

Colonial Neuroses: Kipling and Forster

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MARGERIE Perham, the distinguished authority on colonial affairs, has spoken of her feelings when she was about to enter Somaliland for the first time:

Next day we were to cross the Gulf of Aden to Berbera to live almost alone and far inland among a population of dark people. I had an overwhelming spasm of recoil, of something more than physical fear. I referred to this in one of my Reith Lectures: a revulsion against the thought that I, so white, so vulnerable, so sensitive, so complex, was about to commit myself to that continent across the water, one among tens of thousands of strange, dark, fierce, uncomprehending people, and live away on that far frontier, utterly cut off from my own race. It was like a nightmare. I suppose it was racial fear. It passed.¹

This kind of nightmarish experience was a characteristic aspect of European life in the colonies, and I propose to examine its presence in Kipling's earliest stories and Forster's *A Passage to India*. Probably, "racial fear" is only a part of this experience; the cultural fear of the alien and the invaders' fear of their subjects² are more or less important causes.

It is natural that this aspect of colonial life should have occupied Kipling's mind at the beginning of his literary career just as it was a part of Conrad's concerns in his first two (Malayan) novels and in his African tales. Louis L. Cornell argues that Kipling's four earliest stories were "a false start and that it was through newspaper sketches, not grotesque tales, that the main course of his development was to lie."³ But it seems to me that "the main course of his development" was only partly through "newspaper sketches"; it *was* partly through these stories of nightmarish experience that he arrived at the body of his work, which focused on the ordinary world of Anglo-

India. The development of Kipling's interest from nightmarish experience to ordinary experience is logical: he moves from a kind of colonial experience which tends to strike a sensitive alien like Margery Perham, Conrad or himself with immediate force, to experience which impinges later on the consciousness of such a person. Moreover, Cornell's epithet, "grotesque," does not accurately describe the earliest stories of Kipling.

There are more reasons why these stories are an integral part of Kipling's development as an artist, reasons which affect their quality. These stories illustrate the kind of unevenness despite consistent care which, W. W. Robson observes, is one feature of Kipling's work at any period of his career.⁴ In all of them Kipling, like Conrad, employed narrators partly for the sake of an objectivity which became characteristic and a condition of artistic success, though it did not consistently guarantee it in his case. These stories reveal his type of economy. This probably derives mainly from his habit, as he himself confesses in his autobiography, of "shortening his Anglo-Indian tales, first to his own fancy after rapturous re-readings and next to the space available"⁵ — that is, a habit formed by considerations of artistic effect and journalistic exigence.⁶ His fictive economy at times contributes to and at other times detracts from the power of his stories; these stories about nightmarish experiences are no exception. In "The Gate of the Hundred Sorrows" (1884), he treats Gabral Misquitta's opium-addiction as the centre of the story, but he artfully introduces a compressed account of Misquitta's entire life to bring out the full import of his deterioration. But in "The Dream of Duncan Parrenness" (1884) he condenses too much. The story is an allegory about a European's maturation after a nightmare, set in India in the eighteenth century when Warren Hastings was Governor-General:

Yet there be certain times in a young man's life, when, through great sorrow or sin, all the boy in him is burnt and seared away so that he passes at one step to the

more sorrowful state of manhood: as our staring Indian day changes into night with never so much as the grey of twilight to temper the two extremes.⁷

This extremely swift maturation passes through three stages: Parrenness's future self takes from him his "trust in man," his "faith in women" and as much as remained to him of his "boy's soul and conscience."⁸ The whole process is rendered with an extreme conciseness which is partly responsible for the impression of slickness created by the development of the action.

The basic narrative mode of all these stories is the same and is that which was established in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*⁹ — that of the "sahib" recounting his experiences in the colonies. But the quality of the language in each and also the quality of the experiences, though all are broadly nightmarish, are diverse. As a Eurasian deteriorating in a colony, Misquitta in "The Gate of the Hundred Sorrows" is a representative figure and belongs with such characters as Conrad's Almayer and Willems, Joyce Cary's Gollup in *Mister Johnson*:

How did I take to it? It began at Calcutta. I used to try it in my own house, just to see what it was like. I never went very far, but I think my wife must have died then. Anyhow, I found myself here, and got to know Fung-Tching. I don't remember rightly how that came about: but he told me of the Gate and I used to go there, and, somehow, I have never got away from it since. Mind you, though, the Gate was a respectable place in Fung-Tching's time, where you could be comfortable and not at all like the *chandookhanas* where the niggers go. No; it was clean, and quiet, and not crowded. Of course, there were others beside us ten and the man; but we always had a mat apiece, with a wadded woollen headpiece, all covered with black and red dragons and things, just like the coffin in the corner.

At the end of one's third pipe the dragons used to move about and fight. I've watched 'em many and many a night through. I used to regulate my Smoke that way, and now it takes a dozen pipes to make 'em stir. Besides, they are all torn and dirty, like the mats, and old Fung-Tching is dead.¹⁰

An "I" introduces the story at the beginning as that told entirely by Misquitta when he was at death's door. As

the story unfolds itself, it becomes clear that Misquitta had become fatally addicted to opium. At this point, he is halfway through his account when Kipling introduces one of his flashbacks to an earlier period of Misquitta's life. It coheres with the rest as a natural part of one of his open answers to the "I's" series of implied questions, answers which compose the whole story. This flashback is one of his rather hazy recollections of the origins of his addiction which the reader finds suggestive. Through it Kipling shows Misquitta's deterioration in depth and, at the same time, ensures that the story is unfailingly in character. On the other hand, it is equally appropriate that Misquitta describes precisely the stage of opium addiction because it comes later and grips his mind: he evokes the very experience of the increased addiction to opium-smoking. Through this kind of conversational idiom, Kipling presents Misquitta's case from the addict's standpoint as well as implies his own through suggestions in the language and organization beyond the narrator's consciousness. Here Kipling suggests how Misquitta's fate is of his own making though he does not face this squarely, how he clings incongruously to his sense of superiority as a sahib when both his character and his opium den have declined. The deterioration of the den parallels and intensifies his own. Kipling uses Misquitta's expression of happiness over his poor allowance of "sixty rupees fresh and fresh every month" as a kind of refrain which suggests an abortive attempt to appease a nagging sense of failure beneath his protestations of contentment and indifference. His last hopes are in keeping with and suggest movingly the irretrievable wreck which he has become:

One of these days, I hope, I shall die in the Gate
 I should like to die like the bazar-woman — on a clean,
 cool mat with a pipe of good stuff between my lips.
 When I feel I'm going, I shall ask Tsing-ling for them,
 and he can draw my sixty rupees a month, fresh and
 fresh, as long as he pleases. Then I shall lie back,
 quiet and comfortable, and watch the black and red
 dragons have their last big fight together; and then

Well, it doesn't matter. Nothing matters much to me — only I wish Tsing-ling wouldn't put bran into the Black Smoke.¹¹

Not all the nightmarish experiences of Europeans in colonies, however, arise because of or are conditioned by that complex of colonial fears which I mentioned at the beginning. The young Kipling realized this. The "dream" of Duncan Parrenness is couched in an archaic prose to suit its period, but it remains rather artificially sterile. The dream remains artistically flimsy and is not related to those colonial fears. In "The Phantom Rickshaw" (1885), a much better story than "The Dream of Duncan Parrenness," Kipling subtly suggests that Jack Pansay's "delusion" reflects a kind of schizophrenia caused mainly by his sense of guilt over his affair with Mrs. Keith-Wessington. It is not presented as an experience which is typically or specially colonial.

Yet in "The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes" (1885), Kipling presents a colonial kind of experience, "going native," which appears nightmarish to a sahib. The sahib, Jukes, narrates his own story and the author introduces it. The author vouches for its truth, but indicates that Jukes "has touched it up in places and introduced Moral Reflections"¹² presumably from his present healthy and maturer state in ordinary Anglo-India. The latter point is clear in the story, but the former is qualified by the story itself. Jukes is, certainly, true to his experience, but the experience itself is half fantasy. The authorities of the Village of the Dead remain a mystery and the armed boat, which guards the only almost totally unknown way of escape from the Village through the swamp, is inexplicably rather strange. But these are suitable correlatives for Juke's nightmarish experiences — of being ruthlessly hemmed in by "native" life and of inner discomposure because of an overturning of his notion of what social roles should be and were in a colony. The European as conqueror holds the "native" in subjection basically through

force which appears nakedly during "rebellion," but here the roles are reversed:

As I led Pornic over the sands I was startled by the faint pop of a rifle across the river; and at the same moment a bullet dropped with a sharp '*whit*' close to Pornic's head.

There was no mistaking the nature of the missile — a regulation Martini-Henry 'picket.' About five hundred yards away a country-boat was anchored in mid-stream; and a jet of smoke drifting away from its bows in the still morning air showed me whence the delicate attention had come. Was ever a respectable gentleman in such an *impasse*? The treacherous sand-slope allowed no escape from a spot which I had visited most involuntarily, and a promenade on the river frontage was the signal for a bombardment from some insane native in a boat. I'm afraid I lost my temper very much indeed. Another bullet reminded me that I had better save my breath to cool my porridge . . . (p. 138)

Kipling captures the kind of slightly forced playfulness which a sahib would come out with in this kind of situation, and the shooting is described exactly. The fantasy works because it stylises into an extreme form the actual essence of the coloniser's position.

Jukes's experience is half real in an extremely grim way. He has to live among Hindu outcasts on the verge of death in a tiny barren village in a crater. He has no alternative but to live on a staple diet of crows and sleep in a filthy hole in a sand-bank. Thus he is placed in extremely primitive and difficult circumstances which test the very essentials of his kind of character. Kipling renders ironically a range of feelings within Jukes arising from a tension between his ingrained sense of superiority as "a Sahib, a representative of the dominant race" (p. 144), which is absurd for one in his situation, and a sense of inescapable degradation.

One does not protest against the doings of a den of wild beasts; and my companions were lower than any beasts. While I ate what Gunga Dass had provided, a coarse *chapatti* and a cupful of the foul well-water, the people showed not the faintest sign of curiosity — that curiosity which is so rampant, as a rule, in an Indian village.

I could even fancy that they despised me. At all events they treated me with the most chilling indifference, and Gunga Dass was nearly as bad. I plied him with questions about the terrible village, and received extremely unsatisfactory answers. (p. 143)

Jukes's experience is brought to a focus mainly through his interaction with Gunga Dass. He had known the Indian earlier as a Government servant with among other things "unctuous speech" (p. 139). But Dass now treats him differently. Indeed, none of the Hindus place him on his accustomed sahib's pedestal. His case is in some ways similar to and in others different from Dass's. The latter feels that his present state is a humiliation particularly because he is conscious of his past as a "Brahmin and a proud man" (p. 141), as a high caste and a proud man. He reconciles himself with difficulty to life in the Village, but Jukes finds it impossible to do this. The difference in their positions in Anglo-India matters here. The perils which await a person such as Jukes are indicated concretely when he learns of the Englishman who had died there and sees his remains. These carefully woven significances arise from the action whose realistic aspect, like its fantastic one, is rendered in precise detail. This is equally true of the everyday activities such as eating, and of the social attitudes that come up. It brings the story potently to the senses so that we lose the sense that it is half fantasy. Indeed, it raises it to the level of a symbolic dramatisation of aspects of "ruling-race" and "native" psychology in a colony.

In *A Passage to India*, Forster also deals with the subject of colonial neurosis. In this respect, Adela Quested and Mrs. Moore in the Marabar Caves have physical, psychological and cultural affinities with Jukes in the crater. The visit to the Caves is the crux of the whole action, and their nightmarish experiences during and after it are an important part of the novel's significance. Adela imagines that Aziz had tried to rape her in a cave. Forster suggests that Aziz did not do so, but he leaves vague what actually happened to Adela in there. The question as to what hap-

pened is as irrelevant as "How many children had Lady Macbeth?" What matters is that in a situation of social and racial friction there can be no smoke without fire. The British and the Indians gather as though they were opposed armies, as Forster suggests in the novel.¹³ The British as alien invaders feel a nightmarish sense of beleaguement:

People drove into the club with studious calm — the jog-trot of country gentlefolk between green hedgerows, for the natives must not suspect that they were agitated. They exchange the usual drinks, but everything tasted different and then they looked out at the palisade of cactuses stabbing the purple throat of the sky; they realized that they were thousands of miles from any scenery that they understood. (pp. 177-78)

Forster metaphorically suggests that even nature seems to them murderously menacing because they have projected their own kind of fear onto it. Adela herself is haunted by an echo after her experience in the cave, and this is a definite sign of neurosis. The echo disappears after she clears Aziz of the charge, and this suggests that it is associated in her unconscious mind partly with a doubt as to his culpability and a related sense of guilt, a sense that she has brought the experience on herself.

Thus Forster is able to render the nightmarish kind of experiences of Europeans in colonies with a psychological and social depth which Kipling achieves in the best of his earliest stories, "The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes." Yet Forster also sees a philosophical dimension to this kind of experience which the young Kipling does not. The Marabar Caves themselves are important in this respect:

The first cave was tolerably convenient. They skirted the puddle of water, and then climbed up over some unattractive stones, the sun crashing on their backs. Bending their heads, they disappeared one by one into the interior of the hills. The small black hole gaped where their varied forms and colours had momentarily functioned. They were sucked in like water down a drain. Bland and bold rose the precipices; bland and glutinous the sky that connected the precipices; solid and white, a Brahminy kite flapped between the rocks with a clumsiness that seemed intentional. Before man, with his itch for the seemly, had been born, the planet must have

looked thus. The kite flapped away . . . Before birds, perhaps . . . And then the hole belched and humanity returned. (pp. 144-45)

Nature is presented accurately and strikingly in terms of human reactions to it, and is linked to the human action. Forster unobtrusively introduces symbolic suggestions of life as being puny in a world which has come to pass through a long mindless evolution; the sense of the material world as "viscous," as so much clogging stuff devoid of values, anticipates Sartre. Suggestions of this kind begin to converge on Mrs. Moore. It is mainly through her that Forster presents his deepest insights into philosophical rather than social matters.

A Marabar cave had been horrid as far as Mrs. Moore was concerned, for she had nearly fainted in it, and had some difficulty in preventing herself from saying so as soon as she got into the air again. It was natural enough: she had always suffered from faintness, and the cave had become too full, because all their retinue followed them. Crammed with villagers and servants, the circular chamber began to smell. She lost Aziz in the dark, didn't know who touched her, couldn't breathe, and some vile naked thing struck her face and settled on her mouth like a pad. She tried to regain the entrance tunnel, but an influx of villagers swept her back. She hit her head. For an instant she went mad, hitting and gasping like a fanatic. For not only did the crush and stench alarm her; there was also a terrifying echo.

Professor Godbole had never mentioned an echo; it never impressed him, perhaps. (p. 145)

It is a European, not an Indian, who is prone to have experiences of this kind. On a realistic level, Forster renders the reactions of an elderly European woman. At the same time, he suggests symbolically a surreal sense of the unreality of the world of fact.

There are some exquisite echoes in India; there is the whisper round the dome at Bijapur; there are the long, solid sentences that voyage through the air at Mandhu, and return unbroken to their creator. The echo in a Marabar cave is not like these, it is entirely devoid of distinction. Whatever is said, the same monotonous noise replies, and quivers up and down the walls until it is absorbed into the roof. 'Boum' is the sound as far as the human alphabet can express it, or 'bou-oum' or 'ou-boum', — utterly dull. Hope, politeness, the blowing

of a nose, the squeak of a boot, all produce 'boum'. (p. 145)

The echo is real and, at the same time, a recurring symbol of a sense of nullity. It goes with that sense of life as being puny, and these two kinds of symbolism intensify each other.

The crush and the smells she could forget, but the echo began in some indescribable way to undermine her hold on life. Coming at a moment when she chanced to be fatigued, it had managed to murmur, 'Pathos, piety, courage — they exist, but are identical, and so is filth. Everything exists, nothing has value.' If one had spoken vileness in that place, or quoted lofty poetry, the comment would have been the same — 'ou-boum'. If one had spoken with the tongues of angels and pleaded for all the unhappiness and misunderstanding in the world, past, present, and to come, for all the misery men must undergo whatever their opinion and position, and however much they dodge or bluff — it would amount to the same, the serpent would descend and return to the ceiling. Devils are of the North, and poems can be written about them, but no one could romanticize the Marabar because it robbed infinity and eternity of their vastness, the only quality that accommodates them to mankind. (p. 147)

For an instant the prose here deteriorates into false rhetoric ("Devils are of the North and poems can be written about them"); devils are found in the mythology of cultures at least as far south as Ceylon and Bali. This apart, the nullity and pettiness of life are presented with power and particularity. It is an outstanding characteristic of this phase of the novel that the real and the symbolic interpenetrate, and Forster thereby succeeds in the difficult task of rendering philosophical considerations with the concreteness of immediate experience. From one aspect Mrs. Moore reflects the depressed sense of an absence of solidly accepted or acceptable system of values which haunts the modern European mind. In this respect Forster is in the line from Hardy (for instance, *Jude the Obscure*) and Nietzsche ("God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him."), through to existentialism and the Absurd (for instance, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*).

Mrs. Moore's wisdom is appreciated neither by the British nor by the Indians. Adela thinks that "the old lady had turned disagreeable and queer" after the episode at the Caves (p. 212). Aziz is attached to her emotionally, but she is "nothing" to him in an intellectual sense (p. 307). Her apotheosis as "Esmiss Esmoor" by the mass of the Indians reflects a spontaneous religious reaction, which is primitive. She is presented by Forster with a critical realism. We noticed that her elderliness matters; here is a part of the scene immediately after her experience in the cave:

As each person emerged she looked for a villain, but none was there, and she realized that she had been among the mildest individuals, whose only desire was to honour her, and that the naked pad was a poor little baby, astride its mother's hip. Nothing evil had been in the cave, but she had not enjoyed herself; no, she had not enjoyed herself, and she decided not to visit a second one. (p. 146)

Forster suggests that she had made too much of her experience. Here she is leaving India:

As she drove through the huge city which the West had built and abandoned with a gesture of despair, she longed to stop, though it was only Bombay, and disentangle the hundred Indias that passed each other in its streets. The feet of the horses moved her on, and presently the boat sailed and thousands of coconut palms appeared all round the anchorage and climbed the hills to wave her farewell. 'So you thought an echo was India; you took the Marabar caves as final?' they laughed. 'What have we in common with them, or they with Asirgarh? Good-bye!' (pp. 204-5)

Forster suggests that it is because Mrs. Moore is an outsider that she finds it impossible to understand India, though he is aware that it is an extremely complex country. Her view is deeper than the conventional "mysterious-East" kind of view, but is still limited. Mrs. Moore's character is a development from Mrs. Wilcox's in *Howards End*, but, unlike Mrs. Wilcox, she comes alive as both fully real and richly symbolic. The nightmarish kind of experiences of Europeans in colonies provide one way by which Forster is able to make a "passage to more than

India" (to use Walt Whitman's phrase). He taps the same vein as the young Kipling; yet he attempts and achieves a much larger structure of experiences and significances than the latter.

NOTES

¹Margery Perham, "African Dreams" *The Listener*, 12 March 1970, p. 336.

²This is evident, for example, in Churchill's speeches on India: When the nation finds that our whole position is in jeopardy, that her whole work and duty in India is being brought to a standstill, when the nation sees our individual fellow-countrymen scattered about, with their women and children, through this enormous land, in hourly peril amidst the Indian multitudes, when at any moment, this may produce shocking scenes, then I think there will be a sharp awakening, then, I am sure, that a reaction of the most vehement character will sweep this country and its unmeasured strength will once more be used. That, Sir, is an ending which I trust and pray we may avoid, but it is an ending to which, step by step and day by day, we are being remorselessly and fatuously conducted. — Winston S. Churchill, *India: Speeches* (London: T. Butterworth, 1931), p. 69.

³Louis L. Cornell, *Kipling in India* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966), p. 108.

⁴W. W. Robson, "Kipling's Later Stories," in *Kipling's Mind and Art*, ed. Andrew Rutherford (Edinburgh & London: Oliver & Boyd, 1965), p. 258.

⁵Kipling, *Something of Myself* (London: Macmillan, 1964), p. 207.

⁶For instance, "thirty-two of the *Plain Tales* had been printed in the *Civil and Military*; the remaining eight made their first appearance when the book was published, in January 1888": Charles Carrington, *Rudyard Kipling: His Life and Work* (London: Penguin, 1970), p. 129.

⁷Kipling, "The Dream of Duncan Parrenness," *Life's Handicap* (London: Macmillan, 1964), p. 302.

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 300, 301.

⁹See, e.g. Sir Hugh Clifford, "The Quest of the Golden Fleece," *'Blackwood' Tales from the Outposts* (Edinburgh & London: William Blackwood, 1933), Vol. 8; Lord Baden-Powell, "Jokilobovu," *ibid.*, Vol. 9; J. A. G. Elliot, "The Ngoloko," *ibid.*, Vol. 9; Lieut-Colonel R. L. Kennion, "A Country Postman," *ibid.*, Vol. 1; Lieut-Colonel F. M. Bailey, "A Quiet Day in Tibet," *ibid.*, Vol. 1.

¹⁰Kipling, "The Gate of the Hundred Sorrows": *Plain Tales from the Hills* (London: Macmillan, 1964), pp. 215-16.

¹¹Ibid., p. 218.

¹²Kipling, "The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes," *Wee Willie Winkie* (London: Macmillan, 1964), p. 134; all later quotations from the story are from this edition and their page-numbers are noted in my text.

¹³Forster, *A Passage to India* (London: Penguin, 1959), p. 167; all quotations from the novel are from this edition and their page-numbers are noted in my text.

Me Being Stupid

I am too tired today to understand
how it is you I meet at the beach.
When I say "The water is blue."
you cry. Gathering driftwood
you talk about the scheduled tides:
what they do to dead things
that ride the sea woodenly:
shaped into cats
and peacocks with smooth wings.

KENNETH FIFER