such a way that all the features and all the spheres mirror and blur into each other. Likewise, Shashthi's Land as a whole is not clearly demarcated from the world outside.

(The effect is rather like that of the unmappable topography of "Kubla Khan," which at first seems precise, but which actually does not indicate what is inside or outside the pleasure-dome.) Both these sets of fluid blurrings and mirrorings depend on the use of folk rhymes, and both make for a pleasant sense of phantasmagoria and vertigo.

Each recurrent feature may be the same or different when it reappears: one may deliberately foreshadow the next or may merely be an innocent detail. Parrots are omnipresent. There are first the dangle-tailed parrots of the templeground (almost certainly an allusion to the dangle-tailed bird of rhyme 3 rather than an evocation of the dancing parrot of rhyme 19); then all the authorial parrots of Kamalapuli that squawk about and play with the boys of that land (the identification with the long-tailed bird of rhyme 3 is strengthened, for in one form of that rhyme it is called to play with a little boy); then at the Land of Father's House a particular parrot takes the fish and brings the boat (conflated parrots from rhymes 5 and 15). When the Land of Shashthi vanishes away, the first thing to go is "the dangle-tailed parrot," and it is not clear whether this is one of the first lot mentioned at the templeground or the last one at the Land of Father's House, or whether they are the same.

Similarly, the mango and jackfruit groves of the templeground may be a mere detail, may foreshadow, or may be the same as those mentioned when the Land vanishes (which are unmistakably from rhyme 7). The round-eyed catfishes in the river at the templeground may or may not foreshadow or be the same as the unmentioned catfish who takes away the boat in which the parrot comes (from rhyme 5), and who is assimilated with the carp (of rhymes 15 and 16) in the Land of Father's House. The individual otter who dances with glee (from rhyme 5) in the Land of Father's House may have some or no relation to the many dancing otters underneath the tamarind tree when the Land vanishes.

Hence, the spheres of Shashthi's Land seem simultaneously far from each other and near to each other. For the monkey moves with ease and rapidity between them, and when the Land vanishes, the features from all the various spheres are mentioned: the long-tailed parrot from(perhaps) the templeground, Lord Shiva from Kamalapuli, the girls from the Land of Father's House, and Puturani's escorts from the edges of the forest. The various spheres have hitherto seemed far apart, but the juxtaposition of elements from them at this point seems to bring them all close together, and all simultaneously visible as if in a bird's-eye view.

Because of the rural background of the rhymes and because Shashthi's Land represents the Bengal countryside, the text also presents the question of how distinct Shashthi's Land is from the ordinary world outside it.

Dignagar is a rural part of the ordinary world, with fields, cowherd-boys, a little boy sleeping beside his mother, a village schoolhouse, schoolboys, and a schoolmaster with a whip in his hand in the sleep-sequence (TAGORE 1974a, 45). Shashthi's Land is also one of open fields, mothers beside their little boys, sleeping boys, and a cane-wielding schoolmaster as an evoked absence (TAGORE 1974a, 46). Furthermore, conflation of places results in substitution of place-names from rhymes (so that Kamalapuli of rhyme 14 is and is not the land of the diamond-toothbrushed Hattamals of rhyme 10, to which it is assimilated but which is not named). As a result, there are in effect two Dignagars in the new world of *Doll*, both derived from the same traditional folk rhyme. Dignagar is first mentioned as the place in the ordinary world where the monkey's party pitches camp; then it is located by allusion within Shashthi's Land, where the maidens go down to bathe, as they do in the source rhyme (no. 15) that explicitly mentions Dignagar, but in the text they are only evoked and placed within the Land of Lord Shiva's third bride's Father's House (no. 13).

## RHYME IN NEW FANTASY FICTION: A FOREIGN SOURCE?

*Doll* thus uses the technique of evocation, juxtaposition, and assimilation of discrete traditional (including folk) materials of the same (or similar) generic type (here, nursery rhymes). This technique provides a mise-en-scène for (all or part of) a new narrative by simultaneously recontextualizing the materials into a single fictive geographical sphere and a common temporal frame. I do not think that any work regarded as a classic of Bengali children's literature or fantasy fiction before *Doll* sustainedly uses this technique. The technique could have been generated independently, but more likely Abanindranath's source for it is a foreign one, well-established in Victorian English fantasy fiction, that he applied to native material and made his own. This is all the more likely given that such works as *Peter Pan* (1904) and *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils* (1907) are known directly to have inspired other works by him.

This technique stems from a playful parodic impulse to look at material again and to reuse it, without necessarily imitating it. The technique is also common to (and unites) the distinct genres of the *Kunstmärchen* and the fantasy novel. Thus, for example, Fairy Blackstick in Thackeray's classic *Kunstmärchen, The Rose and the Ring* (1855) is the same traditional fairy who has played a part in many of the traditional märchen of Perrault, and who goes on to replicate (with a difference) one of these roles from an old tale ("The Sleeping Beauty") in the new one. Lewis Carroll elaborated upon the technique of using traditional materials (including traditional nursery rhymes) in his fantasy novels *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and

*Through the Looking-Glass* (1871). In many other English fantasy texts after Carroll, figures from nursery rhymes appear, usually throughout the narrative with comic inflections and in combination with figures from märchen, folk tradition (e.g., Santa Claus, Puck), and juvenile games (e.g., Happy Families). Maggie Browne (1890) juxtaposed many characters from traditional nursery rhyme and märchen in a new plot. The land of nursery rhyme in *Doll* functions much as it does in Merle, though it is a smaller part. The technique is also found in lesser fantasy texts like Victor Herbert and Glen MacDonough's *Babes in Toyland* (1904), E. F. Benson's *David Blaize and the Blue Door* (1918), Compton Mackenzie's *Santa Claus in Summer* (1924), Caryl Brahms and S.J. Simon's *Titania Has a Mother* (1944).

Abanindranath's own fantasy novel *Bhut[a]patrir desh[a]* [The Land of Ghoulies and Ghosties] (TAGORE 1974b, considered below) is very obviously more Carrollean in its use of rhymes and in other ways, than *Doll*. Thus most probably *Doll* derives the technique of using nursery rhymes from Carroll's books. Abanindranath, however, does not follow Carroll slavishly. The books by Carroll on Alice's adventures use a great deal of cultural material (things, places, linguistic phenomena, etc.), and the traditional (not always folk-derived) nursery rhyme is only one of a number of poetic genres they use. Most other poetic genres provide material for interpolated comic parodies, but among the nursery rhymes—called "songs"—only "Twinkle, twinkle, little star" is briefly parodied.[11] The other nursery rhymes provide characters and incidents that the new text fleshes out, and with which Alice becomes involved. Thus, the Jack of Hearts's theft of tarts in *Wonderland*, and the Tweedle twins' quarrel, the fall of Humpty Dumpty, and the battle of the Lion and the Unicorn in *Looking-Glass* become discrete segments of the plot sequence. Each of the relevant rhymes is quoted (in whole or part) by a character and set off from the rest of the text obtrusively to signal the intertextuality (as in *The Land of Ghoulies and Ghosties* later). The recitation of the rhyme about the "Knave of Hearts" serves as the history behind the current situation (the trial). The three others all serve as prophecy, since the things in the rhyme determine what will happen in these lands after they are recited. The characters and images in the English nursery rhymes are themselves ridiculous, and made even more ridiculous in relation to Alice's interaction with them.

*Doll* does not mark a great development in the technique of using nursery rhymes over Carroll or his English followers (SIRCAR 1984), but as well as being in a different genre of fantasy fiction, it does depart from Carroll in some significant ways. It is more economical than the Alice books and those of Carroll's English followers. It draws only upon märchen motifs and conventions throughout the text, and also upon Bengali folk nursery rhyme in

the third part. It does not elaborate or flesh out the characters or incidents from the rhymes into plot segments, and the actual lines from the traditional rhymes are more important than in Carroll. It does not use the rhymes for comic parody, and the characters and images in the rhymes are, for the most part, neither ridiculous in themselves nor made so in relation to the monkey, who is much more a passive viewer of the characters and incidents in the rhymes than Alice herself. The narrative is not focused on what the monkey does in this land, but rather on the nature of the special land of Shashthi and on folk rhyme itself. The monkey's movement through Shashthi's Land is a miniature, very fast-moving quest that is intended to entertain the listener, but it does not contain spells, monsters, or other obstacles.

The celebration of the Bengal peasantry and the Bengal countryside through the folk rhymes in *Doll* is also unlike the function of nursery rhymes in the English texts, where folk rhymes do not celebrate the countryside. The gradual buildup to an awareness of the intertextuality in *Doll* and the importance of the reader's recollection of the rhymes (which is necessary because of the lack of quotation and marking-off signals) is also unlike Carroll's texts, and most of the texts that follow Carroll. *Doll* seems to be the only text which does not spread the material from the rhymes through the whole narrative. It also appears to stand alone in its device of foreshadowing the appearance of rhymes (as with the sleep-bringing aunts and Dignagar) and then giving them their own space in a discrete, marked-off, non-jocular, "waking-dream" section.

The section in which the rhymes appear is shorter, more intense, faster moving, and more phantasmagoric than the corresponding parts of the Alice books or their English followers. The charmingly inchoate rapid sequence of phantasmagoric images in the section conveys the sense of an intense and relatively short-lived gust of inspiration. The way that *Doll* sets off the boundaries of its folk rhyme space is also an advance upon the usual dream-frame in Carroll and his followers (though it uses a variation of that technique as well). The monkey moves from home to faraway and from indoors to outdoors. Also unlike the English texts, *Doll* overtly relates the space of these rhymes to the spiritual realm (rather than only to the unconscious realm of dream) through the goddess's mediation and her gift of "insight." It is a special holy region that is not permanently inhabited. It is not a permanent place at all, but a location in-between the starting point and destination (like the monkey himself, who is in-between human and animal). The party pitches camp at Dignagar on the way to the father-in-law's kingdom. While in Dignagar Shashthi's Land of childhood and folk rhyme appears, and fulfils the desire for a son, the new life that averts death (which

the king has threatened). The blessings of the Mother-Goddess are received there and then the land vanishes away. This transcendent, transitory folk rhyme land literally exists before it appears, exists before and above the "normal" time and space of the ordinary *Kunstmärchen* world of *Doll*. Nothing like this is suggested in Carroll or in the texts of his followers.

### Folk Rhyme in a Companion Text

Ten years after *Doll*, Abanindranath deployed the technique of using folk rhymes again, this time in *The Land of Ghoulies and Ghosties,* a more self-conscious comic fantasy novel, directed to a much more sophisticated audience than that implied by the relative simplicity of *Doll*. He also used the technique in other works, such as *Khatanchir ḳhata* (1921), the adaptation and transcreation of *Peter Pan*. *Ghoulies* more clearly indicates Carroll's influence than *Doll*, with its formless, fluid fantasy journeys, and a wonderland that reverses the customs of ordinary life. It is a first-person narrative in the voice of one Abu (i.e., an authorial persona), who seems to start and end in a land of nursery rhymes. He starts by taking leave of his maternal aunt (the same one as in rhyme 4), and goes on a journey to the place were his paternal aunt is through realms with ghosts, talking trees, and underwater monsters, and where there is a good deal of transmogrification. *Ghoulies* includes a verse parody of a famous poem about palanquin bearers, an interpolated creation myth, and two long interpolated stories by Abu's palanquin bearers (one of which combines themes from the *Arabian Nights,* world history, Indian history, novels, and detective stories, while the other is modeled on Hindu myth). *Ghoulies,* like *Doll*, ends with a return home to mother.

Only the rice-sweetmeat-making maternal aunt from folk rhyme is mentioned at the beginning, and here she is more generous than she is in the rhyme. But towards the end, Abu arrives at the home of the paternal aunt, where everything is in reverse (as it was in Carroll's *Wonderland* and *Looḳing-Glass*), and the climax has a group of comic speaking-animal characters (again, as in the Alice books rather than in *Doll*). The story is also peppered with approximately 18 folk nursery-rhymes (allowing for snippets that might be authorial). These rhymes are a different selection from those in *Doll* (though both use rhymes 4 and 9), and more of them are comic rhymes. The rhymes, furthermore, are quoted (rather than alluded to) at much greater length than in *Doll* and sometimes put into the mouths of characters. Most of the rhymes are set off in the last 13 pages of the main text (Tagore 1974b, 271–84). The rhymes sometimes serve a similar "prophetic" function as in the Alice books, so that quoting a rhyme calls up the character (e.g., a bogey), and at other times the appearance of a character (e.g., a fox) is followed by a rhyme. On the whole, however, the folk rhymes in

*Ghoulies* work differently from the way they work both in the Alice books and in *Doll*. In *Ghoulies*, the rhymes largely provide fodder for dialogue or, albeit rarely, act as a spring board for long, rambling stories.

In this section the scenes shift rapidly, and there are many transmogrifications of people into animals and back into people. To start with, the mother of Govinda lulls an otter-baby with one rhyme, then Abu's palanquin bearers turn into groups of crabs and spiders while playing a contest-game and chanting another rhyme, and then they sing a third rhyme. At the end, the characters turn back into humans and exchange lines from a rhyme in a dialogue with Govinda's mother. An owlet recites the whole of a nonsense rhyme to Abu and quotes the relevant lines when a fox character from a rhyme appears. The owlet then turns the rest of the rhyme into a long story mixing new rambling prose with quoted verse. The owlet's second and longer story repetitively elucidates and quotes portions of many stanzas of a rhyme about frogs and a weaver.

The scene shifts and the fox first articulates two parts of a rhyme inquiring what various children would like to eat. The fox then frightens Abu with a rhyme about a bogeyman, which appears. The bogeyman then articulates a rhyme describing his doings. A group of foxes say part of a rhyme inviting a child to ride an elephant. Abu claps his hands and speaks a line from a rhyme about going to his maternal uncle's house, and then goes there. At his maternal uncle's house Abu calls out a rhyme about a monkey to a monkey, and the monkey replies with a rhyme about bats. The bats come and take Abu back to his paternal aunt's house, and then turn into the palanquin bearers. The palanquin bearers take Abu to the schoolhouse and call out one part of a rhyme to the schoolmaster (rhyme 9), who replies with another part.[12] The schoolmaster teaches Abu a couplet about studying, but Abu gets it wrong (and is thus comically parodied, as in *Alice*). The schoolmaster tells Abu to write down a rhyme about a mother telling a son to study, upon which Abu thinks lovingly of his own mother and rushes off home.

Though the technique of using folk nursery rhymes for the climax of *Doll* and *Ghoulies* is similar, *Ghoulies* uses it more explicitly than *Doll*. In *Doll* the folk rhymes far more subtly and fluidly interpenetrate the text, and require more attention to follow. The rhymes in *Doll* thus provide greater rewards, and are more closely integrated with a plot. *Ghoulies*, the plotless fantasy novel for adults, is more ambitious in this and other respects, but in this respect is less successful than *Doll*, the *Kunstmärchen* for children.

## Conclusion

Generically, the *Kunstmärchen* and the folk-rhyme are for children and are similar in their use of fantasy. The new genre can incorporate and supersede

the old one. When *Doll*, a late-Victorian Bengal *Kunstmärchen*, uses folk rhyme, it draws upon urban upperclass nostalgia. Its land of rhymes and its larger world reflect each other and blur into each other by concentrating on sleep, weddings, animals, folk-religion, water/fishing, and mother-love. Conflations, collocations, intercalations, and repetitions of rhyme elements in *Doll* make the listener feel that the space that contains them is not fixed or stable. The technique of using rhymes may be an English import from Carroll, but it is applied differently with different Bengali material. Abanindranath's later companion text, *Ghoulies*, a fantasy novel, uses folk rhymes similarly, but *Doll*, his most famous *Kunstmärchen,* is probably the more successful.

## NOTES

1. Compiled by Dr. P. N. Chakravarti but never published. DAS[A]GUPTA looked for this tale but was unable to find it (1992, 26). Though SEN[A] sees *Doll* as woven around two folk-tale motifs—A489.1, "The Benevolence of the Deity," and C312.3, "The Taboo Against Seeing a Child for Some Years"—and an affinity with *Kalavati,* he says *Doll* can not be placed with any type (1992, 97)

2. This märchen is also known as "Stupid [Monkey] and Specter [Owl]"). See SIRCAR 1996.

3. I have checked this contention with actual "common readers" of the text. SEN[A] notes Abanindranath's use of six rhymes and the untraditional mixture of genres (1992, 97–98).

4. Gupta's Hindi translation breaks up the text even more, making the two paragraphs into seven.

5. Two errors in my 1997 article should be noted here. The source for rhyme 19 should be no. 230 in DATTA 1973, and in rhyme 4 "accomplished bride" should be "modest bride."

6. These lines also appear in other rhymes, such as those about the Noton doves.

7. This is the only one whose quality is evoked rather than actually mentioned in the text.

8. The watery connotations of these rhymes are evoked by association only.

9. See my comments (SIRCAR 1997), on rhymes 6a, 8, 15, 16, 18.

10. There is a phrase on the glistening sands of Chitpur Field in a long version of rhyme 16, but this is only just possibly an allusion.

11. Whether "Twinkle, twinkle little star" is a nursery rhyme or not is a matter of debate, since we know the author and since it has a fixed form rather than a variable one.

12. I do not know this rhyme from any other source, and its appearance in *Ghoulies* in the midst of other indubitable folk rhymes leads me to conclude that it is one of them, and that it is the one alluded to in *Doll.*

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