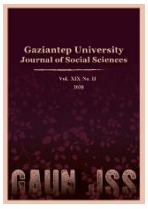

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Araştırma Makalesi ● Research Article

A Foucauldian Reading of Timberlake Wertenbaker's Our Country's Good in a Socio-Political Context

Timberlake Wertenbaker'ın Our Country's Good [Ülkemizin İyiliği] Adlı Oyununun Sosyopolitik Çerçevede Foucault'cu Okuması

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ÖZ

İngiliz edebiyatının önde gelen kadın oyun yazarlarından biri olan Timberlake Wertenbaker, *Our Country's Good* (1988) [*Ülkemizin İyiliği*] adlı oyununda hem savaş sonrası İngiltere'ye yönelik bir eleştiri hem de tiyatronun iyileştirici işlevi hakkında bir propaganda sunar. Thomas Keneally'nin *The Playmaker* (1987) adlı romanından esinlenilen bir oyun olan *Our Country's Good*, on sekizinci yüzyılda Avustralya'ya götüren bir gemide bir grup mahkûmun yaşadıklarını canlandırarak tiyatronun iyileştirici etkilerini konu edinir. *Our Country's Good*, geleneksel cezalandırma yöntemlerine inanan ve ağır cezaya alternatif olarak tiyatro yoluyla kurtuluş olasılığını öne sürenlerden oluşan farklı otorite figürlerini ele alır. Hükümlülere uygun cezalandırma yöntemleri konusunda görevlilerin çelişkili görüşlerini Foucault'cu bir bakış açısıyla incelemek mümkündür. Bu okuma, Foucault'nun, iş ve egzersiz yoluyla suçluların davranışlarının düzeltilmesi anlamına gelen ceza reformu önerisine dayanmaktadır. Bu makale, ceza kavramının toplumsal işlevine odaklanmakta ve Thatcher yıllarında İngiltere'de bu konulara ilişkin egemen ideolojinin ışığında Wertenbaker'in oyununda tiyatro ve ceza arasındaki ilişkinin temsilini analiz etmektedir.

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ABSTRACT

One of the pioneering women dramatists of British literature, Timberlake Wertenbaker provides both a criticism of post-war Britain and propaganda of the ameliorating function of theatre in her play *Our Country's Good* (1988). As a play based on the novel *The Playmaker* (1987) by Thomas Keneally, *Our Country's Good* builds upon the issue of redemptive effects of theatre by portraying a group of convicts on a ship that takes them to Australia in the eighteenth century. *Our Country's Good* portrays different authority figures consisting of those who believe in traditional means of punishment and who suggest the possibility of redemption through theatre as an alternative to severe punishment. It is possible to analyse the conflicting views of officers concerning the appropriate punishment methods of the convicts from a Foucauldian perspective. This reading draws on Foucault's proposal of a penal reform that requires the use of carceral transformation through work and exercise resulting in the correction of delinquents' behaviour. This paper focuses on the social function of punishment and analyses the representation of the conflation between theatre and punishment in Wertenbaker's play in light of the dominant ideology concerning these issues in Britain in the Thatcher years.

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Introduction

Timberlake Wertenbaker's play *Our Country's Good* (1988) functions both as a criticism of post-war Britain and a manifestation of the art of theatre and performance. Based on the novel, *The Playmaker*, by the Australian novelist Thomas Keneally, "which recounts the early days of Britain's first penal colony in Australia" (Carlson, 2000, p. 137), *Our Country's Good* mainly builds upon the issue of redemptive effects of theatre. By presenting the convicts on a ship that takes them to Australia in the eighteenth century and portraying the conditions in which they live, the play also makes a critique of the establishment's understanding of punishment. This paper discusses the conflict portrayed in the play concerning the appropriate punishment means from a Foucauldian perspective in light of his observations in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975) specifically focusing on the concepts of penal reform and disciplinary power that require the correction of individual behaviour as an alternative to the more traditional methods of corporal punishment. While the play's more authoritarian officers' views of punishment recall the earlier forms of punishment based on torture targeting the body of the convict, the others' suggestion of rehabilitating the convicts instead of severe punishment reminds the more reformative approach towards punishment mentioned in Foucault's work. Wertenbaker's play is mainly based on this dialectic and it offers the application of more reformative and humane means of punishment as a synthesis. This study, therefore, evaluates the experiences of the convicts in *Our Country's Good* with references to Foucault's analysis of discipline and punishment and elaborates on the redemptive effects of theatre by portraying its positive effects on the convicts at the end of the play. This emphasis is also used to highlight the idea that Wertenbaker's work poses a criticism of the dominant ideology concerning punishment, prisons, and theatre in Thatcher's Britain.

Our Country's Good takes place in Australia, which is referred to as the "dark edge of the earth" and "stinking hole of hell" (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 1). As these names suggest, Australia was then unknown to most of the English in the eighteenth century; it was a place where convicts could be taken as it was considered a place with an uncivilised population. Regarding the historical baseline of the play, the reason for taking the criminals to Australia in the eighteenth century was that there was not enough space in English prisons. As it is proposed by Bill Naismith (1995), "[t]ransportation allowed England to dump its 'criminal class' on the other side of the world, there to be forgotten, with the added advantage that returning ships could carry raw material home to equip the navy" (p. xviii). Several convicts are taken there, and they are poor people "whose labor is being extracted in order to build New South Wales. For the most part, these felons are men and women whose crimes were related to their poverty-stricken status in their homeland" (Sullivan, 1993, pp. 141-2). Most of the authorities on the ship support the idea of punishing these convicts cruelly; however, Governor Phillip believes that it is more important to make the convicts dignified people rather than punish them. As a result, in a metatheatrical note, he proposes to put Irish dramatist George Farquhar's play *The Recruiting Officer* (1706) to stage by making the convicts on the ship work as actors to celebrate the King's birthday on June 4th. Regardless of other authorities' discouragement, Ralph Clark who acts as the "benevolent ruler who eventually brings his flock into line" (Sullivan, 1993, p. 148) agrees with Phillip to produce the play. Despite continuous oppression, they are capable of putting the play into performance, thereby proving the corrective function of theatre with the improvement observed in the convicts' behaviours and attitudes towards each other.

Wertenbaker is against the idea of excessive punishment, and to assert her argument, she suggests that her main aim is to "write about how people are treated, what it means to be brutalised, what it means to live without hope, and how theatre can be a humanising force" (qtd. in Naismith, 1995, p. xxiii). As a verisimilar note in the foreword of the play, Wertenbaker

places several letters from real prisoners to show how cruel punishment does no good to anyone and to present her belief in the possibility of offering the exercise and practice of dramatic art as a solution to this problem. In one of these letters, it is mentioned, "[p]rison is about failure normally, and how we are reminded of it each day of every year. Drama, and self-expression in general, is a refuge and one of the only real weapons against the hopelessness of these places" (White, 1989, p. 1). This belief, however, is contradicted with the practices of the authority figures in the play as exemplified in Tench's statement: "Justice and humaneness never goes hand in hand. The law is not a sentimental comedy" (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 3). As one can see, the authorities are not concerned whether the punishments they exact are cruel, instead, they take it for granted that punishment is crucial and functional in the improvement of the convicts' dignity. Providing a powerful alternative to this idea, Wertenbaker presents how it can be possible to make the convicts better citizens through drama, which has led the play to be acclaimed for its humanist approach to characters convicted as criminals: "Theater in this play is a force for good, a force against unrule and against excessive rule as well" (Baker-White, 1999, p. 100). As it turns out, the application of dramatic arts in the process of conviction in the play contributes a lot to the development of the prisoners, and those who stand for cruel punishment are proven to be wrong.

Considering the play's emphasis on ideas of conviction, punishment, and rehabilitation, this paper discusses the text from a Foucauldian perspective, specifically drawing on the concepts of penal reform and disciplinary power proposed in *Discipline and Punish*. Foucault (1995) suggests that penal reform requires detention to be a means for transformation of individual behaviour: "Penal detention must have as its essential function the transformation of the individual's behaviour" (p. 269). What is formerly known as penal detention that is more related to corporal punishment should now be altered with carceral transformation, alluding to the corrective function of more humane punishment practices. Foucault (1995) argues that "one punishes not to efface the crime, but to transform a criminal (actual or potential); punishment must bring with it a certain corrective technique" (p. 127). By equating punishment with correction and social function, Foucault argues that it is not only possible but also necessary to render former delinquents more decent figures through work that includes different ways of training and exercise. Pointing to the essential function of training in the process of punishment, he claims that "[s]o much so that the corrective effect expected of it involves only incidentally expiation and repentance; it is obtained directly through the mechanics of a training. To punish is to exercise" (Foucault, 1995, p. 180). Wertenbaker's approach in this play is similar to the reformative approach proposed by Foucault as the play is based on changing the behaviours of the delinquents on the convict-ship, which operates as an institutionalised form of punishment. Theatre is suggested by one of the officers as the ideal means to alter the minds of the convicts and turn them into "docile" figures, to use another Foucauldian term. Therefore, Foucault's proposal of penal reform and disciplinary power is central in this particular analysis that primarily focuses on the redemptive effects of theatre on the prisoner characters of the play.

Dialectics of Punishment in Foucauldian Perspective

The emphasis on the function of punishment and proper means of rehabilitation renders Wertenbaker's work a possible source to analyse from a Foucauldian perspective concerning the nature of punishment and discipline. Foucault analyses the history of punishment systems and observes a move from public execution to sentences that intend to correct and improve as the main socio-economic system shifts from feudal/archaic to industrial/modern. According to his analysis, corrective sentences address the soul of the condemned instead of the body which is the primary target in public execution. In his words, as time passed and economic structure shifted from the aristocracy to the bourgeois, "a few decades saw the disappearance of the

tortured, dismembered, amputated body, symbolically branded on face or shoulder, exposed alive or dead to public view. The body as the major target of penal repression disappeared" (Foucault, 1995, p. 8). With a move towards industrialism and modernism, the focus of punishment changed from body to soul (Foucault, 1995, p. 16). Likewise, the dominant form of penalty changed from torture to discipline. In this sense, *Our Country's Good* is a possible source to evaluate from Foucault's interpretation of the punitive system as it displays a dialectical representation of corporal and intellectual punishment methods dealt with in *Discipline and Punish*.

In the play, there is a continuous debate among the officers concerning the true nature of punishment as to whether it should be punitive or rehabilitative. Among the officers, Major Ross, Captain Campbell and Captain Tench are more conservative in their approach to punishment, and they support the application of more cruel means of punishment. These officers represent the "disciplinary power" in Foucauldian terms as they stand for both colonial and juridical power in the play. On the contrary, Phillip, Collins and Ralph Clark support penal reform and offer the possibility of rehabilitating convicts with a theatrical performance. Governor Phillip proposes the idea of producing a dramatic piece with the convicts to rehabilitate their behaviour by turning incarceration into a corrective experience. This approach forms an analogy with Foucault's penal reform, whose objectives are listed as follows:

> [T]o make of the punishment and repression of illegalities a regular function, coextensive with society; not to punish less, but to punish better; to punish with an attenuated severity perhaps, but in order to punish with more universality and necessity; to insert the power to punish more deeply into the social body. (Foucault, 1995, p. 82)

Penal reform, according to Foucault, necessitates following a more refined and civilised form of punishment which is not based on torture but rehabilitation and correction. Foucault's suggestion is echoed in Wertenbaker's play with Governor Phillip as he supports rehabilitation over punishment, and specifically with his insistence on carrying out rehearsals with the convicts, aims to transform their conviction process into a more educative one.

There are several instances in the play in which the dialectics of proper punishment might be observed as other officers do not accept Phillip's idea easily. One instance is observed in Act 1, Scene 3 where the authorities treat an 82-year-old woman cruelly and punish her with death penalty:

> **Harry:** There is also Dorothy Handland, 82, who stole a biscuit from Robert Sideway.
> **Phillip:** Surely we don't have to hang an 82-year-old woman?
> **Collins:** That will be unnecessary. She hanged herself this morning. (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 5)

The crime for which they see the old woman's hanging fit is stealing biscuits. The worry in the process of wait for this severe punishment leads the character to commit suicide. As the punishment is carried out according to the torture system, even a minor crime is responded with a grave punishment directed at the elimination and exhibition of the body of the convict. Another example of a similar treatment is Major Ross ordering one of the convicts, Elizabeth Morden, to be flogged for being impertinent to one of his captains (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 6). Additionally, five other convicts have to run away as a result of inhumane treatment. The convicts are silenced, whipped and lashed, and this treatment is entertainment for some of the officers as it can be seen at the beginning of the play when one of the convicts, Robert Sideway, is flogged. Foucault sees cruel punishment as a form of public spectacle and calls the arena in

which this practice is held as the punitive city (1995, p. 113). In this case, the convict-ship serves as a punitive city where authorities execute the law in accordance with traditional torture methods publicly. Another example of this idea in the play is observed as Tench offers the idea that convicts consider hanging a form of entertainment, which recalls Foucault's elaboration on punishment as public spectacle or rather "[a] ceremony of punishment" (Foucault, 1995, p. 49). In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault quotes Rémusat and claims that "[t]he convict-ship is an open-air prison" (Rémusat qtd. in Foucault, 1995, p. 115). This metaphor finds a correlative in Wertenbaker's play as the ship operates as a prison and the methods applied in prison are also relevant to the experiences of the convicts and the officers in charge.

Supporting Foucault's proposal of penal reform, Wertenbaker believes that violent treatment of the convicts is unjust and unacceptable. For this reason, in her play, "she presents theatricality as an opportunity for people who have been atrociously brutalized and debased to discover, through the playing of scripted roles and the interactive process of rehearsal, aspects of the self that have been submerged" (Crow, 2002, p. 133). Suggestive of Wertenbaker's opinion, the officer Governor Phillip suggests that the convicts should organise a play in which they are expected to act: "I would prefer them to see real plays: fine language, sentiment" (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 4). He believes that the convicts will become better people through rehearsals, and with the production of the play, they will eventually become better citizens who "think in a free and responsible manner" (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 21). Phillip's suggestion is similar to Foucault's proposal of using work as an essential component of punishment: "Work must be one of the essential elements in the transformation and progressive socialization of convicts" (Foucault, 1995, p. 269). Recalling this idea, Phillip believes that there is no benefit of severe punishment and thinks that art can function as a redemptive force for all the convicts concerned. Phillip's ideas relating to the necessity to perform a play are best described with his own words in the play:

> The convicts will be speaking a refined, literate language and expressing sentiments of a delicacy they are not used to. It will remind them that there is more to life than crime, punishment. And we, this colony of a few hundred will be watching this together, for a few hours we will no longer be despised prisoners and hated gaolers. We will laugh, we may be moved, we may even think a little. (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 21)

His proposal to make convicts work for a play fits in the definition of the function of work and training in the betterment of individuals in Foucault's analysis of detention:

> Exercise is that technique by which one imposes on the body tasks that are both repetitive and different, but always graduated. By bending behaviour towards a terminal state, exercise makes possible a perpetual characterization of the individual either in relation to this term, in relation to other individuals, or in relation to a type of itinerary. It thus assures, in the form of continuity and constraint, a growth, an observation, a qualification. Before adopting this strictly disciplinary form, exercise had a long history: it is to be found in military, religious and university practices either as initiation ritual, preparatory ceremony, theatrical rehearsal or examination. (Foucault, 1995, p. 161)

Apparently, Foucault already lists theatrical rehearsal as an exemplary corrective punishment method used in the past. The proposal to perform a play, therefore, has its roots in Foucault's analysis of the carceral system as a social function. Similarly, Phillip thinks that these people were involved in crime as a result of a lack of high education, thus, he does not hold them

responsible but the circumstances in which they were brought up and offers to change this by providing them with an opportunity to be involved in performance arts. This attitude also fits in Foucauldian analysis of penal reform in which modernity is concerned with the "social factors that produced the enactment of . . . crime (i.e., was the criminal mad, from a deprived background etc.?) (Shapiro, 2002, p. 5). In the play, Governor Phillip seems to be the only character who considers such issues in the process of judgment and punishment and "sees theatre as a way to level differences of education and class" (Carlson, 2000, p. 137).

Despite Phillip's support of a theatrical production for the benefit of all characters, the other officers do not approach this idea with encouragement due to their lack of belief in the intellectual competence of the convicts to produce a theatrical performance. In the eyes of the gaolers, the prisoners are dehumanised beings who are not worthy of any remarkable success. Their view of the convicts as inferior beings reminds Foucault's discussion of hierarchical superiority in the punitive system. In Foucault's observation of disciplinary power, there are three "simple instruments" the first of which is hierarchical observation (1995, p. 170). The officers assume their hierarchical superiority by all means as they insult the convicts and dehumanise them. For instance, the first character to oppose the idea of preparing a performance with the convicts is Major Robbie Ross who "hates the convicts and the idea of the play with equal vehemence" (Naismith, 1995, p. xxxvi). Ross's approach illustrates his support of the more traditional ways of corporal punishment while Phillip proposes penal reform that targets the soul of the delinquent. It appears that the main concern of dissident officers is the fear of losing authority over the prisoners as Ross stresses that "[t]his is a convict colony, the prisoners are here to be punished and we're here to make sure they get punished" (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 18). In another argument, he also openly accuses Phillip with a similar concern: "You don't take anything seriously, but I know this play - this play - order will become disorder" (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 25). Moreover, when five prisoners escape, Major Ross uses this situation to accuse Ralph Clark once more: "[I]t's all because of your damned play and your so-called thespists. And not only have your thespists run away, but they've stolen food from the stores for their renegade escapade, that's what your play has done" (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 51). The dichotomy between the officers on opposite views is quite strong, and this polarisation constitutes the backbone of the dialectics in the play.

Apart from Major Ross, another authority figure Reverend Johnson also opposes the idea of putting a play asserting puritanically that "actresses are not famed for their morals" (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 17). He believes that the play does not suit the teachings of the Catholic doctrine, and it causes some unwanted behaviour especially in women as he believes that "these plays are about rakes and encourage loose morals in women" (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 22). Another officer, Tench also makes fun of Clark's trust in the convicts' ability to transform through performance: "[A] bunch of convicts making fool of themselves, mouthing words written no doubt by some London ass, will hardly change our society" (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 19). In another example, as a response to Phillip's offer, Tench argues: "If you want to teach the convicts something, teach them to farm, to build houses, teach them a sense of respect for property, . . . teach them how to work, not how to sit around laughing at a comedy" (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 22). Tench's statement illustrates a common attitude among the authorities who underestimate the transformative power of art. Another like-minded officer, Dawes, similarly argues that whether they put the play or not "it won't change the shape of the universe" (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 19). Ralph Clark, on the other hand, suggests wistfully: "But it could change the nature of our little society" (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 19), which shows that he emphasises the importance of human beings rather than politics and "the universe," and regards their dignity equally important.

Despite the discouragement and lack of belief of notable officers in the crew, a decision is made towards the production of a performance by the convicts. When it is decided that the play is going to be performed, the convicts' lack of knowledge about acting and performance becomes evident from their responses to Clark's directions. Ralph Clark's work is already difficult since he needs to prove the availability of his idea to other authorities, and he encounters another difficulty with the convicts' inexperience. Governor Phillip supports him in this matter and he also believes in the potential of the prisoners by stating that "human beings have an intelligence which has nothing to do with the circumstances into which they are born" (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 57). Highlighting the potential of drama to influence all the prisoners positively, Phillip continues: "It's a matter of reminding the slave of what he knows, of his own intelligence. And by intelligence you may read goodness, talent, the innate qualities of human beings" (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 57). What he emphasises, different from other authorities is that it is essential to show his belief in the convicts rather than rasping their self-confidence with further violent behaviour. An example of this is seen when he does not consent to Liz's hanging and advocates that she should be redeemed instead of being hanged: "If we treat her as a corpse, of course she will die. Try a little tenderness, Lieutenant," and continues: "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, 1995, p. 59). This remark shows that he respects the prisoners as human beings and does not want to practice cruel punishment on them, and in return, he does not want to be hated by them. This statement clearly shows Phillip's rejection of torture as a possible means of punishment.

Emblematic of Foucault's term "hierarchical observation," the officers who do not approve of the production of the play continue their superiority on the convicts by all means. Regardless of Phillip and Clark's efforts, other authorities continue punishing the convicts cruelly. For instance, Major Ross whips Sideway for answering an officer and displays his scarred back to others in a rage: "I have seen the white of this animal's bones, his wretched blood and reeky convict urine have spilled on my boots" (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 64). Another convict Dabby is also severely punished and Major Ross demonstrates his superiority over her by making her go down on all fours in front of everyone and commands her: "wag your tail and bark, and I'll throw you a biscuit" (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 64). These practices exemplify the idea of spectacle of physical punishment in the Foucauldian sense (1995, p. 14). Ross's dehumanising attitude forms quite a contrast with the more humane treatments of Governor Phillip and Lieutenant Ralph Clark. However, the conflict between the two groups of officers resolves in favour of the humane ones as there is an observable improvement in the behaviours of the convicts at the end of the play. As Naismith (1995) sums up their final attitude: "Under the influence of their play they become a group, sympathetic and supportive of each other. They begin 'alone, frightened, nameless' and end by recognising each other's worth" (p. xxv). This illustrates that the type of treatment they receive during the process of the rehearsals civilises the convicts, which is quite the opposite of what the officers supporting violent punishment expected.

Theatre as a Redemptive Power

The penal reform as different from the torture/terror system acts "on the 'soft fibres of the brain'" (Servan qtd. in Foucault, 1995, p. 103). In the modern punishment system, "unlike the scaffold, the point isn't to create terror and fear in the viewers, but to educate them" (Shapiro, 2002, p. 13). In Foucault's analysis of discipline in the 19th century in which he discusses the use of the body of the condemned in punishment, he states that the body "must be made efficient. The body must be exercised" (Shapiro, 2002, p.15). In Foucault's own words, "[a] body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved" (Foucault, 1995, p.

136). The understanding and the use of the body in the torture-based practices of punishment of the past have changed in Foucault's analysis as he sees exercise and training as key practices in the transformation of individuals. The body, therefore, is no longer there to be tortured but to be exercised to accompany their mental improvement. What Foucault proposes instead of torture of the body is discipline as he believes "discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, 'docile' bodies" (Foucault, 1995, p. 138). In this regard, the ship that imprisons and educates the convicts becomes an epitome of a disciplinary institution that bears docile bodies. In Wertenbaker's play, the performance of the play requires numerous rehearsals, which enables/forces the bodies of the convicts to exercise, hence, transform and/or cultivate their minds.

Wertenbaker shows that humane treatment is the only solution to ameliorate the conditions of criminals as well as society in a larger context with an observable improvement in the convicts' behaviours. A comparison of the characters' relationship before and after the performance illustrates that the theatrical production improved their communication with each other. As it is seen before the rehearsals, the couple convicts, Harry and Duckling, always utter harsh words towards each other. Harry accuses Duckling of having a secret relationship with one of the soldiers and calls her a "filthy whore" (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 27). He bores Duckling with his jealousy, which causes Duckling to rise: "JUST STOP WATCHING ME" (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 27) as she feels she is captivated. She is already a convict on the ship and has to endure violent punishment, and her lover does not leave her alone either by denying her freedom. For that reason, she complains that "I wish I was dead. At least when you're dead, you're free" (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 28). Besides this example, another problematic relationship is observed between Dabby and Mary. Dabby attaches importance to virginity and insults Mary for having had some prior relationships: "[Y]ou're only virgin once. You can't go to a man and say, I'm a virgin except for this one lover I had. After that, it doesn't matter how many men go through you" (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 30). In both of these problematic relationships, where Wertenbaker also impliedly makes a critique of male-centred heterosexual relationships, especially male prisoners are not dignified figures before the performance. However, a positive change occurs in their attitude towards themselves and their beloved following the performance.

The positive impact of the rehearsals and being engaged with art on the convicts' behaviours is undeniable, which supports another idea suggested by Foucault (1995): "The punishment and correction . . . are processes that effect a transformation of the individual as a whole - of his body and of his habits by the daily work that he is forced to perform, of his mind and his will by the spiritual attentions that are paid to him" (p. 125). Regarding the positive change in the convicts' attitude with the help of drama, Ralph Clark observes that especially some of them such as Mary Brenham "seemed to acquire a dignity . . . they seemed to lose some of their corruption" (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 22). When in one of the rehearsals he calls them "ladies and gentlemen," Dabby is surprised to be addressed as a lady: "We're ladies now. Wait till I tell my husband I've become a lady" (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 40). In another instance, when Sideway calls Dabby "Mrs. Bryant," she is surprised and asks, "Who's Mrs Bryant?" (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 41) as she is not used to being referred to as a "Mrs." As such examples demonstrate, the convicts require being recognised and respected by others, and when they are treated with good manners, they express their gratitude by exerting more dignified manners in return.

Another positive influence of the performance on the convicts is their increased confidence. Before the rehearsals, it seems that the characters do not have a close relationship; however, later on, they all want to produce the play and they believe in each other's success. As an example, when Wisehammer is chained, he does not give up acting, and all the others, in

a union, say: "This is theatre. We will believe you" (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 56). These incidents display that the players start to believe in the ability of one another and support each other, which is another indication of their more respectful and refined nature. In line with this idea, Ralph's remark at the end of the play is also noteworthy: "The theatre is like a small republic, it requires private sacrifices for the good of the whole" (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 90), which implies that they are also taught to work as a group and respect each individual separately with the help of the theatrical performance.

One of the most important benefits of the rehearsals for the group is that they help them to overcome the forced silence upon them by the officers. Before the rehearsals, they are always silenced, and they could not even claim their rights. In that sense, the progress with Liz is especially significant because it is believed that "[s]he develops under the influence of working together with the other convict actors to a point where she has to 'speak'" (Naismith, 1995, p. xl). Her example might be the most interesting one in this sense as she is sentenced to death for stealing, and, although she is innocent, she could not express herself. As a result of continuous silencing, she is afraid of defending herself and wants Harry to tell the Lieutenant that she is innocent after she is hanged. Later on, with the insistence of Ralph Clark and Governor Phillip, she tells the truth, and it is revealed that the soldier who accused her is actually a liar. The fact that she transgresses the boundaries of oppressive silence shows that the rehearsals taught her how to defend herself. Susan Carlson (2000) describes the change in this character: "Liz Morden . . . gives up her silence and adopts the particularity of Farquhar's language to reclaim her dignity before a group of men ready to hang her" (p. 138). This illustrates one of the best examples of the transgressive power of art in the face of cruel punishment. Besides, it is also important that when she defends herself, "the gaolers believe an honest convict over and above the word of a drunk and uncertain officer" (Godiwala, 2007, p. 1022), which proves that she has become a more respectable member of society in the eyes of the gaolers. Robert Baker-White (1999) also draws attention to such improvements in the characters:

> Through rehearsal, voices are brought out from mute personalities; the constricting hierarchy of military order is undercut by relationships that have been thrown into flux and suspension; and the crushing monotony of penal colony life is interrupted by the freshness of creative alterity. (p. 100)

Through the rehearsals and the performance, the convicts can recognise their own identities, which shows that they interiorise the instructive and liberating function of performance that Phillip and Clark wished for them. Foucault (1995) claims that in the process of penal reform, you can still be coerced or forced to do something by being observed constantly (p. 170). He suggests that "[i]mprisonment must be followed by measures of supervision and assistance until the rehabilitation of the former prisoner is complete" (Foucault, 1995, p. 270). The convicts in the play, therefore, are indirectly coerced into being better citizens through a performance that is steadily monitored by authority figures.

Another benefit of the rehearsals is that they provide the convicts with a feeling of escape from the deprivation in their own lives. The players feel much happier while they are acting, that is, when they feel like someone else other than themselves. For instance, while acting her role, Ascott says that "I don't want to play myself. When I say Kite's lines I forget everything else. I forget the judge said I'm going to have to spend the rest of my natural life in this place getting beaten and working like a slave . . . when I speak Kite's lines I don't hate any more" (Wertenbaker, 1995, pp. 73-4). While acting the role of Kite, Ascott realises the futility of her own life. As Esther Beth Sullivan (1993) suggests, "[a]fter 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" (p. 142). It seems that the theatrical production does not only save the convicts from violent punishment but also makes them enjoy the process as they observe the improvement in themselves as well as their peers. It also turns out that as the convicts are good at playing, the officers who did not believe in their talent and intellect are once more proven to be wrong. At the beginning of the rehearsals, the characters do not know how it will be possible to act as someone other than themselves. Baker-White (1999) also interprets that "in Dabby's imagination of theater, roles from 'real life' must directly correspond to roles played within the dramatic fiction" (p. 102). While Mary and Dabby are talking about the characters they are going to act, Mary asks "[h]ow can I play Silvia? She's brave and strong. She couldn't have done what I've done" (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 30). This question indicates the deprivation of Mary as one of the insignificant convicts on the ship, and also shows her naive ideas concerning acting. When Dabby tells she could pretend to be Silvia, Mary answers: "No I have to be her . . . Because that's acting" (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 31). Although she does not know much about acting, it is an important improvement that she starts to regard the theatre as an art, and she wants to do the best on her own part. The importance the prisoners give to the art of performing is also possible to see through the words of Liz who warns the others: "Now take your whirligigs out of our sight, we have lines to learn" (Wertenbaker, 1995, p. 33). It is possible to observe from such examples that although convicts begin as quite ignorant performers, after some time, they can even rehearse without the lieutenant's surveillance. For instance, when Clark has some other business, Mary has the authority to guide the players so that they do not lose time, which shows that they have developed a sense of responsibility as well.

The rehearsals ultimately make the experiences of the convicts a valuable one which would otherwise be a waste of time. Eventually, the convicts take pleasure in the performance in time as it is seen that Wisehammer does not want to turn back to England anymore because he wants to be a writer. He gets uncomfortable with the discrimination he faces in England as a member of the Jewish minority: "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, 1995, p. 85). He has a sense of creativity and believes that he can be a writer. His example proves the validity of the statement that "[theatre] begins to show itself as a medium for crossing the boundaries between the licentious world of 'criminality' and the authoritative world of 'civilization'" (Baker-White, 1999, p. 102). Concerning this discernible improvement of the convicts, Sullivan (1993) suggests that

> [i]n *Our Country's Good* action is defined alongside notions of individualistic self-empowerment, occurring through increasing consciousness of culture, tradition, and community. As a result, the convicts of this drama pull themselves up by their own bootstraps, become productive members of their society, and undertake action for 'our country's good.' (p. 141)

Although the convicts were criminals once, now they are civilised enough to consider pursuing a career in writing. Like Wisehammer, Sideway also wants to start a theatre company, and Liz and Ketch want to be actresses in this company. This change in behaviour and attitude can be explained with the argument that "[t]he prison, though an administrative apparatus, will at the same time be a machine for altering minds" (Foucault, 1995, p. 125). This evident change in convicts' behaviour epitomises Foucault's assertion that "[t]he education of the prisoner is for the authorities both an indispensable precaution in the interests of society and an obligation to the prisoner" (Foucault, 1995, p. 270). This improvement in the prisoners' aspirations can only

be explained as a possible consequence of Ralph Clark and Governor Phillip's support.

Criticism of Thatcherism

Stephenson and Langridge (1997) interpret Wertenbaker's aim in *Our Country's Good* as to show "the effects of enforced silencing, the definition of crime and civilisation" (p. 136) while criticising the practices of cruel punishment at the same time. Along with this, she also poses a critique of post-war Britain as she says that "[i]n a society that's not very much in touch with itself, art will be uncomfortable and I think that's the situation in England at the moment" (Wertenbaker, 1997, p. 141). As illustrated in this remark, Wertenbaker also criticises the post-war understanding of art in Britain through historicization by criticising the wrong punishment practices and questioning the meaning of civilisation in the eighteenth century. Alexander Feldman (2013) confirms that "[t]hough the play's historical setting is the eighteenth century, its immediate, political context was provided by current events, specifically, Margaret Thatcher's substantial cuts in arts funding" (p.153). As a play written in 1988, *Our Country's Good* might specifically be read in relation to ideas of punishment and art in Thatcher's period. It is known that after Thatcher's election, arts subsidy was eroded in England and it was "a time during which the ruling Conservative government steadily dismantled the welfare state, destroyed the country's manufacturing base, disempowered the trade unions, and sold off public utilities" (Dymkowski qtd. in Carlson, 2000, p. 127). The lack of subsidy in arts is summed up by David Gritten (1990) as follows: "During the 11 years of Margaret Thatcher's government, the arts and broadcasting in Britain suffered mightily under reduced subsidies and thinly disguised hostility" (par. 1). Relating such controversial practices of the government with the control and surveillance of theatres, Wertenbaker (1997) says that "the minute something is threatening . . . something's closed down. I think it's [theatre] seen as an area where people have too many ideas" (p. 142). The hostility towards theatre and creative arts that do not directly provide a source of income for the state in Thatcher's period recalls the officers' attitudes against the performance of the play in Wertenbaker's work. As the officers regard the performance as useless and a waste of time in the play, subsidy cuts in Thatcher's government indicate the lack of support for arts. This illustrates, though the play takes place in the eighteenth century, the problems portrayed in it are also valid for 1980s Britain when Wertenbaker produced this play.

Another matter that relates Wertenbaker's play to its context is the dominant establishment's views on the penal system. Margaret Thatcher made her opinions about punishment and crime clear in these words: "We Conservatives know . . . even if many sociologists don't, that crime is not a sickness to be cured – it's a temptation to be resisted, a threat to be deterred, an evil to be punished" (qtd. in Stewart, 2013, p. 316). A relevant aspect of Wertenbaker's play to its political context is the establishment's lack of belief in rehabilitation as a crime policy. As noted by Burnett and MacNeill, "[a] further aspect of crime policy at this time was a direct attack on the notion of rehabilitation" (qtd. in Farrall, 2006, p. 270). Clearly, Thatcher was a proponent of traditional punishment instead of rehabilitation, which is another reason for Wertenbaker's criticism of the dominant establishment. It is often noted that the condition of prisons in Britain in the Thatcher years was worse than before. Specifically, unrest among the prisoners was widespread as there were many riots around the country's prisons. In the words of Richard Garside (2020),

> [b]etween 29 April and 2 May 1986 . . . 46 prisons in England faced widespread disturbances in what the official inquiry described as "the worst night of violence the English prison system has ever known". Further disturbances followed in 1988 and 1989. Then, in 1990, a number of prison disturbances broke

> out, including the longest and most destructive prison protest in British history: at Strangeways prison in Manchester. (par. 18)

An analysis of the unrest around practices concerning the criminal justice system in 1980s Britain reveals that Thatcher's Conservative government also supported the violent punishment system instead of a more dignified and civilized one aimed at improving the "soul" of the convicts. As it is known, Thatcher also voiced her support of the death penalty in several circumstances. Stephen Farrall (n.d.) confirms that "[s]he [Thatcher] also favoured the use of corporal punishment and voted to bring back hanging whenever there was a vote on the topic in the Houses of Parliament" (par. 3). Instead of providing subsidies to arts or improving the relationship between the Department of Education and prisons in Britain, Thatcher's government granted the police force greater power and increased the number of prisons. Considering the similarities between Thatcher's policies on the prison system and punishment and that of the authoritarian officers in *Our Country's Good*, Wertenbaker's work alludes to the criminal justice system in Thatcher's government. The play, therefore, displays a critical stance towards the Thatcherite establishment due to its prioritised principles around the punitive system.

Conclusion

Wertenbaker's play problematises the punishment practices in its context and offers the application of reform in the criminal system as a better way of rehabilitating convicts. As it gives voice to the experiences of the convicts and illustrates the obvious improvement in their behaviours and increased self-confidence, the play might be regarded as a Foucauldian survey of modern punishment and its more humane consequences. Through a dialectical approach represented by two groups of officers in the play, Wertenbaker makes her ideas clear concerning the nature of punishment and art. In a Foucauldian sense, penal reform is upheld by Wertenbaker while prior means of punishment based on torture are condemned. Her work, in the final analysis, poses a criticism of punishment and serves as a proponent of arts and rehabilitation. To justify this point, Wertenbaker uses some actual convicts' statements showing the dysfunctionality of punishment and torture. Instead, she provides a successful production of a performance realised by a group of convicts previously humiliated by the officers. Along with this, the play also posits a response to Thatcherite politics in terms of subsidy cuts and an insistence on more brutal forms of punishment. Wertenbaker's approach in this play is a humanist one and she tries to demonstrate this through a discussion around the nature of crime, judgment, punishment, and art. In conclusion, what the play reveals is that crime could be compensated, judgment could be tempered, punishment could be humanised, and art should be embraced.

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