Frye Among (Postcolonial) Schoolchildren: The Educated Imagination

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Résumé: Selon l'auteur, l'ouvrage de Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination*, permet d'étudier l'influence persistante et paradoxale de l'idéologie impérialiste sur l'enseignement de la littérature. À la lumière de travaux d'étudiants du secondaire, il examine différents thèmes caractéristiques de l'impérialisme, tels ceux des îles désertes, de l'identité de l'Autre, de la place du Canada, *etc.* afin de montrer à quel point la distinction Est-Ouest et le clivage entre la civilisation et le monde primitif perdurent et finissent par définir cet apprentissage de la littérature même si les étudiants eux-mêmes rejettent l'impérialisme.

Summary: This paper argues that Northrop Frye's book, *The Educated Imagination*, provides the means of examining the lingering influence of imperialism on the way we teach literature to the young. Using instances drawn from the responses to the book by high school students, the paper reviews the themes which Frye develops of uninhabited islands, being outside and other, the place of Canada, and the work of literature to show how the divide between West and East, civilized and primitive, continues to define the critical work of this discipline, even as they are taken up and resisted by students using Frye's vision of the educated imagination.

"When asked to write a short essay on the good of the study of literature, I was stumped. What good is it?" (Carrie, Grade 13)

I have become convinced that we need to attend to the educational legacy of imperialism, despite the existence of other pressing educational issues such as national standards and international competitiveness. Compared to these higher profile issues, this one holds out the promise of a small but significant advance in the sense which the young make of themselves and the world. In growing up, the young are asked to find themselves within the complex categories of race, culture, and nation, placing themselves at the intersection of identity and history. My concern is that students currently receive little help from the school curriculum in understanding how these determining concepts, that still bear much colonial baggage, are something other than natural divisions of humankind. I think it especially important for teachers and students to realize how these relentless divisions of the world were originally, and in some cases continue to be, underwritten by the arts and sciences around which the schools are organized. Therefore, I advocate that, among a number of approaches to education, teachers and students consider the academic influence of what I would term the "colonial imaginary." This particular constitution of the world continues to shape our understanding of "Self" and "Other," white and coloured, first and third world, West and East. If we see how we have arrived at these conceptualizations, we can better see how to move beyond them.[1]

In this article, I will illustrate how the colonial formation of literature teaching can still figure in a high school English class. Although I might have selected any one of a good number of texts, I am restricting my attention to Northrop Frye's *The Educated Imagination* (1963), a well-known defense of literary study that is itself assigned on occasion to senior high school students. It offers an opportunity to examine the values assigned to literature by one of the century's finest critics.

However, I would first set the stage by returning to the colonial invention of the English literature class marked by the 1835 English Education Act (India) and the 1872 Foster Act (Great Britain). The English Education Act made English the language of instruction in the Indian schools under British control, serving the "natives" as Latin had served the English people in a ladder of learned ascendancy. Here the key figure is historian Thomas Macaulay who, in his famous 1835 Minute to the British government, advised as far as education was concerned, the entirety of Indian literature was unworthy of a shelf of English writing. The Orientalist Horace Wilson advised the British Parliament in 1853 that as "we initiate [the Indians] into our literature, particularly at an early age, and get them to adopt feelings and sentiments from our standard writers, we make an impression upon them, and affect any considerable alteration in their feelings and notions" (Viswanathan 48). In her study of literary education in India during the British rule, Gauri Viswanathan explores how English literature was, in effect, field-tested in India as a school subject intended to convince the people "that their destinies were guided by men of principle" (72). Viswanathan points out that English literature was "transformed into an instrument for ensuring industriousness, efficiency, trustworthiness, and compliance in native subjects" (93). For Great Britain, the Foster Act was one of a series of legislative moves to bring compulsory education to all British children, thus forging a unified state/empire that included the British working class. Matthew Arnold, the great literary critic and celebrated school inspector of the last century, brought together these two sides of his life in advocating literature for the Church charity schools he visited. "Good poetry," he advocated in that now famous educational claim from his 1880 inspectorial report to the Privy Council, "does undoubtedly tend to form the soul and character" (60).

Between the English Education Act and the Foster Act, in the time leading up to Canadian nationhood, Canada was the site of much educational activity on behalf of English literature. Robert Morgan's history of English teaching in Ontario is filled with exemplary instances of literature's colonial mission. The evidence he presents ranges from specific topics assigned for composition at the University College in Toronto—"The connection between literary excellence and natural greatness, as exhibited in English history"—to the declarations of education Henry Scalding that Shakespeare is "virtually a type of colonist... appreciated among the junior members of the family of nations—among the human downrootings from the great mothertree of England" (209, 213). In a similar vein, George Paxton

Young, whom Morgan identifies as the architect of English studies in Ontario, advised in his Department of Education Report for 1867-68 that *The Merchant of Venice* "was a lesson in practical Christian Ethics ... that can scarcely be read intelligently without entering the soul and becoming part of its conviction for ever" (203). This sense of literature's educational mission was built on the language of spiritual salvation reflecting what might be described as the literary reformation of the mothertree. From India to Ontario, no less than at home in the British Isles, Englishmen went forth equipped with this testament of natural greatness.

In this century, Northrop Frye assumed his own Arnoldean mantle for Canada and beyond, in his dual roles as exemplary literary critic and educational overseer.[2] Frye is not only widely acknowledged as one of the great critics of his time; he also served for many years as honorary president of the Ontario Council of Teachers of English, taught countless teachers in his undergraduate classes, and acted as an editor of a popular series of literature textbooks for high schools. In considering Frye among schoolchildren, as a way of rethinking the colonial hangover in the classroom, I am restricting my attention to *The Educated Imagination*, now in its twenty-fourth printing, as the only one of his books to be assigned with any regularity in the schools. Here we have literary study's defense and its practice in a single text. It is not all of his thinking, but it is that part that is taught in schools, and that which was written to reach a wider audience.

His book makes the work of literature plain, in a way that eludes much postcolonial work. The subtlety and nuances of his thinking about literature are not about to be undermined by my suggesting a second reading of the work that attends to the book's structural anthropology and to the establishment of literary value. I am asking, in effect, a return to Frye, in the spirit of his own resistance to American cultural imperialism and his own developing response to the temper of his times, to see how, through his book, we can re-imagine an education that distances itself from the earlier imperial projects in which it was involved. Frye holds his own special place in the educated imagination of Canadians, as a beloved and venerated professor, who gave intellectual definition to a community that continues to grow outward from the English heritage of its colonial period to a larger embrace of the global possibilities represented by those who understand *here* as home.

In arguing for the curricular possibilities of a postcolonial reading of Frye, I draw on the work of two classes of senior high school students from rural Ontario who wrote their essays about two of Frye's six essays, "The Motives for Metaphors" and "The Keys to Dreamland." The 39 students had begun to work with multicultural anthologies that raised issues of migration and displacement, under the guidance of their teacher, James Greenlaw, who was at that time working on a dissertation that dealt with the classroom implications of postcolonial theory (1993). Through our respective projects, we hoped to make apparent the educational relevance of including the legacy of imperialism in literature classes, whether the assigned text was *The Educated Imagination*, *The Tempest*, *Othello*, *Lord of the Flies*, *The Pearl*, *Obasan*, and so on. The starting point, at

least for these students in an advanced English class, is their ready embrace of literature's importance, as these two students demonstrate:

> If you sat back and started to think about it, has there ever been a day when literature of some form didn't affect your life?

> Literature is good to everyone in one way or another just not everyone knows it.

While only a few of the students in these two classes introduced what might be interpreted as a postcolonial perspective in their essays, the majority showed a willingness to engage with this country's preeminent literary critic in discussing the relationship between literature and reality, as well as the effects of reading, in ways that suggest they are prepared to consider the particular meeting point between the history and literature presented here.[3]

In today's schools there has been a slow recognition of the multicultural fabric of Western societies, a recognition that calls into question how well all students have been served by the subjectivities celebrated by English literature. I am advocating that the use of literature as a tool of empire become part of a student's literary education. On academic grounds alone, I would argue that this is to do no more than to connect English classes with current thinking about literature by a new generation of scholars and critics, like Edward Said, who are attending to the interrelatedness of culture and power.

This work complements efforts to expand the range of materials read in English classes, but it is not about proscribing or policing any given piece of literature. Instead, teachers and students are going to seek literature's place within a history that, in its division of the world, has carried them to this place.

The Educated Imagination was initially delivered as the 1962 Massey Lectures broadcast on national radio by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, a crown corporation of the Canadian Government. The annual lectures series had been initiated the year before to honour the Rt. Hon. Vincent Massey, Governor-General of Canada. We can imagine, then, Frye bringing his word on English literature to the greater student body of Canada assembled around their radios, a word that he otherwise delivered to those attending Victoria College at the University of Toronto, where he taught for five decades. Even as these radio talks were broadcast to the country's most outlying settlements, as part of the CBC's federal mandate, they located the nation in the imaginary space cultivated by *English* literature—an ambiguous designation that is both language and nation, both national and multinational. The very concept of English literature is, in this shifting and ambiguous geography of meaning, implicated in the "colonial imaginary" of centre and periphery, motherland and colony. This outreach function is also carried by the sense that literature "doesn't just train the mind: it's a social and moral development too" (66).

Frye has noted elsewhere that the CBC's mission "to promote Canadian unity and identity" was bound to be frustrated by the fact that "identity is local and regional, rooted in the imagination and works of culture; unity is national in

reference, international in perspective, and rooted in political feeling" (ii). On the other hand, Frye tends to root the national imagination in international forms of culture and politics, rather than in regional ones, and he does so in ways that I want to explore below in *four* sections: (1)the theme of uninhabited islands, (2) Outside and Other, (3) the place of Canada, (4) the work of literature.

Imagining the Uninhabited Island

Frye's opening lecture in *The Educated Imagination*, "A Motive for Metaphor," begins with a small imaginary disaster: "Suppose you're shipwrecked on an uninhabited island in the South Seas" (2). Thus Frye subtly transports us to the colonial era. The South Seas evokes an earlier age, harking back to 1513, when Balboa named this new-found ocean *El Mar del Sur*, back to the eighteenth century, when Cook opened the Pacific to the British Empire, back to the nineteenth century of Robert Louis Stevenson and Paul Gaugin. For its part, the uninhabited island of the South Seas is a palimpsest that is the always already written-over space that offers its own buried treasure of colonial imagery. The pastoral myth which opens this lecture is cut with the colonial theme of starting anew in a new-found land, of going back in time to an untainted version of the homeland. Frye himself grew up in the Canadian province of *New* Brunswick. There is something striking, then, in Frye locating his island in the South Seas, so far from Canada's own abundant supply of similarly "uninhabited" territories, including no shortage of islands. Is it that our postcolonial nationhood has placed all of this vast dominion within the *civilized* and thus *inhabited* world? Is this land no longer available in the same way for the dreams of writers and scholars. The colonial vision is about gaining a distance, about the portability of culture and the transformation of what is, in effect, a blank page, through the expansiveness of an overwritten civilization. The *uninhabited* island is, of course, a reference to European absence and the erased or denied presence of indigenous populations. In that sense, the islands on which Columbus first set eyes in the Caribbean were uninhabited, even as the native Arawaks stood on the beach to watch this odd man come ashore and resolutely lay claim to their land in the name of his God and Queen.

In wrecking us upon a South Seas island, Frye is obviously echoing such literary precedents as *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe*, which attest to Europe's civilizing mission. Prospero gives the gift of a civilizing language to an uncivil Caliban, while the ever-resourceful Mr. Crusoe reprises, in short order, the industrious rise of the English to civilized existence, complete with an indentured if not enslaved savage, named in imitation of God's own schedule for creation. Caliban and Friday remind us that the "uninhabited" islands were still the homeland of a people (with one imaginary native standing for the many). Derek Walcott, in "Crusoe's Journal," takes up the voice of the islander who ironically observes his subjection to the erstwhile educator:

Like Christofer he bears
in a speech mnemonic as a missionary's
the Word to savages,
its shape an earthen, water-bearing vessel's
whose sprinkling alters us
into good Fridays who recite His praise,
parroting our master's
style and voice, we make his language ours,
converted cannibals
we learn with him to eat the flesh of Christ. (93)

In choosing the island metaphor, Frye asserts that if you want to reach people where they live, you begin with their bookshelves, especially if you are speaking to them about literature. The South Seas island is more likely to suggest a colonial Eden, in its seemingly unoccupied splendour ("the self-creating peace of islands," in Walcott's poem), affording a time-window on an earlier, simpler era. The deserted island has no less a home in popular culture. There are the perennial cartoons of the shipwrecked sailor stranded with the voluptuous passenger, with high-brow variations such as the BBC radio program, "Desert Island Discs," which imagines escaping with the great monuments of culture, a return to Eden with a walkman. But for all of its sense of escape, the Western idea of the South Seas island also carries with it the hope of rescue and a return to one's proper home. The island offered writers and dreamers a fantasy of escape (from dreary winters and wives, as gender always figures in the colonial imaginary); it speaks to opportunities for renewing the balance between innocence and experience. Above all, the island is intended to afford Frye, as it has served many before him, a clean slate on which to work the evolution of humankind. In this case, Frye inscribes his island with what he sees as the three stages in the civilizing force of language: (a) there is a "consciousness or awareness" that leads to self-expression; (b) it is followed by a "practical sense" that gives rise to a technical language; and (c) the process culminates in the imaginary realm of poetry, plays, and novels (3-5).[4]

Frye's literary study moves between the evolutionary poles of the primitive and civilized. They are guiding beacons: "You find that every mother tongue, in any developed or civilized society, turns into something called literature" (2). Frye allows for the complications of this history with his denoting of "any developed *or* civilized society," which is probably meant to include a yet-to-develop-but-surely-civilized China (questions about Frye's placing of China are raised below). Although his original scheme of three stages distinguishes between the technical language of science at the second level and imaginary expression of literature at the third, he keeps these two strongholds of Western achievement closely associated: "A highly developed science and a highly developed art are very close together, psychologically and otherwise" (6-7). He does finally set them apart on the grounds that science "evolves and ... improves," compared to literature, which possesses timeless classics (7). And yet Frye posits an evolutionary scale that sets primitive

literature off from the timeless classic: "Primitive literature hasn't yet become distinguished from other aspects of life: it's still embedded in religion, magic, social ceremonies" (13).[5] There are different conceptions of timelessness at work here. Based on the principle "that every form in literature has a pedigree, and we can trace its descent back to earliest times," he goes on to chart the descent and disengagement of a true literature through "war-songs, work-songs, funeral laments, lullabies" (14). Frye continues the evolutionary motif by tying literature's relevance to the idea of cultural progress: "The more advanced a civilization, the more literature seems to concern itself with purely human problems and conflicts" (22). It is also a matter of genre: "the most primitive nations have poetry, but only quite well developed nations can produce prose" (51).[6] Frye, then, puts this scheme to pedagogical use, following the lead of school inspector and literary critic Matthew Arnold, by asserting that it is only natural to start children on poetry before moving them into the more mature prose. In this way, the young of the West might recapitulate the ascent of civilization and overcome the stagnation of primitive and poetry-bound cultures.

The importance that Frye places on literature's "pedigree" is troubling. It inevitably imbues his evolutionary scale with the racial bearing of imperialism's long-standing divisions between primitive and civilized peoples. It troubles as well because of the prominence this literary paternity suit gained in Europe during the nineteenth century, when Matthew Arnold, Ernest Renan, and others contrasted the Hellenic and Hebraic influences on the European disposition, with the refined and cultivated Hellenic influences proudly held to be ascendant. This had racial ramifications for the Jewish people, who had been recently "emancipated" in England and elsewhere after a period of aptly termed internal colonization (Olender).[7]

In *The Educated Imagination*, Frye returns his listeners to the pedigree issue: "The basis of the cultural heritage of English speaking peoples is not in English; it's in Latin and Greek and Hebrew" (49). There is still a suggestion of that dual-track ascent of English literature—Hellenic and Hebrew. Little credit is given to the influential Orientalism of Burton, Fitzgerald, and Pound, or the Celtic imaginings of Scott and Joyce. Het also overlooks that other Hebrew heritage, of anti-Semitism, which has long found expression in English culture. And finally, he sidesteps the millions of English-speaking people who bring to the language a literary heritage that is neither Latin, Greek, nor Hebrew. The educated imagination is still being constructed within the colonial imaginary as it navigates among primitive and civilized islands, holding its true course of direct descent from a golden age. It is easy to imagine students comparing these island themes in popular and literary culture with the more recent experiences of "boat-people" who, in a reverse pattern, have sought to shipwreck themselves in North America.

In going over the high school students' essays on *The Educated Imagination*, I found a number of them took up the island metaphor. They saw the advantage in using the island to create a world of one's own making, both far away and yet subtly attached to the known world. Kristy, for example, introduces "a small island" as

part of her own thought experiment intended to demonstrate how non-fiction also extends the human imagination. In this way, she shows how effectively students can pick up both the substance and method of the literary critic, as well as something of his dry wit as she extols the power of the written word to expand our horizons:

> Through literature, Frye believes that our human experience will grow, and I feel this could not be more true. Not everyone in the world has the time or money to visit all different cultures, and lifestyles. By reading a book or an article on a specific place or time, we learn everything you could possibly need to know about that society. To stress this point, I would like to use a hypothetical situation. Let's pretend that you have been born on a small island and the only people on the island with you are your devoutly Catholic parents. Left on the island is a biology book from a shipwreck. Inside this book, you find many interesting scientific explanations for the phenomenon that your parents had originally explained in biblical terms. These few words that you read would definitely give your mind many things to think about and choices for you to make.

Equally present in this student's defence of literature and biology is the presumed responsibility of the educated to experience a world of different cultures, learning along the way "everything you could possibly need to know about that society." This sense of global mastery and the related release from primitive superstitions which permits one informed and superior choices, are all part of what suggests the "educated imagination" still bears something of a colonial construct. This is not grounds for condemnation but may, in Kristy's words, "give your mind many things to think about and choices for you to make." Without calling Kristy's intentions into question, it would still seem valuable to set such commonplace ideas, as the sense of global masters, within the context of the colonial imperative and its educational objectives. Without dismissing or condemning the students' readings, we can turn to the origins and implications of these widely held views, setting them upon a larger historical stage, as we explore the continuing play of the colonial imagination within the literary landscape.

A second student, Sam, understands that to engage the island metaphor is to raise the evolutionary spectrum of primitive cultures versus evolved civilizations. The difference is that Sam is not entirely prepared to accept this as a development for the good. His pattern of initially resisting Frye's position, only to come around on the question of literature's contribution, was a pattern pursued by a number of students:

> Frye talks about a different person stranded on an island who has no intellect or let's say without literature, often he "feels lonely and frightened and unwanted in such a world." I must object to that. If you look and compare the primitive people, for instance aboriginal and civilized people, look at what people with intelligence have done to our world. They created a more dangerous place with pollution, over population and potential nuclear wars. It seems to me it's more peaceful to be less civilized.

Having realized the value of less-civilized forms of life, Sam then moves on to the corollary of this challenge by pointing out literature's dangerous side, in a manner that tends to confound teacher and text, literature and hate-literature. He raises the well-known Canadian instance of Jim Keegstra, an Alberta school teacher who for 14 years taught his high school students in Social Studies class

about a Zionist global conspiracy until he was finally brought before the courts for spreading hate. It leads Sam to conclude that "studying literature can cause people to be dangerous.... Being intelligent from studying literature doesn't mean you're the most worthy." Although Sam is working critically from the imperial construct of the primitive and civilized, his essay finally arrives at an anthropological model of literary criticism similar to Frye's. For Sam, literature marks the advance of humankind, and is a civilizing influence: "I realize now that literature brought us away from the primitive era when we used to live like the animals around us. And as we became more aware of literature we created civilizations."

Heather is another student who challenges the line which Frye draws between reality and the imagination. She resists that posture of the colonial which imagines a hostile nature in need of governance:

> Frye mentions being shipwrecked on an island and he sees the world on the island as objective and that it is "something set over against you and not yourself or related to you in any way" (2). I disagree with Frye because the world is not objective and when you are on the island one is more related to and a part of the world ... I feel people can make conversation in their own way with nature and its surroundings.

This conversation with nature, even amid her odd sense of nature's "surroundings," still represents the empathetic reach across differences (rather than a *conquest of*, or Frye's sense of "against"). She proposes a healing of the distances that set us apart from nature and native. Yet before I, in turn, thoroughly romanticize the views of this student, I would also note how she does go on ultimately, to agree with Frye's faith in the civilizing force of literature:

> Frye feels what comes naturally to humans is their civilization. I think Frye's arguments need to be revised into a form we are comfortable with and where civilization is the essence of what it is like to be a human being. Literature provides us with a vision for our lives. It lends a little more zest in our experiences.

It is not entirely clear from Heather's essay how she would comfortably revise Frye's arguments, except perhaps to mend this apparent breach with nature. Frye offers his own reconciliation between imagination and nature in a later lecture which Heather was not assigned (although I discuss it below). In the final analysis, she, too, sides with Frye. She affirms his belief in the evolutionary progress that literature can make as a zestful and visionary guide to a civilized essence. One might assume that to fall short of the civilized standard set by literature is to be something less than human. Without putting too fine a point on it, Heather's engagement with Frye today, after three extremely important decades for global decolonization, does not totally escape what we might think of as the habits of thought, if no longer the deep-set beliefs, of a once-and-lingering colonial imagination.

Outside and Other

In laying out the contours of the educated imagination, Frye places the Orient on that distant horizon, at the ends of the earth, where it stood during the age of empire.

Frye's literary anthropology situates humanity between primitive and advanced civilizations, Eastern and Western sensibilities. At the moment of the initial shipwreck, he suggests that, "if the ship you were wrecked in was a Western ship you'd probably feel that your intellect tells you more about what's really there in the outer world and that your emotions tell you more about what's going on inside you" (3). Then, in a move he does not repeat in the lectures, he introduces the *other* possibility: "If your background were Oriental, you'd be more likely to reverse this and say that the beauty and terror was really there, and that your instinct to count and classify and measure and pull to pieces was what was inside your mind" (3). The distinction, with its suggestion of the mystifying East, is quickly passed over, having served in defining the Western disposition. A few pages later, Frye returns to this sense of the East's foreignness, drawing attention to what was clearly the wayward, unreliable, and non-literary thinking of Ezra Pound in the (linked?) areas of "fascism and social credit and Confucianism and anti-Semitism" (7). Other critics have also found Frye's separation of literature from politics, especially as the two occur so vividly within the same person, worth pausing over.[8]

On the next page, Frye shows his range by linking the mythic theme of human flight in the Icarus story and the *Sakuntala*, "an Indian play fifteen hundred years old," which he pulls in to illustrate how these imaginative ventures can lead to a "scientific civilization like ours" (8). It would be easy to note how these instances of Frye's great learning lightly season his texts, giving his claims a universal purchase, if they were not part of a larger and systematic pattern of locating literature within an evolutionary scale that places India and China in the past, or *as* past. When he addresses poetry's primitive qualities, he draws our attention to the poetic "singsong" of children's speech before contrasting the "Chinese language" (more properly Mandarin or Cantonese) which has "kept differences of pitch in the spoken word" with the Canadians' "monotone honk" (51). While he does make a humorous, self-deprecating pun on the Canadian goose, the association left standing groups the primitive, the child-like, and the Chinese. Of course, Frye intends no slight to Chinese civilization. He is addressing the nature of poetry, after all, but such is the result of the passing anthropological contrasts. If these rhetorical uses of China once mattered little enough, they now leap out at us as reminders of just how the world was once put together. Such references weigh little enough in the face of Frye's enormous critical accomplishment, little enough against how he has helped us appreciate the achievement of literature. Yet as a literary critic, he would have us attend to the commonplaces, to the archetypal patterns, as well as to the unique literary turns that distinguish a text.

When it comes to addressing the literature of empire, Frye readily recognizes that in a literary text "the whole cultural history of the nation that produced it comes into focus" (52). His encompassing vision distances the imagination from the reaches of this earth and then affixes it to the whole cultural history of the nation. For instance, he turns to *Robinson Crusoe*, with its "detached vision of the British empire, imposing its own pattern wherever it goes," before focusing on *Anna and*

the King of Siam (better known through the musical, *The King and I*): "The story of the Victorian lady in an Oriental country" whose "whole bearing and attitude" made it clear that she was to be treated like a Victorian lady, with Frye drawing parallels with Queen Victoria, as "eventually Siam fell into line" (52-53). In accepting Frye's argument that literature is "a kind of imaginative key to history" (53), we need to realize how this cultural ethos continues to shape our vision of the world. Amid the pleasures of Anna Leonowens' story, we need to ask what it meant for Siam (Thailand), a country that successfully resisted colonization, to fall "into line," just as we need to ask how the Thai now figure within the educated imagination among rising forms of economic neo-colonialism and cultural imperialism (Bello).

It cannot be said that Frye is without sensitivity to the unwarranted prejudices in ordinary speech: "Some years ago, in a town in the States, I heard somebody say, 'those yellow bastards,' meaning the Japanese. More recently, in another town, I heard somebody else use the same phrase, but meaning the Chinese" (63). By locating this racism in America Frye provides a reassuring answer for his oft-smug Canadian audience to the question of *where is here?* We are not alone, of course, in this habit of locating unpleasantries on the other side of some border, diverting attention from a Canada which has succumbed to various waves of xenophobia over a "yellow peril" (Ward). Frye's ostensible point in recalling these incidents, however, is to eschew the mechanical nature of this racist language: "There are many reasons not connected with literary criticism, why nobody should use a phrase like that about anybody. But the literary reason is that the phrase is pure reflex: it's no more a product of a conscious mind than the bark of a dog." (63). While Frye allows that his literary objections are not the whole of it, to equate this overheard virulence with a dog's barking suggests that it is nothing more than the product of bad breeding or poor training. Is Frye suggesting that racial prejudice is simply too vulgar for the cultivated imagination? After all, he notes the prejudice in the highly cultivated Ezra Pound, whose anti-Semitism has its place in English literature, from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* to Eliot's "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar."[9]

When Frye returns to the temptations of common talk a few pages later, it is to exhort us, in the name of a "genuine and permanent human civilization," to withstand the mass culture that surrounds us: "There is something in all of us that wants to drift toward a mob, where we can all say the same thing without having to think about it, because everybody is all alike except people that we can hate or persecute" (67). While Frye's target is clearly the clichéed and hackneyed expressions of small talk, this sense that English literature affords a paved road to a genuine and permanent dominion of human civilization is the idea that I want to query as part of a literary education. What was distant and other a few decades ago no longer stands so far away and apart from that "something in all of us."

The question can fairly be asked, however, about whether this sort of reading is too much to expect of high school students. This postcolonial approach is bound to present a special pedagogical challenge. One of the high school

students, Sam, whose work has already been cited in this chapter, commented on Frye's opposition of East and West: "Frye [was] probably brought up learning some stereotypes as he mentions that Easterns and Westerns think differently because they are opposite to where they live." It is easy to counter that, in fact, Frye was very much a global thinker and reader, dedicated to identifying the common structural features of literature on a global scale, just as the school anthologies he edited included myths from many lands. But in these public lectures, almost as a reflex one might say, he readily contrasts the Oriental with the West. That Sam twigged to this idea indicates that we might well ask students and ourselves about how, out of this colonial imaginary, some people and places are seen as serving a European process of self-understanding in what amounts to a definition of civilization through the educated imagination. The point is all the more poignantly made when we realize that these same people are not so distant, but are rather our neighbours often, if not ourselves.

Canada, Neither Here nor There

One of the most fascinating aspects of a postcolonial perspective is the complex question it makes of geography, and more particularly, of Frye's question, Where is here? The educated imagination is, at once, boundless and free-ranging, while remaining attentive to the detail and nuance of place. It is also located within a pedigree, a certain line of descent that runs, Frye reminds us, from Jerusalem and Athens, through Rome to London, and then out into the culturally "uninhabited" world settled by the British empire.

Where does that leave a place like Canada? It is not absent from the lectures, but it is not as firm or fertile a place for grounding a defence of literature, as the uninhabited island in the South Seas of the imagination. If Frye appears to recognize some debt to this nation, and he does speak to it in the Massey lectures, his uncertainty about what to do with this land provides the perfect entry point for thinking about lingering colonial sensibilities that will not be banished by the nationalism of a Canadian literary movement, itself a product in many ways of the age of imperialism.[10] But let us consider the lay of the land for Frye.

In the opening of the lecture series, Frye groups Canada, an officially bilingual and, in fact, multilingual state, with the "English-speaking countries" (2). This trans-national language ensures a special cultural bond with things English, although it operates on a different basis between the former "white colonies" and the rest of the British Commonwealth. For Frye, "English means, in the first place, the mother tongue" although it is not clear whether this maternal reference is to the English mother country, or to Canadian mothers, who all presumably speak English to their babies (2). And so this complicated place begins to unfold like so many backdrops coming down in a theatre, each a transformation of the landscape in an unfolding story. The educated imagination feels at home within a transported literature (a cargo cult one is tempted to

say) that secures this country's place as a proper extension of English culture. This close identity with a British national culture that Canadians are at once part of and removed from, is another reminder of how the study of literature is implicated in an imperial order. I am asking that we pause over the blocking out of this cultural space among colonies and motherlands, to see how it creates spaces of inclusion and exclusion, how it continues to operate on assumptions that went without question until a few decades ago, when Frye specified the requirementsof an educated imagination to this nation.

In Frye's dealings with Canada, it is interesting to note how there is a sense of reconciling nationhood with a perpetual displacement from the centre. "When Canada was still a country for pioneers, it was assumed that a new country, a new society, new things to look at and new experiences would produce a new literature" (15). It has not, of course. Frye ends up dismissing Canadian writers—first for originally running with second-hand imitations of Byron and Scott, and then moving on to "producing imitations of D.H. Lawrence and W.H. Auden" (16). All is imitation and invisibility, with the centre of meaning located in an anglo-American imaginative terrain. In this apology for Canadian literature, Frye again distances those people who, 10,000 years before, had come to inhabit this land.[11]

"The constructs of the imagination tell us things about human life that we don't get in any other way. That's why it's important for Canadians to pay particular attention to Canadian literature, even when the imported brands are better seasoned" (53). This needs to be weighed within a series of six lectures on the value of literature in which Frye fails to give full credit to a single Canadian writer, and which is immediately followed by his reflections on Lincoln's Gettysburg address. It is the colonized concession to feel that one's place is other than in the centre. While it is easy enough to speak of the imagination as unbounded, Frye is actually retracing the well-trod path from Homer to Wordsworth as it was followed in ships' cabins, plantation mansions, and schoolhouses around the colonial empire.

Where precisely is Frye to be found then? Broadcasting from the towers of this former colony, but still not necessarily here in mind. In his life at Victoria College in Toronto, Frye trained generations of Canadian students, many of whom went on to be English teachers. He trained them in an English literature that was imagined to form the natural order of our mother tongue. The imagined community, which Benedict Anderson wisely identifies with the formation of the nation, is marked in this post-imperialist world by the cultural tensions of former colonies and motherlands. *Here* is not so much a place as an intersection of lives and imaginations, languages and narratives. Where Canada figures in this, with its history as both colony and colonizer, is still being struggled over, through aboriginal land claims, multiculturalism policies, and Quebec referendums. In responding to Frye's lectures, none of the high school students found reason to comment on where *their* Canada fits into a defence of literature.

It's true that Frye refers only in passing to South Seas islands, China, and Canada, and I know that I must seem to be making too much out of so little. These are no more than the traces of an imperial legacy, given to situating the centre and periphery, the civilized and primitive; they are no more than the places that now need to figure in Frye's identity question of *where is here* as a question that still needs to be asked within the context of literature and empire. In trying to understand how literary study might still depend on the rhetoric of empire, we arrive, finally, at the relationship of literature to life. Frye does not make it easy. He believes literature is a form of writing both removed from the world and an imaginative guide to living in it. He repeatedly distances literature from the real—"literature belongs to the world that man constructs, not the world he sees" (8)—suggesting that it is simply naive to relate literature "directly to life or reality" (39). In Frye's terms, to imagine literature's involvement in such a worldly matter as imperialism is to make a category mistake: "In the world of the imagination anything goes that's imaginatively possible, but nothing happens. If it did happen, it would move out of the world of the imagination into the world of action" (5-6). Rejecting this sense of literary and critical agency, Frye secures a space for literary study that is safely bound by literature's recurring mythopoetic structures, and protected from earthly cares. Frye's professional calling is to hive literature off from "ordinary life" (9). I recall my father doing much the same with his medical practice. While he enjoyed discussing "interesting cases" with us, he always acted surprised when we interrupted these disembodied presentations to asked questions about the actual lives of the patients. We seemed to him to be missing the point. The craft begins with detaching literature (and medicine) from life. At the same time, however, Frye celebrates Defoe's ability to bring the nation's history into focus through the life of a single, stranded sailor. In this, Frye and I are not so far apart. We need to talk about literature as both *apart from*, and *a part of*, the world.

To grasp the subtleties of this relationship we need to return to the proverbial island that gave rise to Frye's three-storey evolution of language. The linguistic escalator begins at the garden level, with the creation of a human realm separate from the rest of nature, creating a home in an environment, to use Frye's terms (4). We then ascend to the second level, where language works the world in very practical ways. When we finally reach the third level, we construct our own world in a language that reconnects us to the world that we have come to know as outside of ourselves: "We recapture, in full consciousness, that original sense of identity with our surroundings, where there is nothing outside the mind of man, or something identical with the mind of man" (9). There is, in this final level, "an identity between the human mind and the world outside of it" with all of that global expansiveness that I read as part of imperialism's intellectual legacy (12).

To assist us with this rather illusive identity—are we to think of *imagination* and *world* as identical and/or parallel, as a unity, and/or an overlay?—Frye uses both

religious and scientific analogies. In the first instance, he states that "there can never be any ... set of beliefs founded on literature" (31). I would agree that literature, as a whole, tends toward a certain anti-dogmatic mutability and equivocation. Yet I also think that, if specific beliefs cannot be founded on particular works of literature, one can find plenty of evidence that educators believe in literature's redemptive virtues. Frye only adds to this sense of literature's spiritual value in warning his listeners that "if we shut the vision of [literature] completely out of our minds, or insist on its being limited in various ways, something goes dead inside of us, perhaps the one thing that is really important to keep alive" (33). A little later he adds that "literature gives us an experience that stretches us vertically to the heights and depths of what the human mind can conceive, to what corresponds to the conceptions of heaven and hell in religion" (42). Similarly, when he speaks of literary criticism as "the activity of uniting literature with society" (55), it reads very much like the Church bringing the Word of God to man.[12]

Ultimately, literature is an "imaginative verbal structure" that stands alongside "philosophy and history and science and religion and law," in defining civilization (67). Literature's particular contribution is to dream-test ideas in "the laboratory where myths themselves are studied and experimented with" (67). Of course, experiments in laboratories often lead to actions of some consequence in the world. The imaginative writing of colonialism in literature was similarly about proving the worth of old and new myths about human difference, about ways of dividing the world. It can be expected to have had an impact, just as it was shaped in turn by the news from the empire. The "constructive power" of "imaginative verbal structures" was given in such cases to forging self-serving notions of race, culture, and nation that have long outlived that earlier era, and it will continue to do so, unless there is a concerted effort to re-examine original myths.

Given the complex relationship between literature and life posited by Frye, it is not surprising that the high school students often found his essays hard to digest. Some students were extremely pragmatic about literature's contribution to the world. Heather, for example, wrote that literature "teaches one about times, dress, work, and homes"; Jeremy divided it between education and escape: "We study literature to improve our imagination, our vocabulary, to get away from reality and escape to another world or ... time." Jeremy's sense of literary escapism corresponds to Frye's advocacy of literature-as-another-world. Patricia also extends Frye's stance, as she pushes his idea of it as a laboratory for humankind toward an anthropological field model:

> For example, we may read a book and gain an understanding of the plight of a black slave. In this way and others literature helps us grow, spiritually and mentally. Our political attitude is improved because literature gives us a more worldly view. Without literature we would not be influenced by or introduced to new societies or attitudes.

If this is somewhat more than Frye would comfortably subscribe to, Patricia's

caricature of growth-through-literature suggests a similar sense of literature forming a bridge to a better world, leading the way in understanding what is not yet part of ourselves. My work shares the same inclination: there is growth in taking a stand against that earlier global turn of imperialism. As it turns out, one student comes close to capturing the parallels between Frye's sense of the educated imagination and the intellectual history of the colonial venture. He portrays the world as an imaginative opportunity for mental stimulation, with the metaphor of the expanding horizon that would stretch before an empire on which "the sun never set":

> Literature awakens one's imagination, it brings one's attention to things they hadn't ever thought of before. With this in mind one could say that literature helps to broaden our horizons. Frye and I both agree on this.

Literature broadens our horizons; it educates the imagination. We cannot help but be better for having studied it. Without objecting to this enthusiasm for the subject, I suggest here only that it be recognized how continuous this faith is with the colonial interests of a century ago that launched English literature as a school subject, a subject which Gauri Viswanathan has termed, in the colonial setting of India, as a "mask of conquest."[13] Situating these common beliefs about the good of literature within imperial history can help teachers and students to better appreciate, through literary study no less than other school subjects, how maps and stories may continue to be rooted in a colonial view of a world still divided by race, culture and nation among the primitive and civilized. Toward the end of the lectures, Frye explains how the Tower of Babel has been the organizing myth for his lectures, with its underlying theme of a lost universal language—"the language of human nature" (68). What was lost finds its expression for Frye in the "authentic poets," Shakespeare and Pushkin, and in the "social vision" of Lincoln and Gandhi (68).[14] Here the crux of cultural discrimination comes not only out of this global sense of a *brother*hood of genius, but in his insistence that the language of human nature "never speaks unless we take the time to listen in leisure, and it speaks only in a voice too quiet for panic to hear" (68). This refined sense of listening, as to a radio talk in the evening after dinner, returns us to the book's opening image of civilization as "a little cultivated world with a human shape, fenced off from the jungle" (9). It takes little to see that Frye's ideal world, hidden behind the one we see on the streets and along the backroads, has long been furnished with props and imagery left over from the age of empire. If we are to get beyond this particular dressing up of literary study, we need to listen to literature in new ways. We need especially to note how literary study and its object long contributed to the writing of the colonial world as a dream recalled, a paradise lost and regained. The complex relationship between literature and world described by Frye should now give classrooms pause in thinking about the construction of distance and difference in the imaginative disposition of islands and colonies. This is part of the literary work that remains to be done with the changing nature of *where is here*?

NOTES

1 Franz Fanon (1963), Gayatri Spivak (1990), Edward Said (1978; 1993), and Stephen Jay Gould (1981), among others, have been doing path-breaking work in exposing the colonizing contributions of the arts and sciences. As a starting point in approaching the many new works in this educational field of identity, race, and representation, I would recommend McCarthy and Crichlow (1993), with Trimmer and Warnock (1992) presenting a related but distinct focus on "cross-cultural studies" in the teaching of literature.

2 Frye's textbook series, *Literature: The Uses of the Imagination*, is published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. In an earlier work, I have written on Frye's educational contribution in a book that included studies of Matthew Arnold, F.R. Leavis and Louise Rosenblatt (*Triumph*). I treat the greater body of Frye's work in terms of the connections between his literary and educational theories, as well as dealing with his direct and indirect influences on the teaching of English literature in the schools.

3 This paper can be thought to extend, perhaps only by a postcolonial footnote, Deanne Bogdan's considerable delineation of Frye's project in *Re-Educating the Imagination* which addresses the limits to Frye's vision of "identity as similarity," as she puts it, in which differences in power and location are "subsumed under the developmental assumption that wider and wider reading and more and more informed responses will inexorably propel the respondent into the third order of experience, where every other voice resonates as part of our own" (131). While Bogdan argues for an extension of Frye's determination of literary study, I return to Frye, as already far more expansionary in a colonial sense than originally thought.

4 Ian Hunter, in analyzing literary education "as an arm of the emergent governmental educational apparatus," interprets Frye's island metaphor as part of an effort "to derive a 'total history' of culture and society from the split in the mentality of a castaway parachuted in from the aesthetic empyrean" (10).

5 On the category of the *primitive*, Bernard McGrane helpfully describes its anthropological invention as but a third phase in the European regard for an alien Other that has continued to be formed since Columbus: "The alien Other is not fundamentally pagan, savage, and demonic from a Christian frame of reference, nor fundamentally ignorant and superstitious from an Enlightenment frame of reference; rather the Other is now *fundamentally primitive* from a progress and evolution frame of reference" (98, original emphasis). For the usefulness of "primitive" as a category in the realm of art, see Price.

6 In this, he echoes the Elizabethan Philip Sidney, in the first great defence of English literature, *Apology for Poetry*, when he wrote that "the most barbarous and simple Indians, where no writing is, yet have they their poets" (9).

7 George Steiner gives a recent twist to the pedigree question in the final words of his review of the late poet Paul Celan, Jewish survivor of Nazi Germany: "'We are all Greeks,' proclaimed Shelley. 'Every poet is a Yid,' replied Paul Celan with unplumbed bitterness and self-mockery. The old story: Athens and Jerusalem. Between them lies the uncertain advent of what remains of European language and literature" (4)

8 Harvey Teres, for one, argues that the use of such terms as *jew-girls* and *yits* in *The Cantos* is not removed from the other expressions of Pound's anti-Semitism: "The poetic elements which normally have an illuminating effect function only to enhance the subtlety, sophistication, prestige and ultimately the appeal of anti-Semitism" (72). Jerome McGann has little trouble pronouncing the *Cantos* "the greatest achievements of Modern poetry in any language," while declaring it at the same time, "a fascist epic in a precise historical sense" (97).

9 I have dealt elsewhere with anti-Semitism in English literature as an influence on the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s definition of *Jew* (*Empire* 140-156).

10 The legacy of colonization on current understandings of immigration in Canadian culture is the subject of Roxana Ng's analysis of Canadian nationalism. A postcolonial perspective on the Canadian landscape is well-represented in the Bannerji collection in which Ng's essay appears.

11 Julia Emberley writes about the nature of the postcolonial imagination which Native women writers such as Lee Maracle are exploring.

12 There are parallels between this call for a mind-stretching, heaven-and-hell literary experience to the "total universe" which Susan Sontag identifies with the pornographic imagination (112). If the pornographic imagination represents a "spectacularly cramped form of the human imagination," it still possesses "'a wider scale of experience' than healthy-mindedness" (116). "No wonder, then," she notes, "that the new or radically revamped forms of the total imagination which have arisen in the past century—notably those of the artist, the erotomane, the left revolutionary, the madman—have chronically borrowed the prestige of the religious vocabulary" (114).

13 Viswanathan cites the following from *Madras Christian Instructor and Missionary Record* from 1844: "The genius of literature ... clearly sees ... that she has found the men who are to extend her empire to the ends of the earth, and give her throne a stability that will be lasting as the sun" (166).

14 Arun Mukherjee explores the universalist credo of Western literary criticism, using Frye's references to "a single international style" as an instance, and taking exception to, among other things, the way in which it tends to "deradicalize" the "fiercely political confrontations in the works from the Third World" (13).

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