

ARIEL

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Colonial Neuroses: Kipling and Forster

D. C. R. A. GOONETILLEKE

MARGERY 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-