Not at Home in Empire

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Ranajit Guha

There is something uncanny about empire. The entity known by that name is, in essence, mere territory. That is, a place constituted by the violence of conquest, the jurisdictions of law and ownership, the institutions of public order and use. And when all the conquistadors, consuls, and clerks are taken out, there is little left to it other than a vacancy waiting for armies and bureaucracies to fit it up once more with structures of power and designate it again as empire. As such, it *requires* no homes, if only because the authority, the imperium, from which it derives its form, function, and purpose, is easily sustained by forts and barracks and offices. Yet as history shows, empire is not reconciled for long to this abstracted condition. Caravans seek the shade of the camps, markets their custom in the garrisons, even religions their flock among war-weary souls. Towns and settlements grow, as empire too is seized by the urge to make a home of its territory.

However, this is not an urge the modern colonial empire can easily satisfy. For it rules by a state which does not arise out of the society of the subject population but is imposed on it by an alien force. This irreducible and historically necessary otherness was what made imperialism so uncanny for its protagonists in South Asia, as witness the experience of a British officer, Francis Yeats-Brown, who could, with good reason, describe the first year of his career in the Indian army as "a jolly life"; and

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"yet among these servants and salaams," he recalled later on in his memoir, *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer,*

> I had sometimes a sense of isolation, of being a caged white monkey in a Zoo whose patrons were this incredibly numerous beige race.
>
> Riding through the densely packed bazaars of Bareilly City, . . . passing village temples, cantering across the magical plains that stretched away to the Himalayas, I shivered at the millions and immensities and secrecies of India. I liked to finish my day at the club, in a world whose limits were known and where people answered my beck. An incandescent lamp coughed its light over shrivelled grass and dusty shrubbery; in its circle of illumination exiled heads were bent over English newspapers, their thoughts far away, but close to mine. Outside, people prayed and plotted and mated and died on a scale unimaginable and uncomfortable. We English were a caste. White overlords or white monkeys—it was all the same. The Brahmins made a circle within which they cooked their food. So did we. We were a caste: pariahs to them, princes in our own estimation.[1]

The defining terms of this Englishman's sense of isolation in this passage are not only ethnic—a "beige race" contrasted to one that is white. The customary coding by color is mediated here by a sentiment which could easily have passed as fear were it not for the fact that he identifies no particular object as frightening. What comes through is rather an acknowledgement of being overwhelmed by the scale of things. "I shivered," he writes, "at the millions and immensities and secrecies of India." Number, dimension, and depth are all apparently a measure of the colonizer's difficulty in coping with the responsibility called empire. He feels diminished: used to the freedom of the Western metropolis, he now regards himself as caged in India; born to an open society, he has his status frozen into a castelike structure. The empire has shrunk into an uncanny trap for him, and he seeks refuge in the club. For that is a surrogate for home. Nearly as small as cage or caste, it is still a circle of illumination where he can recognize fellow exiles by their heads bent over English newspapers and their thoughts, like his, turned to a place far away from

1. Francis Yeats-Brown, *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (New York, 1930), pp. 4–5.

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this outpost of empire—a place called home, "a world," as he put it, "whose limits were known."

Limit, says Aristotle, is "the terminus of each thing, i.e. the first thing outside which there is nothing to be found."[2] It is in the nature of limit, therefore, to define the limited by an operation that excludes as much as it includes, and of all possible worlds of known limits there is none more inclusive, of course, than home. A space of absolute familiarity, it makes the members of a family feel secure by the completeness of their mutual understanding. The club, the Englishman's home away from home under the raj, replicated such familiarity to some extent. For those who gathered there at the end of the day understood each other by the signs of a shared culture and a common language. Each of them could say of the others, "[they] answered my beck."

Conversely, India, standing as it did beyond the limit, was an empty, hence inaccessible, outside. Empty because it had "nothing to be found" in it for content, and inaccessible because a void is a non-entity one can hardly get to know and relate to. For a limit, to cite Aristotle again, is also "the substance of each thing" and as such "the limit of knowledge; and if of knowledge, of the object also."[3] Beyond limit, hence beyond knowing, India was thus the unhomely opposite of the world of known limits.

Its unknowability for the young soldier was evidently a function of its immeasurability, as indexed by his reference to its "immensities" as well as to "a scale" he found "unimaginable and uncomfortable." The comfort of a world of known limits derives precisely from the known measure of things. It does so because measure, despite the apparent rigidity of its image in the numerical tables of school arithmetic, is a fluid and indeed necessary process which, according to Hegel, enables quantity and quality to "pass into each other."[4] As such, it stands for the essential dynamism of things and their relationships. It is only by understanding the latter that one comports oneself within a given environment and feels at home in it. Which indeed was why the empire had turned out to be so uncanny for Yeats-Brown. He could not find his bearings in a colonial environment where the "unimaginable" scale of things was beyond his comprehension. What made him feel so isolated was not therefore fear predicated on any given object but simply an indefinite and pervasive anxiety about being lost in empire.

The isolation of rulers from the ruled was integral to the colonial

2. Aristotle, *Metaphysics: Books Γ, Δ, and ε,* trans. Christopher Kirwan (Oxford, 1971), p. 54, D17.

3. Aristotle, *Metaphysica,* vol. 8 of *The Works of Aristotle,* trans. W. D. Ross, 2d ed. (Oxford, 1928), D17.

4. G. W. F. Hegel, *Logic,* trans. William Wallace (Oxford, 1975), p. 161; see pp. 156–61.

experience in South Asia. It could hardly be otherwise considering that the raj was a dominance without hegemony—an autocracy that ruled without consent. Isolation was therefore a structural necessity. What made it worse and difficult to forget was the absurdity of Britain's claim to have fitted the roundness of colonial autocracy to the squareness of metropolitan liberalism. A sore that refused to heal, it went on festering by being compulsively touched. Symptom of an unredeemably bad conscience, it developed the habit of insinuating itself into all manner of colonial discourse, ranging from homiletics to politics, from the novel to the lyric to the common joke.

Yet in Yeats-Brown's memoir we have this pervasive concern presented to us in an aspect that remains concealed in the standard histories of the empire. This is not a lacuna which is explained by any shortage of material, for there is no such shortage. The responsibility lies rather with historiography itself—with its tendency to misconstrue the evidence of anxiety simply as fear. In this it allows itself to be uncritically influenced by the discourse of law and order, which has little use for the indefiniteness so characteristic of anxiety and assimilates it readily to fear, if only because the latter offers it the assurance it needs of a definitive causality to justify itself. Historiography, with its statist bias, follows suit and reads fear for anxiety.

Consider for instance the following extract from that truly brilliant work of imperial historiography, John Kaye's *History of the Indian Mutiny*. Written in the manner of grand narratives of war and revolution, it has a storyline which follows close on the heel of events, as in Clarendon's history of the other great rebellion of two centuries before, and stops occasionally, like the latter, to allow metonymy to congeal in reflection. Commenting on the Mutiny at one such stop, he speaks of it as an event that caught the government of the day entirely by surprise.

> In all countries, and under all forms of government [he writes], the dangers which threaten the State, starting in the darkness, make headway towards success before they are clearly discerned by the rulers of the land. . . . The peculiarities of our Anglo-Indian Empire converted a probability into a certainty. Differences of race, differences of language, differences of religion, differences of customs, all indeed that could make a great antagonism of sympathies and of interests, severed the rulers and the ruled as with a veil of ignorance and obscurity. We could not see or hear with our own senses what was going on, and there was seldom any one to tell us. When by some accident the truth at last transpired, . . . much time was lost. . . . The great safeguard of sedition was to be found in the slow processes of departmental correspondence. . . . When prompt and effectual ac-

tion was demanded, Routine called for pens and paper. A letter was written where a blow ought to have been struck.[5]

The differences of race, religion, language, and custom which separated the colonizer and the colonized are perceived in this passage as clearly as they are promptly assimilated to a concern for the security of the state. Of no significance in themselves, they are regarded simply as "a veil of ignorance and obscurity" preventing the rulers from seeing or hearing "what was going on" and combating sedition. An instance, par excellence, of the prose of counterinsurgency, this gives the phenomenon of isolation an unmistakably disciplinary slant in colonialist historiography and reduces it into one of fear. For the lack of information that made the regime feel so isolated was supposed to have been all about "dangers which threaten[ed] the State." Isolation was identified thus with fear—the fear of sedition and rebellion. As such it belonged to a rather different category from what had driven Yeats-Brown to despair. There was nothing in the latter so specific as a nameable "cause" of fear and none that could be dealt with by something so positive as police intelligence about "what was going on."

This is a distinction of some importance—one which we would suggest, following Kierkegaard, is that between fear and anxiety. The former, he says, refers to "something definite."[6] It does so as a state of mind related to a threat—like that to which all states, including the colonial state, are subjected, according to Kaye. A threat is detrimental by its very nature—it harms—and the fear it inspires has its definitiveness rooted as much in the character of the region from which the threat comes as in that of the entity marked out for harming.[7] The fear that haunts the British rulers of India in texts like the one cited above is something definite in this Heideggerian sense. It originates in a clearly specified region—namely, the civil society of the subject population and the equally specific object to which the harm is addressed, that is, the raj. However, directedness alone is not enough to make a threat into an agent of fear. It requires the further condition of drawing close without being actually within striking distance, so that the affect it has is heightened by a degree of uncertainty on the part of the frightened (see *BT,* pp. 179–80). The alarms and panics of La Grande Peur of 1789 and the Mutiny of 1857

5. John Kaye, *History of the Indian Mutiny of 1857–8,* ed. G. B. Malleson, 6 vols. (London, 1898), 1:374.

6. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin,* trans. and ed. Reidar Thomte and Albert B. Andersen (Princeton, N.J., 1980), p. 42; hereafter abbreviated *CA.*

7. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London, 1962), p. 179; hereafter abbreviated *BT.* I rely generally on section 30 of that work for this and related aspects of my argument here.

were all fearsome precisely because they were charged with such impendency.

There was little in Yeats-Brown's anguish that could be said to be either directed or impending. We have no idea where it came from, nor indeed what in particular it sought for its focus. Far from being definite, it was a phenomenon characterized by a total indefiniteness—one which the two great thinkers mentioned above have helped us to diagnose as anxiety.

"That in the face of which one is anxious is completely indefinite," writes Heidegger. This is so in two ways, as he goes on to explain.

> Not only does this indefiniteness leave factically undecided which entity within-the-world is threatening us, but it also tells us that entities within the world are not "relevant" at all. . . . The world has the character of completely lacking in significance. In anxiety one does not encounter this thing or that thing which, as something threatening, must have an involvement. [*BT,* p. 231]

This is how we read the young officer's state of mind in the passage from his memoir cited above. It spoke of no particular entity as the cause of his isolation. For his sense of isolation carried no threat at all; it had neither the regionality nor the directionality characteristic of the latter. It was not that the world around him had ceased to exist. Only the things that constituted it appeared to signify a nowhere and a nothing—an emptiness beyond limit, a nullity rendered incomprehensible by a scale of things beyond measure. Such nothing and nowhere indicate, according to Heidegger, "that *the world as such is that in the face of which one has anxiety*" (*BT,* p. 231). To be in such a world is not to be at home in one's environment. "In anxiety one feels *'uncanny'*" (*BT,* p. 233).

Can we afford to leave anxiety out of the story of the empire? For nearly two hundred years the answer of colonialist historiography to this question has been one in favor of exclusion. It is not anxiety but enthusiasm that has been allowed to dominate its narratives. The latter is a mood which is consonant with all the triumphalist and progressivist moments of imperialism—its wars of conquest, annexation, and pacification in the subcontinent; its interventions in our environment and our economy by industrialization, monetization, and communication; its project of social engineering by administrative measures and its mission of civilizing by education. Its politics of expansion and improvement, its ethics of courage, discipline, and sacrifice, its aesthetics of orientalism have all been assimilated to this mood by a whole range of rhetorical, analytical, and narratological devices, so that enthusiasm has come to be regarded as the very mentality of imperialism itself. The result has been to promote an

image of the empire as a sort of machine operated by a crew who know only how to decide but not to doubt, who know only action but no circumspection, and, in the event of a breakdown, only fear and no anxiety. However, the picture does not look nearly so neat when we step outside official discourse and meet individual members of that crew agonizing like Yeats-Brown over the immensity of things in a world whose limits are not known to them.

During the dying days of the empire the complexities of this predicament came to be widely known in the words of another Englishman, George Orwell, who too had gone out to serve the raj. The importance of his essay "Shooting an Elephant" for our discussion can hardly be overstated.[8] It speaks from a situation which is not quite so aloof as Yeats-Brown's when he writes of his Indian environment as an "outside" of panoramic proportions viewed by a rider on horseback or a passenger out of the window of his railway carriage. In either case, the scene, described so well in *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer,* is as broad as it is one that is swiftly passing by, so that the observations, for all their anguish, maintain a distance from what is observed. It is an alienating rather than an inviting distance witness to the fact that things have lost their significance in this world which the observer, in his anxiety, can apprehend only as an unparticularized whole.

By contrast, there is nothing that separates Orwell from his scene. Indeed the idea of separation would seem to be altogether out of place in the drama of that morning's events some seventy years ago in an obscure corner of Britain's South Asian empire, a small town of Burma called Moulmein. An elephant in a state of *must* had gone berserk, killed its mahout, destroyed parts of a slum, and was on a rampage threatening more lives and properties (see "SE," p. 5). The police officer, called to help, felt beleaguered as he found some thousands of the local population closing in to watch him shoot the beast. Packed with crowds and action, this is not just an outline sketched hurriedly from afar. To the contrary, the details of an involvement in a fast-approaching danger clutter the text. Yet as the crisis ticks away, a terrible sense of isolation gathers in the midst of that tumult, lifts off, and extends beyond the town to all of the empire—to all that goes by that name territorially as well as conceptually. It is precisely this unforeseen and somewhat abrupt development that deflects what might have shaped up as fear from its object and turns it into an anxiety addressed to nothing in particular—no elephant, no yellow face which Orwell so intensely dislikes, not even the dilemma of having to destroy the animal he would rather leave alone.

Indeed Orwell himself refers to his own state of mind at this crisis as no ordinary fear. "I was not afraid in the ordinary sense," he writes ("SE,"

8. See George Orwell, "Shooting an Elephant," in *"Shooting an Elephant" and Other Essays* (New York, 1950), pp. 3–12; hereafter abbreviated "SE."

p. 9). How then is one to understand this being not afraid in the ordinary sense? Not, we suggest, as an instance of the moral and political revulsion so conspicuously displayed in the opening paragraphs of that essay. He had gone to the East, says the author, without knowing much about it or what to expect there and was shocked to see how tyrannical British rule was in South Asia, how cruelly it oppressed its subjects, and how strongly the latter resented the raj. All of which he found "perplexing and upsetting"—to the point of being haunted by "an intolerable sense of guilt," hating "the dirty work of Empire" he was appointed to do as a subdivisional police officer in the imperial service, and about to make up his mind "that imperialism was an evil thing and the sooner I chucked up my job and got out of it the better" ("SE," pp. 3, 4, 3). Above all he was as bitter about what seemed to him "an aimless, petty kind of . . . anti-European feeling" among the natives as he was about "the utter silence . . . imposed on every Englishman in the East" when it came to criticizing the regime ("SE," pp. 3, 4). A terrible quandary, which he defines as one of being "stuck between my hatred of the empire I served and my rage against the evil-spirited little beasts who tried to make my job impossible" ("SE," p. 4).

Years later, when the time came for Orwell to be canonized as a great advocate of liberty, sentiments like these would be bracketed with the ideological stance of his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and regarded as evidence of his consistent opposition to all tyrannies—Russian as well as British—and of his unfailing commitment to the ideals of liberalism. However, a close reading will show that the earlier text, published in 1936, doesn't quite measure up to such claims. For one thing, it has no room in it even for the standard liberal value of racial tolerance. It is peppered with phrases that speak explicitly of his disapproval of the Burmese not only for the color of their skin but for what he obviously perceived as their cultural and moral inferiority. He describes them as gutless, venal, lying.[9] The youth of the town, with whom he was apparently not so popular, are referred to as "the sneering yellow faces" that met him everywhere, and a crowd of the local poor who had turned out to see the shooting as a "sea of yellow faces above the garish clothes" ("SE," pp. 3, 7). And this racial loathing is laced with a violence which loses none of its ugliness even in the confessional rhetoric as he writes how "with one part of my mind I thought of the British Raj as an unbreakable tyranny . . . [while] with another part I thought that the greatest joy in the world would be to drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest's guts" ("SE," p. 4). Furthermore, what is crucial for our understanding of his predicament is that his urge for freedom is obviously not strong enough to inspire him to grasp it when he has a choice to do so. Indeed, the importance of this essay for me lies in its candid documentation of

9. See "SE," pp. 3, 5, and 7–8 for assertions and innuendoes to such effect.

liberalism's failure to act up to its profession of freedom when the crunch comes.

The misreading of Orwell's anguish as the simple cry of a liberal conscience to no small extent owes to a confusion between its two registers. Unclear about the nature of his own despair, he shifts erratically from one to the other, confusing both himself and the reader in the process. Yet it is precisely such confusion that dignifies this otherwise unremarkable belletristic exercise with the authenticity of a moral dilemma. The two registers have rather different, though mutually overdetermined, interpretations for their content. Both speak of the author-official's understanding of his own world but do so from perspectives which are not quite the same.

One of these, briefly noticed above, concerns the uneasy, doubt-ridden, yet dutiful British bureaucrat overwhelmed by his sense of isolation from the people he rules in empire's name and hates as a racially and culturally inferior species who prevent him from properly doing his job. Yet that job, he knows, stands for "the dirty work of Empire"—an empire that is oppressive, exploitative, and evil. But the evil victimizes its own instruments as well. The latter must not demur, but carry on with their assignments in silence. They have lost their freedom no less than their subjects. Caught between two hatreds—that of the raj and of the natives—Orwell speaks for his colleagues as well. "Feelings like these," he says, "are the *normal* by-products of imperialism; ask any Anglo-Indian official, if you can catch him off duty" ("SE," p. 4; emphasis added).

In other words, we have an interpretation here of colonial rule in one of its aspects, which may appropriately be called normal. For all that is odious about it, it seems to have been absorbed into the ideology and practice of everyday administration where colonizer and colonized are locked in routine transactions. The moral and political doubts the subdivisional police chief has about such transactions are all integral to and indeed consistent with the normalcy of this world. It is a world where the Anglo-Indian official is quite at home in his secondary society—the society of courts, clubs, and bungalows, of tax collection and pig-sticking and crowd control, of servants and salaams, as Yeats-Brown had characterized it—a secondary society kept scrupulously apart from the wider and larger indigenous one. No cry of conscience, Orwell's observations are simply the record of a common, if grumbling, compliance of the worker ant which carries the grain and the honey of empire industriously, incessantly, and ever so obediently to its queen.

What however lifts Orwell's sentiments above the ordinariness of routine is the other register, where his interpretation of the place he has in that unhappy but duty-bound world of colonial dominance acquires a somewhat different spin. Concerned no longer with the feelings of the

generic white official out in the East, it is about a dilemma whose universality derives from its being all his own. The terms of this dilemma are known well enough to require no more than a brief recapitulation. Called upon to deal with the rampaging elephant, he had armed himself with a gun but realized on closer approach that it had calmed down and there would be no point in shooting it. However, a large crowd of onlookers, nearly two thousand strong, had already gathered there. "And suddenly I realized," he writes, "that I should have to shoot the elephant after all. The people expected it of me and I had got to do it; I could feel their two thousand wills pressing me forward, irresistibly" ("SE," p. 8).

The suddenness of this realization, emphasized further by temporal markers like "glimpse" and "moment," is what alerts us first to its character as a phenomenon of anxiety ("SE," pp. 4, 8). For "anxiety," says Lacan, "is always defined as appearing suddenly, as arising."[10] As such it is a signal of the shortest possible duration, as short as "a blink of the eye," which, according to Kierkegaard, is how a moment is expressed figuratively in his own language, Danish (*CA,* p. 87).[11] This is an ancient usage which coincides with its rendering as *nimesha* (alternatively, *nimisha*) in Sanskrit and goes back to the Vedas within the Indian tradition. What it signals is an abrupt break with continuity, with any preexisting series whatsoever, just as the blink cuts off the steadiness of a gaze. It is precisely in this least of intervals, which relates to time as succinctly and economically as the point does to Euclidian space, that Orwell situates the suddenness of his realization.

> And it was at this moment [he writes], . . . that I first grasped the hollowness, the futility of the white man's dominion in the East. Here was I, the white man with his gun, standing in front of the unarmed native crowd—seemingly the leading actor of the piece; but in reality I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind. I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys. He becomes a sort of hollow, posing dummy, the conventionalized figure of a sahib. For it is the condition of his rule that he shall spend his life in trying to impress the "natives," and so in every crisis he has got to do what the "natives" expect of him. He wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it. I had got to shoot the elephant. ["SE," p. 8]

"This moment," the *nimesha,* witness to an interpretation that had so abruptly translated the sahib's contest with the elephant into a contest of

10. Jacques Lacan, *Freud's Papers on Technique 1953–1954,* vol. 1 of *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan,* trans. John Forrester, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York, 1988), p. 68.

11. See the editorial note on this point: "The Danish word *Øiblikket* (the moment) is figurative in the sense that it is derived from *Øiets Blik* (a blink of the eye). Cf. the German word *Augenblick*" (*CA,* p. 245 n. 21).

will between colonizer and colonized, was the signal of an entirely new realization. As such, it stood for a qualitative leap—a "negation of continuity," as Kierkegaard put it (*CA,* p. 129). There was nothing in it that could be regarded as continuous with the hatred he had distributed so evenly between imperialism and its victims in the first register. It would not be possible to transit directly from that to this other register—the register of anxiety. For what distinguished the latter was the suddenness of a leap that ruptured the *tediuum mobile* of an imperial administration where conscientious objection was securely yoked to the routine performance of official chores, however evil or ignominious these might have been.

The moment of realization, we have noticed, is also described by Orwell as a "glimpse"—that is, as an altogether unexpected disclosure. Curiously enough, that glimpse of what he calls "the real nature of imperialism" turns out, on close inspection, to be rather different from his initial understanding of empire as a tyranny imposed on the natives ("SE," p. 4). In the register of anxiety, by contrast, the emphasis shifts to the colonizer's own loss of freedom. He has no will of his own any more and is controlled "by the will of those yellow faces behind." Trapped in the image of the sahib fabricated by sahibs themselves in order to impress the natives, he is now forced to live up to it by doing what natives expect a sahib to do. They expect him to shoot the elephant. He doesn't want to shoot it. He must shoot it.

What is clearly at issue in this dilemma is freedom and its possibility, which stares our protagonist, the police official, in the face. The suddenness of this confrontation unsettles him; its urgency is fraught with a terror he finds hard to bear. Seized by anxiety, he has to decide whether to throw off his mask or continue to wear it, to assert his own will or be guided by that of others, to play or not to play sahib before the natives—in sum, to shoot or not to shoot the elephant.

In the event, as we know, he decided to act as a white man must and shot the animal. In doing so, he overcame the anxiety of freedom by coming down firmly on the side of unfreedom—an unfreedom articulated doubly as the native's subjection to colonial rule and the colonialist's to native expectation about what he must do in order not to lose face. This was indeed the unfreedom where he was at home as a functionary of the raj acting out the official roles assigned to him and dutifully, if grudgingly, performing his chores. In such a context, the incident of that morning was nothing other than a signal of the uncanny calling out to him to step out of the groove and walk away to freedom. He had heard that call, but a moment's glimpse of the abyss of possibility was enough to make him recoil from the brink. He chose to stay where he was, clinging firmly to the homeliness of the routine and the familiar. The uncanny of empire had frightened Yeats-Brown by its incomprehensible dimensions,

by excesses beyond measure. Some twenty years on, it was to frighten Orwell by the urgency of its insistence on freedom.[12]

The essay "Shooting an Elephant" is therefore no parable of liberal revolt against colonialism. To the contrary, it demonstrates how a liberal conscience succumbed to colonial imperatives. Yet in the very act of doing so, it was singed by anxiety and brought back, however momentarily, from its absorption in the familiar world of the sahib. From that moment the raj would no longer be the same to it again. For it had caught a glimpse of freedom in the flash of time's passing, and had known, if only for the duration of a blink, the possibility of not being at home in empire.

12. Yeats-Brown mentioned New Year's Eve of 1905 as the date of his first encounter with the uncanny of empire; see Yeats-Brown, *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer,* pp. 3–13. Orwell joined the imperial service in Burma about twenty years later in 1926.