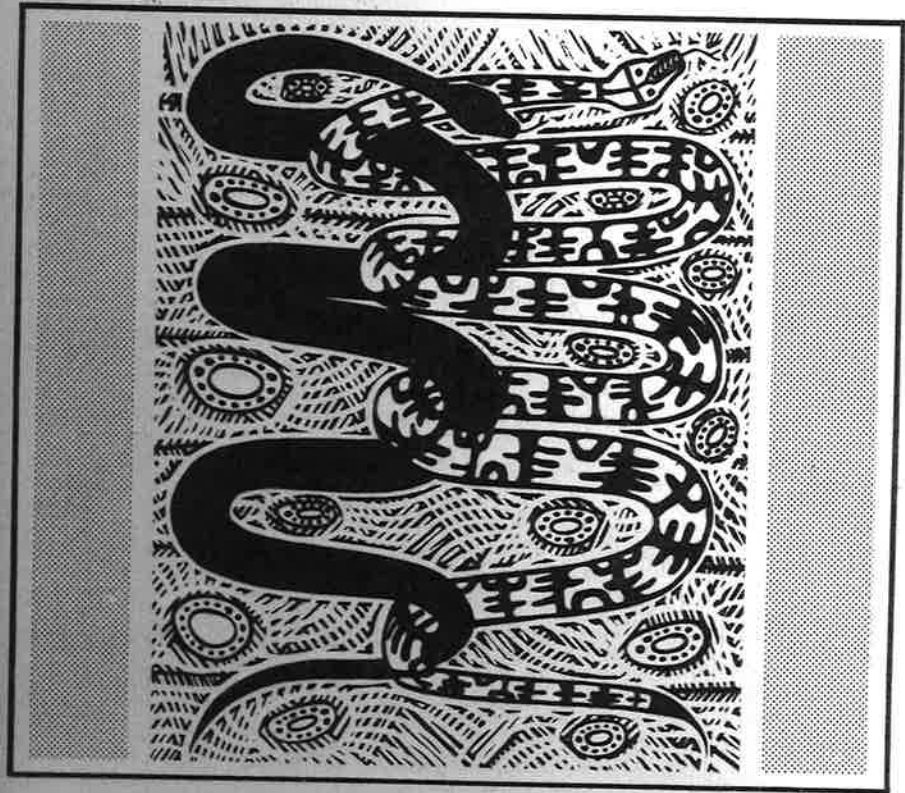


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Not Wanted on the Voyage: Textual Imperialism and Post-colonial Resistance

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In the European constitution of the colonial subject, texts and textuality played and continue to play a major part. European texts constructed colonial worlds, judging the colonised 'other' assimilatively through European cognitive codes, while reading that alterity as absence or negation against those codes. As Peter Hulme (1986) notes, Columbus did not 'see' a new world; like Cortez after him, he read it in terms of European *pre-texts* which had already constituted 'alterity'. While the law, the military and commerce are the visible institutions maintaining imperial power, much covert work in colonial dominance is done by the collusive forces of education and textuality. Texts such as Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, or Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, the classic formulations of Europe's encounters with alterity, were presented not as the culturally situated documents they were, but as great literature which dealt with 'universals'. Specific imperial perspectives were thus naturalised as 'common sense', as the way things are. Read in this way, at the colonial 'peripheries' of empire, such works operated as teaching texts whereby the colonial *learned*, over and over again, that his/her subjectification was as natural as water, or the sky. Chinua Achebe has noted the multiple ironies involved in the teaching of new critical interpretations of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in Nigerian universities. Although any form of cultural dominance will inevitably carry an important textual function it is arguable, as Stephen Slemon notes, that the literary text in the British colonising project has played the central role in the successful naturalisation of what Gramsci has called 'cultural domination by consent'!

Understandably it has become the project of post-colonial writing to investigate European textual capture of places and peoples and to intervene in that originary and continuing containment. Literary revolution, through strategies characterised by Terdiman (1985) as 'counter-discourses' has been an essential part of the process of decolonisation. Post-colonial refusals of the interpellated subject position take place, appropriately, through that original avenue of interpellation, textuality, and a mapping and dismantling of particular, canonically-enshrined imperial texts constitute important parts of post-colonial writing - rewriting of *The Tempest* by writers from Australia and particularly Canada, the West Indies and Africa; of *Robinson Crusoe* by Marcus Clarke, J.M. Coetzee and Samuel Selvon; of *Heart of Darkness* by many writers; and perhaps most famous of all, Jean

Rhys's rewriting of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. This practice invokes a particular counter-discursive strategy, canonical counter-discourse, but it is possible to consider all post-colonial literatures not as offshoots of an English literary tradition, but as sites of resistance to it and all that English and European texts represent. It is essential to recognise, I think, that this writing back, this resistance, is not directed against the particular text alone, but addresses the whole of the discursive field within which those texts were/are situated in colonialist discourse.

'Discourse', as Foucault theorises it, is the name for that language by which dominant groups constitute the field of 'truth' through the imposition of specific knowledges, disciplines and values. And the term 'discursive formation' identifies the set of rules or system of 'regularity' which defines the order or correlation of those knowledges and naturalises that order as synonymous with thinking itself, making it 'virtually impossible to think outside [it]'.² Discourses do not describe some object or experience, but constitute it as a knowable element within a semiotic practice that casts itself 'as timeless, as transparent, as proof against all corrosion and complication [Terdiman, 1985, p.67]'. Discourse is 'a violence we do to things... the practice we impose on them' (Foucault, 1981, p.50) and this concept of discursive formation is a useful one for considering imperial practice and post-colonial resistance to it.

Post-colonial counter-discursive resistance involves a mapping or reading of the dominant discursive formations, and exposure and/or overturning of their underlying assumptions and tropes, as well as an interrogation of, and retreat from, the ontological and epistemological bases of those assumptions. Textuality and politics are inseparable, complicit in the colonialist enterprise, and any political decolonisation inevitably implies imperial interrogation, unmasking, and the establishment and ratification of a disidentified colonial self, not entirely free perhaps of its European pre-texts, but aware, actively resistant and independently creative.

A number of Canadian writers (as Max Dorsinville, Diana Brydon and Chantal Zabrus' have noted) have taken up the challenge by rewriting particular European pre-texts, notably Shakespeare's *The Tempest*; but in *Not Wanted on the Voyage* (1984) Timothy Findley interrogates that ur-text of Western imperialism, the *Bible*, rewriting the account of Noah and the Great Flood, source myth in Western civilisation for motifs of destruction and salvation. As Findley's novel demonstrates, the construction or 'salvation' of any system, civilisation or tradition as authoritative precludes 'other' possibilities; the 'rise' of any culture is not just coincident with the demise of other forms and futures, it involves the active suppression and/or annihilation of 'otherness'. It closes off alternative tropes or modes.

In Canadian writing animals often

represent prehistoric Canada, the Canada which existed before its European colonisation. More generally they stand for a world which existed before Western rationalist thought imposed dualistic modes of description. They represent life before discourse, before history, and before gender stereotyping [Thieme, 1984, p.74].

The setting of Findley's novel is not prehistoric Canada, but the world of Judaic myth. But by returning to this textual site, Findley anatomises not only the specific kinds of control exercised by patriarchy over 'others' (women, animals and other forms of life), but also the fundamental processes of exclusion and the establishment of power. One of the most important means by which this is achieved is control by textual authority and appropriation of the means of communication and interpretation. Findley thus re-enters the philosophic bases of Western imperialism and dismantles them. *Not Wanted on the Voyage* also makes clear the complicity of Judaeo-Christian practice in colonial history and the kind of radical othering which allowed and even encouraged slavery and the wholesale suppression of 'others', a theme to which many post-colonial writers have returned in historical and more contemporary settings.

The biblical story of the Flood stresses salvation of the righteous, God says to Noah 'I have determined to make an end of all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold I will destroy them with the earth [Genesis, 6:13]', and charges Noah to build an ark, 'And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female [Genesis, 6:19]'. But in Findley's radical interrogation of the story, this myth of salvation becomes a saga of destruction in the name of minority righteousness and the extension of petty power. Dr Noah Noyes's dedication to the God he has created in his own image results in the annihilation of other life forms in the world (the fairies, the unicorns, the dragons and the demons) and the marginalisation and radical suppression of others - women and animals. To put it another way, once Western thinking has been codified in and sanctioned by the biblical *Genesis*, 'othering' in its most radical form has been achieved. *Genesis* thus becomes, in Findley's account, not the beginning, but the end, and the story of the Ark not one of salvation, but of marginalisation and destruction. Being itself becomes locked at the centre with 'nothingness' at its margins, and the processes of interpretation of reality - literally here, of God's word - are the assumptive and self-appropriated bases of Noah's power. Findley's account of Noyes's techniques exposes the ideological processes by which a dominant discourse establishes and maintains its power.

Early in the novel God sends a message to Noah which he immediately acts upon, without revealing its text to any of the inhabitants of his world, all of whom will be drastically affected by it. This gives him sole interpretative control of events, a control which he extends into supreme authority over those who have already been 'othered' by his incorporation of the authoritative, the axiomatic. Moreover, interpretative power and written record become complicit, so that a particular reading of event and symbol not only gains control of the 'moment', but is fixed for the future by its inscription in writing as the exclusive meaning of that event or symbol. The process (the way in which *Genesis* itself operates in the world) is exposed in the early sections of the novel when an apparently inexplicable phenomenon occurs:

Here it was the end of summer and though it hadn't rained, it had already snowed. Or so it had seemed. Small white flakes of *something* had fallen from the sky and everyone had crowded onto the porch to watch. Dr Noyes had at once proclaimed a miracle and was even in the process of telling Hannah to mark it down as such, when Ham went onto the lawn and stuck his tongue out, catching several of the flakes and tasting them.

'Not snow', he had said. 'It's ash.'

Ham, after all, had the whole of science at his fingertips and Mrs Noyes was inclined to believe that it had been ash - but Dr Noyes had insisted it was snow - 'a miracle!' And in the end he'd had his way. Hannah had been instructed to write: TODAY - A BLIZZARD [Findley, 1984, p. 21].

From the beginning the only interpretations to be recorded are Noyes's and hence, as Mrs Noyes has already pointed out, 'the only principles that matter here are yours [p. 13].' Even where common sense and knowledge dictate a different interpretation, Dr Noyes will insist on a reading of the event which confirms his position. 'Principles of ritual and tradition' are therefore the self-serving ratifiers of Noah's views and the basis of his power. Control of interpretative modes facilitates continuing domination and powers of exclusion in ontological as well as material terms.

The peacock, still maintaining the display of his tail, now lifted his head very high on his neck and gave a piercing scream.

'You see?' said Dr Noyes. 'By every sign and signal, my decision is confirmed.' He smiled but had to draw the smile back against his wooden teeth, which had almost fallen out of his mouth.

'He's only calling to his mate, for God's sake!' said Mrs Noyes.

'How dare you!' Dr Noyes was livid. 'How dare you take the name of God in vain! How dare you!'

This sort of rage - more a performance than a reality - was necessary to keep Mrs Noyes in her place. Also, to intimidate the other women, lest they follow her example and get out of hand [p. 13].

Signs and signals, tradition and ritual, are agents of a sinister power enforcement which through its self-referentiality, maintains the centrality of Noyes and his control over his family, women and animals. Such epistemic control ensures that challenges to its validity can only come from *outside* the system: internal challenges immediately find a place within the hierarchy of attempted but always smothered rebellion. The ash has come from the burning of cities in areas outside Noah's control: indeed, the burnings are a deliberate challenge to Yaweh's power, and therefore to Noah's. But by naturalising the ash as 'snow', 'a miracle' within his own system, Noah both denatures the outside challenge and actually capitalises on it by having it bolster his own powers of ascribing meaning.

Hierarchies and 'systems' of the kind Noah/Yaweh represent depend for their functioning on rigid categorisations, specifically on binary codifications of the kind embodied in Dr Noyes's own name (No/Yes); and real challenges to his authority can, and do, come from three areas where those binary codifications and established hierarchies are disrupted: by alternative, specifically *unconsolidated*

'systems' whose model is that of the network rather than the ladder: from marginalised perspectives on the centrist authority; and from hybrid or mimic forms which destabilise the essentialist codifications of the ruling power.

Not Wanted on the Voyage depicts a multiplicity of relationships between different beings, some realistic, some imaginary. This extension of characters, with the resultant complexity of relationships, implies different ways of being (and knowing) and acts to subvert the establishment of any one notion or way of being as axiomatic. Thus the very *dramatis personae* of the novel counters Noyes's attempts to consolidate a single authoritative structure. In the world of Yaweh and Dr Noyes, all relationships are essentially rigid and hierarchical, so that 'the controlling word' passes from God to Noah, to male humans, to female humans and to all lesser beings. Traditionally the uses of the structures of English support and/or reflect the triumph of this kind of categorisation - 'he' for the human experience in general with 'she' as a lower term, having only the authority of its specificity and no claims to human attributions and therefore rights and power - he, she, it. In Findley's novel, personal pronouns are used to include animals and humans within the same frame of being, and by focusing on such marginalised and victimised groups as women and animals, it reinstates such groups as offering valid and powerful alternatives to 'meaning' and 'being' subsequently captured by one exclusive code.

For Dr Noyes these vertical relations are reinforced by symbols, ritual, tradition, referenced exclusively to a self-serving interpretative code whose apex is himself/Yaweh. This code is characterised by its emphasis on the transcendent, the immutable, the holistic. By contrast, the world of animals and of their beings, and those humans who cannot conform to, or refuse to conform to the rigidities of Noyes's system, is one in which the immanent, the transformative and the relational underpin meaning and being. In Noyes's world, interpretations (plural) are precluded; in that of Motty, Mrs Noyes, the Unicorn and Crowe, interpretation is just as important an activity. But here it occurs by negotiation between differing perspectives and involves not one world, but many, the crossing of whose territories requires negotiated manoeuvres and consideration of differences as much as similarities in perception. The animals come to their conclusions about the angel intruder after much trading and weighing of inter-species perceptions. Brute force does operate, but the key to survival is vigilance through communication. Because of this 'web' of inter-species activity, more senses and therefore perceptions are available - there is not the determination to exclude that pervades the philosophy of Noyes, but the necessity to include. To include, but not to assimilate. Reality thus becomes that which can be negotiated between a multiplicity of groups and possibilities, not a series of differing perspectives on *the same reality*.⁴

Interestingly, certain signs and symbols can be communicated directly by one species to another, though misreadings and misinterpretations of them occur. The fairies, who will not survive the Flood, communicate the symbol of 'infinity' to Mrs Noyes. Mrs Noyes is impressed by the symbol, even though she cannot

'read' it, and absent-mindedly reproduces it with her fingers while Yaweh is at dinner. As a result she is attacked by his cat, presumably for making the sign which God has appropriated as His and His alone. But as the fairies have tried to warn, the very concept of infinity, of endless plenitude, is tragically threatened by Yaweh/Noah's rule and effectively annihilated by Noah's subsequent actions.

Thus the view of Noah and his cohorts that the world offers one reality arrived at through a semiotic which he alone is privileged to read, is contested in the novel (in spite of its increasing consolidation of his own power) by the possibility of an infinite network of negotiation. Noah's will to power almost destroys it, but it survives in attenuated form through the animals in the Ark and through Mrs Noyes and Lucy.

The decentring achieved by a multiplicity of perspectives is also used in the novel to undermine the self-aggrandisement of Noyes and God. Great moments of investiture or those which might be expected to invoke the high seriousness attendant on manifestations of absolute power are undermined by relativising perspectives. God's arrival, the climax of the flight of the dove, the sacrifices, and the ritual preparations, are viewed from the angle of Emma, lowest of the low in Noyes's household, and from the perspective of Mottyl, the cat. Both the irreverent (if awed) perceptions of Emma and the assessment available to Mottyl's rather different senses add up to the same thing: the uncanny resemblance between Yaweh and Noyes. 'Man' has indeed created God in his own image:

Yaweh drew a small tin box from somewhere in His robe and opened it. His fingers were not as long as Emma had thought they might have been, though part of the reason for this was plainly arthritis... Something was lifted from the box - placed against His lips and drawn into His mouth. *God sucks lozenges!* thought Emma, astonished. *Just like Dr Noyes.*

The Lord God Yaweh, who was about to step into the air, was more than seven hundred years older than His friend Dr Noyes, kneeling now in the road before Him. To Mottyl, it was meaningless. Her Lord Creator was a walking sack of bones and hair. She also suspected, from His smell, that He was human [p.66].

In the Noyes's scheme of things, difference in nature but 'equivalence in value'⁸ is not possible. Hence the hierarchical structures on which his power depends must be policed for 'difference' and everyone/everything rigidly categorised on a scale of value whose successive boundary lines are clear. Noah is below God, his sons below him, the women below them, the animals below them and so on. In this 'Great Chain of Being' there are also angels, between God and man, but some of these are more equal than others. When the novel opens, however, other forms which do not belong to any of the above categories also share the earth: the demons, who are brought into the Noyes's kitchen by an as yet unembittered Japeth, and whose heat scorches the furniture; the fairies, who can be seen by Mrs Noyes and the animals, but not by the other humans; the dragons, who stray into the field and whose presence is a source of terror. Then there are those animals who will later be rendered 'extinct', such as the Unicorn and his Lady. Above all, there are the worryingly ambiguous 'Lotte children' (ape-children) and the 'fallen' Lucy who found the rigid binary

classifications of 'Heaven' too boring and unpleasant. Such 'hybrid' forms offer a complex challenge to the hierarchical categorisations on which Noah's power depends.

Anxiety about ambivalence stems from a deep-seated contradiction in the processes by which the 'other' is constructed, a basis of fundamental contradiction which opens colonial discourse to the possibility of fracture from within. As Homi Bhabha (1984, pp.125-33) notes, the dominant discourse 'constructs' otherness in such a way that it always contains a trace of ambivalence or anxiety about its own authority. In order to maintain authority over others in a colonial situation, imperial discourse strives to both delineate 'the other' as radically different from itself, yet at the same time maintain sufficient identity *with* that other to valorise imperial control over it. The other can, of course, only be constructed out of the archive of 'the self', yet it must also articulate that other as inescapably different. Otherness can thus only be produced by a continual process of what Bhabha calls 'repetition and displacement' and this instigates an ambivalence at the very site of imperial authority and control. Thus there is a kind of built-in resistance in the very construction of any dominant discourse - and opposition is an almost inevitable effect of its construction of cultural difference. Of course, what such authority least likes, and what presents it with its greatest threat, is a reminder of such ambivalence. This ambivalence at the very heart of authority is exposed by the presence in the colonial subject of hybridisation or colonial mimicry.

In *Not Wanted on the Voyage* two figures in particular lie at the heart of Noah's authority anxiety. These are the 'Lotte children' in the human community; and Lucy/Lucifer whose gender and human/angel status are ambiguous and hybrid. Lucy prefers the multiple possibilities of earth (at least those offering before the voyage of 'salvation') to the certainties of Heaven, and the more community negotiated perceptions of the female to those of the closed and hierarchical male order. Lucy has left Heaven (cast out in God's version) because of the intolerance of difference and the inbuilt resistance to any questions. In Heaven, theirs not to reason why. In marrying Ham, the most rational and gentlest of Noah's sons, the disturbing Lucy becomes a part of Noah's family just as the recurring ape-children already are. Though these 'hybrid' forms are either destroyed or are marginalised, their very presence disrupts the apparently axiomatic signifying system which has invested itself with absolute authority over those it has constructed and ranked as 'other'. Most important of all, both Lucy, Hannah's child and Japeth's murdered twin are actually part of Noah's family, indeed of his own blood.

As the voyage of destruction/salvation continues, many forms are lost or deliberately annihilated, drowned, or burned. The fairies are not allowed aboard the Ark and perish in the Flood. The Unicorn is brutally 'raped' and murdered through Noyes's use of him as the instrument of rape. The demons are thrown over the side. The dragons failed to make it aboard in the first place. Multiple forms and possibilities of being are lost forever. Those who survive, including Mrs Noyes, have been brutally 'othered'. But in *Not Wanted on the Voyage* the

processes of this exclusion and 'othering' are not only exposed and anatomised, but the phobias that induce such responses to otherness, ones that lie at the very heart of imperialism and colonialism, have been charted.

Not Wanted on the Voyage, then, investigates the most fundamental processes of othering and of the imperial colonial relation, and does so in a way characteristic of the post-colonial text. It deploys a number of counter-discursive strategies, re-entering the Western episteme at one of its most fundamental points of textual origination to deconstruct those notions and processes which rationalised the imposition of the imperial Word on the rest of the world, focusing on the complicity between material power and textual authority and the naturalisation of that authority. But *Not Wanted on the Voyage* also offers counter-discursive resistance to that imperial authorisation, naturalisation and colonial interpellation. And while both the colonialist discourse it anatomises and the resistances it enacts are couched in generally Western terms, a specific imperial power is also referred to.

The Prologue to the novel, in its direct address to the way in which discourses constituted as 'timeless... proof against all corrosion and complication' might be destabilised ('Everyone knows it wasn't like that' [p.3]), has a particular setting. That setting is recognisably British and faintly Edwardian, and the band that pipes the happy voyagers aboard is playing 'Rule Britannia!' and 'Over the Sea to Skye'. The play of empire, 'Flags and banners and a booming cannon... like an excursion', is exposed as: 'Well. It wasn't an excursion. It was the end of the world [p.3]'. By the end of the nineteenth century, the naturalisation of British imperial power was completed - but resistance to it was well under way. In his recent book, *The Telling of Lies* (1986), Findley has moved from the exposure of old imperialisms to anatomise the continuing operation of colonialist strategies in the contemporary world where a rampantly capitalist United States has replaced Britain as the major imperial power. *The Telling of Lies*, like *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, exposes the discursive strategies of older and contemporary imperialisms and offers resistance to them.

Notes

1. See Slemon (1988) p.335, unpublished dissertation. Also Viswanathan (1987) p.22.
2. See Foucault (1977) p.38, and (1981) p.48 - Robert Young's Preface.
3. See Dorsinville (1974) passim; Brydon (1984) pp.75-88 and Zabus (1985) pp.35-50.
4. I am indebted to Leigh Dale (1987) for this formulation in a rather different context of discussion.
5. See Todorov (1984) passim.

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