

In Frances-Anne's [post](#), she wrote, "Creation is a form of Terror, particularly when you come from a colonial context and background in which Empire (read: a sense of inferiority) was imposed through education, language, culture, as much if not more than through the barrel of a gun." This insult to our [minds, hearts, and bodies](#) is one of the themes of [Olive Senior's](#), "Colonial Girls School," and the erasure of sense and sensibility by [suppression of the natural, denial of the native](#), and the implied superiority of "northern eyes" is masterfully woven through the text with use of the prefix-[de](#). The poem's iconoclastic language relies on the metaphor of "images" that are shattered at the end of the poem, "How the mirror broke," and the word play on "[pale](#)."

Colonial Girls School
For Marlene Smith MacLeish

Borrowed **images**
willed [our skins](#) **pale**
muffled [our laughter](#)
lowered [our voices](#)
let out [our hems](#)
dekinked [our hair](#)
denied [our sex](#) in gym tunics and bloomers
harnessed [our voices](#) to madrigals
and genteel airs
yoked [our minds](#) to **de**clensions in Latin
and the language of Shakespeare

Told us nothing about our selves
There was nothing at all

Throughout the first stanza and the refrain, the speaker uses the language of servitude and slavery with the words, "**muffled**," "**lowered**," and "**harnessed**." The girls' bodies "our skin, " and minds have been "**yoked**" to a system that is foreign to their way of being.

How those **pale** northern eyes and
aristocratic whispers once **erased** us
How [our loudness](#), [our laughter](#)
debased us.
There was nothing left of ourselves
Nothing about us at all

The speaker continues to show the effects of the "pale northern eyes" on the girls and the subsequent reduction of self-esteem.

Studying: *History: Ancient and Modern*
Kings and Queens of England
Steppes of Russia
Wheatfields of Canada

There was nothing of our landscape there
Nothing about us at all

The next stanza is a turning point in the poem after the catalogue of injustices wrought by colonialism that resulted in the speaker's inability to "see" herself history, the landscape and literature, or even to

appreciate herself because "There was nothing at all." Racism and patriarchal colonialism result in a kind of invisibility that was fully explored in Ralph Ellison's, *Invisible Man*.

Marcus Garvey turned twice in his grave.
 'Thirty- eight was a beacon. A flame.
 They were talking of **de**segregation
 In Little Rock, Arkansas, Lumumba
 and the Congo. To us mumbo-jumbo.
 We had read Vachel Lindsay's
 vision of the jungle.

Feeling nothing about ourselves
 There was nothing about us at all

Months, years, a childhood memorising
 Latin **de**clensions
 (For our language
 --'bad talking'--
 detentions)

Finding nothing about us there
 Nothing about us at all

So, friend of my childhood years
 One day we'll talk about
How the mirror broke
 Who kissed us awake
 Who let Anansi from his bag

For isn't it strange how
 northern eyes
 in the brighter world before us now

Pale?

With the introduction of Marcus Garvey and the Trickster, Anancy (Eshu) there is a reversal of the former condition. Senior masterfully demonstrates the transformation with a change of meaning of the word "pale." The "pale" northern eyes" that once denigrated the speaker's humanity have now become "pale" in significance.

"Colonial Girls School" is one of Olive Senior's best known poems and a study of her short stories and poems reveals a writer who has been grappling with the "decolonization of the mind."

[Olive Senior](#) was born in 1941 to peasant farmers in Trelawny, Jamaica, the seventh of ten children, and later migrated to Canada. She is the author of several collections of short stories: *Summer Lighting* (1986), *Arrival of the Snake-Women* (1989), and *Discerner of Hearts* (1995); collections of poetry *Talking of Trees* (1986), *Gardening in the Tropics* (1994), and *Over the roofs of the world* (2005); and non-fiction about Caribbean culture: *A-Z of Jamaican Heritage* (1984) – greatly expanded and republished in 2004 as *The Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage* – and *Working Miracles: Women's Life in the English Speaking Caribbean* (1991).