



Australian Aborigines' Reconstructed History in Robert Merritt's Play, *The Cake Man*

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Abstract

One of the parts and parcels of postcolonial literature is to deconstruct the history written by imperialism and to present the one as experienced by the colonized. As victims of British colonialism, Australian Aborigines have always mirrored the historical religious and territorial subjugation of their land in their writings, especially in their dramatic literature because of its high popularity and social impact. Robert Merritt's *The Cake Man* is an important dramatic text in Aboriginal literature which explores forced conversion and resistance to it. The play's reexamination of history as experienced by the colonized makes it a suitable target to study the application of Althusserian philosophy to postcolonial literature. Because of the recurrent exposure of colonial ideology and "ideological state apparatuses" in *The Cake Man*, it can be concluded that Althusserian theory can be an illuminating background to investigate historical concerns of postcolonial literature.

Keywords: Robert Merritt, *The Cake Man*, Aborigines, Althusser, Ideological State Apparatuses

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Introduction

Aboriginal stage has always been a significant place to put Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people next to each other. From the late eighteenth century to the twenty-first century, one of the important functions of Aboriginal performances has been “to break the silence that surrounded their history and survival” (Casey, 2013, p. 156). To publicize the centuries-long imperial injustice befallen on them, Black Australian writers have counted on the socio-political power of the stage. They believe the theater is a powerful site to set the stage for expressing their true history. In their genealogical approach to injustice, these writers follow Kevin Gilbert, one of the most outstanding activists in Aboriginal human rights. In a prominent manifesto-like speech, Gilbert remarks:

An onus is on Aboriginal writers to present the evidence of our true situation. In attempting to present the evidence we are furiously attacked by white Australians and white converts, whatever their colour, as ‘Going back 200 years . . . the past is finished . . .!’ Yet, cut off a man’s leg, kill his mother, rape his land, psychologically attack and keep him in a powerless position each day – does it not live on in the mind of the victim? Does it not continue to scar and affect the thinking? Deny it, but it still exists. (qtd. in Russo, 2010, p. 126)

Gilbert’s recommendation is in fact the one for revisiting and representing an Aboriginal history in front of white audience to remind them of what they have been doing to the real inheritors of Australia. To this end, Aboriginal playwrights such as Jack Davis, Robert Merritt, Gerry Bostock, and Kevin Gilbert himself went to their own experiences to express Aboriginal land claim and to challenge the silence regarding their survival. In their Aboriginal revitalization of history, one of the issues that differentiates between the playwrights is their view of language. For example, in *The Dreamers*, Jack Davis (1982) makes use of Aboriginal words to the extent that a non-Aborigine needs a dictionary to understand some of the dialogues. This may indicate that Davis’s play is a challenge for non-Aboriginal audience and is more accessible to Aboriginal people. In contrast, Merritt’s (1978) *The Cake Man* rarely uses Aboriginal language, making it more accessible to white audience. Such accessibility seems to be intentional in that Merritt dramatizes imperial history from Aboriginal viewpoint to make his non-Aboriginal audience sympathize with native Australians. To discuss the root of Aboriginal social and political calamity, Merritt’s focal point in *The Cake Man* is Christianity. In the words of Adam Shoemaker (2004), Merritt believes that “the Church has buttressed the efforts of government to remove all the authority of Aboriginal men” (p. 135). Since Merritt regards Christianity as “the most destructive force that has ever hit the Aboriginal people . . . You can’t even say it’s Christian charity; it’s a sick interpretation of a sad political philosophy” (qtd. in Shoemaker, 2004, p. 135), *The Cake Man* uncovers the historical, ideological workings of Christianity in furthering imperial domination.

Review of Literature

In *Black Words, White Page: Aboriginal Literature 1929-1988*, Adam Shoemaker (2004) refers to *The Cake Man* as “an historical play which makes pointed comments about black/white interracial history in Australia” (p. 135). Shoemaker believes that Merritt’s play, though aboriginal in content, “caters more to European theatrical conventions and is generally more accessible to non-Aborigines as a result” (p. 136). In “Indigenous Identity through Hybridity and Humor: A Postcolonial Reading of Robert Merritt’s *The Cake Man*”, Parvaneh Ganjtalab Shad (2018) investigates Edward Said and Homi Bhabha’s colonial negotiations in Merritt’s play, concluding that the playwright’s expositions of “colonial Christianity, colonial otherization, and figurative emasculation of Aboriginal men in Australian society” lead to “the realization that colonial discourse has the policy of obliterating Aboriginal traditions” (p. 9). In their critical analysis of Jack Davis’s *The Dreamers*, a play frequently compared with *The Cake Man*, Bahee Hadaegh and Himan Heidari (2018) draw on Tim Edwards’s notion of the crisis of masculinity and Judith Butler’s notion of performativity and gender identity to focus primarily on “unemployment, imprisonment, alcohol consumption, and acts of violence” in Davis’s play (p. 1).

Althusser and Ideology

Nowadays, Louis Althusser’s fame is indebted to the ground-breaking terms that he added to the Marxian philosophy. The greatest Althusserian influence in Marxism can be seen in his concept of ideology in his article “ideology and ideological state apparatuses” (1971). The significant question that Althusser propounds in this article is the way societies reproduce their dominant relations of production, which is vital to their function. The significance of the question lies in the fact that relations of production have always been tantamount to the relations of exploitation. So, how is it that the oppressed let themselves be continually exploited? To answer this question, Althusser proposes the idea of “ideological state apparatuses” which, according to him, becomes meaningful when juxtaposed to “repressive state apparatuses.” The two concepts, which are the most well-known ones by Althusser, describe the way states exert power in societies.

To put it simply, ISAs and RSA work next to each other to keep the order of society going. To sustain the economic ascendancy of the ruling class or class coalition, RSA carries out its social mission through force or the threat of force. If a person resists the police’s arrest, he or she will be forced to surrender. This force is socially approved since we are born into a sequence of ideological discourses that make it legitimate. Legitimization of force and propagation of ideological discourses are responsibilities on the shoulders of ISAs which are also aimed at sustaining the economic ascendancy of the ruling class or class coalition. A clear manifestation of ISAs is the educational systems in which individuals are educated to think and act by some certain principles. In such systems, individuals are punished if they go beyond the limits accepted by the institution. Based on the degree of encroachment, they may expect different penalties from getting low grades to be excluded from the institution completely.

Though the two phenomena, ISAs and RSA, have similar goals, they follow different strategies to be realized. While RSA exercises power by resorting to force and violence through such apparatuses as the army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons, etc., ISAs exercise power simultaneously by gaining consent of citizens through such apparatuses as family, religion, school, media, etc. Since, to keep their existence, modern societies are more inclined to gain consent of their people than showing violence, the role of ISAs is today more clearly felt. To give a better picture of ISAs, in his *Lenin and Philosophy*, Althusser (1971) classifies them into eight subdivisions:

the religious ISA (the system of the different churches), the educational ISA (the system of the different public and private schools), the family ISA, the legal ISA, the political ISA, the trade union ISA, the communications ISA (press, radio and television etc.), the cultural ISA (literature, the arts, sports etc.). (p. 137).

And as was previously mentioned, he sees the final aim of these apparatuses to publicize and preserve the ruling ideologies which are the ideologies of the ruling class.

After all, an important question that should be raised is how Althusser defines ideology. To give his distinctive answer, Althusser (1971) carries out a symptomatic reading of Marx. In his argument, Althusser acknowledges Marx as an originator of the scientific idea of ideology, but he maintains that Marx adopted pre-scientific language to describe the term. According to Althusser, Marx and Engels had discussed ideology principally in terms of “forms of consciousness,” while based on the assumptions of this science expressed elsewhere in Marx’s work, ideology is hardly associated with consciousness. Rather, it is a deeply *unconscious* phenomenon (Ferretter, 2006: p.76). By using the word *unconscious*, Althusser (1971) suggests that ideology is principally the kind of discourse that individuals do not consciously choose for themselves. As a result, they cannot make rational judgment about its truth and cannot be consciously satisfied or dissatisfied about it. This is because individuals are born into the stream of ideological discourses and images, and are automatically exposed to them, very similar to the time when they are exposed to language acquisition. Examples of such exposure are advertisements and propagandas that people are constantly surrounded by: the images of a proper family relationship, of the perfect male and female bodies, of lifestyle and mode, of the arguably supremacy of Western culture over the Eastern one, etc. People come across such images principally in the form of obviousness and inevitability, as things taken for granted. Insofar as the ideological images and discourses continue to be common sense and not becoming objects of critical consideration, they are still instances of the kind of subconscious abstract structure that constitutes ideology.

In order to emphasize the need for critical considerations of ideological discourses, Althusser suggests that there are two discourses present in societies: ideological discourse and scientific discourse. By scientific discourse, Althusser points to those attempts that try to dissect and describe societies as it is, leading finally to a true knowledge of human existence in capitalist society. In contrast, he sees the ideological discourses disseminated by the ISAs as a pretension to understanding,

while it has no mission other than inculcating misunderstanding. In fact, by their attempts to evade the truth, ideological discourses reinforce “the imaginary relation to the real conditions of existence” (Althusser, 1971, p. 153). Althusserian scientific discourse is capable of describing missions of postcolonial writers. Since postcolonial literature is concerned with giving a true knowledge of the oppressed and the marginalized by deconstructing the colonial history, it is very illuminating to detect and discuss the ISAs and the RSA they expose. In other words, it can be argued that one of the undertakings of postcolonial literature is to uncover colonial ISAs and RSA. Merritt’s *The Cake Man* is no exception in such an undertaking. All through the play, we see history from the eyes of the oppressed and how they are constantly in struggle with dominant ISAs and RSA.

A Short Summary of *The Cake Man*

The Cake Man is an absurd exploration of white colonialism from a black perspective. In the opening scene of the play, a native family is portrayed living happily in nature. Their happiness is soon interrupted by the entrance of a priest, a soldier and a civilian who try to convert them into Christianity, the dominant colonial ideology. Following the resistance of the native family against wheedling words of the priest and civilian, the soldier kills the native man and takes his wife and son away. When all is gone, in a symbolic scene, the native man opens his eyes and gets to his feet and in his monologue, he introduces himself as an anticolonial figure.

In the second act, the native man is called Sweet William, his wife Ruby, and their 11-year-old child Pumpkinhead, all living on the missions. Ruby is now a Christian subject while William still resists the new religion. As a result, he is unemployed and spends his days drinking. Because of his poverty, he has lost respect as a man and a father in the home. Ruby seeks solace in the Bible and remains a sympathetic wife and caring mother. Pumpkinhead helps where he can, even by stealing from white colonialists. Before going to sleep each night, Pumpkinhead asks his mother to relate the story of the Cake Man, a mythical character who brings cakes to the children to give them hope when the shadow of gloom is persistent. Though the son loves the story, he is simultaneously dubious about the existence of the Cake Man. After a theft from the civilian house, Pumpkinhead is arrested. By taking the child to his parent’s home, the civilian comes to know their abject living condition. He finally forgives the son by sending a cake to him, resulting in the child’s conviction in the existence of the Cake Man. In the end of the story, William is seen in Sydney to find a job. While standing near a pub, he is taken away by the police mistakenly for some troublesome Aborigines to an unknown destiny.

The Religious ISA

Due to its political and critical stance, *The Cake Man* is rife with scenes in which the colonial power tries to exert its ideological and repressive power. The religious theme of the play, which puts the forced conversion at the center of attention, sheds light on

the presence of the religious ISA and the concomitant RSA. In addition, the family and the cultural ISAs play a conspicuous role in contributing to the religious mission. The common point of all these ISAs is that, as Althusser indicates, all carry out their mission through gaining the “consent” of the subjects (Althusser, 1990: p. 93).

Since *The Cake Man* is highly critical of “forced conversion” (Shoemaker, 2004, p. 135), ISAs are actively present from the very beginning of the play. In the opening lines of the play, members of a native family are happily in Nature and suddenly the sound of drum disconcerts them. The sound stands for a great change. With the introduction of priest, the civilian, and soldier, representatives of ISA and RSA appear on stage and begin the process of subject making. The priest who characterizes the religious ISA resorts to the family ISA to transmit his ideas. Thus, he addresses the head of the family as the receiver of his orders:

PRIST: Greetings! And God’s blessing. I bring you good news! Here it is my child, [*offering the Bible*] for you and little family. And this also I bring to you [*wagging the cross*] and to your people. The gift of love. The promise of salvation. Yours.

[*He stands offering the book and the cross. The MAN stands, shielding his family. Pause.*] (Merritt, 1978, p. 6)

The priest’s statements are full of kind words with positive connotations and all are set in a way to exert power through gaining the consent of the subject. In the process, when the priest finds that the native man does not understand his words, such polite phrases as “Greetings,” “Here it is my child,” and “The gift of love” give their places to “heathen, poor devil” (Merritt, 1978, p. 6). This contrast indicates the priest’s conscious application of ideological discourse. When the priest’s plots in getting the attention of the native family prove to be useless, the civilian, another representative of ISAs, moves toward them. Like the priest, the civilian tries to attract their attention through getting their consent:

CIVILIAN: Here, I’ll reach them with my pretties.

[*He steps forward, reaching in his bag to bring forth bright beads, ribbons, and so on. He offers them in a coaxing way to the MAN, WOMAN, and BOY. They step back from his pretties.*]

You refuse? [*Angrily*] Well!

[*He stuffs the pretties back in his bag. Another pause.*]

PRIEST: Well. He refuses, yes. (Merritt, 1978, p. 7)

Because of the native family’s resistance, the subject making process through ideology and getting consent fails, resulting in the priest and the civilian’s anger. This does not result in the withdrawal of state representatives, as the colonial orders should be carried out. Thus, the priest, as the ideological basis of repression, issues harsher actions:

PRIEST: Alas, yes. Too ignorant for light, too old for change ...

SOLDIER: Too stupid for words.

PRIEST: Oh, now they are harsh words.

SOLDIER: Well, it's a brute, Father. So it is.

CIVILIAN: No child is a brute, surely?

PRIEST: Exactly not. We must save the child, by all means we must do that. He is, they are, and we all are God's own children, strange as it is, and we must love one another ... or be damned, and lost, and defeated utterly by the power of darkness.

[*The SOLDIER hefts his rifle.*]

SOLDIER: Never, so long as I live!

CIVILIAN: Ah! Christian soldier!

[*The SOLDIER holds the gun out. The PRIEST blesses it briefly.*] (Merritt, 1978, p. 7)

The priest and the soldier's dialogue in this excerpt can be taken as ISAs' permission for RSA's actions. As Althusser points out, states cling to a series of ideological discourses to legitimize repression. Here, Christian discourse issues this decree and the priest, as the best representative for such a discourse, "blesses" the soldier's rifle and issues repression, all under the pretext of saving the child and giving "light" to the family. Since interactions of ISAs and RSA appear in other scenes of the play, they are more discussed later in this research.

Following the murder of the native man, the colonial agents need to take his wife and son with themselves. To do this, the priest applies "the old routine" and orders the other two to "take up your parts on cue" (p. 10). In fact, the priest intends to sing to the woman and boy, a cultural strategy which he believes will "get 'em for sure" (p. 10). As was pointed out, the cultural ISA is one of the eight ideological apparatuses that Althusser enumerates in *Lenin and Philosophy*. According to Althusser (1971), the cultural ISA appear in the forms of "literature, the arts, sports etc." (p. 137) and, like other ISAs, transmit the ideologies of the dominant class. In *The Cake Man*, the cultural ISA manifests itself in the song the priest, accompanied by the soldier and civilian, recites for the native family:

Oh, there's a happy land somewhere,

And it's just a prayer awaay.

[*He carries it through, the others harmonizing.*]

All you've dreamed and planned is there,

And it's just a prayer awaay!

There'll be good conditions on your friendly Missions
Filled with laughing children at plaay.
Where your hearts will sing for it means one thing
All your old sins will be passed awaay.
[*They really sing it up.*]
Ohhhh! There's a happy land somewhere,
And it's just a prayer awaaay. (Merritt, 1978, p. 10)

While the priest seems to be consciously cunning in choosing strategies to convert his subjects, there are suggestions in the play that shows his wholehearted belief in the religious institute. In the foregoing excerpt, the fact that the stage direction holds "They really sing it up" can indicate the three men's conviction to their ideological statements. This belief on the side of ISA agents is also pointed out by Althusser. Althusser (1969) maintains that the dominant class lives its own ideology. It has to "believe in its own myth before it can convince others" (p. 234). In *The Cake Man*, besides the aforementioned stage direction, there are other indications of the priest and the soldier's conviction to their actions. The clearest of them is the two's dialogue in the beginning of the play. In the opening lines, when the native man does not react to the priest's words, the priest comes to believe that the native family does not understand his language. As a result, with no concern about the native family, he and his companions express their thoughts:

PRIEST: He doesn't understand me. [*Shaking his head sorrowfully*]
Who would dream, in this age, of such ignorance?
SOLDIER: Well, father, he must be one of the last. I mean, I've heard it told that God's word has been told the length and breadth of the country. So this lot ought to be about the last lot.
PRIEST: Ah! All our black brothers.
SOLDIER: Aye.
PRIEST: Saved.
SOLDIER: God be praised.
PRIEST: From their ignorance and sin.
SOLDIER: Yes Father, indeed.
PRIEST: And from hell.
SOLDIER: Oh, aye.
PRIEST: Through God's mercy and love.
SOLDIER: Amen.

PRIEST: Amen. (Merritt, 1978, p. 6)

In addition to the characters' conviction, another important issue that can be pointed out in these lines is the pattern by which ISA agents change individuals into subjects. In these and other lines of the play, the entity that is frequently referred to is God and the native family and their black fellows are called ignorant because they have not identified with this absolute entity. Accordingly, the ISA agents attempt to convert the natives into their intended subject through God as an absolute entity. This attempt is an issue that is pointed out by Althusser. Althusser (1971) argues that

All this 'procedure' to set up Christian religious subjects is dominated by a strange phenomenon: the fact that there can only be such a multitude of possible religious subjects on the absolute condition that there is a Unique, Absolute, Other Subject, i.e. God. (p. 166).

Discussing the quotation, Luke Ferretter (2006) maintains that "Within the Christian ISA, individuals learn to think of themselves and act as subjects insofar as they are addressed as such by the great Subject who precedes them" (p. 90). Althusser (1971) proceeds to generalize the "phenomenon" to all ideologies, remarking that this is a drive in all ideology that it "interpellates individuals as subjects in the name of a Unique and Absolute Subject" (p. 168). Althusser's argument manifests itself in other sections of the play, especially where the native man refers to the Dreamtime and relates a story from it.

In Australian mythology, the Dreamtime is an idealized world and a holy era, and contains the belief that the world was created by gods and ancestors (Knudsen, 2004). This Aboriginal religio-cultural worldview becomes an ideology that occasionally competes with Christianity in the play. Near the closing of the first act of *The Cake Man* after native woman and son are taken away, in a symbolic scene the native man "gets groggily to his feet" (Merritt, 1978, p. 11) to become an emblem of anticolonialism. In his drunken monologue, the native man complains about the conversion of his wife and begins addressing Jesus irreverently: "'You dirty Jesus,' I says, 'Come down here, you dirty little Jesus, and I'm gonna give you a drink a *my* vinegar with me'" (p. 13).

The man insults Christianity at the same time when he glorifies the Dreamtime because he believes "The Australian Aborigine – that's me – stands in danger of losing his identity" (p. 13). To regain the lost identity, there are some occasions in the play which the playwright makes the native man refer to Aboriginal heroes:

Sick of it, Rube, tired of knowin' that Pumpkinhead makes me tell him stories too. You know that, Rube, about the bushrangers, about Jimmy Governor, how the Kuris used to be brave, and how we'd fight and run and fight again (p. 34)

On the surface, the man complains about being made by their son, Pumpkinhead, to tell Aboriginal stories. But, in actual fact, when he acknowledges that "he's only meanin' to make me know about myself" (p. 34), he expresses his deep regret at not being able to act like the heroes of his land. This regret is in fact a glorification of an Aboriginal past which is revived next to the dominant religious ISA, Christianity.

Because of the presence of Aboriginal gods and heroes and the identification of subjects with these absolute subjects, it can be argued that the native man is associated with an Aboriginal ideological system. This means that the native man is himself a subject to a native ideology (the Dreamtime) and, very similar to Christianity, follows "a Unique, Absolute, Other Subject." Thus, the priest's claim to deliver the native family from "ignorance" (Merritt, 1978, p. 6) and lead them "out of darkness into the light" (p. 9) is shown to be a clearly ideological one. Since the colonial system overlooks the deep-rooted Aboriginal tradition and religion, Merritt rereads history to expose it from the perspective of the colonized. In his rereading, the playwright exposes how religious ISA paves the colonial path in the public arena, obliterating native rites and principles of a native land along the way.

The Family ISA

In the second act of the play, the scene moves from outside into inside. While in the first act the audience witnessed ideological and repressive apparatuses in the public arena, in the second act they see them in the private sphere. In the second act, the native woman of the first act, who is now called Rubi, has become a Christian subject and lives with her husband and son, the native man and boy of the first act who are respectively called Sweet William and Pumpkinhead, in a missionary district. In their private sphere Ruby plays the role of the family ISA: in different scenes, she caresses the Bible and invites the family members to Christianity through different ways such as storytelling and direct ordering. The important point about Ruby is that like the priest of the first act she seemingly has a strong conviction for her ideological thoughts and also, she tries to further her causes through implementing consent in her addressees.

Ruby's ISA role becomes apparent from the opening of the second act. In the stage direction, Merritt describes her in this way: "RUBY, *the woman from Act One, now 'civilised', stands using a flat iron over brown paper to iron a child's shirt dry*" (p. 18). By setting Ruby's "house on a mission for Aborigines" (p. 18) and using the word *civilised* in the quotation, the play ironically indicates that the woman is now cultured in the colonial sense. Also, the stage direction and the following dialogues state that Ruby irons her son's school clothes. While ironing, she motivates Pumpkinhead to do his school assignments: "Be lucky you get your stuff done for school" (p. 19). The reference to school in a domestic setting like family is suggestive in Althusserian philosophy. In *Lenin and Philosophy*, Althusser (1971) argues that the bourgeoisie has made "the educational apparatus" as "its dominant ideological State apparatus," resulting in the fact that "the School-Family couple has replaced the Church-Family couple" (pp. 103-104). Similarly, in *The Cake Man*, the school-family couple becomes the dominant educational apparatus and, with Ruby as the

coordinator, religious and educational conformity to the dominant class is practiced in these seemingly private domains.

In the household where Ruby plays the family ISA role, the audience can hear resisting voices coming from the targeted subjects. For instance, Pumpkinhead is seen saying “Don’ care I can’t go to school” and is seen defying her mother’s order to respect his father (Merritt, 1978, pp. 19-20). Nearly in all such resistance, Ruby tries to handle the son through “*Coaxing*” (Merritt, 1978, p. 19), as the stage direction informs us. When Ruby has to be harsher with Pumpkinhead because the son is stubborn in disobedience, she tries to attract the sulky son by relating a Christian story. By hearing the name of the Christ, Pumpkinhead is revived emotionally and turns to ask his mother to relate the story of the Cake Man, which is again a Christian tale. The story of the Cake Man is in fact a cultural ISA and since ISAs are meant to get the “consent” of subjects, Ruby says, “Well come on, you gotta laugh first!” (p. 21). But, at the end of the narration, Pumpkinhead says sorrowfully that there is no Cake Man. He has got this belief from his friends and as a result begins another conflict with Ruby, leading in fact to a struggle with the family ISA. This opposition becomes more serious with the presence of Sweet William, who is still a symbol of resistance.

In Merritt’s play, Sweet William is a figure whose resistance can be a touchstone to discuss an ongoing debate in Althusserian scholarship. In his philosophy, Althusser leaves no room for successful opposition. He argues that individuals finally surrender to the process of subjectification and consequently one cannot imagine any room for their resistance (Jørgensen & Philips, 2002). This aspect of his philosophy has been frequently attacked by later critics. Today, a large number of critics in such fields as cultural studies, communication research, and discourse analysis contend that “the dominant ideology thesis underestimated people’s capacity to offer resistance to ideologies” (Jørgensen & Philips, 2002, p. 15). In *The Cake Man*, such a conflicting view is seen in Sweet William.

Prior to his arrival on stage, Sweet William brings his thoughts by reciting Ned Kelly’s song (Merritt, 1978, p. 24). Since the song is about a bushranger who is one of Australia’s greatest folk heroes (Basu, 2012, p. 18), spectators come to see that he has not only become a Christian subject, but also has feelings of belonging to a hero who has nationalistic and anarchist aspects simultaneously. This subversive tendency can also be seen in Pumpkinhead. Though Pumpkinhead is apparently averse to William, the roots of his skepticism can be found in his father. In other words, William and Pumpkinhead are figures who stand against the representative of the family ISA, Ruby, with difference in intensity. In her interactions with the deviants, Ruby, who steadfastly tries to carry out her mission as the family ISA, talks to them in a very kind and appealing way in the first place, like the priest of the first act. When mingled with caress, humor, and storytelling, this strategy works somehow effectively and immediately with Pumpkinhead. But, William proves to be highly obstinate and even intent on changing Ruby:

WILLIAM: Huh. You prayin’ again, Rube?

RUBY: Now don't you go talkin' like that, Sweet William. That's why we never have no luck all the time. Do you good, it would, to read this book, that's where I get my strength from in every day, truly is.

WILLIAM: Couldn' do me no more good than a smoke would right now, Rube. Or a little drink.

RUBY: Don't want you talkin' like that in the presence of this here good book, Sweet William! (Merritt, 1978, p. 28)

As the stage direction informs readers by stating "He looks at Ruby, gets a smile" (p. 28), Ruby's approach in this dialogue is to tenderly convince William to respect the holy book. Gradually her tender suggestion for respect becomes an invitation to Christianity. In such a scene, to empower William emotionally in their discussion, Ruby tries appealingly to remind him that for success he should resort to the Christ's God: "We just got to trust in God, don't I keep tellin' you? And you see how good it comes one day" (p. 32). Ruby's process of subjectification through getting consent does not work with William. In the end, William's obstinacy and subversive mind makes Ruby appear symbolically as the representative of repressive state apparatus at home. When William questions the truth of Ruby's words and her religious convictions, Ruby adopts a verbally repressive stance:

WILLIAM: Rube, I'm sick of hearin' you tell the kids damn stories that ain't never comin' true. All about Jesus loves us, and how one day we're gonna find the Cake Man ...

RUBY: Jesus is true. Cake Man is true. Shut up.

WILLIAM: Ah, Rube ... ain't no Jesus, ain't no man who ... They just stories.

RUBY: Shut your wicked mouth, Sweet William! (Merritt, 1978, p. 33)

Ruby is sanctioned to be repressive since she is an ISA agent. Though she approaches William in different ways, the native man remains resistant to the colonial religion. Remarkably, William is not only obstinate to become a Christian subject, but is also optimistic to get his portion of life from the colonial system: "I'll go to Sydney; Rube, and I'll make everything right before it's too late" (p. 34). William keeps his obstinacy until he gets to Sydney. There, while passing a pub, he sees some drunken Aborigines "*pushed out*" (p. 57) the pub's door. The police come and take William mistakenly away:

POLICEMAN: Right you, get your arse in that wagon.

WILLIAM: Who, me? Oh, no boss, I'm down from the bush.

POLICEMAN: Don't you bloody well answer me back! (Merritt, 1978, p. 57)

William is taken away by the RSA. At this time, the music "There's a Happy Land Somewhere" is heard, the very one the priest, the soldier, and the civilian sung before taking away Ruby and Pumpkinhead. This coincidence may be taken as a sign

of William's subjectification in the end. While William evaded ISAs in the play, he was finally forced to surrender by the RSA. The claim for this surrender is further supported in William's epilogue at the end of the play: "Forget all that shit they say about giving me back my culture. That's shit. It isn't what I'm really after, not really" (p. 58). Yet, he leaves a very faint hope of Aboriginal reclaiming at the end of his speech by wanting one of his realities back: "Not yours ... mine" (p. 59).

William's deterministic end keeps in line with Althusser's antihumanistic view of humanity. In agreement with Althusser's antihumanistic rejection of resistance, the play finally hands over its symbol of resistance to the State apparatuses. This is also true of Pumpkinhead. In the beginning of the play, the boy exhibits promising sings for future anticolonial stance. William's claim of his portion of life from "white fellers" (p. 36) is more extremely seen in Pumpkinhead when he attempts stealing coal from the civilian's house (p. 27). While William regrets not being one of "bushrangers" (p. 34), Pumpkinhead claims "I'll be a bushranger" (p. 20). However, the little boy's restoration of the stolen coal (p. 53) and his final belief in the Cake Man, when the civilian brings him a cake out compassion (p. 56), symbolizes his surrender and subjectification.

Interwoven ISAs and RSA

An important feature of Althusserian philosophy, which is reflected in *The Cake Man*, is the interwoven relationship between ISAs and RSA. In the section Religious ISA, the intricate relationship between ideology and repression was pointed out. There we saw how the priest in his role as the religious ISA issued the permission for repression for the soldier as the RSA representative. We saw how the priest clung to Christian words to justify and underestimate the aggressive act of the soldier. Also, the same relationship is seen in Ruby's role as the family ISA. For instance, in her discussion with William on the Christ, she represses William's rejection of the prophet by her verbal attack. This means that Ruby's ISA presence is mingled with RSA traces. The interaction in question has a special place in Althusserian philosophy, to the extent that he sees the functions of the two state apparatuses as deeply interwoven:

The (Repressive) State Apparatus functions massively and predominantly *by repression* (including physical repression), while functioning secondarily by ideology. (There is no such thing as a purely repressive apparatus.) ... For their part, the Ideological State Apparatuses function massively and predominantly *by ideology*, but they also function secondarily by repression, even if only ultimately, but only ultimately, this is very attenuated and concealed, even symbolic. (There is no such thing as a purely ideological apparatus.) (Althusser, 1971, p. 138)

In Merritt's play, the interaction of ISAs and RSA is apparent from the very beginning in the title of the first act. The playwright names the first act "God and Gun" and by juxtaposing the representatives of the two words, the priest and the soldier, demonstrates the ideological interaction of these concepts (Merritt, 1978, p. 5). This

issue is best epitomized when the soldier wants to shoot the native man and the priest intervenes to give ideological tone to the soldier's terrorization:

PRIEST: I must pray!

[He falls to his knees, praying, head down. The SOLDIER shoots the MAN dead. The priest looks up to see him fall, the WOMAN and the BOY crying, falling on him in grief.]

Murder! What doest thou? *[Weeping]* Oh, oh, my children! Why killest thou each other? Why murderest thou each otheresth? *[To the CIVILIAN, who is inspecting the corpse]* Is it dead? Oh, woe, then, woe to him whose hand obtained the deed! *[Turning to the SOLDIER]* Was I not praying for our answer to this problem? Did you not see me at my prayers? *[Sadly]* Oh, why did you kill this child of God?

SOLDIER: Well, you blessed me rifle.

PRIEST: Thank God for that. (Merritt, 1978, pp. 7-8)

The priest adopts two roles before and after the shooting. Before the murder, he hears the soldier saying "Now my duty is plain" (p. 7), meaning that the ISA has failed and the RSA has to intervene. It is in fact the priest himself who prepares the ground for this intervention by saying "Alas! I have failed" (p. 7). Then, when he sees the soldier is talking about his "duty," he provides a religious justification for the shooting by praying in the scene. While all his actions are indirectly invitations for the RSA intervention, he takes on a different posture after the shooting because he has to condemn murder as a danger to social order. What is remarkable is the priest's ideological discourse for invitation to murder, for condemnation, and even when wants to forgive the soldier:

PRIEST: God's law is against it!

SOLDIER: Well, I wish I hadn't done it.

PRIEST: You confess to the deed?

SOLDIER: To you, Father, aye.

PRIEST: And are you truly sorry?

SOLDIER: Aye. I am indeed.

PRIEST: And was there anything else?

SOLDIER: No, not offhand, Father.

PRIEST: Say three Hail Marys, two Our Fathers. And mind, before you go to sleep this night.

SOLDIER: Aye. Thank you, Father. (Merritt, 1978, p. 8)

Like a physician, the priest prescribes ideological drugs to have control over the events. He paradoxically issues the order of murder and at same time gets a confession for it. Remarkably, the priest's presence in the play is a clear indication of how the ISAs and the RSA are deeply interwoven. Like the priest, Ruby keeps a level of repression or a threat for repression in her ideological prescription in the domestic domain. When her coaxing attempts to make William respect Jesus fails, she uses such offensive expressions as "Shut your wicked mouth" (p. 33), "you stupid man" (p. 34), and "you fool of a man" (p. 34) to suppress William's deviation. Also, in her dealings with Pumpkinhead, she threatens the boy by reminding him of the consequences of violation:

RUBY: Welfare said you miss any more school they put you in the home for bad boys.

PUMPKINHEAD: Don' care.

RUBY: They do that to my baby I'll die. (p. 19)

Ruby's ideological statements "function secondarily by repression" though they are "very attenuated and concealed, even symbolic" (Althusser, 1971, p. 138). The degree of the threat for repression goes up and down based on the degree of violation. For not attending the school, the threat is exclusion; for using a bushranger's spear, the threat is death:

PUMPKINHEAD: I'll be a bushranger.

RUBY: They hang you sure then.

[*But she smiles and rubs his head.*] (p. 20)

What is noteworthy is the fact that repression or the threat for it is issued, justified, and communicated by the ISAs. Pumpkinhead desisted from stealing from the white men because he was warned "thieves are put in gaol, my boy, and other nasty places" (p. 48). William finds no other choice than begging for money (p. 30), because he was informed that stealing is "a sin" (p. 36). In fact, all the "deviant" characters in *The Cake Man*, deviant in the colonial sense, are surrounded by ideological discourses which constantly remind them if they violate limitations, they are there to issue and justify suppression. The ironic point about the colonial ISAs is their negligence of a historical fact that the real deviant is the very system for which they propagate ideologies, the very system that encroached Aboriginal land and life, and the very system that covers the real history by claims of bringing civilization and progress.

Conclusion

Robert Merritt's (1978) *The Cake Man* is a postcolonial play aimed at rewriting the colonial history and portraying events as seen and experienced by the colonized. The play puts forced conversion and Christian missionary at the center of its attention to emphasize the colonial workings of ISAs and RSA in both public and private domains. Though *The Cake Man* presents resisting and anticolonial characters, it finally depicts

them surrendered to the State apparatuses. This may suggest that the playwright has acknowledged the white ascendancy in Australia and has found resistance to the hegemony to be impractical. In fact, it seems Merritt has staged an Aboriginal life history to make his white audience aware of the miserable circumstances of Aborigines in their own mother land. This argument can be strengthened by the presence of the civilian in the play. As the name suggests, the civilian seems to be the character that Merritt wishes his white audience to identify with. In the fifth scene of the second act, when he gets into Ruby's house to find his stolen coal, the civilian comes across the Aboriginal pitiable and underprivileged life. At this moment, he feels a pain in his chest, takes back his claim of theft, and goes and returns with the cake. Merritt seems to claim such heartache on the part of his white audience. Thus, in its integrationist approach, *The Cake Man* writes a systematically Aboriginal history to make white Australians sympathize with the Aborigines whose serene and natural life in Australia was disrupted by imperialism and its State apparatuses.

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