

# Tribunations: George Ryga's Postcolonial Trial "Play"

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FOR POSTCOLONIALISTS interested in anti-colonial, anti-authoritarian writing, it is a sobering fact that from its earliest beginnings European literature reveals (and revels in) a marked irony toward legal discourse; British writers, especially British playwrights, for example, have perennially deployed legal imagery to explore shifting political or moral themes. One thinks immediately of the morality plays' ranting Pontius Pilates or Chaucer's Sergeant of the Law, characters used satirically to expose the contortions of medieval feudalism or Christian immorality, or of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, Dickens's theatricalized readings from *Oliver Twist* (or even his vast filibuster, *Bleak House*), all of which employ legal imagery to explore chicanery, sinfulness, or political corruption. But in most cases, law's practitioners, not the law itself, are seen as corrupt. The validity of law, the fact that it is both necessary and desirable, is rarely questioned.

Intriguingly, European writers also consistently have used legal strategies to manipulate the reader into "judging" the merits of a "case." Chaucer's or Fielding's or even Agatha Christie's implicatory techniques are well known; Dryden, similarly, drawing on both the Platonic dialogues and the root meanings of "critic" as "judge," puns his way through the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* — a piece that subtly plays with both legal strategy and legal imagery to foreground the acts by which his readers are jostled into mulling over their own moral condition or immoral bad taste.<sup>1</sup>

Anti-colonial writing, especially anti-colonial theatre, is permeated also with both legal imagery and legalistic techniques of manipulation. Anti-colonial literature, in fact, is even *more* saturated with "legality" than its European forebears. Even the most cursory survey turns up numerous recent works that deploy legal dis-

course and legal techniques, from major scenarios (as in Thomas Keneally's *The Playmaker*) to over-riding structures (as in André Brink's *A Chain of Voices* or the more recent screenplay of *A Dry White Season* with its cameo trial scenes) to even minor techniques of dialogue (as in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*). We have what seems to be an endless litany of courtroom dramas, prison memoirs and plays, police dramas, and detection suspense.

I want to explore a particular issue implicit in my juxtaposition of anti-colonial and European works: namely, are anti-colonial representations of the law different from European ones and, if so, how? My initial answer is that deconstructive representations of the law form a crucial feature of postcolonial writing; that postcolonialists do in fact share strategies with their European predecessors (indeed many, like Canada's George Ryga, Australia's John Romeril, or New Zealand's Mervyn Thompson are happily indebted to radical predecessors like Bertolt Brecht, with whom they are in literary and political allegiance); and that in their handling of legality many postcolonial writers (like André Brink, for example) develop those readerly manipulations in direct imitation of European predecessors (that is, Fielding or Conrad or Beckett).

But I want to argue also that anti-colonialist writers differ from their less radical "parent-texts" in one major way: the law is no longer seen as an intrinsically innocent thing corrupted by invidious molesters. Colonial law, rather, emerges in anti-colonial representations in its true form: one of the ruling-class's most powerful textualities — an encoding of class violence under the guise of social contract. Despite its claim of equality and self-defense, such a contract, for anti-colonialists throughout the postcolonial worlds, is always a violent codification of self-interest. The law is not simply corrupted in anti-colonialist texts; it has been corrupt and violently imposed since the beginning. Accordingly, it merits a violent exploration and rebuttal.

I want, more specifically, to use George Ryga's difficult and clumsily beautiful trial play, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, as a paradigm to explore this recurrent crucial feature of anti-colonial literatures. For it is precisely in trial plays that we see most clearly some of the integral features of this deconstructive re-presentation

of imperialist law: a language that disguises power relations beneath the idealization of unity, stasis, and totalization in textualized form. Colonial law, in this sense, emerges in anti-colonialist writing as that official attempt to “arrest” the dangers of ambiguity (hence, fluidity, amorphousness, anarchy) into the fixed “hardness” of written language (Levinson 156). As such, hermeneutic disputes about it cannot help but be political struggles. As the New Zealand playwright, Mervyn Thompson, pointedly remarks in his own mock trial play, *Songs to the Judges*, “Once in a generation/The gavel turns into a gun” (165-66).

### 1. *Tribunations*

One theoretical truism in current anti-colonialist discussions is that many anti-colonialists rarely simply mimic their parental texts, but actively either adopt subversive techniques from them or impose parodic variations onto them. The mere representation of the law in a non-legal setting de-familiarizes (for example, the terrorist “trials” of Western industrialists); such brazen acts set the observer-critic in an inescapable position of judgement. In non-legal settings which are both anti-colonial and literary, such “representations” of European law (and its mechanisms) are further characterized by a distinct “deconstructive turn” — what Bloomian theorists might call a misprision, and what postcolonial theorists call the reclamation of a world through irony.<sup>2</sup>

The deconstructive turn, a form of “in other words,” is not merely a superficial caricature, though obviously it can and does often engage many of the latter’s characteristic devices: humorous mimicry, distortion, subversion, outright mockery, or invective. Whether it be a visual image, a form of theatre, or a piece of writing, in each case, such a strategy seeks to expose the tensions and/or contradictions inherent both in any given official “text” and the multitude of “official” interpretations that that text has generated around itself. Such a turn, then, has its fulfilment in the ruptured spaces between what an official text (or its interpreters) might seek to say, and what the forms of that text (or its interpretations) constrain it to reveal. Fredric Jameson aptly remarks in *The Political Unconscious*:

In its emergent, strong form a genre is essentially a socio-symbolic message, or in other terms, that form is immanently and intrinsically an ideology in its own right. When such forms are reappropriated and refashioned in quite different social and cultural contexts, this message persists and must be functionally reckoned into the new form . . . the ideology of the form itself, thus sedimented, persists into the later, more complex structure as a generic message which coexists — either as a contraction or, on the other hand, as a mediatory or harmonizing mechanism — with elements from later stages. (Jameson, 140-41)

It is precisely this former kind of contradictory identification of residual meaning implicit in generic form that sets into motion in George Ryga's mock trial, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, one of anti-colonialism's most famous reappropriations of a legal "genre." This dislocation, what Gerald Graff calls in another context a "hermeneutics of power," then leads to the uncanny moment, that demystifying moment, when what has long been concealed appears in all its strangeness and original "vested" interests — the Empire's old clothes, as it were. Within this context, *Rita Joe reappropriates* colonial law; as a "new" literary language that contains sediments of law's "old" forms, it theatricalizes (and makes visible) the invisible processes by which colonial law *per se* embodies oppressive centralist ideologies (and, indeed, it is no wonder Mr. Homer works at the "Centre").

"Real" trials are paradoxically open-ended "fictions"; they are representations or actualizations of linguistic codes subject to endless interpretations (Elwork 1-25). To the happy citizen, this actualization constitutes a balanced dialogue, an objective pursuit of "truth" through an equal hermeneutic exchange. As Ryga's happy Magistrate moronically comments to Rita in the dock: "All relationships . . . are determined and enriched by laws that have grown out of social realities. The quality of the law under which you live and function determines the real quality of the freedom that was yours today . . . Nobody is a prisoner here" (17). To a criminalized native (like Donald Marshall, for instance), trials within capitalism-colonialism are anything but such a jolly, disinterested enquiry. Trials, rather, are the mystified semiosis of power relations: *the site wherein colonial authority*

asserts its own supremacy, listening unendingly to its own voice. Accordingly, although Rita is invited initially to “speak for herself” (17), she is asked four different times to “speak” through a lawyer (27, 32, 34, 39) — a Derridean nightmare, if ever there was one, of *not* hearing oneself speak.<sup>3</sup>

Given the possibility of such opposed interpretations, the trial is an appropriate trope with which to dramatize colonizing encounters and their harsh legacies — as it is, say, in Tony Strachan’s *State of Shock*, Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, Ali Mazrui’s *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo*, Wilfred Watson’s experimental *Gramsci X 3*, John Coulter’s *Riel*, and Dorothy Hewett’s feminist version, *The Chapel Perilous*. In each case, the playwright attempts to demystify the mystifications that sustain such “puppet theatre,” usually through what Bakhtin calls carnivalesque reversals of officialdom, that is, distortions wherein the law’s official pursuit of unity, fixity, and unambiguous univocality is subjected to the rigours of anarchic pluralism, fluid punning, and a Rabelaisian enjoyment of multiplicity (Bakhtin 1-58).<sup>4</sup> This contrast reveals the colonial trial in all its biases; it is in fact a process through which an official elite pursues what it hopes is the stasis of a fixed “writtenness.”

At its simplest, the trial can be used satirically to reverse the focus of interrogation, thus “trying” the system which creates criminals from the remains of its own victims. This kind of subtle attack certainly underpins classic European “legal plays” like Gay’s *Beggar’s Opera* (a transparent attack on Walpole), or Brecht’s *Threepenny Opera* — the *subversive* precursors that post-colonialist playwrights cull for their strategies.<sup>5</sup> For them, though, the targets are not an individual, a genre, or an economic system, but the legal-linguistic embodiment of an oppressive world, an entire fictional history, and an encoded narration of displacement.

In one sense, then, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* is typical of virtually all anti-authoritarian trial plays. Formally, it is an ironic replication similar to, but radically different from its legal models. At its core, it uses the trial process to recount the colonial oppression of indigenous peoples. Accordingly, it has a deranged, authoritarian white magistrate (who emerges, most crucially, as the principal interpreter of the written word), pitted against defendants of colour

(and *their* interpretations); Ryga, like most dramatists, composed the play collaboratively, deconstructing Western “poetic” notions of the individual author.<sup>6</sup>

As engaged political theatre, moreover, *Rita Joe* strategically reverses the focus of legal enquiry and, as in Brecht, Weiss, or more recently Dario Fo, it is the audience that ultimately emerges as the central defendant — the audience, whose history is placed on trial and judged guilty of imperialistic complicity at worst, ignorance at best. Ryga identifies the colonial crime not simply with racial prejudice, but with the ongoing legacy of distortions inherent in Western individualism and economic capitalism. The colonial encounter, in other words, is a variation of class struggle. Given this, the play operates on a relatively straightforward level of parodic inversion. What historically and politically has been removed from the public eye is here foregrounded. The invisible is made visible.

However, there are parodic activities in these deconstructive trials, the inner workings by which radicalized trial plays seek both to disclose the “real” historical truth of colonization and to reveal the trial process as an elaborate official fiction, a theatre of power, a representation by which justice may try to be seen to be done but more often than not is a pantomime of the intruding language of control. In these attempts at exposure and literary and political subversion, *Rita Joe* continually deconstructs its own fictionality. From the outset, Ryga emphasizes that “*no curtain is used during the play*”; “*the house lights and stage work lights remain on. Backstage, cyclorama, and maze curtains are up, revealing wall back of stage, exit doors, etc.*”; and that the cast “*entrances are workman-like and untheatrical*” (15-16).<sup>7</sup>

This kind of self-reflexivity is familiar to postcolonial critics. As both New Zealand’s Reg Berry and Australia’s Helen Tiffin have observed, the interplay between the “real” and the “fictional” not only forces a reader or audience to consider each in the light of the other, but the juxtaposition deliberately raises questions about the nature of history and fiction as representations of postcolonial realities. Echoing Hayden White — history is “a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse” (ix) — Tiffin remarks: “both history and fiction depend on the word, in particular on the

written word, in the capture of alterity within European systems . . . The tropes of fiction, like those of history are hegemonizing in their encounters with otherness" (32).

In the same vein, the tropes of law (notably the trial and/or prison) provide the anti-colonial playwright with a ready-made theatre or performance which, when repeated *ex cathedra*, uncannily discloses its own mystified agenda: the hegemonizing pursuit of an oppressive stasis and the pursuit and imposition of fixed definition, of hermeneutic triumph. As the word "lex" makes clear, the law is a "set form of words"; as the Canadian army made clear when it cut telephone lines at Oka, the exercise of law requires the silencing of polyphonic possibilities in favour of a unitary, monoglossic control.

*Rita Joe*, then, like so many anti-colonialist trial plays, takes on a significant multifarious form of writerly reaction to this monoglossic discipline, that is, the deliberate indiscipline of a language revelling in punning, strategic evasion, and subversion. Ryga stages what is perhaps one of the most metonymic speeches in postcolonial theatre when the Magistrate upbraids Rita in the following diatribe:

MAGISTRATE. Rita Joe . . . It is against the law to solicit men on the street. You have to wash. . . . You can't walk around in old clothes and running shoes made of canvas . . . You have to have some money in your pockets and an address where you live. You should fix your hair . . . perhaps even change your name. *And try to tame that accent that sounds like you have a mouthful of sawdust . . .*  
(51-52; emphasis added)

Throughout the play, Rita's language is "improper," from her stutterings to her jokes about the melting pot and Wordsworth; in each case, officialdom views her language as a form of verbal prostitution. This overt juxtaposition between poor (oppressed) and proper (official) grammar is a stock element in virtually all the postcolonial legal plays: without exception, Magistrates are in control of grammatical propriety which, in turn, seeks mainly after fixity (in both addresses and meaning). Defendants and prisoners, like Ryga's Rita (and especially Thompson's Maori defendants), inevitably speak ungrammatically, favouring obscurity, poor syntax, abbreviations, and elisions. (A situation that

gives rather poignant new meaning to legality's ubiquitous phrase of definition: "Of no fixed address.") Their language is marked throughout as a dynamic "alter-tongue," a form of inner speech that both elides official classifications and resists official "fixes." Virtually all these plays return finally to this ultimate concern of language, particularly the violence of a language self-consciously different from that of the outside world.

Ryga's deliberate "indiscipline of language" — his use of colloquialisms, jargon, and impoverished grammar, all of which are characteristic of postcolonial legal plays — actively subverts through a carnivalesque imitation both the theory and praxis of the King's English and by extension the worlds contained therein. This specialized jargon — like David Dabydeen's contemporary "nigger talk" — thus represents a discourse that invents an alternative world, a creative inscription hostile to all that is complete, immortalized, and cherished by officialdom. Such vernacular, in an act of violent transgression, dismantles the curse of vertical communication and, by inference, the stifling hierarchies of authority, and the disciplinary and linguistic hierarchies in control of all carceral society.

Michael Foucault deconstructs modern legality as precisely this type of powerful and empowering discourse, a method of control which uses representations — semiotics — rather than brutal physical assault. The trial, as it replaces older forms of public torture and confession, emerges as a network of figurative representation, a language or form of writing complete with its own tropes, idioms, and expressions. As Foucault remarks, the trial and process of conviction constitute a metaphysical form of inscription; sentencing (itself an unintentional official pun) "marks the offender with a negative sign" (9).

If we develop this insight, these play-trials emerge as a type of supreme monologue, a discursive event in which power asserts its own authority while infiltrating and appropriating native forms of expression and, therefore, identity. Though it may purport to be a communal polylogue in search of "truth," as Ryga's Magistrate believes — "There is room for dialogue. There is room for disagreement" (111) — it functions rather as a site of irreconcilable dialogue, or even worse, of irresistible "sentencing." It is no coinci-



dence that *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* addresses this peculiar form of writerly victimization, for throughout the various contours of their attempts to “re-try” an enquiry into human justice, anti-colonial playwrights continually recognize and foreground this most powerful and fundamental form of enslavement. From the Magistrate’s first words in *Rita Joe* — “Who is she? Can she speak English?” (16) — to the Judge’s first words in Mervyn Thompson’s “Scales of Justice” in *Songs to the Judges* (“Name? Born? Father? Mother?” [170]), these trial plays seek finally to disclose and alter the textualizations of power within the multiple contours of colonial law.

## II. *The Fine Arts of Discipline*

If, on one hand, the “real” colonial trial represents this hermeneutic collision within a visual field (an event in which the normalizing gaze of authority evaluates abnormality) it also functions as a site of discursive convergence. This visual space of the courtroom contains not simply a dialectical interplay between observer and observed, offender and offended, but a network of written information drawn from multiple disciplines. Police reports, case histories, psychiatric reports, personal and medical testimonials, all converge around the criminal body, seeking a knowledge that will enable a later transformation, a disciplinary “re-righting” of deviance. The trial constitutes not the final struggles of a political endgame, but the opening gambit of acquisitive power.

Throughout *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault concentrates on these two seminal features of the modern penal process: how classical forms of arrest and torture have given way to more metaphysical forms of inscription through the disciplines; and how these disciplines generated a body of documentation which could then be exploited in the cause of power-knowledge. The term “discipline” represents a wide variety of activities and comes to embrace virtually every form of socialized training; militaristic drills, schoolroom regulations, medical partitioning of diseases and patients, timetabling in the workforce, even formulas for proper calligraphy — all represent a methodology of control, a means by which the body is disciplined according to a semiotic system and put to productive use.<sup>8</sup>

Coupled as they are with a proliferation of scientific documentation, the “disciplines” signal the beginnings of total control, the initiation of the body not only into a vast field of documentation, but consequently into its most regulated mode. Foucault offers a singularly condensed analysis of this phenomenon when he remarks that

the historical moment of the disciplines was the moment when an art of the human body was born, which was directed not only at the growth of its skills, nor at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful, and conversely . . . [t]he human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down, and rearranges it. A ‘political anatomy’, which was also a ‘mechanics of power’, was being born. (137-38)

Throughout the trial procedure, the disciplines thus function as both a reference point (a potential explanation as to *why* the criminal is like this), *and* as a methodology of subsequent inscription or rehabilitation. Taken as a metonymy for either colonial encounters with alterity or authority’s confrontation with alternatives, the trial can be seen not so much as a sign of terminal triumph, but as the initiating step in a subsequent series of ideological controls.

Foucault’s examination may be read as a gloss on *Rita Joe* (and by extension, much anti-colonial writing), particularly his emphasis on the docile body, the spread of disciplinary documentation, and the body itself as the target and subject of power-knowledge.<sup>9</sup> Not surprisingly, given their nature and content, anti-colonial legal plays, especially Ryga’s, compulsively interrogate and deconstruct this complex image of the inscribed “useful body.” More to the point is how anti-colonial trial plays disclose the more covert workings of disciplinary inscription through the foregrounding of the body. Almost without exception, these plays hover obsessively around the image of the body confronted by powerful metaphysical disciplines that seek to explore it, break it down, and rearrange it into a socially-sanctioned productive force. As well as an inscribed object, the body inevitably appears as the site of aggressive sexual fragmentation and cajoled transformation.

Just as Thompson, André Brink, and J. M. Coetzee meticulously return to imagery of writing and inscription, so too in *Rita*

*Joe* the Magistrate continually fumbles with a “folder of notes” containing both references and Rita’s case history (“one letter for a lifetime” laments Rita [76]); significantly he then lapses into a profoundly *writerly* vocabulary when he sentences Rita towards the end of the play: “You’ll be back . . . always back . . . growing older, tougher . . . filthier . . . looking more like stone and prison bars . . . the lines in your face will tell everyone who sees you about prison windows and prison food” (117). The criminalized female body here transforms into a living text: fully inscribed and depowered, able to “speak” only in official terms of an internalized oppression.

As in Thompson’s “Scales of Justice” (which recalls *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* as it re-enacts a biographical interrogation of a young Maori), the individual native body appears throughout Ryga’s play as a straightforward emblem of a general victimization. Regarded with voyeuristic suspicion by officials and assaulted by employers — she ultimately is raped and murdered — Rita’s body is an overt metonymy of all native peoples deemed sexually abnormal by puritanical stereotyping, objectified by the dominant culture, and destroyed by rapacious economic oppression. However, Ryga firmly locates Rita’s body in a field of controlling ideological disciplines. As in a Foucaultian allegory, she confronts various embodiments of cultural controls seeking to break down the body and rearrange it into an acceptable mirror image of the colonial master. As Foucault remarks, the “judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the social-worker judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual . . . subjects to it his body, his gestures, his behaviour, his aptitude, his achievements” (304).

Appropriately, “Religion’s” Father Andrew preaches submission and bodily purity (81-85); “Education’s” Miss Donohue preaches Omar Khayyám and Wordsworth, while advising Rita to “wash [her] neck [and] clean [her] fingernails” (64); “Social Welfare’s” Mr. Homer proffers clothing and a bodily “cure” for racial and political problems: “There’s nothing special here. . . . At the centre here the quick cure is a bowl of stew under the belt and a good night’s sleep” (52). But both the latter ultimately reject Rita by

referring explicitly to her unruly body, her anarchic sexual deviation from Canadian middle-class morality: Miss Donohue complains, "I tried to teach you, but your head was in the clouds, and as for your body . . . Well! I wouldn't even think what I know you do! . . . I saw it then . . . pawing the ground for men like a bitch in heat" (66-67); to Mr. Homer Rita is nothing more than a "slut . . . [a] breed whore" (109).

Ryga particularly complicates this image of Rita's body subjected to the disciplines of church, education, and social welfare in his presentation of the paternalistic Magistrate — the Lacanian Law of the Father. As the figurehead of Law itself, Ryga's paternalistic (and sexualizing) Magistrate, like Thompson's Judge, develops into an uncomfortable variation of Lacan's phallic father, the signifier of cultural normalization and male/colonizing language. Throughout *Rita Joe*, he is at once the father of law and the law of the Father — an allegorization of patriarchal legal language. As Ann Jones remarks, "[t]he Law of the Father is Lacan's formulation for language as the medium through which human beings are placed in culture, a medium represented and enforced by the figure of the father in the family" (375n). Ryga not only emphasizes that the Magistrate is himself a father — he twice refers to his own children — but he displays a markedly voyeuristic interest in Rita as a young girl.<sup>10</sup>

From the outset, moreover, Ryga's Magistrate betrays a voyeuristic obsession with the body of the condemned, and within the opening minutes he alludes three times to Rita's face (23, 25, 26). Towards the end of Act One, in a combination of sexist, colonialist, and linguistic aggression, he becomes progressively obsessed with her case history, and instigates a series of medical and juridical anatomizations of her body. Following hard on his allusion to Rita's coiffure, the Magistrate's interrogation returns continually to the notion that her body is infectious (58, 78); he methodically questions her about her dental records (73-74), her lungs (74), her venereal condition (74), whether she has had her ears checked (77), had boils, discharges, or a bath (77); and he ends his anatomical interrogation by prescribing "all necessary treatment at the prison clinic" (116).

Rita's body, in other words, (and for that matter, all criminalized

native bodies in postcolonial legal theatre) floats surrealistically throughout the play which, in turn, textually and parodically re-enacts the fragmenting power-knowledge intrinsic to the procedures of trial and imprisonment. The body disintegrated into fragments — a semiosis of absolute power. In this play, defendants' bodies exit in the same manner as they enter: as a sign of the political victim, fragmented and figuratively inscribed by the social disciplines. In *Rita Joe*, the first Murderer's final remark provides an ironic comment on this kind of physical and intellectual control: "Shit . . . She's dead . . . We hardly touched her" (124).

On one level then the Magistrate illustrates the interplay between jurisprudence and scientific discourse in the judgement of crime and alterity; throughout his role, he continually refers to a mass of documentation — a folder that significantly contains a police statement (40), a case history from the prosecutor (49), a letter or reference from Miss Donohue (74), and a letter from the School Board Clerk (76). In this sense, Ryga's Magistrate views Rita as an already inscribed body: he bases his judgement on a network of disciplinary discourses which, according to Foucault, "by solemnly inscribing offences in the field of objects susceptible of scientific knowledge . . . provide[s] the mechanisms of legal punishment with a justifiable hold not only on offences, but on individuals; not only on what they do, but also on what they are, will be, may be" (18). Confronted with this network of information, the Magistrate can only comment in a peculiarly "textualizing" vocabulary that there is "nothing here but a record of your convictions . . . Nothing to speak for you and provide me with any reason to moderate your sentence. What the hell am I supposed to do?" (58). What he does is sentence Rita to prison—a place of incarceration, to be sure, but also *the* ultimate site of hermeneutic triumph — that locale where the social mechanisms work most microcosmically to sever and therefore control, and where legality works ceaselessly to maximize the component power of isolated bodies while simultaneously minimizing their political capability.

In the case of Ryga's *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* (and of most post-colonial "legal fictions") the mechanisms of "law" are not simply

the most obvious embodiment of cultural controls; they also form something of a specialist word-hoard or polytropic grab-bag within the general warehouse of English "literature"; anti-colonialist artists hover continually over that interstitial point where law and literature lose their boundaries to each other, the point where both types of writing appear demystified and are perceived as textualizations of power demanding interpretive struggle. As Sanford Levinson observes, "the principal social reality of law is its coercive force vis-à-vis those who prefer to behave other than as the law 'requires.'" He adds two key points to this: "the centrality of textuality to the lawyer's enterprise" and "the centrality to the law of textual analysis" (163, 156-57). In current anti-colonial literary enterprises, representing the law means re-interpreting its texts, which means re-integrating its implications, which means ultimately re-enacting an original political struggle.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Consider, for example, the punning on both legalisms *and* the concept of critic (Crites) as judge in Dryden's introductory paragraphs: "I would ask Crites to what part of poesy he would confine his arguments, and whether he would defend the general cause of the ancients against the moderns, or oppose any age of the moderns against this of ours?" (Dryden 432).
- <sup>2</sup> Bloom's agonistic theories have struck a sympathetic chord in postcolonial circles, particularly his ideas on the deliberate "misreading" of the suffocating parental (read Eurocentric) text. Cf. Bloom (4): "What is revisionism? As the origins of the word indicate, it is a re-aiming or a looking-over-again, leading to a re-esteeming or a re-estimating. We can venture the formula: the revisionist [read, postcolonialist] strives to *see* again, so as to *esteem* and *estimate* differently, so as then to aim 'correctively.'"
- <sup>3</sup> See During (369): "Postcolonialism then is the name for products of the ex-colonies' need for an identity granted not in terms of the colonial power, but in terms of themselves. It operates in modes similar to what Derrida in his early work on Husserl called 'pure auto-affectation': 'the operation of hearing oneself speak' . . . To apply the argument in our context: the post-colonial self knows itself in universal terms, that is, in terms of the international centres of a colonial past. Yet the images and texts [and, I would add, puns] it produces as 'its own' can affect it as if they have passed through no 'external detour', no world which is not their own."
- <sup>4</sup> Although only peripherally related to my main concerns here, Sherrill Grace's recent stimulating essay on Ryga and Gurik offers a number of insightful comments on the "tribunal play"; see esp. 49-50.
- <sup>5</sup> Postcolonialists tend to parody or reject Eurocentric — not European-authored — texts. In an interesting recent essay on Soyinka's use of the Scriblerians, Peter Sabor has written an important corrective to the post-colonial misconception that all parental texts are rejected out of hand.

- <sup>6</sup> Ryga simultaneously addresses Terry Goldie's problematic of white writers "creating" yet another level of semiosis for indigenous peoples. Christopher Innes discusses the collaborative nature of *Rita Joe* throughout his fine study, *The Canadian Dramatist: George Ryga, Politics and the Playwright*. This kind of collaborative effort, particularly where a non-indigenous playwright surrenders individual "author-ity" over his or her words to indigenous actors would qualify Terry Goldie's otherwise insightful comments in chapter 9 of his *Fear and Temptation*.
- <sup>7</sup> Compare Thompson, for example, who directs that the "*Actors confront [the] audience, challenging them*" (152); many of the stage directions indicate that "*the 'you' of the song is the audience*" (157); in the concluding song "*the actor playing the judge return[s] as himself — an actor in Songs to the Judges*" (181); and perhaps most intriguing, the Judge at one point asks the defendants, "What sort of performance do you think this is?" (164).
- <sup>8</sup> Cf. Foucault 166: "From the master of discipline to him who is subjected to it the relation is one of signalization: it is a question not of understanding the injunction but of perceiving the signal and reacting to it immediately, according to a more or less artificial, prearranged code. Place the bodies in a little world of signals to each of which is attached a single, obligatory response."
- <sup>9</sup> As Hulme and Goldie have both shown, much postcolonial writing, in fact, can be read as a history of authoritarian "writing" of the body. The colonial encounter, moreover, continually appears as either an educational attempt to mould malleable native bodies, the military imposition of disciplinary training, the takeover of orality by written discourse, inter-racial rape, or a combination of all four patterns. This fascination with the "alter body" underpins the colonialist's voyeuristic fascination with miscegenation; cf. Fanon 41-83 and Goldie *passim*. Margaret Atwood continually returns to the image of a fragmented female body reconstituting itself in her calls for a non-colonialized culture; see *Survival* 32, 39, 40, 41, 42, 235, 237. On this last topic, there is much cross-fertilization to be had by postcolonial theorists and feminist theories of "re-writing" the colonized female body. See esp. Gubar and Jones.
- <sup>10</sup> Parent-child relationships also form one of the colonial structures explored in the play; see especially Jaimie Paul's comment on the social do-gooder, Mr. Homer: "He's got no kids . . . Guys like that get mean when they got no kids . . . We're his kids an' he means to keep it that way" (97). On the colonialist's exploitation of this structure in the South Pacific, cf. Field *passim*.

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