

"Give Me Back the Real Me"
The Politics of Identity and *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, 1967 - 1992

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Abstract

Practically since its celebrated premiere in 1967, George Ryga's drama about urban Native Canadians, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, has enjoyed canonical status in Canada. Yet the same three decades that have seen over 200 productions of *Rita Joe* have also witnessed radical transformations in the ways First Nations' peoples are represented, heard and perceived in Canada. How has a play written about Natives by a non-Native man in 1967 managed such a long production history on such contentious and unstable ground? How do identity politics influence this piece of theatre, and how does the theatre shape identity politics?

As popular notions about Native identities have changed and as Native people continue to represent themselves in and out of court, and on and off the stage, this play about Native people in Canada has been performed and re-performed. But the directors, the venues, the actors, the costumes and sets, the language itself and (most significantly) the resulting characterizations have changed over the years — in subtle and rather dramatic ways. While the words and the fundamental plot of *Rita Joe* have remained the same, its messages about Native identity has evolved since 1967, in relation to social, political, economic, and cultural changes. Indeed, historical developments impact the particular ways an "Indian" is represented in a particular time; what makes a "real Indian" tends to shift with the political and social needs of the moment. This paper examines the way Native identity is represented in eight productions of *Rita Joe* mounted between 1967 and 1992, creating a production history that focuses on the relationship between representations of identity and particular moments in time and space and, ultimately, discerns a complex and symbiotic relationship between the aesthetic, creative world and the historio-political world. Perhaps most remarkably, the play stretches to accommodate diverse cultural narratives, gathering meaning from the identity politics of its particular performance place and time.

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In 1967, George Ryga's now-classic play documenting the tragic realities for First Nations' people, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, debuted in Vancouver — written, produced and directed by white Canadians. Its producers cast white actress Frances Hyland in the title role as a young Native woman living and ultimately dying on the streets of Vancouver. Reviewer Jack Richards, heralding Hyland as “a magnificent messenger” in the pages of the *Vancouver Sun*, seemed particularly struck by the authenticity of her performance: her “every movement, every gesture, every word sketched a vivid, all-too-familiar picture of the Indian girl from a reservation in the country, bewildered and degraded....”⁰ James Barber of the *Vancouver Province*, reflecting stereotypes prevalent then and now, wrote that the play was “a documentary of the Indian problem...a misunderstood people with strange gods caught up in the irreconcilable conflict that arises from imposing the urban and organized values of society on simple, rural children.”¹ This play about “the Indian problem” delivered a wake-up call to Canadian audiences in their Centennial year. As a 1976 Vancouver reviewer would later reflect, Ryga's play “punctured the euphoria and smug complacency of Canada's birthday celebrations and declared unequivocally that all was not well with this country and its institutions.”²

Fast forward twenty-five years to the silver-anniversary staging of *Rita Joe* at Vancouver's Firehall Arts Centre. Reflections on the 1992 performance, taken as a whole, differ strikingly in tone and language. Although reviewers write about the same play — that is to say, the same words and the same plot — they derive a very different message, a testimony to the strong and enduring First Nations people of Canada. A Firehall press release, avoiding any mention of “tragedy” or “social victims,” promises “a provocative, powerful and poetic look at the social, economic and political issues facing our first people.” The cast, featuring Native people in all Native roles and even an African-American man in a “white” role, went so far as to debate the value of performing Ryga's play at all in the pages of the *Vancouver Sun*. In this discussion, Ryga is accused of “voice appropriation”: narrating a story that should rightfully be told by Indians themselves. “People would rather go and see a white person's book about Natives than go and see a Native play written and performed by Natives,” lamented this *Rita Joe*, Vancouver actress Columpa

Bobb.³ People received the play, Bobb noted, not as the wake-up call of 1967, but as a grim reminder of how "so many things have stayed the same" for Native people.

Clearly, the ways First Nations' peoples were represented and perceived in Canada changed significantly between 1967 and 1992, far more significantly than this short example can convey. The same three decades that saw over 200 productions of *Rita Joe* also saw intense Red Power protests, the 1969 White Paper on Indian Policy and the Nielsen report, the influential *Caulder* decision of 1972 (which led to the negotiation of modern treaties), battles over Native fishing grounds, land rights and self-government, Oka, and raging voice appropriation debates. As popular notions about Native identities have changed and as Native people continue to represent themselves in and out of court, and on and off the stage, this play about Native people in Canada has been performed and re-performed. But the directors, the venues, the actors, the costumes and sets, the language itself and (most significantly) the resulting characterizations have changed over the years — in subtle and rather dramatic ways. While the words and the fundamental plot of *Rita Joe* have remained the same, its messages about Native identity have evolved since 1967, in relation to social, political, economic, and cultural changes, and certainly because of the hard work of native actors, directors and writers. Examining a series of specific productions reveals that the temporal and geographic space of a particular production, the ideology of its producers, actors and audiences, and a host of other variables ultimately alter the play's messages. This short paper examines representations of Native identity in the production history of *Rita Joe* — analyzing the relationship between representations of identity and a particular temporal moment in a variety of productions, and ultimately discerning the complex and symbiotic relationship between the aesthetic, creative world and the historio-political world.

It would be impossible to discuss every production mounted between 1967 and 1992 in this space; furthermore, many of these productions have not left a significant historical record. Since my primary goal is compiling a selection of historically and geographically diverse productions to study, I have not attempted to be comprehensive. The following is a list of major professional productions of *Rita Joe* from 1967 to 1992 which I have uncovered and which will be discussed here: the 1967 premiere in Vancouver;

the 1969 remount in Ottawa; a 1973 Washington, D.C. performance; a 1975 London, England production; a 1982 tour mounted by the Prairie Theatre Exchange in Winnipeg; a 1984 Calgary production; a 1989 Toronto production; and the twenty-fifth-anniversary staging in Vancouver in 1992. By closely examining records of these historically and geographically diverse performances, we discover what these specific productions and their critics had to say about Native Canadian identity, and how and why those messages change from production to production. What choices have production companies made in representing Native people? What political messages are theatres thus picking up and transmitting? What messages are Native and non-Native audiences getting, messages that impact their views and in turn impact their politics? By asking these questions about each production, we develop a sense of the changing faces of First Nations people in *Rita Joe* and in Canadian society, and can draw some synergetic links between those representational changes and the socio-political history of this time.

Along with programmes, interviews and other archival records from specific productions, this paper relies heavily on first-hand accounts of performances taken from newspapers and other media. While newspaper reviews are a tremendous source — particularly when many accounts describe a single production — they are certainly not a perfect source. We know, for example, that the particular biases of a newspaper or a reporter can certainly color an ostensibly “impartial” account, and that reviewers do not always reflect the sentiments of general audiences. It is imperative that we remember these limitations. But along with the archival material from the theatres themselves, professional reviews comprise the majority of the available historical record, and are, for better or worse, an essential element in uncovering theatrical histories.

Plays which continue to be performed over a significant period of time offer a unique look at history and cultural change. Although the words and the plot stay the same, sustained productions clearly change over time in relation to larger societal changes. Analyzing production histories in this way relies on something of an assumed, dialectical relationship between “timeless” performances and historically marked audiences. To be performed repeatedly — to be considered current and classical — plays have to have a

message, intrinsically, for their current audience. But, to say something to their audiences, plays sometimes evolve in historically significant ways. Thus, tracing a play through various productions over time, especially a play with contentious or political messages (like *Rita Joe* or *Hamlet*, for example) tends to reveal very dynamic and powerful social assertions and assumptions. As performance theorist Elin Diamond writes, "it is impossible to write the pleasurable embodiments we call performance without tangling with the cultural stories, traditions and political contestations that comprise our sense of history."⁴ By examining claims about Native identity and politics in the sustained production history of *Rita Joe*, one can learn more about the politics of identity in Canada from 1967 to 1992, and appreciate the relationship between politics and art through history — emphasizing both the profound relevance of the arts in shaping our world and the profound impact of politics in the aesthetic world.

Powerful and tenacious stereotypes of native people have informed and pervaded their portrayal in Canadian (and American) history, and continue to affect the way their actions are characterized in the media and the arts today. Mass cultural images of Native people and the resulting white mythologies have long been characterized by a reliance on designated Indian artifacts, mannerisms and values to transmit messages of "real" Indian-ness.⁵ Constructed ideas about Indian identity are multifarious and contradictory. But from the varied cast of Tonto-esque sidekicks, noble Princesses and chunky squaws, consistent Indian roles emerge and are assigned to Native people. Most Indians are represented as trapped in history, unable to adapt to mainstream society and incapable of distinct cultural vibrance. Historical developments impact the particular ways an Indian is represented in a particular time; what makes a "real Indian" tends to shift with the political and social needs of the moment.

Although this production history of *Rita Joe* spans the years 1967 to 1992, it is important to reach back several decades to get an understanding of the historical and cultural events shaping Indian reality and representation in these years. Historians agree that, over the first half of the 20th Century, most non-native Canadians believed that Native people were members of a dying race. Indeed, the constructed and stereotypical Noble Savage popular in these years derives his romantic allure from the inevitability of his

complete extinction.⁶ Given this widespread, constructed notion of Native identity, the Canadian census of 1941 came as quite a shock to policy makers, as Dianne Newell relates in her book on Native communities and fisheries: "The 1941 federal census had shown [Indians] to be the fastest-growing group in the country. By 1960, their numbers were expanding by about 3 per cent per year."⁷ With the realization that the Indian population was not dying but was, in fact, growing came national recognition of "The Indian Problem" — the very existence of Indians is the problem — and, in turn, a perception of Native people as hopeless, helpless victims trapped in a world they could not understand or alter. Compounding the "problem," government policy forced Indians, particularly the young, off reserves and into large urban markets. Alienated from their support systems and offered no real opportunities, the "urban Indian" (as depicted in *Rita Joe*) was very much a contemporary social phenomenon when Ryga's play was written.

This same conceptual shift engendered a major change in cultural representations of Native people. To say that noble savagism died hard after 300 years as the dominant representation of Native people in Canada is both an understatement and a falsehood — for the noble savage lives today in Canadian theatre and popular images. During these years, however, the noble savage certainly took a back seat to a more dominant image of the Indian as a national tragedy and a serious social and urban problem. The plays of this time miraculously transformed the more familiar, noble-but-dying savages into an unsolvable, hand-wringing cultural predicament: pitiful and pitiable characters doomed — not by the extinction of their race, as earlier plays held, or by white people, as later plays would contend — but by their inability to live in either the (Indian) past or the (white) present.⁸ Like the theatrically constructed image of the noble savage, the "Indian-problem Indian" did important cultural work for the dominant political ideology. (As Margaret Atwood wrote in 1972 in *Survival*:, "An imported whiteman looks at a form of natural or Native life and appropriates it for symbolic purposes. The Indians and Eskimos have rarely been considered in and for themselves; they are usually made into projections of something in the white Canadian psyche, a fear or a wish."⁹) Behind these artistic decisions of character and plot, of course, lay a political need for a new

national narrative — the image of Native people as helpless, victimized by what amounted to their own culture, and utterly without hope.

Despite the limited insight of political leaders in the 1950s and 1960s, Indians and many white Canadians called for more information and better solutions for Indians during these years, for social, moral and economic reasons.¹⁰ Native poverty, problems with resource allocation and the large-scale migrations of Native people from reserves to cities caught the attention of white Canadians. This impulse spurred Harry Hawthorn's *Survey of Contemporary Indians*, known as the Hawthorn report, which detailed the appalling conditions and daily degradations of Indian life in Canada; a 1958 pilot study on British Columbian Indians preceded the much-larger national report, which Ottawa released in two volumes in 1966 and 1967.¹¹ While the report made it clear that the Indian Act, amended or not, was not working, it also laid the ideological groundwork for the highly unpopular, assimilationist policies the government would eventually propose.¹² The final volume of the Hawthorn report was released in 1967, Canada's Centennial year. Neither the promise nor the irony of this coincidence was lost on Native groups. Nor was the potential of this national threshold lost on poet and playwright George Ryga, who in 1967 wrote *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*.

Ryga was commissioned to write the play in 1966 for the Vancouver Playhouse, as part of an all-Canadian season of plays celebrating the 1967 national centennial.¹³ Although the story of *Rita Joe* was inspired by a short article in the *Vancouver Sun*, it is a story which (as many noted then) could have taken place in any Canadian city. Rita Joe is a young woman who has left the reserve because of its hopelessness, only to find herself just as hopeless in the city. With her we drift through memory and reality from one experience to another, moving from the courtroom where she stands trial for prostitution and vagrancy to the reserve and back again. Along the way we meet her boyfriend, Jaimie Paul, who is also unhappy and restless in the city and her father, David Joe, a stoic patriarch from the reserve. We watch her struggle in vain to communicate with and to understand the ways of the white establishment before finally succumbing to her death: a brutal and (in the context of Ryga's story) inevitable rape-murder.

Ryga's play is ideologically connected to the politics of its birth year in a number of ways. Most obviously, *Rita Joe* owes some of its success to the same societal curiosity about and concern for Native people that produced the Hawthorn report; many white Canadians wanted to understand their nation, particularly in light of the national introspection of 1967. The play reflects many of the sentiments of the Hawthorn research, particularly the inadequacy of social services. But Ryga goes further, revealing the racism, stupidity and ill-will at the heart of white Canada's failures — both linking *Rita Joe* to and distinguishing it from the more prototypical, blame-free "Indian Problem" plays. In Ryga's story, the villains behind the "Indian problem" are revealed pointedly and systematically as individuals: the priest, the teacher, the bureaucrat, the white liberal, the agent of legal justice. Finally, while the Hawthorn report suggests urbanization as a possibility for Native people, Ryga offers a stinging critique of this notion; the city is just another dead end for the Native people of *Rita Joe*.

Like its script, the original 1967 production of *Rita Joe* at the Vancouver Playhouse represents a particular temporal moment in the history of Canada and the representation of Native Canadians. Although the Playhouse is Vancouver's premier local theatre and caters to an affluent crowd, it is located around the corner from a "skid row" area frequented by down-on-their-luck urban Natives, bringing real-life drama uncomfortably close to fictional drama. In this production, the "Indian problem" is a regrettable but undeniable fact; Native people are presented as the ultimate, passive victims of a society they cannot begin to understand or to fight, and as relics of a bygone era. Although "white" people are clearly to blame for this state of affairs, they are also (implicitly) signified as fit to enact, characterize and frame the story of *Rita Joe*. This point is exemplified by an examination of three major areas in the original production of *Rita Joe*: casting and characterization, the attitudes of the production staff, and the reactions of critics and (as well as can be determined) audiences.

In the first production, in addition to casting the prominent white Canadian actress Frances Hyland as *Rita Joe*, the lead Native male characters (Jaimie Paul and David Joe) were played by Native actors, with the popular West Coast Native Canadian actor Chief Dan George as David Joe. I found no

evidence that any public, critical voice challenged the decision to cast a white woman as Rita Joe in 1967, although two rather obscure stories hint at the actors' own feelings about race and casting. A 1967 Toronto article on the play relates a story untold elsewhere: "Chief Dan had resented Franny's playing his daughter because she was a white woman. But during the second week of rehearsal he came to [the director] and said, 'I think of her as my own daughter. Now I must be David Joe.'" ¹⁴ Hyland made this comment in a later interview: "Chief Dan said a real Rita Joe could never tell her own story and that it was better that I should do it for her." ¹⁵ If these accounts are accurate, George ultimately accepted a white woman in the title role, and perceived limitations for a more "authentic" voice.

In interviews, Hyland was quite frank about the ethnic mannerisms she adopted to play Rita Joe, and her hard work was met with public praise for the authenticity of her characterization. In his *Vancouver Province* review, Lorne Parton raves about Hyland's physical presence as Rita Joe. ¹⁶ "Hyland is unbelievably real in her characterization of an Indian girl," wrote Parton. Her "absorption of the Indian mystique" was facilitated by the fact that she was "virtually adopted" by George and family, he writes. Like the earlier story attesting to George's paternal feelings for Hyland, this comment blurs Hyland's ethnic identity by focusing instead on her status as an Indian-by-association. Hyland and Parton discussed how a white person properly plays an Indian: "Not only has she (Hyland) mastered an authentic Indian accent," Parton wrote, "but she has accomplished something more difficult: she moves like an Indian girl. I asked her how she did it and she explained, 'I try to think of nothing under my heels but the ground.'" Their exchange reveals some of the (rather racist and constructed) assumptions which underlay an "authentic" characterization of an Indian woman in the dominant Canadian theatre of 1967. Although another reviewer, Nathan Cohen, deemed Hyland's characterization "believable," he painted a rather-less-flattering picture of Hyland's mannerisms and gait: "She shuffles around the stage in sweater, jeans and sneakers (and) wrinkles her nose....," he wrote. ¹⁷ James Barber's description of her 1969 Rita Joe, published in the *Vancouver Province*, really makes one wonder what exactly this "authentic" Indian movement and speech was all about. "Frances Hyland as Rita Joe walks pigeon-toed out of the audience to the stage, a study of

apathy, flatfooted, splaylegged, tired and stumbling. . .with that liquid, woods-and-sea voice.”¹⁸ And this was a flattering review.

Chief Dan George received great acclaim for what audiences recognized as dignity and authenticity in his portrayal of David Joe in 1967, 1969 and 1973. “It might even be enough for Chief Dan George simply to bestow on the play his presence and that wonderful face with the wisdom of the ages etched on it,” an Ottawa reviewer noted in 1969. “Instead, he brings to the role an authentic dignity and humour which is eloquent beyond words.” More recent analyses have criticized him for portraying the ultimate white-man’s Indian. Cultural scholar Terry Goldie, who in 1989 describes George’s David Joe as “a perpetuation of a noble savage stereotype of an order seldom seen in contemporary white culture,” claims that the semiotic sins of both George and Ryga were compounded by that fact that a “real” Indian portrayed an absolute construction on stage, thus manipulating the audience’s sense of authenticity.¹⁹ That Goldie believes that audiences accepted George’s characterization as truth speaks both to the power of performance in shaping notions of identity, and to the already-dominant cultural “knowledge” of what Indians were like in the late 1960s. The important thing for our purposes is that — despite the criticisms of inauthenticity and stereotyping — the performances of Hyland and George were seen by many in the late 1960s and early 1970s as utterly authentic portrayals of contemporary Indian identity.

Certain notions of Native identity were also reflected in the attitudes of the play’s producers and designers. In terms of costuming, make-up and hair, this original production of *Rita Joe* was styled very attractively — a decision which could speak to the star-power of Hyland and the aesthetics of the era, or could signal a deeper strategy of portraying the naive young ethnic girl as sexualized and attractive.²⁰ The art on the cover of the programme points to the latter: a curvaceous young woman with long, unfettered curls, who is clearly non-white but could easily be African-Canadian or Latina, looks upward, her long thin neck pulling the eye down to her low-cut shirt and unusually protuberant breast.²¹ The set for the *Rita Joe* premiere consisted of a series of ramps and a “maze scrim” (a curtain) which, along with the circular choreography, represented this innocent Rita’s trapped and hopeless situation.²² The image of “the butt of a

cut tree" was also present.²³ If one equates nature with Native people (as many discussing the play at this time do) the set piece can be read as an indication of the death of the Indians and their way of life, an interpretation which is bolstered by the contemporary reflections of Ryga himself.

Although Ryga's comments in the programme were no doubt written and read as a compassionate social critique, they also (perhaps unwittingly) present a vision of Native people as irrelevant, pitiable relics that time has passed by. "Canadian Indians have languages that bear little reference to the realities of our lives," he writes. "There is no word for jet aircraft, air hammer, computer, freightshed. As with their languages so with their lives, they became the forgotten people, mutely desiring health and life."²⁴ The programme also reprints Dan George's words of protest on Canada's Centennial, portions of which also seem to present a vision of Native people as culturally dead and to encourage assimilation with the rest of Canada: "Let me humbly accept this new culture and through it rise up and go on...I shall grab the instruments of the white man's success — his education, his skills and with these new tools I shall build my race...."²⁵ Director George Bloomfield made reference to his own ideas about the essential character of Native people when he said frankly in a 1967 interview that Indian actors "did not grow up with the white man's inhibitions."²⁶ It is important to resist a presentist condemnation of Ryga, George, Bloomfield, Hyland and others associated with the production. They created what is arguably the most popular socially conscious performance in Canadian history, an act which certainly required courage and character. Instead, we can cull from their words and actions an understanding of the ideas about Native identity which were taken for granted during these years — ideas which reviewers and other audience members also reflect.

James Barber's aforementioned sympathetic description of the Indians of *Rita Joe* as a victimized, powerless race ("a bewildered and confused people," "simple, rural children") was repeated and amplified by other members of the critical audience. One radio reviewer, speaking of the "victims of colonization," managed in a few short sentences to make reference to Native people as trapped in history, as tied to nature and as biologically determined: "Torn between the ties of the past, the blue evening of the first warm day,

of being free to live and laugh — children of nature. Torn between what is in the blood and the phony attraction of the streets.”²⁷ Less dramatic examples still contain nuggets of “truth” about Indian identity. A rather harmless profile of Native actor August Schellenberg in the role of Jaimie Paul, for example, notes that Schellenberg answered questions “in Indian-type staccato.”²⁸ Some of the ideas about Native identity reflected here were no doubt culturally ingrained in these audience members before they saw the show. Based on the evidence we have reviewed to this point, however, it seems likely that *Rita Joe* did not challenge these ideas, and very likely supported some of them.

In sharp contrast to the profusion of social theory the play seemed to inspire in reviewers, many observers note that audiences were silenced and awed by the production: “It wasn’t taken as a sort of dramatic event that you applauded afterwards,” Playhouse Artistic Director Joy Coghill noted. “It was such a moving experience that the people didn’t want to clap. They simply were stunned.”²⁹ In the opinion of one Toronto reviewer, the play’s characterizations of Indians were non-offensive to Native audiences at the time: “The Indians who have seen it have loved it,” while “the white men have sat in rapt silence taking their lumps for a situation they helped create.”³⁰ Indeed, many observers remarked that “white” audiences responded to the abject victimhood of the characters in *Rita Joe* with a measure of pity and guilt. “The silence it commands in the theatre,” CBC radio reviewer Ben Metcalfe stated, “is perhaps the echo of shame and guilt, even momentary contrition.”³¹

The silence of the audience turned to loud applause in 1969, when *Rita Joe* moved to Ottawa and became the first English language production in the theatre-in-the-round at the newly-opened National Arts Centre. As Innes wrote, “the opening night received a five minute standing ovation that paid tribute to the actors’ skill and the play’s status, in place of the silent stillness that had acknowledged their intensity and its passion (in 1967.)”³² Barber lectured in the pages of the *Vancouver Province* that the Ottawa audience’s applause was an inappropriate and disturbing response to Ryga’s play, noting perceptively that the change signaled a fundamental shift in the cultural work of the performance:

Are they . . . applauding their own relief at being able to sit comfortable and warm in a theatre

while they achieve vicarious understanding of a problem that has once and for all been shown in sufficient detail to be talked about but remember only as a cultural experience?³³

But Barber's admonitions to the audience were likely misplaced; the Ottawa audiences were cheering for a different production than the one Vancouverites had silently pondered in 1967. Indeed, director David Gardner's 1969 production is remembered as a more slick, more professional and certainly more highly anticipated production of *Rita Joe* in Canada's premier showcase. These were not the only distinctive features of the Ottawa performance. Although the casts of the 1967 and 1969 productions were almost identical and the productions were only two years apart, the representation of Native people shifted to accommodate the particular time and space of this performance. At the same time, the impact of these mutable characterizations upon the audience was sometimes different, reflecting changing audiences and times.

This is not to say that the same stereotypical constructions did not emerge around the 1969 production. Frances Hyland and Dan George, by all accounts, maintained the essence of their characterizations. Ottawa reviewer Robin Dorrell, characteristically remarking on the "nobility" and "validity" of George's performance, again raises the question of how an authentic Indian looks and moves: "In his tired face is the sorry history of the Indian nations," Dorrell writes. "His shuffling walk betrays a future without hope."³⁴ Bolstering the validity of Terry Goldie's semiotic fears about George blurring the line between "real" Indians and stage Indians, Montreal critic Patrick McFadden noted that "it is right that (George) should so confront us, an uneasy reminder of the social realities behind the theatrical illusion."³⁵ Comments about Hyland's character reflect the same stereotypical ideas about authenticity and race. Reflecting both the victimized status of *Rita Joe*'s Native characters and Hyland's characterization, McFadden wrote that Hyland "has created in Rita the country's first modern martyr." Christopher Dafoe of the *Vancouver Sun* spoke of this innocent victimhood in Hyland's character indirectly when he noted that "one is tempted to wish for a harder edge to the character...Rita Joe seems, at times, to be too much the unfortunate waif with big brown eyes."³⁶ Audrey Ashley of the *Ottawa Citizen* added an interesting critical

dimension to our knowledge of Hyland's speech patterns when she noted that "the rhythms of speech which the playwright uses often make Rita Joe appear obtuse."³⁷ This is not the last we will hear about Hyland's speech and movement.

Reviews and articles based on the production tend to reflect the same highly fantastic and victimized views of Native people in Canada. Reflecting on the message of the 1969 *Rita Joe*, Dafoe waxed metaphoric and stereotypical. "Caught between two cultures," he wrote, "they gasp like beached salmon."³⁸ Writing about an encounter with Dan George, Frank Penn of the *Ottawa Citizen* described him as "sitting like some small island of serenity against the frenziedly-active backdrop" and swooned over "those brooding eyes."³⁹ Critics also seemed to feel that *Rita Joe* presented a view of Native people as victims, and of the Native situation in Canada as hopeless. Remarking that the production supported a view of the "suffering Indian," Dorrell described the play as "a mission-oriented, highly biased documentary."⁴⁰ In a too-perfect example of the play's temporal location, Jacob Siskind of the *Montreal Gazette* wrote that "if Rita Joe says anything it is, in the current lingo, 'Man, you can't beat the system, so swing with it,'" — a fatalistic proposition in any lingo.⁴¹

Despite the similarities of characterization and critical reaction in the 1967 and 1969 productions, one can also detect a number of important shifts in the representation and the reception of ideas about Native people. Most notably, Ryga actually altered the play's content between 1967 and 1969. Ryga, Innes tells us, became "aware that the attitude of the Indian community had changed in the interval (between 1967 and 1969) from despairing resignation to determination and a renewed assertion of their Native values." While it is questionable if the attitude of the "Indian community" had changed, powerful social forces (like Indian activism in Canada and the Red Power and Civil Rights movements in the U.S.) certainly highlighted the pride and outrage of Native people. According to Innes, Ryga became aware of cultural changes that had already overtaken his text. Innes describes the changes here:

The closing moments of the first production highlight degradation and injustice — with a dazed Jaimie, beaten up by the murderers, being arrested as a drunk by a policeman who ignores the rape and with Rita's body ignominiously crammed into a packing case. . .

(In Ottawa) the ending has a tragic, archetypal quality, with the additional murder of Jaimie corresponding to a pattern set up earlier in one of the songs and a formal funeral ceremony.⁴²

It is perhaps historically significant that Innes, writing in 1984, does not explicitly describe the aspect of the new ending one finds most striking in 2000; instead of moping about after Rita's death, the Native characters now stood facing the audience proudly and defiantly. As reviewer Jack Richards described it, "the Indians do not leave the stage with the body of Rita Joe at the end. They remain and it is the others including the audience who leave." The new finale was a bold statement that Native people had no intention of disappearing or shrinking sadly into the realm of tragedy. "It is a more positive statement of the Indian attitude, now in a great upsurge, of the determination to stand against their treatment by whites," Richards wrote.⁴³

The political impact of the 1969 *Rita Joe* and its representation of Native people changed, too, in relation to its audience. The very act of staging the play in the nation's capital altered its potential impact, in that some of the people soaking in its images of Native people actually had the power to make and change Indian policy in Canada. A Vancouver critic hoped wistfully that "perhaps [*Rita Joe*] can make some even more radical changes in the people who can change the laws, and for that to happen would mean that George Ryga's play would mean and do more than it could locally."⁴⁴ Indeed, the charismatic new prime minister, Pierre Trudeau, attended the production with his Indian Affairs Minister, Jean Chretien. Chretien, on whom the play had a "noticeable impact," reportedly told director David Gardner that he wanted "a third act added to George Ryga's play."⁴⁵ One can interpret Chretien's "third act" as a redemption for Native people, most likely initiated by the government. Indeed, *Vancouver Sun* columnist Allan Fotheringham reported that Chretien himself linked his reaction to the play to a major policy initiative. "So there at the reception was Indian Affairs Minister Jean Chretien," he wrote. "Tell me, Mr. Minister, is this going to produce any results in your policy?" "Just wait. In two weeks, you'll see. There's an announcement coming. People are going to be surprised." ⁴⁶

Chretien was right; the particular policy initiative unveiled two weeks later was unanticipated. What has become known as the White Paper on Indian Policy (*A Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy*) was released on June 25, 1969, and amounted to nothing less than an attack on Native people in Canada. Instead of enlarging social support for Natives, the plan called for the abrupt elimination of Indian status and advocated assimilation: "separate legal status of Indians and the policies which have flowed from it have kept the Indian people apart from and behind other Canadians," it read.⁴⁷ It seems that nothing that Chretien or Trudeau saw in the play dissuaded them from the notion that the new policy was appropriate and just; indeed, if anything, the play reinforced their ideas about Native people and public policy. Even with the altered and more empowering ending, the 1969 production of *Rita Joe* still presented a vision of Native people as victimized and as members of a relic culture; these same ideas underlie the White Paper.

Native reaction to the White Paper was swift, united and victorious. Resistance to the plan and its ideas sparked a new period of self-definition and empowerment for Native people in Canada — a shift that is clearly reflected in subsequent performances of *Rita Joe* in Canada. Three of the most notable performances in the years following the Ottawa staging were a 1969 Montreal performance of *Rita Joe*, a 1973 staging in Washington, D.C. and a 1975 London production.

Obviously, the production of *Rita Joe* staged in Montreal in the fall of 1969 shares most of the historical characteristics of the Ottawa production staged just months earlier. But this production, a French language adaptation titled simply *Rita Joe*, offers an opportunity to examine the way that representations of Native people and interpretations of their situation (particularly their group identity) alter when "translated" to a new language and a new socio-political situation. The 1969 French-language version of *Rita Joe* presents a vision of Native people in Canada contextualized by the group minority experiences of French-Canadians.

Translator-adaptor Gratien Gelinas explicitly linked the situation of Canadian Indians to that of French-Canadians in a November interview:

The problem of *Rita Joe* is basically closer to us as French-Canadians than it is to Anglo-Canadians...People should have the right to live their own lives to decide if and how they can survive...So you can see their problems are closer to us French-Canadians, collectively speaking, than to the people in Vancouver. We are the ones who have a problem with survival.⁴⁸

Gelinas called his *Rita Joe* an adaptation (as opposed to a translation) precisely because of his desire to translate the play not simply into the French language, but into the French-Canadian experience. "It is one thing to convey words from one language to another," he said, "but in an adaptation one can change the locale, one can establish corresponding values."⁴⁹ In this way, the Indians of *Rita Joe* became part of a very specific and distinctive political debate about minority rights and French-speaking Canadians. Their identities and experiences were thus represented, transmitted and received differently, and utilized a new cultural vocabulary of sign and memory. The actors — and the audience, for that matter — were "seeing it through a mentality different to the artists who played it in English," as Gelinas said.⁵⁰ The presence of implicit cultural and historical referents in this *Rita Joe* — specifically, those linked to Gelinas's subtext about French-Canadian identity — necessarily altered representation of Native identity for these audiences; they were probably more apt, for example, to equate themselves with the Native characters than white English-Canadian audiences viewing Ryga's version may have been.

Gelinas' explicit linkage of the two minority groups aside, the very vocabulary with which one talks about minority status in Quebec invokes the French-Canadian experience of group identity. Discourse about group rights is inextricably connected to the French-Canadian situation — even when that situation is not explicitly referenced. Lawrence Sabbath's review of the production typifies this point (and adds a note of xenophobia to an already overdetermined political conversation). "The playwright has depicted in graphic terms," Sabbath wrote, "the national malaise of ignoring one's minorities, of treating the members of our own Canadian family with less respect and decency than is accorded wholeheartedly to tomorrow's unknown immigrant."⁵¹ Sabbath continued, describing the play as a "lament for a dispossessed people denied the basic rights of the majority and made subject to restrictive laws which do not apply to the majority."⁵² But even without such a strong connection to the rancorous identity debates in Quebec, the

translation of *Rita Joe* into another language would have necessarily altered its message and its impact. "In French. . . *Rita Joe* is a different play, and possibly a better one. At any rate, a deeper one," stated one reviewer.⁵³

From examining the 1969 Ottawa and Montreal productions, we learn that productions of written texts transform their meanings over time not simply because of their temporal spaces, but also in relation to their geographical and political spaces — an essential point made all the more clear in looking at the major stagings of *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* in the 1970s. It is ironic that the most prominent productions of Canada's (arguably) most prominent play were performed beyond its borders, in Washington, D.C. and London, England. Neither production was particularly successful critically or economically, but a look at the historical records of both productions reveal much about the representation and understanding of Canadian Indians, about the translations of these "truths" within other national identities, and about the history of constructed Native identities throughout the Western world.

In the historical records of the Washington and London productions — alongside the more-dominant stereotypical characterizations of and commentary about Indians — one finds a just-dawning awareness of the problems with representing and categorizing Native people as child-like and doomed victims, recognizable by their quaint movement and speech. Sprinkled throughout the productions' publicity materials are moments that suggest that the social protests of Native people in the 1960s and 1970s (first in the U.S. and then in both the U.S. and Canada) already had an impact on their representation and the reception of these images. As early as 1960, the future leaders of the American Red Power movement demanded justice for Native Americans and emphasized the need for racial pride among Indians.⁵⁴ A decade later, resistance to the 1969 White Paper mobilized similar movements in Canada. Over the next two decades, Canadian Native people expressed their tremendous distrust for the Canadian government and their renewed self-reliance and empowerment.⁵⁵ In his 1969 criticism of the White Paper, the widely read *The Unjust Society*, Alberta Cree leader and activist Harold Cardinal characterized the White Paper as marking a new age in Native resistance and cynicism. "We will no longer trust the

government with our futures," he writes. "Now they must listen to and learn from us."⁵⁶ These actions implicitly and explicitly challenged images of Native people as victimized, powerless and doomed.

The historical record of the Washington Theatre Club's *Rita Joe* (1973) offers glimpses of Indian representation in these rather transitional years, along with insights about the particular racial situation of the United States at this time. While both the Washington and London productions feature a wealth of typically constructed Native characters maintaining the victimized stances and false characteristics found in earlier productions, change is in the air. The "Red Power" of Native people in both Canada and the United States seems to have influenced some commentary about the play and its productions; one can sometimes see a still-vague awareness that there may be alternatives to the constructed identities of *Rita Joe*.

"Red Power" was a phrase very much on the minds of the Washington audiences in May of 1973; Innes hypothesized that "reaction to contemporary resonances of Wounded Knee (South Dakota) might . . . have coloured the response" of audiences to *Rita Joe*.⁵⁷ Since the company was known for presenting new and controversial works, its audiences may have expected social commentary. Indeed, the critical audience categorically connected the experience of the production with the news of the time, effectively linking the representation of Native people in *Rita Joe* with "real" Indians in South Dakota. Jay Allen Quantrill assured his Washington-area radio audience that a trip to see *Rita Joe* would give them "some understanding of the why of Wounded Knee."⁵⁸ The National Public Radio critic started his review with a reminder of Wounded Knee and an assurance that *Rita Joe* "treats this very subject."⁵⁹ Mike Heid of CBS radio endowed this representation of one (Canadian) Native woman with over a century of symbolic significance: "She's everything suffered from Little Big Horn to Wounded Knee."⁶⁰ It is difficult to know if director Harold Stone embedded these cultural referents into his production (like Gratien Gelinas did in Montreal in 1969). Innes tells us that Stone directed an "overly realistic" production, which may well have reminded audiences of the television news stories of the day.⁶¹ In any event, it is clear that — like French-Canadian audiences in 1969 — Americans in 1973 utilized the representations of Native people in this production to understand and transmit ideas about their own cultural situation.

For all the mixed cultural messages in this production, the cover of the programme sends a very clear message about Native identity. A historical-looking, black-and-white photograph of a Native man and woman adorns the programme cover. They are on horseback, with braided hair and leather clothing, looking like the perfect Hollywood-movie extras. The man is foregrounded, facing off-right and holding a gun. The woman peeks out from behind him toward the photographer; her horse is much smaller than his. Not only does this choice of art support American notions of Indian-ness based on Western movies and Plains Indian tribes, but it also suggests that Native characters are trapped in history. More inexplicably and significantly, the photograph downplays the play's focus on a Native *woman* by obscuring her behind a man with a gun. The production does not live up to this dubious promise, however; signs of changing ideas about Native identity are found elsewhere in the historical record.

Both Frances Hyland and Chief Dan George reprised their roles in the Washington production. As a recent Academy Award nominee for the epic film of Native Americans, *Little Big Man*, George was a celebrity in the United States in 1973. The international attention seems to have accelerated the conflation of George's on-stage and off-stage personality. Many reviews reflect the sentiment with which David Richards writes here: "Dan George's innate dignity and easy naturalism make it impossible to separate the man from the role."⁶² Despite its worrisome semiotic potential, the confusion between George and the characters he played was a boon to one person: Rita Joe's father David was elevated from simply "David Joe" in earlier programmes to "Chief David Joe" in the Washington programme.⁶³ As in Vancouver and Ottawa, most descriptions of George's characterization are rather fawning and focus on his innate wisdom, his dignity and his majesty. Quantrill praises George's portrayal of the "noble dignity which is perhaps the one accurate characteristic of the Indians which has survived Buntline's books and Hollywood's early movies."⁶⁴ One notable exception, a piece by R. H. Gardner of the *Baltimore Sun*, seems to be anticipating criticisms about the constructedness of George's characterization when he describes David Joe as "an Uncle Tom-type Indian. . . capable only of dwelling in the past."

Echoing Vancouver and Ottawa, observers described Frances Hyland's characterization of Rita Joe as embodying ideas about Native people as victimized, childlike and equated with nature. "Her every move is that of a hungry animal at odds with her environment," Quantrill noted. "Thus she embodies the essence of the Indian's tragedy...."⁶⁵ Along with the usual comments about "martyrdom" and "children of nature," however, much was made of Hyland's accent in this production — perhaps a step toward questioning the authenticity of a non-native woman playing the character. Review after review notes her vocal styling. "Though she was born in Saskatchewan, her accent sounds inexplicably Irish," wrote Tom Shales of the *Washington Post*.⁶⁶ Gardner noted that her accent "evokes images not of the plains but of the River Shannon."⁶⁷ Another *Post* writer, Tom Donnelly, wrote delicately that Hyland "indulges in peculiar vocal mannerisms that are, to say the least, off-putting."⁶⁸ And Julius Novick of the *New York Times*, remarking that the actors "suffer from a lack of unanimity as to what an Indian accent should sound like," pinned the blame on Hyland by likening her Rita Joe to "Siobhan McKenna as Saint Joan."⁶⁹ While it is tempting to read this altered reaction to Hyland's accent as a sign of the times, one cannot know it is indeed evidence of a more racially sensitive audience, if Hyland adopted a different accent for the part, or if American viewers were not used to Canadian West Coast Indian speech patterns.

Descriptions of the Washington performances seem to pay much more attention to the role of Jaimie Paul than in previous productions, another indicator of changing notions about Indian identity. The only character to urge resistance to white supremacy, Jaimie was probably more perceptible as an Indian "character" to audiences in 1973 than he had ever been before; previous writing about the play tended to ignore his character or write him off as inauthentic. Kenneth Stein from NPR articulates this new-found recognition of Jaimie Paul, juxtaposing Rita's victimized stance with his more "contemporary" position:

Rita Joe is resigned to her position and doesn't put up much resistance. The most interesting character in the play is her boyfriend, Jaimie Paul, who does decide to fight the system. The second act of the play catches fire and becomes exciting theater as Jaimie Paul struggles against the establishment⁷⁰

Many other reviewers shared Stein's enthusiasm for the character, some explicitly linking Jaimie Paul's stance with that of other American minority groups. "This is the same conclusion that the black man has come to," wrote one reviewer.⁷¹ Just as French-Canadian critical audiences linked *Rita Joe* to their struggles as a minority, so Washington reviewers seem anxious to "translate" the play into a more local socio-political context.

General reflections on the production offer the same mixed bag of cultural commentary as reflections on the actors and their characterizations; some observations perpetuate the same constructed representations of Native identity that others (rather tentatively) critique. "We know that the relentless advance of technology has ground to bits peoples who cannot adapt or see no need for adapting....," one commentator wrote, reflecting a vision of Indians as primitive and as trapped-in-history. "Time marches on, after all, even if cultures don't."⁷² Many others reflect these same hackneyed notions. More interesting are those who seemed to be aware of representational problems within the play. Clifford Ridley of *The National Observer*, for example, questioned the authenticity of the characters as living, breathing people. In representing an entire race of victims, Rita Joe "becomes not *an* Indian but *the* Indian," he wrote. And R. H. Gardner spoke to the then-invisible question of voice appropriation:

No matter how sincere he may be, a playwright who has never known hunger trying to depict hungry people for an audience that has never been hungry will almost invariably have a phony ring. And how much more difficult when the playwright and the audience are white and the characters are Indians.⁷³

Before canonizing this Gardner as a visionary, one should be aware that his review also contained the following rather narrow insight: "Indians, I am told by those who have had experience with them, are very cliquish people." Thus, Gardner's own reflections seem to embody the inconsistencies in attitudes about cultural representation at this time — inconsistencies that characterize the 1973 production of *Rita Joe* in Washington and the 1975 staging in London.

Like the Washington production, London's *Rita Joe* is marked by its specific geographical and temporal locations. Performed in the then-new Hampstead Theatre, an "off-West-end" venue, its audiences

likely expected provocative new work. Its British critics bring a distinctive sensibility to conversations about theatre, politics and colonial attitudes. Their writing about Native representation in the production is bold and frank — so frank as to be sneering and insensitive at times. Take, for example, this reflection from *The Daily Telegraph's* John Barber:

George Ryga's play gives some idea of a feckless, sensual, innocent unteachable people who cannot adapt to civilized society. They will not use schools or hospitals. They abandon their children. They do not know how to cope with the legal consequences of their bewilderment.⁷⁴

Although the London production of *Rita Joe* cannot be held completely responsible for Barber's ideas about Native people (certainly the right-wing position of the paper played a role), it is remarkable that he felt the production supported this sort of racist analysis. Barber is not the only one who apparently felt that this production of *Rita Joe* supported a particular view of Native people as primitive and difficult. *Times* reviewer Irving Wardle said the play "acknowledg(ed) that the Indians make a lot of trouble for themselves."⁷⁵

Amidst these comments, however, one finds insights into the ways that ideas about Canadian Native people were presented and received in London. In delineating his objections to the staging of a play about Native people, Milton Shulman of the *Evening Standard* invoked a sort of cultural protectionism. "With so many primitives on our own doorstep — football hooligans, Irish terrorists — it is rather hard to get worked up about what modern society has done to the Natives of the Canadian north," he wrote. "We have our own, even worse problems."⁷⁶ One can discern from this statement that the tumultuous state of events in London, along with the ideological position of the *Evening Standard*, affected Shulman's ability to relate to the characters presented in *Rita Joe*. Like critics in Montreal and Washington, Shulman uses *Rita Joe* as a vehicle to make claims about his own socio-political moment — although, instead of using *Rita Joe* as a straight analogy, Shulman uses the production to point out that Britain's own problems are far worse and more worthy of public concern.

In this same sardonic tone, Michael Billington of the *Guardian* revealed and spread a new cultural awareness of the constructions behind the characters of *Rita Joe*. "And just as you can recognize the good Indians by the mystic way they speak of sun and trees and river, so you identify the bad Whites by the way they don Expressionist masks to betoken fundamental rottenness," he wrote.⁷⁷ This awareness of a fundamental inauthenticity within the theatrical "signs" of authenticity shows itself again as London critics discuss characterization in *Rita Joe*. One reviewer describes David Joe (in London no longer "Chief") as an "automated Totem-pole."⁷⁸ Another pokes fun at Toby Robbins, the white Canadian actress who plays Rita Joe, and her attempts at constructed authenticity: "The part of Rita Joe offers irresistible temptations to Toby Robbins, who gives us the standard primitive stage peasant, sitting with legs splayed, arms akimbo, much flashing of teeth and regular tossing back of straggly black hair."⁷⁹

The London characterization of Rita Joe also seems to have changed. Although Frances Hyland's Rita Joe was certainly sexualized, she represented the character as an innocent. Hyland's Rita Joe was more a beautiful and vulnerable waif than a tough temptress. Certainly, it is hard to imagine Hyland being described as either "defiant" or aggressively "sexy" — much less "defiantly sexy," as Robbins' was.⁸⁰ By all indications, Robbins created a louder, more rugged Rita Joe; her matted black hair and tough demeanor (as reflected in the Hampstead Theatre's press photographs) set this Rita Joe apart from Hyland's definitive characterization. Critical reflections mirror this tough new approach, describing her as "gutsy," as becoming "older and tougher" and as possessing "bedraggled pride." Robbins "slams Rita across with a forceful simplicity," one reviewer notes.⁸¹

As in Washington, Jaimie Paul was received in London as a more germane and "authentic" character. Reflecting this sentiment most strongly, one reviewer announced that there was "one good and true scene" in the production, "when Rita Joe and her militant lover spurn the handouts of an Indian Centre in the big city."⁸² Again, Jaimie Paul's new-found popularity as a character speaks to the changing faces of Native people among white Euro-Canadians in these years; the image of a defiant young Indian man

screaming for self-definition and empowerment for Native people was recognizable and meaningful to audiences.

Finally, an awareness of the danger and dishonesty of stereotypical representations of Native people is reflected in the London production's programme art. As in Washington, the cover of this programme utilizes a photographic representation of two Native people. But the similarities stop here. Instead of historical black-and-white, the photograph is reproduced in shades of green and orange, reflecting the popular hues of the time and giving it a more contemporary feel. The photograph depicts a young girl and an older man, presumably her father. She is more prominently placed in the photograph; he is lower and beside her. They both stare curiously and boldly from the photograph, quite comfortable and almost smiling. The photograph manages to look authentic without giving in to stereotype; it is an honest and contemporary image that places its subjects in the context of human familial relationships and emotional experiences.⁸³

The 1973 Washington and 1975 London productions of *Rita Joe* reflect a budding awareness of the consciousness-raising social movements of their era. Indeed, Native rights protesters became a fixture of Canadian life in the 1970s. In these years, many Euro-Canadians seem to have recognized and (perhaps) renounced the paternalism and racism inherent in the notion of "the Indian Problem"; the term seems to have fallen from "enlightened" political and conversational usage. Activist and writer Boyce Richardson traces these shifts of the 1970s in his own account of Native political history and realities, written in 1993:

At first the new Native politics made little impression on the average Canadian; the impact on public awareness grew slowly. But by 1979 a study of the aboriginal presence in the media showed that the stereotyped image of disoriented and dependent Native people had been replaced by an image of articulate Native leaders making cogently argued statements about the needs of their people. Slowly, what Harold Cardinal, the Alberta leader of the 1960s, once described as the 'problem problem' (that is, the problem of being regarded only as a problem) was being overcome.⁸⁴

The more positive views of Native people that Richardson says some Euro-Canadians adopted in the 1970s would, unfortunately, form the basis of a curious (and rather limited) culture of Native veneration in the 1980s and 1990s. At the same time, these changes did allow and encourage theatrical companies to present

views of Native people during these years that, in some cases, left behind tired significations of and generalizations about authentic Indian identity. The 1981-82 touring production of *Rita Joe* — mounted by the Prairie Theatre Exchange of Winnipeg, Manitoba — offers an early example of the transformative power of these changing ideas in the 1980s and 1990s.

By far, the most tangible and talked-about transformation in the Prairie Theatre Exchange staging was the casting of Native people in all Native roles. Newspaper articles buzzed about the novelty of such an act, while questioning its wisdom. One writer noted that “a stage maxim admonishes against hiring a truck driver to play a truck driver.”⁸⁵ A headline reading “Natives Playing Natives Effective in *Rita Joe*” prompts one to wonder how the converse opinion would have been phrased. But those working on the production had no interest in debating the appropriateness of casting Native actors.

Prairie Theatre Exchange Artistic Director Gordon McCall pointedly characterized his casting decision, not as a charitable act, but as a theatrical decision designed to enhance the honesty of the production. “As I told the Native cast right from the beginning, I wasn't interested in being a social worker,” he said in an interview. “I simply wanted a powerful and provocative production and I knew they were capable of doing it.”⁸⁶ This comment represents an important shift in the representation of Native people; McCall implicitly links “authenticity” not to the traditional signals of ethnicity performed in earlier productions, but to the real-life status of the actor playing the part. In another conversation, McCall threw past productions of *Rita Joe* into a new light by placing the act of signing (or physically acting out some perception of) “Indian-ness” next to the avowedly racist act of signing “black-ness” in the United States: “McCall believes that casting Indian roles with non-Indians in *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* is no more defensible than having an all-white cast perform *Porgy and Bess* in blackface.”⁸⁷ McCall's articulation of a new notion of authenticity signals a fundamental shift away from signing “Indian-ness,” certainly a product of the awareness-building agitation of the 1970s. Native actor Tom Jackson, who played David Joe in this production, also questioned the propriety of past productions of *Rita Joe*. “I don't think it ever should have been mounted without an Indian cast,” he said. “That's absurd. Just the involvement of the

people in this cast based on what is being said makes it impossible for me to see how it could have been done by a white cast.”⁸⁸

But McCall's casting decision was not without representational complications. The play's publicity devotes a great deal of attention to the personal stories of the Native cast members, particularly to linking their biographies to those of the characters they are playing — just the sort of semiotic monkey business inspired by the casting of Chief Dan George (as Terry Goldie wrote). The authenticity of this cast was just too much for observers; as had so often been the cast with George and his characterizations, critics simply couldn't keep the actors and the characters straight, especially in the case of actress Margo Kane as Rita Joe. One reviewer wrote of Kane, “she does not simply act the part, she becomes it.”⁸⁹ Another shared similar sentiments: “Margo Kane's Rita Joe didn't seem acted. Her emotion was strong and simple, her pain authentic. She didn't ask for sympathy for the character. She just showed you the way it is.”⁹⁰

If there is a bright side to this critical compulsion to match (real) actors with (constructed) characters, it is that their glaring differences pop to the surface — differences which challenge typically constructed “truths” about Native people. In place of Rita's “bewilderment,” “inability to cope,” and “tragic victimization,” actress Margo Kane seems to have rebounded from problems with drug abuse and an unanticipated pregnancy with self-determination, courage and authority. “I had to find some way to make it work,” she said, reflecting on her personal triumphs. “I just said to myself, ‘I'm gonna do it.’”⁹¹ The articles about Kane's personal life also offered her the chance to thoughtfully challenge just the sort of constructed identities rampant in earlier productions of *Rita Joe*. “It's hard to break out, but when Natives have tried, white people have not allowed them to break out, by stereotyping them,” she told one interviewer.⁹²

The 1981-82 tour prompted some explicit discussion of the play's relevance to contemporary Native people. Ryga himself weighed in, observing that the specific challenges Native people faced had changed although their status within society had not. “The situation has altered in quality, but all our society has,” he said. “If you use a realistic yardstick, it really hasn't changed.”⁹³ Reviewers jumped to call

the play "more relevant than ever," although one writer did concede that "there are those who argue that *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* is dated in its polemic, simplistic in its psychology and ramshackle in its construction."⁹⁴ Another reviewer allowed that "things have changed since Ryga wrote the play 15 years ago. Landmark decisions regarding such issues as Native rights and land claims have been made and, within their own communities, Natives' self-esteem and awareness is now much higher."⁹⁵ But it is *because* of — not in spite of — these socio-political changes that the play has meaning in 1981. The rather minor but essential alterations we have seen introduced into each successive production kept the play relevant to a variety of geographically and temporally located audiences.

The programme reflects many of the same values emphasized throughout the production, in particular the desire to impress the reality and concerns of contemporary Native people upon its audience. Its cover is rather unremarkable, featuring the title of the play printed unsteadily on a brick wall background, resembling graffiti. The image of an agitated bird is silhouetted on the wall, with the face of Margo Kane staring from within the bird's shape. The art choice emphasizes the juxtaposition between natural and urban spaces (a common indicator of the "Native dilemma") and the authenticity of Kane's image. But in the "Director's Notes" section of the programme, McCall offers an excerpt from Maria Campbell's autobiographical book, *Halfbreed*. In this passage, Campbell describes the generation of Canadian Indians convinced by stereotypes and government indoctrination that their culture was vanishing, and that they were helpless victims: "Their way of life was part of Canada's past and they saw no place in the world for them, for they believed they had nothing to offer...You sometimes see that generation today."⁹⁶ Ironically, Campbell describes Rita Joe's generation. McCall's choice of this passage seems to indicate his awareness on some level that the textual characters of *Rita Joe* belong to another time. Enhancing the immediacy and realism of McCall's touring production, the set utilized a "series of ramps and elevations, with most audience members seated in the midst of the action." Although the ramps were nothing new and the 1969 Ottawa production had been presented in the round, the decision to seat

spectators directly in performance areas added to the realism of this production. As one reviewer noted, "there is no way one can look away from the truth of what is happening."⁹⁷

Changes in the way Native people were depicted on Canadian stages did not happen quickly, universally or successively. By no means is this a story of a smooth and linear progression from bad "victim" stereotypes to good "empowering" representations of Native people; the cultural landscape is full of dangerous and unexpected pitfalls. Despite the major representational changes embodied in Prairie Theatre Exchange's 1981-82 tour, their move away from the familiar, disempowering constructions of Native identity was by no means the rule in the early 1980s. A brief look at a 1984 production of *Rita Joe* at Calgary's Loose Moose Theatre tells another story. The 1984 production serves as an example of the rather spotty nature of these representational shifts, and of the dangers of static productions of dramatic texts.

There is no mention of a single Native actor involved in the 1984 Calgary production. Certainly the principals were non-native, with 15-year-old Shawna Burnett playing Rita Joe. The objections to performing *Rita Joe* with non-native actors playing Natives raised so passionately in Winnipeg are completely absent, as far as I can tell, from the literature surrounding this production. This divergence likely relates to the plays' locales; Winnipeg had a very active and political Native theatrical community, ready to foreground this issue in this production, while Calgary's native theatre community was not apparently involved in this production. This production seems to have fallen back on the hand-wringing victimized portraits of Native people we have seen before. Descriptions of the play's message reflect this sentiment: "the blame for Rita's plight rests squarely on the shoulders of the organizations which allegedly try to help her and her people."⁹⁸ Most striking is a short, unsigned summary of the play in the programme:

This is a documentary about a young Indian girl who comes to the city only to die on skid row, a victim of the white man's violence and patronization . . . It is a general condemnation of all organizations which have dealt with the Indian people.⁹⁹

The plot summary, though no doubt well-intentioned, reflects an old vision of Native people as powerless victims of the dominant culture. The language and tone also reflect the sort of fatigued, bored attitude about the crises facing Native Canadians that shows up throughout the production.

Both the young actors and the director had likely grown up with "the fact" of oppressed Indians in Canada, and with *Rita Joe* as a canonical text addressing their status. Director "Patches" Dahlseide described the play's impact on him as a youngster. "I first read it when I was 14," he said. "The play may be 17 years old but it is not dated. You can pick up any paper in Calgary and read the same headlines I was reading and getting shocked over 15 years ago."¹⁰⁰ Far from the eye-opening, contentious text of the 1960s, *Rita Joe* is a fact of life for this generation, a familiar assigned school reading. Certainly this context alters the impact of the play for younger audiences and performers. Performed so anachronistically — with white people "signing" Indians and depicting them as victimized and powerless — it runs the risk of striking its audience as old hat, a representation of the familiar story of poor Rita Joe. In this way, the re-production of the play can reinforce the social relations it depicts, instead of challenging them. This theory directly challenges Dahleseite's assertion that "*Rita Joe* is a story which must be told as many times as possible to increase our awareness of the plight of Native peoples."¹⁰¹ Unless *Rita Joe* is performed carefully and deliberately as a living text, adapting to history and space, it may lose its power to raise anyone's consciousness.

Despite the implications of the 1984 Calgary production, many white Canadians did identify (or listened as Native people identified) the disempowering effects of traditionally constructed Native identities in the 1980s and early 1990s. The strength and effectiveness of First Nations people in these years forced white Canadians to question prevailing assumptions about the unmitigated "victimhood" of First Persons. These decades also found white Canadians (and Americans) glorifying Native people and values in new age religious practices, "fantasy-camp" adventure weekends, and advertisements for natural beauty products. But the popular infatuation with Native people did not translate into material or political gains for Native people. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Native people continued to struggle for socio-economic justice,

self-government, constitutional recognition, and resource rights — with incremental successes. Notably, Native frustration from 1987 to 1990 culminated in a series of violent standoffs in the summer of 1990 at two Mohawk reserves in Quebec, Kanesatake and Kahnawake.¹⁰² At the same time, the violent intellectual standoffs that had helped inspire the Mohawk warriors were further strengthened by their resistance.

The physical and political violence of these years was matched in intensity by the intellectual vehemence of contemporary “culture wars.” Utilizing the newly developed notion of voice appropriation, Native people demanded that white Canadians leave the representation of their people alone and characterized the work of many non-Native writers and artists as inauthentic and presumptuous. In her essay on the subject, Julia Emberley links these political and cultural debates: “During the 1980s, Aboriginal struggles for self-determination in Canada continued to take place in the political arena, while a new form of self-determination also emerged in the cultural sphere.”¹⁰³ At the same time, a cultural backlash against the valorization of all things Native gained momentum — creating the basis of the bitter and contentious “culture wars” of these years.

These debates certainly contributed to more empowering representations of Native identity during these years both directly and by way of (counter-)example, for the will and self-determination of Native people could hardly be ignored in this climate. Mainstream recognition of the new work of Native playwrights, particularly Ontario's Tomson Highway, enabled alternative representations of Native people to live and breathe on stage. Highway's *The Rez Sisters* (1989) and *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* (1991) present stubbornly multidimensional characters who fiercely resist the reductionist tendencies of earlier noble savagism or victimism. His characters have been described as foils to Ryga's representations.¹⁰⁴

Two major productions of *Rita Joe* performed during these years, 1989 - 1992, reflect the contentious cultural conversations of their time, once again contemporizing and situating Ryga's play within the context of contemporary representational debates. The 1989 production at the University of Toronto's Hart House Theatre was marked by the juxtaposition of Ryga's characters against the real

Native actors playing their roles, by a critical backlash against overpraising Native-themed art, and by the director's attempts to contextualize the story with set and staging techniques. And the final production we will examine, the 1992 staging at the Firehall Arts Centre in Vancouver, offers a look at the voice appropriations debates of these years and the curious reluctance to abandon *Rita Joe*.

Despite the fact that the Prairie Theatre Exchange's 1981-82 staging of *Rita Joe* was the first to cast Native actors in all Native roles, several Toronto newspapers claimed that distinction for the 1989 Hart House production. Like the Winnipeg show, publicity focused on the real-life stories of the Native actors and any possible similarities to their characters. One critic divined that Native actress Tina Louise Bomberry (*Rita Joe*) "unquestionably identifies totally with the suffering *Rita Joe*."¹⁰⁵ But, also as in Winnipeg, a by-product of this essentialist equation was that Native actors got the opportunity to speak out and offer characterizations of Native identity which fly in the face of more typical victim mythologies. Ivan Naranjo, who played David Joe, characterized Natives in Canada as strong and culturally viable. "We are not a lost society," he said. "The answer is to let us govern ourselves on reserves, paying us the respect that is demanded from us."¹⁰⁶ And Bomberry (an original *Rez Sisters* cast member) described a generational shift toward cultural empowerment, noting that "young people are starting to be interested in learning and continuing the culture. We're speaking up, we're getting stronger."¹⁰⁷

More remarkable still, these actors actually criticized their fictional counterparts, a step toward inevitable, larger questions of textual authority and authenticity in *Rita Joe*. Jack Horne (Jaimie Paul) recognized the limitations written into his character. "He has anger, but he has no control over it and doesn't know how to do anything about it," Horne commented.¹⁰⁸ Instead of dwelling on *Rita Joe*'s external victimization, Bomberry identified internal qualities that contributed to her inability to survive:

I feel she didn't have a strong enough identity. If her identity was stronger, she wouldn't have gotten caught up in the negative aspects of life and been pulled down further and further into tragedy. I have to balance today's society and the old ways. Identity is the main thing. You can live in today's society and still have the old ways.¹⁰⁹

But despite her criticisms of the character's ultimate passivity, Bomberry's Rita Joe goes down swinging. Although she is still described as "victimized" from time to time, critical response to Bomberry's characterization is much more likely to describe her Rita Joe as "distraught," "angry," "proud," "vulnerable," "rebellious," even "amused and puzzled." Native actors and their bold and perceptive attitudes clearly pulled productions farther and farther from Ryga's original characterizations. Ultimately, one wonders how far Ryga's text could stretch to accommodate these major representational shifts.

The contemporized characterizations of the young Native cast were matched by the 1989 production's staging. In a radical departure from the traditional ramped staging, director Judith McGilligan created a "split-screen effect with the set which facilitates the movement in and out of Rita's memory," in the words of one reviewer. A hanging backdrop of woven rags in autumnal colours represented the reservation flashbacks, contrasted by a series of hard white geometric blocks to signify Rita's urban reality. "Five television screens showing the terrible force of the Magistrate surround Rita Joe in the courtroom," the review continues.¹¹⁰ The television screens seem to equate the oppressive assimilational ideology of the magistrate with the powerful acculturating force of mass media, explicitly linking the doctrine of assimilation with constructed mass images of Native people. The accommodation of representation theory into *Rita Joe* is, to say the least, somewhat ironic.

Critical reaction to the production incorporated familiar stereotypes, to be sure. The most glaring example is downright comic. Jennifer Cowan of *Toronto Tonight* magazine invited Naranjo and Bomberry to brunch to discuss the play and review a restaurant — an odd premise in and of itself. In the resulting article, "Brunch at Bemelman's is Ecstasy for Rita Joe," Cowan manages to simultaneously describe the restaurant's decor and signal the "Indian-ness" of her guests. "The actors . . . were particularly impressed with the ferns and plants that adorned the room," she wrote. "It was apparent that the greenery appealed to their affinity for natural surroundings."¹¹¹

New to critical discussion of this production, however, were a number of rather defensive comments decrying the expectation that all art by or about Native people must be well-received. "A cause

may be worthy and deserving of public sympathy and support," one reviewer explained. "But a work of art inspired by this cause isn't necessarily good just because the inherent cause of the message is noble."¹¹²

This review could be written off as an isolated case of crankiness were it not for the numerous others sharing its sentiment. In the following excerpt, one Bob Pennington goes so far as to attribute the success of Native artists, in part, to the phenomenon of white guilt:

Native participation in our theatre has made some significant strides of late, aided beyond question by a justified feeling of guilt non-Native people of any sensitivity feel over the shameful treatment received by the long-suffering First Canadians. One recent result, alas, has been the well meaning, but essentially patronizing over-praise for almost every act of Native participation in the theatre.¹¹³

Another reviewer condemns a sort of reverse racism in the production's characterizations of whites. "Merely to turn the tables on racism will not end its evils, only perpetuate them," he writes.¹¹⁴ While it would be unfair to characterize these reviewers as part of a "backlash" against Native cultural politics solely on the basis of their comments here, these attitudes are indicative of the reaction of many non-Natives to an increasingly hostile cultural climate and the ubiquity of Native artists in these years. Taken in aggregate, this impulse that can fairly be characterized as a backlash. And while these comments do not specifically challenge representations of Native people, they are a response to prolific acts of Native self-representation and an increasingly militant drive to remove non-Native voices from Native stories.

The questions surrounding and driving these 1989 reviews followed *Rita Joe* to Vancouver in 1992 for a silver-anniversary production at the Firehall Arts Centre. Located in a less-affluent area of Vancouver than the Playhouse, audiences very likely encountered very poor and homeless people upon entering the theatre, blurring the distinction between performance and reality and driving home the intense social relevance of the piece. Director Donna Spencer set the tone for her production immediately, by opening with the assertive and empowering funeral scene Ryga added for the Ottawa performance in 1969.¹¹⁵ The show ended with the same scene, thus incorporating the Native notion of the spiritual circle and driving home the defiant spirit of that scene.

Like the 1989 version, the Firehall production cast Native actors in all Native roles. Spencer also cast an African-American actor to play both the priest and Mr. Homer, the charity worker. The decision to cast a black man in these roles speaks not just to the introduction of "color-blind" casting in these years, but also to the growing awareness of the multi-colored reality of race relations North America, opposing the historic tendency to see in terms of racial binaries: Indians and whites, or blacks and whites. Despite the fact that it had been just eleven years since the first Native Rita Joe took the stage in Winnipeg, critical audiences wondered at the fact that Spencer had been able to find Native actors who didn't condemn Ryga and *Rita Joe* as a classic case of voice appropriation. "It's an indication of just how sensitive Ryga was . . . that the Firehall Arts Centre could find a cast of primarily Native characters willing to participate in their current production," wrote one reviewer.¹¹⁶ They needn't have worried.

It is rather remarkable that *Rita Joe* managed to remain out of the voice appropriation debates for as long as it did. In recent years, many have questioned the qualifications of non-Native writers to write about Native experiences. But in twenty-five years, only a handful of rather quiet (and scholarly) voices had pointed to the ironic fact that the most performed and celebrated art about Canadian Natives was written by a white man. Ryga, the son of new Ukrainian immigrants, had throughout his life emphasized his experiences of injustice and poverty in Canada with the poor day laborers and Indians of his childhood. His direct experiences and friendships with Native people — along with his immigrant and Communist credentials — may account for the sense that his plays about Native people were somehow authentic in a time when the work of other non-Native playwrights was considered insulting and dishonest.¹¹⁷

The question of voice appropriation and the authenticity of Ryga's characters was finally put directly to the 1992 cast of *Rita Joe*, under the rather contrived circumstances of a newspaper interview with Peter Wilson of the *Vancouver Sun*. In the interview, most of the actors skirted the question. Native actress Columpa Bobb (*Rita Joe*) got herself into trouble with a passionate statement against voice appropriation. "There are white people who say I'm writing this [story or play] from the Native point of view. No, you're not," she said. "This is a good story but this is from your point of view and you're white."

The next logical question was, of course, how it was that she could authentically play a Native character written by a white man. Bobb first attributed a lot of the play's honesty to Chief Dan George (her grandfather). Ultimately, after some discussion of the play's honesty, she allowed that "this story needs to be told, regardless of whether a black person or a white person or a Native person wrote it."¹¹⁸

Margo Kane (Rita Joe, 1981-82) and Joy Coghill (Artistic Director for the Vancouver Playhouse, 1967) were also pressed to explain Ryga's special status in 1992. In a series of videotaped interviews commemorating the play's anniversary for The Knowledge Network, theatre scholar Jerry Wasserman asked the women about Ryga and voice appropriation. Kane dodged the question, while Coghill (like Bobb) cited Dan George's hefty influence.¹¹⁹ But according to Ryga, Innes, Ryga biographer James Hoffman and others who have studied the play's development, George was merely a tremendous source of inspiration for Ryga's writing — not a collaborator.¹²⁰

The Firehall's 1992 staging inspired aboriginal writer Lee Maracle to compose a statement publicly exempting Ryga from the ground rules of voice appropriation. In a June 1992 column, Maracle acknowledged that she had quite publicly asked non-Native Canadian writers to "quit writing on our behalf" in the past. Nonetheless, in the light of *Rita Joe's* run at the Firehall, Maracle defended the legitimacy of Ryga's play. "The play inspires in me a huge sense of oneness with Ryga," she wrote. "In this society, if you are white, your chances of creating a truly honest work of art is unlikely if your subject is first nations — but it is not impossible." Not for Ryga anyway, she goes on to say.¹²¹

But despite Ryga's cultural status as a "good guy," the authenticity of the characters he created in 1967 and the durability of his text were certainly in question by 1992. The representational shifts of the past twenty-five years had put tremendous demands upon the elasticity of his text. Extra-textual characterizations of Rita Joe as "rebellious" and "tough" surely required a great deal of skill from the actresses who created them. But shifts in the representation of First Nations people since 1992 call for the impossible — the creation of an unequivocally "empowering" Rita Joe. To find her, one must almost certainly abandon Ryga's 1967 text partially or entirely. Perhaps the reluctance of actors and writers in

1992 to subject Rita Joe to the same rules of voice appropriation as other white writers stemmed from the knowledge that — unlike the race of an actor, the look of a programme cover or even the temperament of a character — one cannot adapt a text branded fundamentally inauthentic to meet the representational demands of the 1990s. Thus the history of representations of Native identity in *Rita Joe* ends on a note of uncertainty about its future.

Just as it was an excellent place to begin, the title of this project is an excellent place to conclude. “Give me back the real me!” demands Jaimie Paul, the frustrated and flaccid (sometimes) activist. Jaimie Paul’s words reflect his sense that his real identity has been obscured by his mythic or “Imaginary” identity, the “real” Indian replaced with so many cigar-box Indians and television fish thieves. But, as we have seen, Jaimie ultimately has no “real” or fixed identity at all. He is a character in a play, and, as such, his real identity can never be definitively characterized at all, even within the play’s text. The real Jaimie is up for grabs every time a new production of the play is initiated.

Examining some of the various “real” identities Rita, Jaimie and the other characters of *Rita Joe* have assumed over a twenty-five-year period has told us much about the cultural utilization and alteration of ideas about Native identity during these years. The original 1967 cast of *Rita Joe* “signed” authentic Indian-ness to its audience through designated mannerisms and vocal conventions, portraying Native characters as powerless and victimized. Successive productions translated these notions of identity for the specific socio-political and temporal situations of Ottawa, Montreal, Washington and London between 1969 and 1975. Gradually, theatre professionals and critical audiences challenged the authenticity of these doomed and defeated stage Indians. By casting Native actors as Native characters, the 1981-82 Winnipeg-based tour shifted the semiotic field significantly, altering notions of authenticity and identity on stage. But these representational changes were by no means progressive or permanent, and the choice as to whether or not to incorporate them into a production had serious implications for the play’s cultural utility (as a look at the 1984 Calgary production revealed). Approaching the play’s twenty-fifth anniversary, the representations of Native identity in *Rita Joe* raised topical questions of cultural politics and voice

appropriation — questions which threaten the sustained cultural viability of the text itself. These ongoing debates suggest the ironic possibility that the “real” Jaimie Paul can be found only by abandoning Ryga's classic text.

Perhaps most remarkably, the production history of *Rita Joe*, a play that explores one very specific cultural identity, has revealed a great deal about identity politics in very diverse cultural and temporal settings. In French-Canada, for example, *Rita Joe*'s story was stretched allegorically to accommodate an entirely different narrative: the identity politics of French-speaking Canadians. In London, it was a commentary on “football ruffians,” and in Washington, an explanation for the bewilderment of Wounded Knee. Performances gather meaning from their own time and space. As powerful as George Ryga's script may be, no text is iron-clad. The very words and ideas are stretched (in performance and reception) to accommodate diverse and seemingly unrelated situations. Like any creative text, the pages of *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* are not strong enough curb the human impulse to find ultimate meaning in the here and now, nor can they resist the inherent elasticity of creative endeavor.

Endnotes

- ⁰ Jack Richards, *Vancouver Sun*, November 24, 1967.
- ¹ James Barber, *Vancouver Province*, November 25, 1967.
- ² Jamie Portman, *Vancouver Province*, April 12, 1976.
- ³ Peter Wilson, *Vancouver Sun*, March 19, 1992.
- ⁴ Elin Diamond, *Performance and Cultural Politics*, 1.
- ⁵ For more excellent research on stereotypical representations and Native people, please see Bird's *Dressing in Feathers*, Francis's *The Imaginary Indian* and Churchill's *Indians Are Us?*
- ⁶ Patricia Jasen, *Wild Things*.
- ⁷ Dianne Newell, *Tangled Webs of History*, 129.
- ⁸ Terry Goldie, *Fear and Temptation*, 177.
- ⁹ Margaret Atwood, *Survival*, 91.
- ¹⁰ J.R. Miller, *Skyscrapers*, 222-3.
- ¹¹ Harry Hawthorn, editor, *A Survey of the Contemporary Indians of Canada*.
- ¹² Newell, *Tangled Webs*, 130.
- ¹³ Christopher Innes, *Politics and the Playwright*, 145.
- ¹⁴ Aubrey Reynolds, *Telegram*, December 5, 1967.
- ¹⁵ Pat Nigra, *Ottawa Journal*, June 11, 1969.
- ¹⁶ Lorne Parton, *Vancouver Province*, November 25, 1967.
- ¹⁷ Nathan Cohen, *Toronto Star*, November 24, 1967.
- ¹⁸ James Barber, *Vancouver Province*, June 10, 1969.
- ¹⁹ Goldie, *Fear and Temptation*, 189-190.
- ²⁰ Marilyn Burgess and Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, *Indian Princesses and Cowgirls*. For photographs of Frances Hyland, see the following articles: James Barber, "Rita — An exhausting emotional experience," *Vancouver Province*, November 25, 1967; James Barber, "Frances Hyland on Regional Theatre," *Vancouver Province*, December 1, 1967; Keith Fraser, "Ecstatic Indians," *Ubysey*, November 24, 1967; "Leisure," *Vancouver Sun*, November 17, 1967; Aubrey Reynolds, "The Ecstasy of Rita Joe, or Indian Blues for Mr. Charlie," *Toronto Telegram*, December 5, 1967.
- ²¹ *Playboard*, November 1967.
- ²² Innes, *Politics*, 159.
- ²³ Richards, *Vancouver Sun*, November 24, 1967.
- ²⁴ *Playboard*, November 1967, "Author's Program Notes," 4.
- ²⁵ *Playboard*, November 1967, "A Lament for Confederation," 5.
- ²⁶ James Spears, *Vancouver Province*, November 9, 1967.
- ²⁷ Mike Tytherleigh, CKWX Radio, November 24, 1967.
- ²⁸ James Spears, *Vancouver Province*, November 17, 1967.
- ²⁹ Innes, *Politics*, 161.
- ³⁰ Reynolds, *Telegram*, December 5, 1967.
- ³¹ Ben Metcalfe, CBC Radio, November 24, 1967.
- ³² Innes, *Politics*, 163.
- ³³ Barber, *Vancouver Province*, November 25, 1967.
- ³⁴ Robin Dorrell, *Ottawa Journal*, June 10, 1969.
- ³⁵ Patrick MacFadden, *Montreal Star*, June 10, 1969.
- ³⁶ Christopher Dafoe, *Vancouver Sun*, June 3, 1969.
- ³⁷ Audrey Ashley, *Ottawa Citizen*, June 10, 1969.
- ³⁸ Dafoe, *Vancouver Sun*, June 3, 1969.
- ³⁹ Frank Penn, *Ottawa Citizen*, June 6, 1969.
- ⁴⁰ Dorrell, *Ottawa Journal*, June 10, 1969.
- ⁴¹ Jacob Siskind, *Montreal Gazette*, June 11, 1969. Interestingly, Siskind and Dafoe remain two of very few Canadians to publicly raise the question of authenticity in Ryga's work, and they both do it 1969. Siskind describes the text as "patently false on the lips of those who have to utter it," but Dafoe gets right to the heart of the matter:

"I know that there are some white men who claim to know the Indian, but I have a feeling George Ryga isn't one of them."

- ⁴² Innes, *Politics*, 163.
- ⁴³ Jack Richards, *Vancouver Sun*, May 30, 1969.
- ⁴⁴ Michael Quigley, *Vancouver Province*, June 3, 1969.
- ⁴⁵ *Vancouver Sun*, June 21, 1968.
- ⁴⁶ Allan Fotheringham, *Vancouver Sun*, June 1969.
- ⁴⁷ Canada, Department of Indian Affairs, *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy* (White Paper, 1969)
- ⁴⁸ Lawrence Sabbath, *Montreal Star*, November 15, 1969.
- ⁴⁹ Sabbath. *ibid.*
- ⁵⁰ Sabbath. *ibid.*
- ⁵¹ Lawrence Sabbath, *Montreal Star*, November 25, 1969.
- ⁵² Sabbath. *ibid.*
- ⁵³ Strowan Robertson, *Montreal Gazette*, November 24, 1969.
- ⁵⁴ "Statement of the National Indian Youth Council," *Takin' It To The Streets*, 196.
- ⁵⁵ Miller, *Skyscrapers*, 300.
- ⁵⁶ Harold Cardinal. *The Unjust Society*.
- ⁵⁷ Innes, *Politics*, 163.
- ⁵⁸ Jay Allen Quantrill, WAVA Radio, May 2, 1973.
- ⁵⁹ Kenneth Stein, WBJC Radio, May 3, 1973.
- ⁶⁰ Mike Heid, CBS Radio, May 3, 1975.
- ⁶¹ Innes, *Politics*, 163.
- ⁶² David Richards, *Evening Star* and *Washington Daily News*, May 3, 1973.
- ⁶³ *Playbill Magazine*, The Washington Theatre Club Edition, May, 1973.
- ⁶⁴ Quantrill, WAVA Radio, May 2, 1973.
- ⁶⁵ Quantrill, WAVA Radio, May 2, 1973.
- ⁶⁶ Tom Shales, *Washington Post*, May 3, 1973.
- ⁶⁷ R.H. Gardner, *Baltimore Sun*, May 3, 1973.
- ⁶⁸ Tom Donnelly, *Washington Post*, May 9, 1973.
- ⁶⁹ Julius Novick, *New York Times*, May 13, 1973.
- ⁷⁰ Stein, WBJC Radio, May 3, 1973.
- ⁷¹ Richard Leberherz, *Frederick News-Post*, May 4, 1973.
- ⁷² Richards, *Evening Star* and *Washington Daily News*, May 3, 1973.
- ⁷³ Gardner, *Baltimore Sun*, May 3, 1973.
- ⁷⁴ John Barber, *Daily Telegraph*, September 23, 1975.
- ⁷⁵ Irving Wardle, *London Times*, September 23, 1975.
- ⁷⁶ Milton Shulman, *Evening Standard*, September 23, 1975.
- ⁷⁷ Michael Billington, *Guardian*, September 23, 1975.
- ⁷⁸ Innes, *Politics*, 163.
- ⁷⁹ *Sunday Telegraph*, September 28, 1975.
- ⁸⁰ Billington, *Guardian*, September 23, 1975.
- ⁸¹ Wardle, *London Times*, September 23, 1975.
- ⁸² Billington *Guardian*, September 23, 1975.
- ⁸³ Programme, London Hampstead Theatre, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, September 22 - October 18, 1975.
- ⁸⁴ Boyce Richardson, *People of Terra Nullius*.
- ⁸⁵ Nicholas Read, *Vancouver Sun*, March 17, 1982.
- ⁸⁶ Bob Allen, *Vancouver Province*, March 18, 1982.
- ⁸⁷ Jamie Portman, *Southam News*, November 1981.
- ⁸⁸ Read, *Vancouver Sun*, March 17, 1982.
- ⁸⁹ Nicholas Read, *Vancouver Sun*, March 20, 1982.
- ⁹⁰ Reg Skeene, *Winnipeg Free Press*, November 26, 1981.
- ⁹¹ Adele Freedman, *Globe and Mail*, November 27, 1981.

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- ⁹² Read, *Vancouver Sun*, March 17, 1982.
- ⁹³ Dennis Kuchera, *Winnipeg Free Press*, November 25, 1981.
- ⁹⁴ Portman, *Southam News*, November 1981.
- ⁹⁵ Bob Allen. "Rita's Passion Survives." *The Vancouver Province*. March 21, 1982.
- ⁹⁶ Programme. *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*. Prairie Theatre Exchange. November 25 - December 6, 1981.
- ⁹⁷ Portman, *Southam News*, November 1981.
- ⁹⁸ Rosemary McCracken, *Calgary Herald*, April 6, 1984.
- ⁹⁹ Programme, Loose Moose Theatre, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, April 4 - 21, 1984.
- ¹⁰⁰ Louis B. Hobson, *Calgary Sun*, April 4, 1984.
- ¹⁰¹ Louis B. Hobson, *Calgary Sun*, April 6, 1984.
- ¹⁰² Miller, *Skyscrapers*, 304-305.
- ¹⁰³ Julia Emberly, "Aboriginal Women's Writing and the Cultural Politics of Representation," 91.
- ¹⁰⁴ Agnes Grant, "Canadian Native Literature," 37-57.
- ¹⁰⁵ Bob Pennington, *Toronto Sun*, November 11, 1989.
- ¹⁰⁶ Bob Pennington, *Toronto Sun*. November 5, 1989.
- ¹⁰⁷ Lindsay Scotton, *Toronto Star*, November, 1989.
- ¹⁰⁸ Vit Wagner, *Toronto Star*, November 3, 1989.
- ¹⁰⁹ Wagner, *ibid*.
- ¹¹⁰ Bernadette Desantis, *The Newspaper* (University of Toronto,) November 15, 1989.
- ¹¹¹ Jennifer Cowan, *Toronto Tonight*, November, 1989.
- ¹¹² John Sheppard, *Varsity*, November 16, 1989.
- ¹¹³ Pennington, *Toronto Sun*, November 11, 1989.
- ¹¹⁴ Alex Patterson, *Metropolis*, November 16, 1989.
- ¹¹⁵ Renee Doruyter, *Vancouver Province*, March 20, 1992.
- ¹¹⁶ Doruyter, *ibid*.
- ¹¹⁷ James Hoffman, *The Ecstasy of Resistance*.
- ¹¹⁸ Wilson, *Vancouver Sun*, March 19, 1992.
- ¹¹⁹ Jerry Wasserman, interviews.
- ¹²⁰ Innes, *Politics*, 160-161.
- ¹²¹ Lee Maracle, *Vancouver Sun*, June 6, 1992.

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