

# IDENTITY(IES)

A MULTICULTURAL AND  
MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

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**EXPERIENCING THE IDENTITY(IES) OF THE  
OTHER(S), FINDING THAT OF ONE'S OWN  
ON/THROUGH THE STAGE IN WERTENBAKER'S  
PLAY *OUR COUNTRY'S GOOD***

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**Abstract:** Drawing attention to the immense potentialities of cultural, artistic and intellectual engagements and focusing particularly on the transformative and regenerative power of theatre in society, Timberlake Wertenbaker's play *Our Country's Good* (1988) depicts the (hi)story of the noteworthy changes and improvements that a group of underprivileged people experience as they gain access to art. Based on a historical event and set in a colonial environment, the play presents a fictionalized account of the real-life experiences of a group of convicts who, transported from Britain to Australia in 1787 as members of the first Australian Penal Colony, are given the opportunity to be actively involved in a theatrical performance and who, through that involvement, go –both individually and collectively– through a notable process of gaining awareness and self-(re)definition. As these convict-actors/actresses play their roles and experience the identities of socio-culturally, economically and hierarchically very different characters, they

increasingly recognize the constructedness and, consequently, the questionable, challengeable and changeable nature of identities, social roles and positions. Wertenbaker depicts the production of *a play within her play* and demonstrates the civilizing, rehabilitating, liberating and equalizing power of cultural and artistic practices. This article, while presenting a detailed critical analysis of the dominant themes of class, cultural, racial, ethnic, gender and environmental discrimination and crucial issues like (in)equality, (in)justice, crime and punishment, displacement and (un)belonging as well as the formation and maintenance of identities within these boundaries, pays special attention to the dual function or the uses and abuses of language, discourse, representation, culture and art in relation to all these crucial subjects. There is a detailed discussion of the role of language and narratives not only as tools of constructing but also of deconstructing and invalidating oppressive and unjust social roles and systems, with a special emphasis on the power and benefits of cultural, intellectual and creative practices.

**Keywords:** Postcolonial Literature, Feminist Theatre, Race-Class-Gender, Displacement, Identity Construction, Rewriting

Based on a historical event and set in a colonial environment dominated by racial, ethnic, class, gender and environmental discrimination, exploitation and violence, Timberlake Wertenbaker's play *Our Country's Good* (1988) presents and problematizes, on the one hand, crucial issues like (in)equality, (in)justice, (in)humaneness, crime and punishment, displacement and (un)belonging as well as the formation and maintenance of "identities" within these boundaries, and, on the other hand, the significant and dual function or the uses

and abuses of language, narratives, representation, culture and art in relation to these crucial issues. In this context, effectively drawing the audience's attention to the immense potentialities of cultural, intellectual and artistic engagements and focusing particularly on the transformative and regenerative power of theatre in society, Wertebaker's play depicts the (hi)story of the noteworthy changes and improvements that a group of underprivileged people experience as they gain access to art.

The play presents a fictionalized account of the real-life experiences of a group of convicts who, transported from Britain to Australia in 1787 as members of the first Australian Penal Colony established in Sydney Cove in New South Wales, are given the opportunity to be actively involved in a theatrical performance and who, through that involvement, go –both individually and collectively– through a notable process of gaining awareness and self-(re)definition. Under the control of the colonial authorities, the convicts put on stage a play. Wertebaker depicts the production of *a play within her play*. This is a demonstration and celebration of the civilizing, rehabilitating, liberating and equalizing power of (especially collective) cultural and artistic practices even under the most oppressive circumstances.

The historical event that the play is based on –the staging of a play by a group of the convicts of the First Fleet in the Australian Penal Colony in New South Wales in 1789– was first recorded as “factual” data in some historical sources like actual journals, letters, and other written accounts about the settlement. Then this historical data was fictionalized in the form of a novel by the Australian novelist Thomas Keneally in his historical novel *The Playmaker* (1987). Then in 1988, the (hi)story was renarrated by Wertebaker, this time in the dramatic genre, with the title *Our Country's Good*. Thus, from the very beginning of the audience's/reader's encounter with Wertebaker's play onwards, the narrative concepts of rewriting

and intertextuality come emphatically to the foreground as powerful reminders of the concepts of the multilayered nature of human experience, perception, and reality, of the plurality of viewpoints, of polyphony, and of the multiplicity of narratives and representation of phenomena. This strongly underlined intertextual context keeps the audience's/reader's attention on the existence of many other (latent) perspectives, stories and histories, including those of the oppressed, silenced, dispossessed and marginalized ones; in other words, those of the convicts, those of the female members of the convict community, those of the native Aboriginal people of the territory, and also those of the environment, still waiting to be (re) written.

From that aspect, a comparative study including all of the above mentioned historical, (auto)biographical, epistolary, fictional/literary/dramatic resources –the historical records, journals, letters, and other material together with the novel and the play– would provide a thoroughly extensive research covering all the dimensions of the subject. However, here, in accordance with the main theme (“identities”) and within the spatial limits and requirements of focus of this collection of essays, the scope of this article will, leaving that kind of an all-inclusive analysis to another wider study, be limited to a critical analysis of the dramatic narrative version of the (hi) story: the play *Our Country's Good* by Timberlake Wertenbaker. For Wertenbaker's plays are especially, in Susan Carlson's words, “often about the making of identity” (Carlson, 1993: 268). They show “her abiding concern with the displacement of peoples and the shifting faultlines of cultural identity”, “a planet on the move and a complex web of overlapping identities” (Peter Buse, 2003). And in this play, Wertenbaker “use[s] history to examine and critique the ways in which identity, especially gender and class identity, is created in contemporary society”, as Verna N. Foster remarks (Foster, 98/99: 256). This dramatic version of the (hi)story is particularly relevant

in this context because the form of a play in general and especially the device of “a play within a play”, or, in Carlson’s words, “the play’s double theatricality” (Carlson, 1993: 278), offer a continual emphasis on the issue of acting and, consequently, on (temporarily) becoming different selves as well as on the relationship between the self and the identities/social roles he/she performs. Moreover, the fact that the processes of rehearsing and playing different roles are presented as an effective medium of discussing and questioning the making and unmaking of identities in Wertenbaker’s play provides a particularly appropriate and productive framework in this regard.

Accordingly, the focal points of discussion in the following pages will be the processes of the construction and maintenance of identities, social roles and positions by the dominant socio-political/economic powers; the inequalities and injustices in these processes of identity formation; the significant issues of raising/gaining awareness about and exposing and invalidating the working mechanisms of those processes; and the function of linguistic, discursive, representational and artistic act(ivity)es in relation to them – as exemplified and examined in Wertenbaker’s play.

The article will analyse in detail how, as these convict-actors/actresses (accompanied by the few officers who contribute to and support the production) prepare for, discuss and play their parts and (anxiously and tentatively) experience the identities of socio-culturally, economically and hierarchically very different characters, the theme of the constructedness of many social positionings comes emphatically to the foreground. The theme will be discussed by tracing the convicts’ gradually increasing awareness of the social, political, economic, historical and ideological mechanisms constructing social positions, relations and identities; of the artificial and thus questionable, challengeable and changeable nature of these constructions; and of the vital importance of being able to have a voice and to speak and the function of linguistic and artistic

devices of (self)expression as a means of achieving this voice. The emphasis will be on the role of language, speech, representation and narratives not only as tools of constructing but also of deconstructing and invalidating oppressive and unjust social roles and systems as well as identities and, in David Ian Rabey's words, "patriarchal-imperial impositions" (Rabey, 1990: 518). Following Wertebaker's points of emphasis, special attention will be paid to the power and benefits of cultural, intellectual and creative engagements –as exemplified not only by the positive results brought about by the convicts' involvement in them (whatever aims the authorities might have had in their minds while allowing this involvement) but also by the kind of extensive awareness that Wertebaker's play provides her audience/readers/us with.

The quotation that the playwright gives before the main body of the text of the play, in other words, the paragraph that Wertebaker chooses as her epigraph, needs to be taken into consideration and discussed in detail since it is especially significant for the introduction of the main concerns of the play (even though it is available only to the "reader" of the script and not to the spectators of the stage performance). It is a quotation from a sociological study on education, which presents some remarkable data on how strongly an individual's intellectual, creative, and emotional performance and success are linked to the encouraging attitude as well as the opportunities he/she receives:

Twenty per cent of the children in a certain elementary school were reported to their teachers as showing unusual potential for intellectual growth. The names of these twenty per cent of the children were drawn by means of a table of random numbers, which is to say that the names were drawn out of a hat. Eight months later these unusual or 'magic' children showed significantly greater gains in IQ than did the remaining children who had

not been singled out for the teachers' attention. The change in the teachers' expectations regarding the intellectual performance of these allegedly 'special' children had led to an actual change in the intellectual performance of these randomly selected children ... who were also described as more interesting, as showing greater intellectual curiosity and as happier. (Wertenbaker, *Our Country's Good*, 1988, introductory pages)

The quotation is taken from *Pygmalion in the Classroom* (1968) by Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson and the title of the book indicates that the case of Pygmalion, the protagonist of one of the most renowned Greek myths, is considered as parallel to the life-changing experiences observed in the defined classroom.

As widely known (especially through its Roman version in Book Ten of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*), Pygmalion is a sculptor from Cyprus, who carves a statue of a woman out of ivory and who, on finishing it and seeing its perfection, falls deeply in love with it. He treats the statue as if it were a real human being, as if it were a real woman, as if it were his beloved; with extreme admiration, care and affection. In the end, through the constructive interference of Aphrodite, the statue comes to life, becomes a real, living, flesh and blood woman. The sculptor's loving and tender expectations and behaviour result in the fulfilment of his wish.

Here, it should be pointed out that the model of male-female relationship presented in this myth, no doubt, is also clearly open to criticism from the aspect that it obviously reflects just another version and reproduction of the dominant patriarchal discourse of creating an ideal woman for or (re)shaping a woman completely in accordance with the male's desire; like manufacturing an object of male gaze, statically, beautifully and silently standing there. For it is also known that Pygmalion experiences this process of creating an ideal woman for himself after he has had some serious disappointments in his



life with some real, flesh and blood local women, whose “loose morals” he condemns:

Because Pygmalion had witnessed these women leading reproachful lives and repulsed by the defects nature had bestowed in such abundance upon the female character, he took to living as a single man without a wife. For a long time he was deprived of a companion for his bedchamber. During this time he carved snow white ivory with propitiously wondrous artistry, giving it shape, a beauty with which no woman can be born. He conceived a love for his own work. (James, 2011: 10)

However, at this point, leaving the discussion of this disputable aspect to a later and relevant section in the pages below and following the underlined themes in Wertenbaker’s play, first the much more positive concept known as the “Pygmalion effect” or the “self-fulfilling prophesy”, in other words, the power of positive expectations, as discussed by Rosenthal and Jacobson will be examined in detail.

Wertenbaker’s choice of this quotation as her epigraph (and the consequent direct reference to the Pygmalion effect or self-fulfilling prophesy) functions as a strong introductory emphasis on the main concern of the play, that is, the theme of the potential improvements that can be achieved by the disadvantaged if they are surrounded by a constructive and encouraging attitude, as exemplified by the experiences of the convict actors/actresses. The special device through which this effect or self-fulfilling prophesy can be achieved so effectively in the case of the disadvantageous subjects in Wertenbaker’s play is defined as the collective experience of cultural and artistic involvements: the theatrical event.

*Our Country’s Good*, in which the playwright presents the above given (hi)story (the events and the characters) through a combination

of factual/historical and fictional elements, opens with the dismal situation of the convicts. The convicts are depicted as suffering from a physical, social and psychological sense of dislocation, exclusion, and the increasingly violent and dehumanizing treatment that they are subjected to erasing all their sense of self-worth. There is this tone of harshness not only in the relationship between the officers and the convicts but among the convicts themselves as well. In fact, there is sheer violence in the very opening scene of the play in which the first words that the audience hears are uttered by one of the officers, the Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark, as he counts the lashes while one of the convicts, Robert Sideway, is being flogged: “Forty-four, forty-five, forty-six ...” (Wertenbaker, 1998: 1). Moreover, throughout the play there is the implication that the crimes for which the convicts were transported and punishments inflicted might not sometimes be proportionate and just. While B.H. Fletcher reminds that “Historians no longer regard them as the innocent victims of adverse social conditions and a harsh penal code” (Fletcher, 1967: 4), Christiane Bimberg, for example, states that “the convicts have been sentenced to absurdly high penalties for comparatively insignificant crimes without mitigating circumstances being allowed for” (Bimberg, 1997/98: 409-410). It is stated in the introductory notes to the script that “[f]our fifth of all transportation was for ‘offences against property’” – as in the case of a twenty-year-old forest dweller convicted of highway robbery side by side with a seventy-year-old person who stole “twelve pounds of Gloucester cheese” or a “nine-year-old chimney sweep” convicted of “breaking and entering a dwelling house and stealing 1 linen shirt ... 5 silk stockings ... 1 pistol ... and 2 aprons” (*Our Country's Good*, introductory notes).

In such a tough atmosphere of frustration, desperation and suffering, Captain Arthur Phillip, the Governor-in-Chief of New South Wales, is introduced: A character who, in contrast to some

of the strictly conservative, discouraging and discriminatory officers, throughout the play expresses his views on the necessity of “educating” the convicts and thus “redeeming” them instead of inflicting severe punishment. Making references to thinkers, philosophers and prominent figures in history, he introduces his ideas on the notions of justice, crime and punishment and equal opportunities. His references to Jean Jacques Rousseau’s ideas, for instance, which he mentions while expressing his belief in the inborn goodness of man, who may then be corrupted by the wrong in society, or to Socrates’s statement “that a slave boy can learn the principles of geometry as well as a gentleman” exemplify his constructive attitude in this regard: “When he treats the slave boy as a rational human being, the boy becomes one, he loses his fear, and he becomes a competent mathematician. A little more encouragement and he might become an extraordinary mathematician” (Wertenbaker, 1998: 57). Even though there is no questioning or criticism of the existence of a system in which there are “slaves” and “masters”, still it is significant that he draws attention to the potentialities of the human being regardless of his/her social status.

Thinking that “the convicts ... are already being punished by their long exile” (Wertenbaker, 1998: 18), and with his belief in the “intelligence... goodness, talent, the innate qualities of human beings” (Wertenbaker, 1998: 57), he expresses his tendency and intention to give an opportunity to those disadvantaged people – and to bring about results that may be defined in terms of the Pygmalion effect. His comments on the case of one of the convicts, Liz Morden, who is waiting to be hanged for a crime she actually has not committed and who is completely unwilling to communicate with those around her –not even just to defend and, consequently, perhaps to be able to rescue herself– reflect the same attitude: “How do we know what humanity lies hidden under the rags and filth of a mangled life? I

have seen soldiers given up for dead, limbs torn, heads cut open, come back to life. If we treat her as a corpse, of course she will die” (Wertenbaker, 1998: 58).

While defining his own position in this context, Arthur Phillip asks “What is a statesman’s responsibility?” and the answer that he himself gives is:

To ensure the rule of law. But the citizens must be taught to obey that law of their own will. I want to rule over responsible human beings, not tyrannise over a group of animals. I want there to be a contract between us, not a whip on my side, terror and hatred on theirs. (Wertenbaker, 1998: 59)

His awareness of and disturbance with the dehumanizing and destructive effects of the violence permeating their small community there become clearer as he, commenting on the case of one of the convicts who has been sentenced to two hundred lashes for trying to escape, says: “It will take time for him to see himself as a human being again” (Wertenbaker, 1998: 57).

At one point, on hearing the comment of Captain Watkin Tench, one of the most conservative and oppressive officers, that “There is much excitement in the colony about the hangings. It’s their theatre” (Wertenbaker, 1998: 4), Arthur Phillip says “I would prefer them to see real plays: fine language, sentiment” and thus comes the idea of the play: He suggests that these prisoners put a play on stage.

Theatre, which for Phillip is “an expression of civilization”, will encourage the convicts “to think in a free and responsible manner” (Wertenbaker, 1998: 21). He believes that the participation of these convicts, or this “colony of wretched souls” as he calls them at one point (Wertenbaker, 1998: 58), in a theatrical activity can turn them into a more civilized community.

Yet, this activity, which Esther Beth Sullivan calls “a kind of experiment in social engineering” (Sullivan, 1993: 142), will obviously also help the establishment of a more proper sort of colony, which will act in conformity with the requirements of the colonial British Empire. It is significant, in this context, that the play is planned to be performed on –and as a celebration of– the King’s birthday on 4 June 1789. Thus, what Ann Wilson defines as the “problematic nature of Phillip’s position” (Wilson, 1993: p.33), namely his humanistic concerns going side by side with his efforts to contribute to the continuation of the oppressive colonial system, is becoming clearer: “A play is a world in itself, a tiny colony we could say”, he remarks (Wertenbaker, 1998: 60). Delores Ringer comments that “The Governor ... uses theatre as a way to colonize the convicts, just as disease, guns and the destruction of their environment will serve to colonize the Aborigines” (Ringer, 2012).

The play that the convicts will stage is an eighteenth-century comedy, *The Recruiting Officer*, which was written by the Irish playwright George Farquhar and first produced in London in 1706. It presents two interwoven themes of, on the one hand, a romance of two couples (Plume and Sylvia, Worthy and Melinda) and the lives and acts of some members of the military life of the time, depicted through a critical yet comical perspective, on the other. So, ironically, these convicts, who live in miserable circumstances and some of whom are just expecting their looming executions, are going to act in a comedy. And they start despite the strong rejections from some of the officers.

Major Robbie Ross, for example, is only one of those who show very strong objection to the idea of allowing the convicts to deal with theatre. He, with all his discriminatory and prejudiced attitude, is not only against the idea of bringing criminals into contact with a play and bringing the officers and the convicts together on the same platform and thus on the same level; he is not only against

the cooperation between the hierarchically very different groups of convicts and officers, but he is also against –in his own words– the “Irishness” of the playwright Farquhar (“An Irishman! I have to sit there and listen to an Irishman!”) and the –again in his own mistaken words– the “Frenchness” of Rousseau (“A Frenchman! What can you expect? We’re going to listen to a foraging Frenchman now”, Wertebaker, 1998: 18, 20). Similarly, being Jewish means being guilty in his view (“You are Jewish ... you are guilty” he says to Wisenhammer, a Jewish convict. Wertebaker, 1998: 52). Being a woman too is, in his view, another one of those inborn sources of inferiority: He calls the women convicts “[f]ilthy, thieving, lying whores” (Wertebaker, 1998: 18). As will be seen later on, when one of the convicts, Liz Morden, is accused of stealing from the colony’s food and is consequently condemned to death by hanging, the decision is made based on the testimony of a drunken soldier, whose words Ross considers more reliable than those of a sober female convict. On hearing Ralph Clark’s words that this drunken soldier may not be telling the truth, Ross shows a sharp reaction to Ralph’s “taking the word of a convict against the word of a marine” (Wertebaker, 1998: 83). He claims that “order will become disorder” if this theatrical event is allowed (Wertebaker, 1998: 25). Theatre, obviously, is a threat to all the discriminatory, oppressive and unjust ideas that shape all his attitude.

Similarly, for Captain Watkin Tench, for instance, who is another one of the officers objecting to the play and who is openly against Phillip’s ideas that the convicts can be educated and reformed, theatre is “an unnecessary waste” (Wertebaker, 1998: 23) and staging a play with the participation of the convicts means “having convicts laugh at officers” (Wertebaker, 1998: 21). According to his completely deterministic and essentialist view, “the criminal tendency is innate” (Wertebaker, 1998: 4); a criminal is a criminal and a savage is a savage: “Many criminals seem to have been born that

way. It is in their nature ... It is like the savages here. A savage is a savage because he behaves in a savage manner. To expect anything else is foolish" (Wertenbaker, 1998: 18, 19).

Yet the Governor, Arthur Phillip, for whom "[s]urely they can also be reformed" (Wertenbaker, 1998: 18), is still determined to go on with his project although he is also aware that this event may not be so very effective after all: "Won't change much, but it is the diagram in the sand that may remind – just remind the slave boy –. Do you understand?", he says to Ralph Clark, who is going to direct the play; "We may fail. I may have a mutiny on my hands. They are trying to convince the Admiralty that I am mad" (Wertenbaker, 1998: 59).

However, whether the Governor's aim of strengthening an act of colonialism –going also side by side with his more humanistic concerns– will work as planned is a question. For there is also the possibility that this act of bringing the convicts into contact with art, with acts of creative and critical thinking, especially in that specific historical/geographical background, may bring about what Verna N. Foster defines as "the twin impulses of subversion and conformity" (Foster, 1997/1998: 421).

There is, first of all, the very important fact that this totally new environment –an almost "extraterrestrial territory" in Bimberg's words (Bimberg, 1997/98: 410)– unfamiliar both to the convicts and the officers, combined with this unusual encounter of all the characters within the context of a collective artistic production, turns out to provide a different platform where the previously very strict boundaries tend to become blurred, even if with tiny steps. As Bimberg states:

The colony dilemma (heavy physical and mental pressures on gaolers and prisoners alike; cultural, social and ethnic dislocation) in fact intersects the whole *colony* and crosses the boundaries

made so far by social and gender determinations. Under the conditions given and for a limited span of time the cultural and social differences usually separating officers and convicts in England are diminished in that “extraterrestrial” territory because both groups are far from being homogeneous in themselves and because the members of both groups are uprooted and dislocated alike. (Bimberg, 1997/98: 410)

Carlson, similarly, draws attention to the fact that this is a settler colony: “The word ‘settler’ itself is telling, since it characterizes the main characters of the play as people who have *come from somewhere else* and mean to stay, not as people who carry with them British positions of class and power (i.e., convicts or military officers). The term ‘settler’ also obscures the hierarchy ... between the two groups of Britons” (Carlson, 1993: 280). Thus in that “extraterrestrial territory”, where “the old social, gender, moral, professional and ethnic identities have been overcome and ... redefinitions of identity are emerging” (Bimberg, 1997/98: 412), and under the guidance of the Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark directing the play, the convicts start the rehearsals.

As the convicts start to imagine what it could be like to be someone else; as they start to “inhabit” other lives, in Rabey’s words (Rabey, 1990: 525); as they start to vicariously experience the identities of the more privileged members of society while they are acting (as the poor plays and thus experiences the identity of the wealthy, as the female plays the part of male figures, as the officer plays side by side with the convict); and especially because of “the multiple and cross-gender casting” in their performance (Carlson, 1993: 284), in other words, since some of the characters play more than one character and even more than one gender, they increasingly gain awareness about the fact that their socio-culturally disadvantageous positions and who they are and how



they live are not their unchangeable fate but the production, the writing, the fiction of certain socio-cultural, historical, and material circumstances.

The themes, characters, and events in the play that the convicts are preparing to stage, Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer*, are particularly suitable to contribute to the convicts' process of gaining awareness about, and a more consciously critical perspective on, the issues of class and gender inequalities and the concepts of country, national ties and one's relationship to his/her country. For Farquhar's play, in which, in Jeremy Cooper's words, "a range of comic characters ... portrays –with gentle satire– the huge differences in wealth and social standing in an 18<sup>th</sup> century town; and Farquhar portrays the very human weaknesses of military 'heroes'" (Cooper, 2015), introduces to the convict actors/actresses a platform where there are so many characters (with their incomparably superior social positions) and their models of behaviour that are completely open to questioning and far from being ideal. The convicts, in Bimberg's words, "take on roles of socially far superior characters who behave in morally doubtful ways in the play, however" (Bimberg, 1997/98: p.411). *The Recruiting Officer* depicts the pragmaticization and commercialization of male-female relationships and of marriage, the use and abuse of human beings, especially of women, the complicated and doubtful practices in the fields associated with heroic notions, the military life, patriotism, and voluntary self-sacrifice for "one's country's good": "Farquhar's play is about gently debunking national heroes, showing them as vulnerable and not entirely honourable human beings", says Cooper. In that context, Alexander Feldman too, similarly comments that "it is her [Wertebaker's] concern with the formation of national and cultural identities that links *Our Country's Good* to the *Recruiting Officer*". (Feldman, 2013: 152)

Especially when the convict actors/actresses play the roles of the characters who in Farquhar's play already perform cross-gender acts

of disguise –for example, when a convict actress plays the role of a lady in Farquhar’s play who, in *The Recruiting Officer*, disguises as a male– there emerge even a much wider and more effective space and distance, from where the fictionality, arbitrariness and artificiality of gender and class roles can be discussed. Farquhar’s play, in Cooper’s words, is also “about what happens when women gain certain attributes (money in Melinda’s case, man’s clothing in Silvia’s case) that enable them to behave (almost) as men” (Cooper, 2015).

This increasing awareness is especially very significant for the case of the female convicts, who are doubly disadvantaged, doubly discriminated, used and abused, objectified. At one point, for instance, when one of the convict actresses, Mary Brenham (playing the leading role, Lady Silvia in Farquhar’s play), is worried that she cannot play the part of a lady like Silvia, another female convict, Dabby Briant, is quick to remind her of two significant points: First of all that the strikingly different circumstances of the convict Brenham and the lady that she will play the part of should never be ignored; and then that an actress, while playing a character on the stage, does not have to “be” the character that she plays; she should only “present” her (Wertenbaker, 1998: 30-31). As their rehearsals progress, Briant herself, dissatisfied with the character of the patriarchally portrayed traditional female figure she is asked to play the part of (a country maid who is expected to “entice” a man and who is expected “to blush”), asks for the role of a male character in Farquhar’s play. Though Mary Brenham, while playing Silvia who disguises as a man in *The Recruiting Officer*, hesitantly complains that “It’s difficult to play a man. It’s not the walk, it’s the way you hold your head. A man doesn’t bow his head so much and never at an angle” (Wertenbaker, 1998: 78).

Among all these discussions of the (potential) identities that one can “perform”, Judith Butler’s concept of “gender performativity” and the concept of “identity as performance” become more and

more relevant to explain the situation on two levels reinforcing one another: On the one hand, there is the strong theoretical emphasis on the concept of identity not as an unchanging essence, an intrinsic and stable quality that one is born with but as a continuous process of formation, a series of changing responses given to changing contexts, a series of performances acted under various circumstances (in a way similar to the Lacanian concept of the self being constantly (re) produced by the gaze of the other). Also, on the other hand, there is the obvious fact that these convicts are gaining this awareness about the mechanisms of identity construction as they really –literally, physically, in the theatrical sense– do *perform* various identities on the stage. Butler, whose Derridean deconstruction of all fixed categories of identity is very significant in this context, states that:

The act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again. (Butler, 1990: 277)

When the convict Dabby Bryant tells her reluctant and hesitant fellow convict-actress not to worry about playing the role of a lady, there actually starts, as Foster points out (Foster, 1997/98: 424), a discussion of the Stanislavskian (representational) approach to acting –that is, to “be” a character, trying to make the audiences believe in the reality of what is going on on the stage– versus the Brechtian (presentational) understanding of acting –that is, to speak the lines of a character with a distance, drawing attention to the fictionality and constructedness of what is going on on the stage (with a constant awareness of the multiplicity and changeability of characters).

Similarly, another female character, Liz Morden, who, as mentioned above, is decided to be hanged for a crime that she actually did not commit but does not just declare her innocence in this subject in a stubbornly taciturn manner just because she can no longer find any meaning in speaking, breaks her silence following her involvement in their collective artistic event and theatrical exercises with new/different identities. And she starts to speak:

Phillip: Why wouldn't you say any of this before? ... Why Liz?

Liz: Because it wouldn't have mattered.

Phillip: Speaking the truth?

Liz: Speaking. (Wertenbaker, 1998: 82)

She speaks; defends herself; and is rescued. She speaks, telling not only that she did not commit the alleged crime but also narrating all her tragic story in detail concretizing the socio-culturally and materially explicable causality of the course of one's life and experiences versus the strictly essentialist and deterministic explanations of the conservative officers decontextualizing and dehistoricizing human beings and their behaviour.

Another female convict in whose life the element of "silence" has a determining effect is Duckling Smith. She keeps silent as a means of showing resistance to the patriarchal oppression and constant control inflicted on her by the man she lives with now, Midshipman Harry Brewer, whose position is somewhere between the officers and the convicts. Duckling Smith's suffering is not only caused by the miserable past she has lived and was imprisoned for but also by this current, continuous, oppressive male gaze of Brewer who tries to control each single moment of her life due to his extreme and unhealthy jealousy. Brewer too suffers heavily from a sense of guilt because of the executions he has had to carry out in the convict community and, in the end, dies tragically following a complete

psychological disintegration. That it is only after his death that Smith can break her silence and even express her words of love for Brewer shows the huge harm done by all kinds of patriarchal and class oppressions on the victim and the victimizer alike. Later on, through her participation in the theatrical production, she both starts to speak and to be a part of the convict community from whom she was isolated before. Moreover, her pain caused by her loss creates an atmosphere of support and solidarity among the other convicts during the rehearsals.

Another character who desperately needs to tell his tragic story, to express himself, to be heard and understood, and to be included in the company of the convict society is James Freeman, called “Ketch” in the convict community, who is (or rather, who has had to be) the hangman of the colony. While telling his whole unfortunate past to Ralph Clark, starting from his displacement from his Irish environment early in his life, he emphasizes the element of “chance” as the determining factor in his life: Condemned for having killed a sailor during a moment of chaos at the docks, he desperately tries to explain that he “wasn’t even near the sailor who got killed” for breaking a strike at the docks and that “they caught five at random” and he “was among the five” (Wertenbaker, 1998: 37).

Being one of the five who were caught “at random” reminds the audience/reader of the randomly chosen children mentioned in the epigraph discussed in the opening pages of this study as an example of the workings of the Pygmalion effect. Though what James Freeman experiences is the complete opposite of the Pygmalion effect. It is a negative version of it, leading the randomly chosen one not to self-actualization as in the case of the “lucky” students, but to utter destruction. Then, having been told “hang or be hanged” (Wertenbaker, 1998: 37), he became the hangman of the colony and as a result has been very strongly rejected and hated by the rest of the convicts. Now in order to rescue himself

from this isolation, exclusion and hatred and to be accepted into the community, he desperately wants to be a part of the production. And at the end, through his inclusion in the process of this collective cultural production, he can little by little find an opportunity for self-expression and dialogue. His case, as he increasingly finds the opportunity to express himself, makes it clear that what he mentions as the element of “chance” is actually very much related to the material circumstances of an unjust social system based on a lack of equal opportunities.

Although there have been harshness, aggression and hostility in the relationship among the convicts themselves, the collective process of producing a play gradually brings about some instances of empathy and solidarity in their treatment of one another. A remarkable example to this is the scene in which, on being the target of one of Major Ross’s extremely cruel, violent and dehumanizing physical and psychological attacks during one of their rehearsals, the convicts –Sideway, Briant, Brenham and Arscott–defy his attack collectively through acting, through theatre, through, in Ann Wilson’s words, an “act of non-violent resistance” (Wilson, 1991: 25). As Sullivan states, “After literally fighting the play into existence, the convicts do acquire a new sense of self-worth and community. Through the collaborative process of theatre, a positive and collective identity takes the place of isolated self-loathing” (Sullivan, 1993: 142). Similarly, Wilson, who draws attention to the “theatre as an important therapeutic tool”, comments that “the rehearsal process creates a community of players which allows the convicts, who are ostensibly anti-social, to begin to rebuild their social identities” (Wilson, 1991: 24). Even though the changes and their influences on their community are no doubt limited, these tiny steps are significant and inspirational for the dismal circumstances of the convicts. It reminds them that “Whilst there is life there is hope” (Farquhar, Act 2, Scene 2), to use a sentence

from Farquhar's play, uttered by Lady Silvia, the character that Mary Brenham plays the part of.

Another significant point in the play is the emerging interest of the Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark, who directs and also acts in the play that they put on stage, in a female convict, Mary Brenham, and their following relationship. It is important because before their collective involvement in the play, he was completely ignorant of and humiliating to the female convicts. ("How can you treat such women with kindness?" he was asking then and his reaction to the idea of convict women playing the roles of ladies was expressed in his deploring question "How could a whore play Lady Jane" (Wertenbaker, 1998: 8). Even though his participation in the production of the play as the director was originally motivated by his desire to be noticed, appreciated and promoted by his superiors, his involvement gradually becomes deeper and more humane. As they progress in their collective cultural production, the positive change in his attitude to the convicts becomes noteworthy. In his own words:

... in just a few hours, I have seen something change... these women who behave often no better than animals ... they seemed to acquire a dignity ... they seemed to lose some of their corruption... but in a small way this could affect all the convicts and even ourselves". (Wertenbaker, 1998: 22)

However, to go back to the dual implications of the Pygmalion narrative that have been mentioned briefly in the opening pages of this study, there are a couple of levels to be taken into consideration in Clark's emerging relationship with Mary Brenham: From one aspect, there is the obvious and very positive fact that the more respectful, civilized and humane attitude that the convicts start to receive during this collective cultural activity brings about a positive response from the convict community which can be defined in terms

of the notion of self-fulfilling prophesy. Yet, on the other hand, it is also obvious that what Ralph Clark does here is actually to recreate Mary Brenham according to his own desire, to appropriate and civilize her before he could accept her (no doubt, with certain limitations) into his life.

Clark is depicted as a man with some rigid and artificial definitions and categorizations in his mind about women, seeing them, in Wilson's words, "either as whores – the convict women ... – or as the Madonna – his wife" (Wilson, 1991: 25). There are on one side, women like his wife back in England, whose picture he takes out and kisses periodically at set times almost as part of a religious ritual, similar to his habit of taking out and reading the Bible – an idealized, spiritualized model of woman; adorable and suitable to be the object of a man's dreams; almost non-physical:

Ralph: I've never looked at the body of a woman before.

Mary: Your wife?

Ralph: It wasn't right to look at her. (Wertenbaker, 1998: 79)

On the other side, there are the convict women who are, at least early in his encounter with them, despicable and almost inhuman in his view:

While this division certainly distances Clark from women because whores are too sullied to touch while madonnas are too pure, it is important to recognize how this way of seeing women reinforces and perpetuates class distinctions: working class women are whores; middle and upper class are madonnas. (Wilson, 1991: 25-26)

However, this complex encounter of those who have previously been rigidly separated by social, cultural, gender, ethnic and



national boundaries but are now unusually and inevitably sharing some very basic concrete and abstract circumstances and situations enables even unexpected developments. This process of performing a collective creative activity, this new language, this new mode of communication and relationship also have a reforming effect on Clark liberating him from some of the more abstract kinds of imprisonment, as Wilson too points out: “Through his relationship with Brenham, which is, strictly speaking, illegal, Clark is freed from the imprisoning ideology of sentimentality, and so comes to recognize women as sexual beings who are not simply desired but desire” (Wilson, 1991: 26). Wertenbaker shows “theatre liberating those who are imprisoned, either literally, as are the convicts, or metaphorically, as is Ralph Clark” (Wilson, 1991: 29). Yet, despite these considerable changes, there is no place for much optimism or idealizations: As their relationship begins and they tell each other about their dreams for the future, Clark tells Brenham that if they have a baby girl, they will call her Betsey Alicia, which is the name of Clark’s wife back in England.

On the other hand, the figure of Mary Brenham is also one of the characters in the play that exemplify and underline the complexity and difficulty of any attempt to recover from the effects of the established oppressive and unjust systems and ideologies. In conformity with Louis Althusser’s explanation of the workings of ideology, which “represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (Althusser, 1971: 18), the inconfident and hesitant attitude of Brenham reflects the model of the individual who, according to the Althusserian explanation, has internalized the distorted version of his/her true “conditions of existence” under the strong influence of the dominant ideology and who is ready to believe that all the artificial and contradictory elements in his/her life are natural. Brenham feels guilty of her past experiences rather than questioning the harsh circumstances

that have victimized her. "I'll never wash the sin away", she laments (Wertenbaker, 1998: 30).

In a way that can be explained through the Foucauldian concept of Panopticism, she herself confines her identity, her position, her capacities to areas and categories set by the oppressive power of the established system of binary oppositions and hierarchies. Michel Foucault uses the concept of the Panopticon, which is a prison model that the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham designed in the late eighteenth century, in order to explain the processes of the internalization of the victimizing authority by those victimized in the modern times. Bentham's prison model consisted of a central tower of observation surrounded by a ring of cells. The plan of this building allowed the guardian in the observation tower in the middle to see every detail of each single cell around him while the prisoners in those cells could not see the supervisor. For this reason, the prisoner cannot even know whether he/she is being watched at a particular moment. Consequently, he/she will always have to behave as if he/she is continuously being watched (even when there is nobody looking), as a result of which the prisoner cannot help contributing to his/her own process of continuous surveillance.

By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible...)

... to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So ... the surveillance is permanent in its effect, even if it is discontinuous in its action ... in short... the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they themselves are the bearers. (Foucault, 1977: 200-201)

This significant shaping mechanism that has a strong impact on the construction and maintenance of identities and human behaviour in society shows itself, for example, in the way Mary Brenham views and limits herself. Now, even when nobody tells her what her limits are, she herself, at some points, does it on their behalf, in accordance with the binary categories created by the hierarchically superior authorities/oppressors/victimizers. By accepting that she cannot act like a lady, that she cannot keep her head like a man, that she cannot avoid feeling always sinful, rather than questioning the unequal, unjust and extremely challenging conditions that have led to all those negativities in her life, she is actually acting in a way that the dominant ideology wants her to do.

Still, it is significant that, despite all her naive, shy and hesitant attitude, after she spends a certain time in this collective cultural production, towards the end of the play, she claims for the central place. When she and the other convict-actors/actresses are finalizing their preparations and are rehearsing the bow, she objects to another convict-actor's –Arscott's– claim to be in the middle: “No, Arscott”, she says, “I’m in the middle” (Wertenbaker, 1998: 84). Her involvement in Wisehammer's act of writing a brand new prologue for Farquhar's play (which will be discussed in detail in the pages below) is also a noteworthy initiative showing the change and improvement in her stance.

This kind of ideological internalization of the unequal social structures by the victimized also shows itself in the case of Black Caesar, a black convict from Madagascar. On learning that a play is being put on with a cast consisting of the convicts, he too goes to Clark and tells him that he too wants to be included in the activity. When Clark tells him that there is no part for him, his answer reflects the fact that he has already, under the assimilatory power of the dominant ideology, naturalized his victim position:

There is always a part for Caesar... I will play his servant...  
There is always a black servant in a play, Monsieur Lieutenant...  
I speak in French. That makes him a more high up gentleman if  
he has a French servant... (Wertenbaker, 1998: 46)

Now he, as the victim of this racially discriminatory system, sees and accepts the victimizer's idea that a black person is only suitable to play a servant as a fact. Later on, as he participates in the convicts' discussion of what it is to be English and the relation of the English language to Englishness, he says "I don't want to think English. If I think English I will die" (Wertenbaker, 1998: 54). Yet, it is through demonstrating his ability to speak the language of another colonizer –his ability to speak French– that he tries to convince Ralph Clark to give him a part in the play. Finally, when Clark cannot ignore his insistent wish to participate in the event, he is included in it: At the end of the play, when Wertenbaker's play is ending with a scene where the convicts' performance of Farquhar's play is beginning, Caesar too is seen on the stage. Yet his part is limited to an act which supports the cliché image of the black native: He is beating the drum.

Another character who experiences very significant changes is John Wisenhammer, who is a Jew, and who, early in the play constantly tries to create a strong sense of "Englishness" particularly with his sophisticated, extremely conscious and meticulous use of and strong interest in the English language (to the extent that he used to study the words in Johnson's Dictionary) and by always expressing his wish to go back "home", to England, as soon as he finishes his conviction. He is strongly interested in words and his discussion of some particular English words reflect his basic concerns, fears, frustrations and yearnings in life: "friend, country, injustice, guilty-innocent, lonely, loveless"... He examines these words deeply and has certain comments on each of them. "Injustice", for

example, is “the ugliest word in the English language” in his view (Wertenbaker, 1998: 39). And his comments on the word “country” are particularly significant – in relation to both the prologue that he writes for Farquhar’s play and the title of Wertenbaker’s play, as will be discussed in detail in the following pages:

Country can mean opposite things. It renews you with trees and grass, you go rest in the country, or it crushes you with power: you die for your country, your country doesn’t want you, you’re thrown out of your country. (Wertenbaker, 1998: 38)

As he becomes more and more involved in the production of the play, in their collective discussions throughout their rehearsals, and in the complex and extremely hard and challenging stages that they go through all this while, his questionings start to cover his own previously-unquestioned sense of belonging to England too. In the end, he, who claims that “[a] play should make you understand something new” (Wertenbaker, 1998: 74), does understand something new: He understands that he actually does not belong to the country that he left behind. He gradually faces his real circumstances – namely, the fact that he does not actually want to go back to that place where he was constantly discriminated and which actually exiled him. He then decides to be a writer, settle in that new land and write a play about “justice” (Wertenbaker, 1998: 86).

I don’t want to go back to England now. It’s too small and they don’t like Jews. Here, no one has more of a right than anyone else to call you a foreigner. I want to become the first famous writer. (Wertenbaker, 1998: 85)

Moreover, he performs a radical act of criticism on the whole system he has/they have suffered from by writing a brand new

“prologue” to the play that they are staging, that is, to Farquhar’s *The Recruiting Officer*. The prologue that he writes for the play and offers to the director Clark is a satirical response to their transportation from Britain to Australia. As Foster emphasizes, it is “bitterly ironic” (Foster, 98/99: 255):

From distant climes o’er wide-spread seas we come,  
Though not with much éclat or beat of drum,  
True patriots all; for be it understood,  
We left our country for our country’s good;  
No private views disgraced our generous zeal,  
What urg’d our travels was our country’s weal,  
And none will doubt but that our emigration  
Has proved most useful to the British nation. (Wertenbaker, 1998: 89)

Yet Ralph Clark, as the director, finds this prologue “too political” and cannot let him deliver it on the stage: “It is very good, Wisenhammer, it’s very well written, but it’s too – too political. It will be considered provocative” (Wertenbaker, 1998: 90). However, it is significant that Wertenbaker chooses a phrase from this prologue, which she depicts as created by an oppressed and underprivileged character but rejected by the authority figure, as the title of her play: “We left our country for our country’s good”.

Therefore, Governor Arthur Phillip’s idea of turning this hopeless, desperate group of people into proper members of the British colony thus ends up, in the case of some of the convicts, with its total opposite – presenting a clear example of Foster’s previously mentioned concept of “the twin impulses of subversion and conformity” as the potential outcomes of these collectively experienced cultural and artistic practices and performance and these new, changed, reshaped modes of communication and relationship. On the one hand, the expectations of the authorities while allowing

this theatrical event were to a great extent linked to their colonial intentions of turning the convicts into not only good human beings but also good members of the colonial empire and celebrating the king's birthday. On the other hand, however, the situation is a perfect reminder of the fact that when it comes to getting in contact with the creative and intellectual processes of cultural and artistic activities which enables critical thinking, the results may not always be totally as predicted and under control. For many of the convicts here just end up questioning the ways of the system which they were actually supposed to be obedient and submissive members of and to celebrate.

Thus, linguistic, discursive, rhetorical and artistic devices are presented both as tools of domination and oppression (as when they are deployed by the colonial authorities) and also as a powerful means of questioning and subversion (as exemplified by the influence of the process of staging a play on the convicts). And this exemplifies more the Gramscian concept of hegemony, in which there is more place for the formation of a response to the dominant and determining structures, rather than the more rigid Althusserian concept of ideology, in which even the potential resistance and responses to the dominant structures are determined by these all-surrounding powerful circumstances. From that aspect, at the end of Wertenbaker's play, the convicts' standing up again and their regain of a sense of self-worth, which had formerly been erased by the humiliating, dehumanizing and extremely violent treatment that they were subjected to, are very important.

These are what the characters in Wertenbaker's play, mainly the convicts, start to see as they act and experience the identities/selves in Farquhar's play and as their consciousness, knowledge and perspectives become wider. These are what triggers some change and improvement in their attitudes and stance accordingly. However, there are also very crucial issues which, not only the oppressive

authority figures but also the convicts fail to see or which they tend to ignore, and yet which we, the audiences and readers of Wertenbaker's play *Our Country's Good*, see clearly: While the play provides a deep discussion of the ill-treatment that these displaced convicts suffer, there is also, on the other hand, a constant and sharp reminder of the existence of another painfully displaced, disturbed, terrorized, and fatally harmed character throughout the play: "A lone Aboriginal Australian".

This unnamed Aboriginal Australian makes only four appearances throughout the play, which underlines the most desperately silenced position of the colonized, of the original inhabitants of the place to where the convicts have been exiled. In his first two appearances he is just looking from a distance at, thinking aloud about and trying to make sense of the white men's existence on *his* land. On first seeing the white man's ship, he likens it to "a dream which has lost his way" and decides that it is "[b]est to leave it alone" (Wertenbaker, 1998: 2). In his second short speech, a tone of worry starts to emerge: "Some dreams lose their way and wander over the earth, lost. But this is a dream no one wants. It has stayed. How can we befriend this crowded, hungry and disturbed dream?" (Wertenbaker, 1998: 62). In his third appearance, we see him increasingly more anxious, seriously wondering who these people are and why they are there: "What do they need? If we can satisfy them, they will go back. How can we satisfy them?" (Wertenbaker, 1998: 69). And in his final and tragic appearance towards the end of the play, he, again at the back stage, horrified and desperate, is heard saying to himself (and to the audience of Wertenbaker's play): "Look: oozing pustules on my skin, heat on my forehead. Perhaps we have been wrong all this time and this is not a dream" (Wertenbaker, 1998: 83). This last appearance of the Aborigine as infected with and suffering from a disease unknown to him (and thus implied to be brought to the land by the colonizer) (Bimberg, 1997/98: 415) is indicative of



the devastating effects of colonialism on the whole land and on all its living inhabitants: “They come around the camp because they’re dying: smallpox”, says Ketch Freeman (Wertenbaker, 1998: 83).

The tone of the words that both the officers and the convicts use to define the environment expresses utter dislike, hostility, distance and unbelonging: It is defined as the “dark edge of the earth”, a “stinking hole of hell” right at the beginning of the play by Wisenhammer, for example (Wertenbaker, 1998: 1), or as an “iniquitous shore” by Ralph Clark (Wertenbaker, 1998: 7), as a “flat, brittle burnt-out country” by Dabby Briant (Wertenbaker, 1998: 29), a “foreign upside down desert” by Arscott, (Wertenbaker, 1998: 55), “a hellish hole” and a “scrub-ridden, dust-driven, thunder-bolted, savage-run, cretinous colony” by Ross (Wertenbaker, 1998: 80).

As Ringer states, although they are having huge and challenging difficulties in their relationship with this new environment, they do not think of taking advantage of the Aboriginal people’s accumulation of knowledge: “Although Aborigines had led ecologically sustainable lives there for over 30,000 years, the first Europeans considered the land barely inhabitable, and they did not look to the Aborigines for either help or example” (Ringer, 2012). For the native people of the land are less than human in their view:

Even at the end of the play hardly any honest efforts are made to look at the different culture of the new continent in a non-superior way. The officers rather view the scene with suspicion from a distance. Their attitudes range from looking at the natives as if they were insects to feeling endangered by the savages”. (Bimberg, 1997/98: 413)

The inhabitants of this environment are automatically defined as “savages” by them all: Throughout the play, these aboriginal people are referred to as “savages”, not only by the colonial

perspectives of the conservative and discriminatory officers in the colony, but also by the very victims of those discriminatory attitudes: namely, the convicts as well. Even after they have experienced (and are still experiencing) the tragic processes of class and gender discrimination, humiliation, exclusion; even after they have increasingly gained consciousness about the need for equal opportunities and rights; even after many of them express that this theatrical activity enables those involved in it to imagine what it could be like to be someone else; even after they have learnt about and started to practice little by little some empathy and solidarity; still, at the end of the play, there is no sign of understanding, respect or recognition in their perception of the Aboriginal “Others” on this foreign land.

Even for Mary Brenham, for example, the usual word to refer to the Aboriginal inhabitants is “savage”: “Are the savages coming to see the play as well?” she asks (Wertenbaker, 1998: 83). Or, to give another example, the very first words that Arscott, another one of the convicts who has suffered, has been abused, deceived, harmed not by the Aboriginal people but by his very own people, utters on learning that the Aborigines are coming near their camp because of the tragic fact that they are “dying” of smallpox, can shockingly be “I hope they won’t upset the audience” (Wertenbaker, 1998: 83). With this attitude, the convicts, who have themselves been shaped and reshaped by the oppressors’ victimizing language, whose identities have been defined and fixed by the rulers’ narratives based on fictional binary categories, cannot avoid now doing the same thing in their relationship with the racial other.

This is why Bimberg states that as the boundaries between the colonizers themselves are weakening, those between the colonizers and the Aboriginal people are simply increasing (Bimberg, 1997/98: 410, 415). Pointing out to the utterly desperate and tragic situation of the lonely Aborigine at the end of the play, Bimberg adds:

Whereas the theatre experiment turns out to be a partial success for the colonisers (officers and convicts), the experiment of colonialism has to be regarded as a failure with regard to the extinction of the native culture and its representatives ... The aborigines have not yet taken up their role as historical agents instead of objects at the end of the play. (Bimberg, 1997/98: 414-415)

Therefore, there have been some criticisms that the crucial subjects of racial discrimination and colonialism have a secondary position in Wertebaker's play (especially compared to Keneally's extensive treatment of them in his novel). Foster summarizes those criticisms as follows:

Several academic critics, however, have noted some problematic erasures and unresolved tensions underlying the optimistic progress and triumphant conclusion of *Our Country's Good*. For one, Wertebaker virtually abandons Keneally's presentation of colonization in favour of her own metatheatrical concerns. For another, the transformation *via* theatre, of the convicts as individuals and as a community that *Our Country's Good* celebrates can also be taken ... as a form of cultural colonialism. (Foster, 1997-1998: 417-418)

For similar reasons, Sullivan too observes what she calls an "ideologically naive" side in the play's treatment of these issues (Sullivan, 1993: 150). However, Foster herself, commenting on those criticisms, reminds that the metatheatrical focus allows Wertebaker to foreground other forms of power relations:

Discussions of theatre and theatrical role-playing among both officers and convicts and the whole process of casting, rehearsing, and finally performing Farquhar's play raise questions about

power relations produced by cultural, social, and gender roles. Such questions serve as a critical counterpoint to the main theme of *Our Country's Good* –theatre's power to improve the lives of the oppressed– complicating but by no means negating Wertebaker's endorsement of theatrical good. (Foster, 1997-1998: 418)

As it has been already discussed in detail so far, it is obvious that the focal perspective in Wertebaker's version of the (hi)story mainly provides a discussion of the issues of the construction and maintenance of identities, socio-cultural positions, categorizations and hierarchies, the function and uses and abuses of language, narratives, representation and art in relation to them, and especially the empowering effects of theatre with regard to all these issues. And in this effort, there are not idealizations or an exaggerated depiction of the positive aspects. The play presents, to use Wilson's words, only "moment[s] of liberation" experienced by some members of the community (Wilson, 1991: 33). As Wertebaker herself states:

I don't think you can leave the theatre and go out and make a revolution. But I do think you can make people change, just a little, by forcing them to question something, or by intriguing them, or giving them an image that remains with them. And that little change can lead to bigger changes. (cited in Sullivan, 1993: 140)

The end of the play reveals that the positive changes and improvements that the convicts have achieved through their cultural practices are not still sufficient for them to perceive the reality of the Aborigines and of the white man's existence in their land and in relation to them. The solitary and deadly harmed Aborigine remains far away, completely isolated and without any communication, dialogue, interaction or contact with the white community. The play depicts that the oppressive exclusion and silence that he suffers

remain. It should also be taken into consideration that actually the very presence of the lonely Aborigine there at the back, in other words, the technique of depicting the utter isolation of this character whose voice cannot be heard by any of the characters in the play, with an emphasis on the suffocating and oppressive separation, loneliness and silence he has to endure, functions as a sharp medium of drawing attention to the very fact that he has been violently dislocated, discriminated, and colonized. It is a shocking reminder of the ultimate destructiveness of colonialism.

Especially within that emphasized tone of intertextuality (discussed in the opening pages of this study), within this framework of multiple voices and perspectives, within that wide web of pre-texts and inter-texts made up of many different (latent as well as actual) versions of this particular (hi)story, the striking need in the end to hear the voice and narratives of the silenced Aborigine too functions as only another reminder of the necessity for the dynamic process of adding more and more layers and perspectives to the (hi)story to continue. Thus, it becomes clearer that within this framework of play within a play, text within a text, story within a story; in terms of these circles of narratives one inside another, one outside another; while the convict actors and actresses (as well as some of the officers) in Wertebaker's play experience a widening in their perspectives and an increasing awareness as a result of their encounter with processes of creative, intellectual and critical thinking; what they still cannot see or somehow tend to ignore is presented by Wertebaker's play to "us, to the audiences/readers of her play". So the acts of adding more and more awareness-creating layers, more and more circles of perspectives and narratives may and must continue, ever widening, and always.

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