

## Staging the Human in George Ryga's *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*

Saradindu Bhattacharya

Assistant Professor, Dept. of English Studies, Central University of Tamil Nadu.

Email: [saradindub@gmail.com](mailto:saradindub@gmail.com)

---

### Abstract

This essay examines George Ryga's play *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* for its literary and dramatic strategies of representation of the violation of the human rights of its titular subject. I demonstrate how Rita Joe embodies the discursive construction of the racialized native subject whose speech and actions, at the textual level, are very often at odds with the immediate theatrical setting of the play itself, while also bearing deeper contextual resonance with the backdrop of the colonial history of Canada within which her story unfolds. The essay examines how (a) popular racial stereotypes operate within the colonial institutions of law and administration, education and religion as the discursive grounds for the dehumanization of the native subject (b) the 'criminality' of the native subject becomes a logical outcome of, and further inducement to, the breach of her rights as human, and (c) the dramatic staging of the violation of the racialized, criminalized subject creates a space for her to articulate her own suffering and thus claim a resistive narrative voice as a human subject. I contend that Ryga employs theatrical techniques (such as voiceovers, stage setting and lighting, transition of scenes) and dramatic elements (like plot, character, dialogue and action) not only to represent Rita Joe's systemic victimization and ultimate destruction within the colonial regime, but also to engage the audience in bearing collective witness to her trauma as that of a fellow human. In doing so, Ryga effects a narrative reconstruction and an empathic recognition of the colonized subject as human in her vulnerability to violence and her capacity to feel and articulate suffering, and thereby positions her narrative within a larger discourse of human rights.

**Keywords:** George Ryga, *The Ecstasy of Rita Jo*, human rights, victimization, colonized subject.

### Colonial Discourses of Race

In the play, Ryga presents a deeply unsettling spectacle of the trial and murder of a native Canadian woman caught in a system of institutionalized colonial power that demands cultural assimilation from her but never grants her recognition as a human subject deserving the right to free expression or action. Rita's subject position is determined exclusively (and unfavourably) in discriminatory terms of her racial identity, which itself is constructed from a set of popular stereotypes about the native woman that have acquired currency through circulation in official discourses of law and administration, education and religion. From the very outset, Ryga exposes the hypocrisy that underlies the legal system within which Rita Joe's subjectivity is constructed and adjudicated. The reduction of Rita Joe's individual subjectivity to a set of colonial stereotypes operates at discursive and institutional levels, as is evident from the views expressed by representative figures of the colonial regime who are all too willing to ascribe certain kinds of predetermined character traits to her. Thus, Mr. Homer, the ostensibly well-meaning social activist who runs a charity home for the native Canadians, observes in a matter-of-fact fashion:

White people leave clothes here for the Indians to take if they need 'em. Used to have them all up on racks over there...just like in a store (*pointing*) But now we got them all on a heap on a table in the basement [...] Indian people... 'specially the women...get more of a kick diggin' through stuff that's piled up like that... (33)

The casual racism of Mr. Homer, masquerading as social altruism, is indicative of the kind of cultural prejudice that anyone in Rita Joe's position has to struggle with on an everyday basis. In a similar fashion, the Magistrate takes note of the prosecution report that states that Rita was "something of a disruptive influence" when she was taken off the reservation and sent to a school but refuses to admit Rita's account of the events that led to her arrest (37). The fact that the state witnesses called upon to testify against Rita (her former employer and the policemen who arrested her) callously admit to abusing her verbally and physically and yet go unpunished, signifies a normalization of violence against individuals belonging to a particular social group. On this occasion, the Magistrate joins in the collective derisive laughter when Rita's former employer recounts how she cried out (after being sexually exploited by him) that she wished she were a school teacher (36). Ryga reveals, through this 'joke', the underlying assumption shared by the men surrounding Rita – that a native woman cannot aspire to white-collar jobs. Thus, Rita suffers the double victimization typical of colonized subjects: on the one hand, she is rendered vulnerable to exploitation and abuse for the lack of equal social opportunities, while on the other, she is admonished on the very grounds of her inability to operate as a valuable citizen of society<sup>i</sup>.

In fact, Ryga offers us glimpses of Rita's past as a student in a public school as a primer to the discrimination and abuse she faces in her adult life. In doing so, Ryga sets Rita's life-story in the historical context of the systematic erosion of indigenous cultures by the colonial regime in Canada<sup>ii</sup>. The racist stereotype of the uncivilized, untameable native governs Rita's experiences in the public school, where she encounters prejudice from a teacher who is ill equipped for her profession. Like the Magistrate, the schoolteacher, Ms. Donohue, is also a figure of oppressive authority who denies Rita her individual freedom of expression, berates her for her "exhibitionism" and declares: "You will never make bronze! Coming from nowhere and going no place! Who am I to change that?" (42). Her prognosis of Rita's doomed future is strikingly similar to the Magistrate's in its reliance on racial stereotypes. Reiterating the official discourse of the Canadian society being a "melting pot", Ms. Donohue additionally accuses Rita of disobedience and sexually immoral conduct: "Arguing...always trying to upset me...and in grade four...I saw it then...pawing the ground for men like a bitch in heat!" (42). The animalization of the native, in this case, is based on the discourse of the (supposed) sexual excess of the native, at once creating a racialized "other" for the civilized European subject and laying the ground for the denial of her human subjectivity on the basis of colonial morality. Thus, at the institutional level of education, Rita's identity, even as a child, is constructed in discriminatory terms of gender and ethnicity that are to inform her experiences of adult life and ultimately lead her to her final trial. In the same vein, the Magistrate goes beyond the particulars of the case to advise Rita on how she ought to conduct herself properly by wearing better clothes and shoes, fixing her hair, taming her accent and even changing her name (38). In thus pushing the agenda of cultural homogenization and denying Rita any scope for individual choice or freedom of being different from the white standard of feminine appearance and conduct, the Magistrate echoes the larger colonial prejudice against native Canadian culture that materialized into official governmental policies of segregation and repression and ultimately resulted in gross violations of the human rights of the indigenous populations. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that he ignores Rita's plea for mercy on the grounds that she is exhausted and starving and sternly declares: "Don't blame the police, Rita

Joe! The obstacles to your life are here... (*He touches his forefinger to his temples.*) ... in your thoughts... possibly even in your culture..." (38).

The racial stereotypes that limit the possibilities of civil life for Rita as well as inform the official judgement on her conduct thus constitute a recursive loop and operate across various inter-related institutional domains of power, preventing identification of/with her humanity and perpetuating her victimization. Pramod K. Nayar identifies in human rights literature examples of perpetrators distancing themselves emotionally from the target of their actions and thereby offering "legitimacy and justification for their cruelties". Nayar contends that such discursive constructions of subjects that deny them their dignity and identity as humans are "made possible due to their emplacement in a condition of moral vacuums" and "anticipate the actual acts of torture" that destroy the victim (11). It is in this moral vacuum, constructed and validated through colonial discourses of racial identity, that Ryga locates Rita's indictment as a criminal and presents it as the pre-condition for the violation of her rights as a human being.

### **Criminalizing the Native**

From the very outset, Ryga exposes the hypocrisy that underlies the legal system within which Rita Joe's criminal subjectivity is constructed and adjudicated. Thus, upon his entry into the courtroom, the Magistrate declares that Rita Joe ought to "speak for herself" since she knows English but proceeds immediately, without pausing to let her actually do so, to deliver a speech extolling the importance of law in ensuring the protection of the rights and liberties of citizens in any society:

To understand life in a given society, one must understand laws of that society [...] The quality of law under which you live and function determines the real quality of freedom that was yours today [...] Your home and your well-being were protected. The roads of the city are open to us. So are the libraries, galleries, administrative and public buildings. There are buses, trains, going in and coming out. Nobody is a prisoner here (27-28)

Even before the trial has begun, the Magistrate's preliminary commentary holds up Canadian society as an instance of egalitarianism, one that is supposedly marked by equal access to civic infrastructure and institutions; ironically, as Ryga demonstrates through the play, the collective "us" that the Magistrate invokes in his opening speech to designate all members of the social order is itself a position of exclusive white, upper class, male privilege that is based on the systematic othering of subjects like Rita Joe in terms of their race, class and gender. The Magistrate's blithe assumption of the egalitarian nature of the colonial order points to the relatively unremarkable presence of human rights in the public imagination. As Paul Rae observes, "One does not *do* [human rights] in the same way as one *violates* them [...] To the extent they are respected, they recede from discourse or dispute into enactment and experience" (13). It is in this recessive, blind spot of colonial public discourse that the dramatic narrative of Rita's trial unfolds.

Because Rita is already identified only in stereotypical racial terms, the establishment of the charges levelled against her becomes merely a predictable formality rather than an exercise in fair and objective judicial scrutiny of evidence. Thus, the Magistrate ignores Rita's statement that she was framed falsely on the charge of prostitution and goes on to declaim the economic achievements and potential of the Canadian economy, mouthing platitudes like "[e]mployed, happy people make for a prosperous, happy nation" (28). As the trial proceeds, it becomes evident that the institutional codes of the court of law deny Rita's testimony any legal validity and the

Magistrate, as a representative of the legal system, merely uses her as an illustrative example of the native subject who wilfully refuses to conform to the cardinal rules of gainful employment and obedience to the law. Called upon to produce three witnesses in her favour within eight hours, Rita faces insurmountable odds against the official representatives of a system who identify criminal predisposition as an inherent aspect of her character. Thus, when none of Rita's acquaintances – Mr. Homer, Ms. Donoghue, the Priest – agrees to submit a favourable testimonial of character, the Magistrate questions her rhetorically:

Why should they lie, and Rita Joe alone tell the truth?... Or are you a child enough to believe the civilization of which we are a part ... (*He indicates the audience as inclusive of civilization from his point of view*)... does not understand Rita Joe? [...] (*with a touch of compassion*) Look at you, woman! Each time you come before me you are older. The lines in your face are those of... (37)

The Magistrate's mock-paternalistic admonition of Rita is indicative of the deep-seated racial prejudice that informs his judgement: like everyone else, he has already cast the native in the role of a criminal in a repetitious pantomime of trial and punishment. In distancing Rita's "criminality" from the "civilization" that puts her in a position of perpetual disadvantage, the Magistrate not only absolves the latter of all legal and ethical responsibility towards the former but also precludes the possibility of a recognition of the native as a human subject with a right to be heard<sup>iii</sup>. Thus, within the context of the courtroom drama, Rita's criminality is not a legal matter to be examined and debated but a cultural attitude to be reiterated by means of holding up the native subject as an exemplar. As Gary Boire observes:

[T]he 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 contact [...]. To a criminalized native [...] trials are the mystified semiosis of power relations: *the site wherein colonial authority asserts its own supremacy, listening unendingly to its own voice.* (6-9)

It is this implication of the colonial structures of power in the criminalization of Rita and the resultant trauma she experiences that Ryga foregrounds through the use of a series of theatrical techniques. Ryga deliberately creates a claustrophobic atmosphere on stage – reflective of Rita's own sense of entrapment in a situation where no one is willing to listen to her – by confining the action to a partially lit circular ramp and eschewing the use of curtain rise and fall altogether. It is not surprising, therefore, that Rita finds it difficult to relate to the proceedings of the court and often delves into the realms of memory and imagination. Her sense of disorientation and alienation from her immediate surroundings is reflected through the expressionist technique of periodically transporting the audience, with Rita herself, into the realms of memory and imagination. Ryga effectively uses stage lighting to visually focus attention on Rita's subjective perception of the events unfolding around her rather than give the audience an objective, linear progression of action. Thus, when the shadowy murderers are seen hovering in the background, whistling and lighting cigarettes (an action we are told will be repeated at the end of the play) (28), we realize that it is actually Rita's deep-seated sense of fear and insecurity, resulting from past abuse, as well as a dramatic foreshadowing of the outcome of the trial, that is staged here. The deliberate confusion between the past, present and future, in terms of plot, action and stage setting, is both a theatrical device intended to suggest that the judgement on Rita is a foregone conclusion, and a representational means of indicating the inadequacy of the courtroom setting and its discursive focus on criminality to accommodate and address Rita's

experience as a victim of the system. Additionally, Ryga also does away with conventional stage techniques such as distinct scene divisions, entries and exits of characters, and coherence of dialogue, to create an inward vision of Rita's tormented mindscape from which the audience has no escape. Rita's solitary voice arrests the audience's attention precisely because it represents human suffering at its core and demands witnessing in spite of its breach of legal codes. This constitutes a form of "empathetic expressionism" that effects an emotional identification with Rita as a recognizably human character even as the audience realize the theatricality of such a non-realist mode of representation of subjective experience (Grace 48-49). It is this recognition of Rita's "humanness", over and above the discursive construction of her ethnicity and criminality, that demands the audience's attention, thereby establishing a testimonial contract between the two and enabling a witnessing of her "story" beyond the immediate context of her trial.

### **Voicing the Human**

The limitations that the discursive predetermination of Rita's "character" imposes on her self-expression as a human subject cause a dramatic tension between what she can say and do on stage and how her speech and actions are decoded by the figures of authority who conduct the trial. Contrary to the Magistrate's prefatory assertion, the material and discursive conditions of the trial deprive Rita of the agency to speak and be heard: she is not only faint with hunger and exhaustion but is also considered an unreliable narrator of her own experience of deprivation and abuse. Thus, while the legal system privileges speech as a marker of individual identity and cultural value (as is evident from the Magistrate's repeated demand for a series of testimonies), it also proscribes Rita's own ability to narrate her experience – in other words, her voice – by means of material and discursive oppression and thereby perpetuates the process of her dehumanization. Her inability to offer direct, coherent answers to the Magistrate's questions entrap Rita further in the web of criminal law whose language she neither speaks nor understands. Charged repeatedly with theft, vagrancy and prostitution, Rita lapses repeatedly into personal memories that she cannot articulate in a legal register. It is these shifts in the dramatic register – from the public and the legal to the private and the emotive – that enable Rita to acquire a degree of agency in narrating her own story beyond the compulsive logic of the courtroom scene. Rita's memories collapse the spatial and temporal distinctions between the past and the present, between reality and illusion and give the audience a glimpse into the truth of her experiences that the Magistrate is unwilling and unable to see. They also function as tell-tale signs of trauma<sup>iv</sup>, which often manifests itself as a destabilizing, disruptive element in the narrative order the victim attempts to give her own experiences. Thus, Rita's memories appear in no definite sequence and are often punctuated with poetic reminiscences that seemingly have no connection with the trial she is undergoing. Yet, it is in the remembering of these seemingly irrelevant and incoherent episodes from her past that Rita is able to find a voice against the legal context of her trial that limits and delegitimizes her speech. Through these frequent narrative interruptions, Ryga draws attention to the fact that the systemic devaluation and neglect of Rita's speech is integral to the process of her disenfranchisement and both the means and the grounds for the denial of her rights as a human. Yet, it is only through such deviant narrative tangents that Rita sounds a discordant note amidst the discursive monotone of the institutions of power that seek to dictate the terms of her speech. We recognize the traumatized human subject at the centre of such dramatic conflict, not in spite of but because of her failure to conform to the speech codes imposed upon her by the structures of power that seek to define her subjectivity. If the denial of voice impedes the articulation and

recognition of Rita's experiences of suffering as human, then her disruptive speech-acts constitute an appropriation of narrative agency and a reconstruction of her humanity.

These fragmentary, hallucinatory recollections, featuring Rita's father, her sister and her friend, Jamie Paul, serve to externalize the feelings of loss and grief that Rita experiences as a result of the trauma she has been undergoing under the discriminatory regime of the colonial government. As Wasserman argues, "The implication is that this world is being seen both from her troubled perspective *and* as it really is" (51). Thus, even when Rita recollects an incident from her childhood when she and her younger sister, Eileen were caught in a summer storm, the scene is invaded by the shadowy murderers silhouetted against the lightning in the background (31). The dramatization of how a tender moment of sisterly bonding is threatened by the menacing spectre of murder effectively represents the contamination of the safe space of home and family with the possibility of violence. Rita's frequent recollections of her past also undercut the grand narrative of progress and development with which the representatives of the colonial regime seek to gloss over the violence and injustice at its basis. Though inadmissible in the court of law as evidence, these disjointed memories and reflections give the audience a glimpse into the inner truth of Rita's experience and help them identify her as a flesh-and-blood human character with her own back-story rather than simply a racialized type. This narrative re-inscription of Rita's character as one with a recognizably human voice calls upon the audience to acknowledge the violence inherent in the very structures of colonial administration that deny credence to such subjective "stories" in order to preserve their dominance over the dehumanized, criminalized native subject. In fact, insofar as these narrative detours into the realm of memory and imagination constitute a confessional performance of the suffering and violation undergone by their human subject, they offer a challenge to the perpetrators' accounts of Rita's life and subvert mainstream colonial history<sup>v</sup>.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the Magistrate displays a condescending impatience towards Rita's detours into her own past and seeks repeatedly to pull her back into the proceedings of the trial. In fact, as Peter Dickinson observes, "[S]he is as much on trial for her insistent imposition of her family and cultural memories upon a social and political system that already wishes to forget her" (207). In fact, the preservation of the supremacy of the institutions of colonial power depends crucially on the silencing of voices like Rita's, for to acknowledge those would be an admission of their humanity. Thus, the trial is marked by an excess of documentary evidence against Rita that turn the space of the courtroom into "a network of written information drawn from multiple disciplines [that] converge around the criminal body, seeking a knowledge that will enable a later transformation, a disciplinary "re-righting" of deviance (Boire13). It is this disciplinary inscription of Rita Joe's criminality that constitutes a denial of her own voice as human, since her only form of protest – oral and gestural – does not bear the stamp of legitimacy in the official code of law. Thus, the various testimonies become a "nightmare babble" as the voices of each of these witnesses overlap and overwhelm Rita (45). The sensory overload created here through the use of multiple, disembodied, indistinguishable voices is an effective means of dramatizing the collective victimization and dehumanization of Rita by a system that is forever biased against her. Yet, it is also precisely at this instance that Rita voices her protest "*cutting over the babble*": "You got rules here that was made before I was born...I was hungry when I stole something...an' I was hollerin' I was so lonely when I started whoring" (45). Her impassioned defence of her own actions is based on an instinctive plea for the recognition of her humanity and an understanding of the fact that the predetermined rules of the legal and social system put her in a position of disadvantage. It is at this moment of conflict between Rita's solitary and pathetic appeal for empathy and the combined, unsparing indictment of her actions that implicates the legal system in the violation of

the human rights of Rita and “reverse[s] the focus of interrogation, thus “trying” the system which creates criminals from the remains of its own victims” (Boire 9).

In the same vein, Rita voices her protest against the institution of religion when the Christian priest, Father Andrew visits her in prison and offers her some vacuous spiritual consolation. Rita's mockery of the Priest's superior social power and her rebuttal of his condescending advice amounts to an assertion of her right to dignity and equal treatment. In a rare instance of clarity, Rita recalls her uncle's account of the spread of Christianity among the native Canadian tribes: “Long ago the white man come with Bibles to talk to my people, who had the land. They talk for hundred years... then we had all the Bibles, an' the white man had our land...” (47). Thus, by establishing a logical connection between her personal experience of persecution and the instrumental role played by religion in the emergence of European colonialism in Canada, Rita is able to map a collective history of the dispossession of an entire community and indict the very institution of the Church that casts her in the predetermined role of a sinner. In refusing to accede to the Priest's demand for a confession and asserting her desire for freedom, Rita essentially voices her humanity that the codes of the Christian religion, in consonance with those of the colonial administrative and legal system, negate. In what amounts to a performative arraignment of the Church and its jurisdiction over her, Rita bursts out:

You go to hell [...] Go tell your God... when you see him... tell him about Rita Joe an' what they done to her! Tell him about yourself too!... That you were not good enough for me, but that didn't stop you tryin'! Tell him that! (47)

Rita's outright rejection of the theological scheme of sin, suffering and redemption, which the Priest recommends to her ostensibly as a source of solace, draws attention to the hypocrisy of a system of justice that condones the violation and negation of her human rights in the material world of the present and offers instead a promise of spiritual salvation in the future. In each of these instances, Rita voices her resistance to the institutionalized discourses that marginalize her subjective experience and deny her identity as human, and thus reasserts her agency to narrate her own story as a human.

It is the same impulse to rebel against the silencing of dissenting voices that Rita's friend, Jamie Paul expresses when he openly challenges the authority of Mr. Homer and the Magistrate with his parting cry, “Gimme back my truth!” (55). The claim to one's right to tell one's own story, even if (and especially if) it contradicts the official discourses of law, order and progress, constitutes a demand for agency and recognition as a human subject, and it is precisely this claim that the colonial regime of power seeks to suppress through Jimmy's incarceration. In what has been foreshadowed throughout the play with the use of the choral songs, the murderers close in on Jamie and Rita in the final scene, thrashing the former and throwing him in front of a speeding train and raping and killing the latter. This harrowing spectacle of the violation of their bodies is a logical culmination of the trial, in that both Jamie and Rita have already been discursively and institutionally cast in roles that devalue their humanness and make their lives dispensable to the colonial regime.

Ryga symbolically implicates the entire cast of the play in this final realization of Rita's trial as their recorded voices overlap to repeat the words they have already uttered. The repetition of the ritual of the trial (one that Rita has undergone several times before) points to the fact that “theatricality may be an inherent part of the judicial process” and forces the audience to recognize the performative aspect of human rights discourse (Rae 51). It is the lack of formal acknowledgement of Rita's rights as human that foregrounds the culpability of the oppressive institutions of law, administration, education and religion in her criminalization and implicates

the audience in the witnessing of her ultimate, fatal violation. In an instance of chilling but not unexpected irony, the perpetrators of the crime (including the murderers) solemnly attend the funeral of Jamie and Rita, thus representing a perpetuation of the colonial order that condones the violation of the rights of its dehumanized subjects. It is only Eileen's soft protest ("No!.. No!... No more!") that marks a note of dissent – too feeble to restore a balance of power and justice but significant enough to prevent a total elision of Rita's memory from the collective consciousness of a witnessing audience: "When Rita Joe first came to the city, she told me... the cement made her feet hurt" (59). By means of retuning to personal memory that the spectacle of violence on stage threatens to completely overshadow, Ryga posits the entire play as a form of narrative commemoration of Rita's life and death, both as an individual and as a symbol of her community.

In conclusion, Ryga compels the audience to recognize and confront the discourses of law, morality, religion and education as historically specific institutional tools implicated in the exclusion of the native subject from the category of the "human". At the same time, by foregrounding Rita Joe's voice over and above the discursive norms of the colonial enterprise, the play also enables a narrative identification of the traumatized victim as a subject of human rights violation. As Boire observes, the play "strategically reverses the focus of legal enquiry...[so that] 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" (10). The violent culmination of Rita's story (her "ecstasy") serves both as a public acknowledgement of the destruction of the human and as a preventive against cultural amnesia about the colonial legacy of Canada. Thus, by means of dramatizing dehumanizing state violence, Ryga enables a collective recognition of the breach of the human rights of the play's titular subject as well as the formation of a shared cultural memory of colonial history for a witnessing audience both responsible and responsive towards narratives of atrocity.

## Notes

---

<sup>i</sup> Winfried Bruggen (1996) proposes that "human rights aim at securing a self-determinate, meaningful, and responsible way of leading one's life for every human being". Based on this formula of "the image of the person" in human rights discourse, Bruggen contends that "the master ideals for the good and just life [...] provide the general horizon of perspectives on potential development" in any culture (601-02). In excluding Rita Joe from the very normative limits of realizing this potential, the colonial regime denies her recognition as a human subject as well as the possibility of seeking redressal of such violation.

<sup>ii</sup> It is a well-documented fact that the colonial policy of enforced cultural assimilation followed by the Canadian government in the public schooling system from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries resulted in the physical, emotional and sexual exploitation of native children.

<sup>iii</sup> Anthony Langlois (2005) points out that Enlightenment historiography posits a universal history of mankind, wherein all societies are seen as progressing from a state of barbarism to a single model of civilization. This results in the creation of a "generic humanity" based on the marginalization of cultural differences (377). Thus, the very idea of the "human", as a fundamental construct meant to justify the 'civilizing' mission of colonial regimes, may be seen as a discursive tool of marginalization and oppression of the 'uncivilized' native.

<sup>iv</sup> In the context of Holocaust testimonies, Dori Laub (1992) argues that historical inaccuracies in the accounts of concentration camp survivors do not take away from the credibility of their experience; rather, it is the psychological truth of the witnesses' memory of trauma, with all its gaps and silences, that is the real subject of testimony.

<sup>v</sup> In the context of the emergence of various truth and reconciliation commissions in the post-Human Rights era, Leigh A. Payne (2008) argues that public confessions by perpetrators of HR violations do not necessarily effect reconciliation but generate debate around official versions of history and enable audiences to produce contesting narratives that expose the truth of systematic and brutal violence (34-40).

### Works Cited

- Boire, Gary. "Tribunations: George Ryga's Postcolonial Trial 'Play'", *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 22.2 (1991): 6-20.
- Brugger, Winfried. "The Image of the Person in the Human Rights Concept", *Human Rights Quarterly* 18.3 (1996): 594-611.
- Dickinson, Peter. "Murdered and Missing Women: Performing Indigenous Cultural Memory in British Columbia and Beyond", *Theatre Survey* 55.2 (2014): 202-232.
- Grace, Sherrill. "The Expressionist Legacy in the Canadian Theatre: George Ryga and Robert Gurik", *Canadian Literature* 118 (1988): 47-58.
- Langlois, Anthony J. "The Narrative Metaphysics of Human Rights", *International Journal of Human Rights* 9.3 (2005): 369-387.
- Laub, Dori. "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening." *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*. Eds. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub. London: Routledge, 1992. 57-74.
- Nayar, Pramod K. *Human Rights and Literature: Writing Rights*. New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2016.
- Payne, Leigh A. *Unsettling Accounts: Neither Truth Nor Reconciliation in Confessions of State Violence*. Durham: Duke UP, 2008.
- Rae, Paul. *Theatre and Human Rights*. New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2009.
- Ryga, George. "The Ecstasy of Rita Joe". *Modern Canadian Plays* (Vol. 1). Ed. Jerry Wasserman. Vancouver: Talon Books, 2000. 25-59.
- Wasserman, Jerry. "It's the Do-gooders Burn My Ass': Modern Canadian Drama and the Crisis of Liberalism", *Modern Drama* 43.1 (2000): 32-47.