



POSTMODERN LAMPOON: METATHEATRICAL SATIRE ON NEOLIBERALISM IN TIMBERLAKE WERTENBAKER'S OUR COUNTRY'S GOOD*

POSTMODERN YERĞİ: TIMBERLAKE WERTENBAKER'IN OUR COUNTRY'S GOOD OYUNUNDA NEOLİBERALİZMİN METATEYATRAL HİCVİ

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Abstract

Metatheatre, which generally indicates a number of strategies revealing the fictionality of plays, has been prevalent throughout the history of theatre. The metatheatrical vehicles like the play-within-the-play have been sustainedly employed by playwrights in Ancient Greek theatre, Roman theatre and English theatre since the Renaissance. In English theatre, many studies on this concept have focused on the Renaissance as it became popular in this period. Studies on metatheatre have often described it as a technical novelty breaking the illusion created by traditional/realist plays. However, a careful analysis of its use in plays from varying periods and cultures shows that metatheatre has also been employed as a tool of satirizing politics by the playwrights. In both Renaissance and eighteenth-century English drama, metatheatrical tools were used to satirize domestic politics and familiar politicians. However, with postmodernism, in the twentieth century, the context of satire changed since it was directed at universal problems, ideologies and accustomed ways of thinking rather than the contemporary problems of a certain country. In line with such a change, metatheatrical satires in the twentieth century aimed to target grand narratives produced by modernity. One such play is *Our Country's Good* (1988) by Timberlake Wertenbaker in which neoliberalism as a master narrative is satirized through the device of the rehearsal-within-the-play. Within this context, this study aims to explore *Our Country's Good* as a postmodern satire to show that satire still has validity in the postmodern age and draw attention to the symbiotic and persistent relation between satire and metatheatre.

Öz

Tiyatro metinlerinin kurgusallığını vurgulayan metatiyatro kavramı tiyatro tarihi boyunca karşımıza çıkar. Antik Yunan'da, Roma'da ve Rönesans'tan itibaren günümüze kadar İngiliz tiyatrosunda oyun yazarları eserlerinde oyun-içinde-oyun gibi çeşitli metateyatral araçlara başvurmuşlardır. İngiliz tiyatrosu özelinde, metatiyatronun Rönesans döneminde popülerleşmiş olmasının neticesinde, bu kavram üzerine yapılan çalışmaların daha ziyade Rönesans dönemi oyunlarını kapsadığı görülebilir. Kavram üzerine yapılan çalışmaların çoğu metatiyatroyu geleneksel/gerçekçi oyunların yarattığı illüzyonu bozan teknik bir yenilik olarak ele almışlardır. Fakat metatiyatronun farklı dönem ve kültürlerdeki kullanımına bakmak onun aynı zamanda siyasi hiciv amaçlı kullanılan bir tiyatro tekniği olduğunu ortaya koyar. Örneğin, Rönesans ve on sekizinci yüzyıl İngiliz tiyatrosunda oyun yazarlarının ülke sorunlarını ve politikacıları hicvetmek için metatiyatroya başvurdukları görülür. 20. yüzyılda ise postmodernizmin etkisiyle hiciv kavramının bağlamı değişmiş, önceki yüzyıllarda belirli bir ülkenin belirli bir dönemindeki ekonomik kriz, sosyal adaletsizlik, siyasi baskı gibi sorunlarını hedef alan hiciv, daha evrensel meseleleri ve ideolojileri tartışmaya açmaya başlamıştır. Bu değişim neticesinde, metateyatral hicivler modernitenin ürünü olan büyük anlatıları sorgulamaya başlamışlardır. Böyle bir durum, Timberlake Wertenbaker'ın oyun-içinde-prova tekniği yoluyla kendi döneminin neoliberal uygulamalarından yola çıkarak neoliberalizmi genel bir ideoloji olarak hicvettiği *Our Country's Good* (1988) adlı oyununda görülebilir. Bu çerçevede, bu çalışmanın amacı, Wertenbaker'ın *Our Country's Good* oyununu postmodern hiciv olarak analiz ederek hicvin postmodern çağda da geçerliliği olan bir tür olduğunu göstermeye ve hicivle metatiyatro arasında süregelen simbiyotik ilişkiyi ortaya koymaya çalışmaktır.

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Introduction

Like theatre itself, metatheatre has an ancient history. However, it was in 1963 that the concept was theorized by American theatre critic Lionel Abel. A limited number of studies on metatheatre, which seem to have focused upon Renaissance drama, introduce the concept as a theatrical innovation that breaks the fourth wall between the audience and the stage, emphasizing the role of the audience as more active participants of the theatrical experience. However, a careful look at plays from Ancient Greek drama to the present reveals that metatheatre is much more than a mere technical novelty since it also serves as a vehicle of political lampoon. While the blending of political satire and metatheatre mainly targets the rulers and politicians of the time in Renaissance and eighteenth-century English drama, there is an evident shift in perspective in the twentieth century in that the fusion of these theatrical strategies collaborates with the postmodernist mode of thinking to put into question and challenge such metanarratives and ideologies as national history, Eurocentrism and colonialism by revealing the similarities, like fictionality, illusion, artificiality and arbitrariness, between such ideologies and theatrical performances. Thus, in twentieth-century English drama, satire and metatheatre acquire a theoretical basis with a pluralistic and fluid take on fundamental political concepts, including social structures and the notions of self. Metatheatrical satires shift the focus onto universal problems and entrenched modes of thinking.

Timberlake Wertenbaker (1951-) is among the major British women playwrights in the twentieth century who persistently tackles with “*global politics of identity*” and offers an overview of late twentieth-century Britain to examine certain “*others*” constituted by hierarchies of sex, race or nation (Carlson, 2000, p. 134). Together with the significance of art, authority, deterioration, forced silence, civilisation and crime (Stephenson and Langridge, 1997, p. 136), loss of home, banishment and displacement are the primary issues her works focus on (Roth, 2001, p. 11). In an interview with Hilary de Vries, Wertenbaker states, “*the whole thing about being a writer is that you have a floating identity*” (qtd. in Bush, 2013, p. 1), which suggests that an author blends diverse, and opposing, personalities in life. Likewise, in her oeuvre, she underlines the lack of fixities and emphasizes plurality (Carlson, 1993, p. 267) in identity politics. Her works foreground “*identity*” and the connection between people and society, which cannot be described via ideological involvements (Carlson, 1993, p. 268).

Based upon Australian author Thomas Keneally's (1935-) novel *The Playmaker* (1987), Wertebaker's *Our Country's Good* (1988) starts with a sea voyage in which several prisoners are taken to New South Wales, Australia from England to build up a colony. In order to keep the prisoners occupied in the camp, the authorities suggest that they perform *The Recruiting Officer* (1706), a comedy by George Farquhar (1677-1707). During the rehearsals, the notions of crime, punishment and meaning and functions of art come to the foreground. While 'theatre' as a thematic content weaves a relatively positive experience in the overall flow of events in the dramatic narrative, the playwright in fact avoids utopian idealism and instead emphasizes the possibilities of establishing 'a heterotopian community' through theatrical means in which characters from various backgrounds can survive in an egalitarian manner. Considering that the play was written and performed during the heyday of Thatcherite neoliberalism in Britain, it is also safe to argue that Wertebaker's call for an egalitarian understating of communitarian politics based on heterotopian values reveals an inherently political content with specific historical implications. Within such a context, this article argues that Wertebaker's "iconic", "landmark play" (Billington, 2015) confronts the neoliberal politics of self and individualism and brings to the fore the need for an otherwise-constructed sociality, and metatheatre, especially the rehearsal-within-the-play, upholds the construction of such a community. In this vein, the study highlights the convergence between political satire and metatheatre in the play and explores satire on neoliberal ideologies.

The Intersection Between Satire, Drama/Theatre and Metatheatre

Satire is a manner of writing that reveals the defects of people, institutions or societies to mock and despise (Baldick, 2008a, p. 299). It rises at particular times of political upheaval, and in such troublesome periods, satirists see themselves as "public servants" and they have a solid trust in the improvement of mankind (Real, 1992, p. 8). They aim to show people the reality behind the appearance of people and situations with their works which expose fraud, unmask deception, and break illusion in order to put an end to people's compliance and nonchalance (Quintero, 2007, p. 4) for causing change in society. The satirical mood might sound rather conservative at first glance, but such functions of satire disclose its relation to subversive frames of thinking like postmodern theory, which has been emphasized by certain critics. For instance, as Dustin Griffin expresses, satire is an open form that intends to question and shatter rather than reach definite conclusions (1994, p. 95) like literary works defined as postmodern. Similarly, Daniel M. Hooley refers to

the self-consciousness of satire, which is a common aspect of postmodern literature: “[S]atire is [...] almost pathologically self-conscious (2007, p. 3). [I]t may have spotted first of all those qualities of literature we lately call postmodern” (p. 9), which implies that satire may be thought of as one of the origins of postmodernism in literature due to its overt self-consciousness.

Oral or literary, satire has always been a part of our traditions, attitudes, grudge, wickedness, folly and how we express our opinions (Hooley, 2007, pp. 1-2); therefore, it has a very long history. In Greek literature, in *The Iliad*, Thersites from the Greek army is considered the first satirist as he orally attacks Agamemnon (invective) (Ugolini, 2016, p. 3). In *Poetics*, Aristotle comments that comedy originates from such invectives (2004, p. 61), “the [...] satirical utterances of the leaders of the [p]hallic [s]ongs” (Elliott, 1960, p. 100) in theatre in Ancient Greece. Aristotle’s remark is a response to the contentious issue of whether satire is originally in poetic or dramatic form and it showcases that satire and drama/theatre are innately related to each other.

The major parallelism between satire and theatre is that satire, too, is performative since it is a form of rhetorical performance (Griffin, 1994, p. 71). For example, Lucian, an Ancient Greek rhetorician and satirist, and the Roman satirist Juvenal were performing rhetoric (Griffin, 1994, pp. 71-72). In a similar vein, the close affinity between satire, rhetoric and performance can be realized in the satirical literature of the Renaissance in which rhetoric was a substantial feature of the period’s culture (Griffin, 1994, p. 72). In addition, satire and drama both rely upon persuasion since satire aims to persuade the audience that someone or something is silly (Griffin, 1994, p. 1). They both employ persona because satirical poets and playwrights do not speak in their voices but in the voice of a fictional speaker to hide their real identities. As Catherine Keane clarifies, satire and drama use apologia and prologue. In a satirical poem, the apologia is the introduction where the poet introduces the subject matter (2006, p. 6). Likewise, the chorus intends to manipulate the audience’s opinions in the parabasis in Ancient Greek comedies.

Like drama and theatre, metatheatre, too, inherently pertains to satirical drama. Playwrights from different cultures and periods, like William Shakespeare, Luigi Pirandello, Jean Genet, Bertolt Brecht and Samuel Beckett, have employed metatheatrical devices in their plays. However, it is still difficult to reach an accepted description of metatheatre, yet it might be useful to look at some of the descriptions to set a framework.

Chris Baldick defines metatheatre as “[d]rama about drama” or moments of self-consciousness where a play displays its fictionality and theatricality (2008b, p. 203). Prologue, epilogue, induction and aside, where the author directly addresses the audience openly reveal a play’s theatricality. According to David Pellegrini, metatheatre points to self-reflexive plays which expose their aesthetic status to their audience (2010, p. 388). Such self-reflexivity may be deposited within the text either by the playwright, which is defined as meta-drama, or it may be accommodated into its production by the designer or the director. In each case, the play has an aesthetic consciousness and remarks on projections of reality and illusion. As Patrice Pavis explicates, metatheatre is “[t]heatre which is centred around theatre” and, thus, it both comments on and stands for itself (1998, p. 210). He further clarifies that metatheatrical plays exhibit life’s theatricality since they blur the boundary between life and the play (1998, p. 210). Such definitions delineate that metatheatrical works consciously emphasize their fictionality to break the illusion created by theatrical experience, an agenda which recalls satire, the end of which is to draw attention to the hidden ideologies prevalent in society.

A more comprehensive specification of metatheatre was provided by Lionel Abel:

[Only certain plays] tell us at once that happenings and characters in them are of the playwright’s invention, and that insofar as they were discovered - where there is invention there also has to be discovery - they were found by the playwright’s imagining rather than by his observing the world. Such plays have truth in them, not because they convince us of real occurrences or existing persons, but because they show the reality of the dramatic imagination, instanced by the playwright’s and also by that of his characters. Of such plays, it may indeed be said: “The play’s the thing”. Plays of this type, it seems to me, belong to a special genre and deserve a distinctive name (1963, p. 59).

As Lionel Abel states, plays conventionally conceal that they are produced in a playwright’s imagination because their purpose is to convince the readers/audience that what they depict is real. However, some plays, “*metatheatre*”, as he calls them, deliberately reveal their artificiality as they intentionally exhibit that the play reverberates the author’s mind and what it represents is a mere story. In this sense, metatheatre works through similar dynamics with satire where the aim is to draw attention to the arbitrariness of social and political arrangements. The subversive function of metatheatre and its connection with satire can also be understood

through its comparison to tragedy. As Abel further puts forth, tragedies praise the status quo by cementing it with their forms, while metatheatre refuses any structure as definitely credible. Whereas tragedies picture man's affinity with the material world, metatheatre figures his consciousness. Tragedy fosters the belief in order; metatheatre aims to underline that the idea of order is only a fabrication (1963, p. 113), an issue he further elaborates on in *Tragedy and Metatheatre: Essays on Dramatic Form* (2003).

Based on Abel's comments on tragedy and metatheatre, it is possible to infer that although metatheatre seems to be a theoretical concept which may have nothing to do with the materiality of everyday lives, like satire, its aim is to show the reality behind man-made social and political structures. In the same way, as political satire intends to demonstrate the hypocrisy of fraudulent statesmen and the artificiality of social and political systems, metatheatre intends to indicate that traditional plays that uphold the importance of make-believe offer pictures of certain ideologies as ideal social order. The ultimate aim of metatheatre is to demonstrate the fictionality of the very notion of order by revealing that such ideologies work to protect the rights of the power-holders.

As Richard Hornby formulates, metatheatre may occur in five forms in plays: "the ceremony within the play", "role playing within the role", "literary and real-life reference within the play", "self-reference" and "the play-within-the-play" (1986). The first strategy refers to different ceremonies such as balls, feasts, tournaments, games and rituals (1986, p. 49) incorporated into the main play, like the banquets in *Macbeth* and the abdication scene in *King Lear* (p. 49). When there is a ceremony in a play, characters take on another identity along with their first identity, which indicates the mobility between the two selves, recalling the fictionality of the play into which they are inserted.

"Role playing within the role" refers to a moment when a character performs a role, for some reason, he/she takes on another role (Hornby, 1986, p. 67). The device displays not simply who the character really is, but who he/she really desires to be and, in an ironic way, the role is closer to the character's real self than his/her everyday identity (1986, p. 67). For example, Hamlet's feigned madness discloses deeper truths about his identity. He persuades people that he is mad, but his real intention is to find out the murderer of his father (p. 67). Therefore, the device shows that a character's actions on the stage may not reflect his/her personality, and this shows to the audience that the play they are currently watching does not represent

reality. The third device, “*literary and real-life reference within the play*”, occurs whenever the play refers to other works of literature and underlines its own fictional status (Hornby, 1986, p. 88). The fourth strategy, “self-reference”, indicates the moment when the play refers to itself and displays its fictionality (p. 103). These strategies imply that the boundary between reality and fiction is not always clear-cut. In these respects, metatheatre shows close thematic and formal affinities with satire, the aim of which is to demonstrate that the prescribed social and political systems which are presented as natural and real are, in fact, man-made and fabricated.

The fifth form of metatheatre, “the play-within-the-play”, is more relevant than other strategies to this study because *Our Country’s Good*, which is going to be analysed in detail in the next section, is characterized as a kind of play-within-the-play (rehearsal-within-the-play). As Thomas G. Rosenmeyer remarks, it mirrors the main play, shaping the audience’s understanding of it (2002, p. 99). Regarding the device, Hornby points out that as the audience we see some other characters who are watching the inner play, which reminds us that the inner play, and thus, the main play we are watching, are both illusory. By extension, we conclude that life, which seems to be rather vivid and exciting, is, in the end, an illusion (1986, p. 45). As Hornby clarifies, the play-within-the-play functions to divulge life as a delusion. Breaking the illusion of the outer play, it confronts the audience with the truth that the play is nothing but a product of the playwright’s imagination. Therefore, metatheatre works as a tool to exhibit that with all its institutions life is a construction organized by the dominant ideologies, and intends to raise awareness regarding the roots of social and political problems in life. That is where the affinity between satire and metatheatre is obviously seen. As in the case of satire, the ultimate purpose of metatheatrical tools is to show the failing sides of social structures. Thus, like satire, metatheatre is not only literary; it is inherently political.

Satire and the employment of metatheatre have been widespread in English drama from the beginning. However, it was in the Renaissance that metatheatre became popular and its use as a tool for satirizing politics could clearly be seen. As Shiladitya Sen expresses, in this period, metatheatre was not employed by playwrights incidentally; instead, it was the conditions of the time which directed them to employ metatheatre in their plays (2012, p. 13). To be more specific, censorship was a problem for the playwrights satirizing well-known political figures and their incorrect policies. In order to escape censorship or punishments like penalty or imprisonment, playwrights were making use of certain metatheatrical

tactics like setting their plays in distant times or cultures (e.g. John Marston's *The Malcontent*, 1603) or employing the play-within-the-play to create a kind of alienation effect and put a distance between their play and the audience. The device also gave the impression that the events displayed in their plays were not the playwrights' projects but the products of the imagination of some literary characters who were acting like authors. In this way, the playwrights were creating some safer space to satirize known political figures and their depravity. Another reason for the increase of metatheatrical techniques in the plays of the period was related to the changing status of the audience. As Sen highlights, the position of the theatre audience went through a significant change in the Renaissance since they became active participants of theatrical productions (2012, p. 13). The playwrights had to address this new situation (p. iii) as it could be seen in the parts of the plays (like prologue) where the performers were directly addressing the audience making them a part of the discussion ongoing on the stage.

The use of metatheatre as a vehicle of satirizing politics can be observed in some popular plays of the period. For instance, In Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (1582-1592) Hieronimo seeks for justice for his son Horatio who is killed unfairly in a combat, however he is ignored by legal authorities. In order to punish the murderers himself and establish justice for his son, he stages a play, *Soliman and Perseda*, and during the performance, kills Horatio's murderers (Kyd, 2002). It is only through the play-within-the-play that Hieronimo becomes visible as a citizen, his voice is heard by the upper classes and the authorities of law, and justice is, though violently, achieved. Thus, metatheatre becomes a means for criticizing the inefficacy and partiality of the Spanish king as the ultimate legal authority and it allows the playwright to satirize the legal corruption in Elizabethan England covertly.

As in the Renaissance, political satire in eighteenth-century English drama was mostly directed at famous political personages as in the plays of Henry Fielding, who used the play-within-the-play in a much effective way. For instance, his *The Historical Register for the Year 1736* (1737) is set at a rehearsal in which both Robert Walpole, known for his nepotism, who imposed heavy taxes on his people, and Whig politicians, who were said to do nothing to solve the country's problems, are harshly attacked (Fielding, 1902)¹. In such cases, the play-within-the-play makes it possible for the playwright to create the impression that his criticism is directed at some

¹ See Ünlü Çimen, E. (2023). *Hiciv Tiyatro*. In S. Şenlen Güvenç (Ed.), *Ana Hatlarıyla İngiliz Edebiyatı: Anglo-Sakson Döneminden Çağdaş İngiliz Edebiyatına* (pp. 153-160). Ankara: Akademisyen Kitabevi.

imaginary characters of the inner play staged by the characters of the outer play, protecting him from the charges of satirizing the politicians of the time.

In twentieth-century English drama, it is still possible to see metatheatrical satires, but, in these plays, the target of the playwrights are universal problems caused by the conflicts between different countries and modernity's "grand narratives", as formulated by Jean-François Lyotard (1984), like national history, Eurocentrism, and colonialism. In Howard Brenton's *The Churchill Play* (1974), set in a dystopian England in 1984, several internees rehearse a play to present to the politicians who will be in the camp soon. The performance allows the internees to declare their honest opinions regarding Winston Churchill which reveals that, as opposed to what is decreed by official history, not every British person regards him as a national figure (Brenton, 1986). Rather than Churchill himself as a statesman, the play deals with the myths created about him; therefore, it can be remarked that it produces a satire of the notion of national history in a general sense. In the same vein, in *Our Country's Good*, rather than attacking Margaret Thatcher, the prime minister of the period (1979-1990), for her responsibility for the economic and social problems of the time, Timberlake Wertenbaker satirizes neoliberalism as a general ideology as her satire is generated within a larger net of questions regarding such universal issues as the nature of the crime, the limits of legal punishment, the role of art as a way of rehabilitation for criminals, collectivity versus individualism, democracy, egalitarianism, the complexity of human relations and perspectives, the multiplicity of alternatives in the solution of contemporary problems, and the possibility of a heterotopian society. The following section will explore the play in this manner.

Our Country's Good: Satire, Metatheatre and Postmodernism

Neoliberalism can be taken as a grand narrative which claims that deregulation and capitalism are the solutions to the social and economic problems of the society. The 1980s were characterized by Margaret Thatcher's authority and neoliberal policies in British political life. A notorious expression attributed to her was "There is no alternative", which suggests that the only functional system is market capitalism. As Christine Dymkowski clarifies, in the period the systems of manufacture were encroached, the unions of trade were not influential, and the conservative government sold public utilities (1988, p. 127). While the weak, the needy, collectivism and imagination were looked down on, the rich, the free market ideology and private enterprise were extolled (p. 127).

Thatcher's neoliberalism operated not only in economics but also in art and culture, bringing about substantial cuts in the funds of such public art organizations as Arts Council. Her policy of culture and art reverberates her conservative attitude which gives priority to the personal over the public all the time. Such cuts in arts intended to support citizens' collectivity reflect Thatcher's other slogan, "There is no such thing as society". Robert Hewison (1995) comments that in her time life, with all its aspects including arts, was seen from the perspective of "*economic anxiety*" (p. 212). In this context, art and culture were tackled through the fundamentally ideological tendencies of the conservative prime minister's perspective.

As demonstrated by Thatcher's neoliberalism in art and culture, the 1980s witnessed the dispersion of public arts assisted by public funding. This was not a mere alteration in the economic system, but also in perspectives regarding the affinity between art and the life of the public. Thatcher's conservatism, which gave priority to the individual over the collective and the mercantile over the aesthetic, was shaping Britain's cultural life. Indeed, this is how neoliberalism as an ideology reverberates in the play most visibly as the colony seems to be a microcosm of the society in which sense of community is dissolving. Rather than addressing economic anxieties, the play critiques neoliberalism portraying its shattering influences on the meaning of collaboration and solidarity among citizens. As a solution to such ruinous effects of neoliberal ideology, the play depicts the rehearsal of a play, during which inmates help each other prepare for the final performance. Since the final performance is not staged, Wertenbaker insinuates that what is significant for the convicts is to develop a sense of cooperation rather than reach a definitive social structure. Thus, the emphasis of the play is on the process of building a sense of togetherness rather than on the final performance itself. Certain critics (Wilson, 1991, p. 23 and Baker-White, 1999, p. 100) put forth that the play portrays the outbreak of a utopian society. However, when analysed closely, it is possible to claim that, from a postmodern point of view, Wertenbaker abstains from utopian ideals and emphasizes the rise of a heterotopian society which hosts several different characters from various cultural backgrounds. In a heterotopian society, the members are allowed to have their own voices without being silenced by other points of view and still remain as parts of the society, which is against neoliberalism which foregrounds individuality and the impossibility of the notion of society and togetherness.

Our Country's Good, Wertenbaker's "historical humanist play" (Gardner, 2018) is about the exile of some convicts from England to Australia to build a colony. After they arrive in New South Wales, the convicts start to rehearse George Farquhar's (1677-1707) comedy *The Recruiting Officer* (1706), during which they also discuss the nature of crime, punishment and rehabilitation through theatre and their dreams and aspirations are revealed. With such overt self-reflexivity, the play breaks the fourth wall right at the beginning and, as opposed to realist plays, in which the aim is to convince the audiences that what they watch is real, it draws attention to its fictional status and, thus, the playwright makes use of metatheatre to make the audience active and critical participants in the performance. The play opens frighteningly. In the first scene, a prisoner, Robert Sideway, is being whipped, and the Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark, enumerates the stripes. John Wisehammer, another convict, recounts his experience of transportation to the colony: "*Spewed from our country, forgotten, bound to the dark edge of the earth*" (p. 1) and, John Arscott grumbles about hunger (Wertenbaker, 1991, p. 1), all of which showcase the brutal nature of the relation between the authorities and the inmates at the colony. However, in Scene Two, the Aborigine remarks, "*A giant canoe drifts onto the sea [...]. This is a dream which has lost its way. Best to leave it alone*" (p. 2). For the Aborigine, the coming of the prisoners is something to be "*Best to leave alone*", which points to the multiplicity of the points of view on the stage regarding colonialism and the play reverberates this multiple perceptions, revealing its postmodern nature. Displaying the multiplicity of the prisoners' perspectives of colonial experience, the play rejects the domination of a certain perspective about colonialism on the audience's own perception of the issue.

The presence of various ideologies and points of view in the play is made apparent when colonial officers have a discussion about penal law, capital punishment and crime while they are shooting birds. In the discussion, it becomes clear that the officers have opposing opinions about criminal law. For instance, Tench thinks that they must hang the criminals as "*Justice and humaneness have never gone hand in hand*", while Philip rejects "*the spectacle of hanging*" (Wertenbaker, 1991, p. 3) for it will not bring about a change in the attitudes of the convicts. For Harry and Tench, hanging is a familiar thing to the criminals. Yet, Philip adopts a much more lenient stance against punishment and criticizes the ways the authorities treat the convicts. For Collins, hanging convicts means that justice is executed for the sake of the colony (p. 5). The officers adopt clashing ideas about the nature of guilt and castigation. Exhibiting such diverse opinions about crime and punishment

without privileging any of them, the play rejects totalizing ideas and displays a critical attitude to generalizations.

In addition, the play foregrounds that the notions of guilt and conviction are subjective and based on a certain context without universal certainties. In the first act, in Scene Four, the confessional remarks of Harry can be thought of as examples to this: “*Sometimes I look at the convicts and I think, one of those could be you, Harry Brewer, if you hadn’t joined the navy when you did*” (Wertebaker, 1991, p. 7). As the quotation implies, Wertebaker aims to show that offence and chastisement are notional. Therefore, it is possible to confer that the play delivers identity as a changeable process and crime is a contextual circumstance, rather than inherent, in which anybody can be involved anytime. Wertebaker also questions the ideology underlying the concept of crime. Wilson highlights that the criminals live through a sense of loss of national identity as they were thrown out of their country because of their crimes against property (1991, p. 24) like stealing candlesticks and food, which can be seen as a reflection of neoliberalism’s influence on the strict economic structure in the country in which even a minor crime against property might cause one to be exiled. For instance, a seventeen-year-old prisoner, Thomas Barrett, is there because he stole a sheep and Dorothy Handland, aged eighty-two, is convicted for stealing biscuit. Although the crimes they committed are minor, they are expelled from their country and, from a contemporary point of view, it seems pretty unfair. However, it must be kept in mind that neoliberalism is an ideology that upholds values of capitalist conservatism such as private property. When it is ordinary people committing crimes against private property, they are regarded as a threat to the political system as it is revealed that it is possible to steal from the system. Therefore, it can be commented that it is due to this financially minor but politically major threat against the social system that they get heavier punishments than they deserve, which is one of the reasons neoliberalism is criticized in the play.

Johnston declares that most convict women committed petty crimes but Tench replies to this in a quite neoliberal way saying, “*A crime is a crime. You commit a crime or you don’t. If you commit a crime, you are a criminal*” (Wertebaker, 1991, p. 19) and soon further states if it is plausible to educate the criminals, their education must be more useful which teaches them to farm, construct buildings and have respect for property (p. 22). His comment reveals the ideology hidden behind the strict precautions which work to protect the advantages of the ruling groups as he implies that the convicts should be taught to respect the wealthy’s right to own rather than

focusing on their own improvement through art, showcasing the play's satire on neoliberalism as a capitalist ideology.

Wertenbaker's critique reverberates through theatrical expressions. The prison officers need to find a way to keep the prisoners occupied at the camp, and if plausible, educate them. The audience finds out that for some prison officials like Philip, theatre is a refining tool for the criminals to "*be reformed*" (Wertenbaker, 1991, p. 18). A number of conflicting opinions about the value of theatre are heard on the stage. For instance, Reverend Johnson, a religious figure, comments: "[...] *Christ never proposed putting on plays to his disciples. However, he didn't forbid it either. It must depend on the play*" (p. 19). Ross does not support the idea of performing a play because the prisoners are there to be punished (p. 18). Tench is of one mind with Ross stating that committing crimes is the nature of the convicts since they were born that way (p. 18). Philip disagrees with them and argues that "*theatre is an expression of civilisation*" and if the convicts get an opportunity to act parts in a play, they will speak a refined language and it will give them a chance to become some other people than disdained prisoners and detested gaolers (p. 21). Tench declares that if the convicts are let spend their time rehearsing a play, they "*will lose the labour of the convicts*" (p. 23). It is obviously seen that the play does not allow any perspective about the value of theatre to dominate, letting the audience to reach their own meanings from the dramatic performance.

As soon as the opinions regarding the usefulness of theatre are declared, the discussion becomes ideological. Ross ponders on the play, which may teach the criminals contumacy (Wertenbaker, 1991, p. 23) and soon comments that due to this play, order will turn into chaos (p. 25). The officers' discussion over theatre's efficacy turns into a discursive fight in which the essence of theatre is questioned from ideological points of view. Whereas Ross and Tench's conservative opinions reverberate authoritarian pragmatism, Philip represents the left intellectual who trusts in the mutual rehabilitation theatre may bring. All these debates address major questions regarding the relationship between art, politics and life. That is, the significance of these dialogues surpasses the medium of theatre to remark on life in a general way. Within this framework, Wertenbaker's play indicates "*a re-visioning of values*" (Carlson, 1993, p. 268) by underlining "*the transformative powers of theatre*" (p. 276), which can also be regarded as a satire on neoliberalism's emphasis on individualism and a foregrounding of the idea of collective rehabilitation through art.

Esther Beth Sullivan argues that here theatre is displayed as a source of power that encourages people to act (1993, p. 144). The convicts who lost their liberty because of economic causes get a chance of “agency” thanks to theatre (Weeks, 2000, p. 155). When the convicts get parts in the play, the prisoners acquire the chance to be somebody else other than mere convicts, weakening the strict power relations between the authorities and the convicts since the convicts can show that they are competent to learn new things and improve themselves as opposed to how they have been treated so far at the colony. For example, Mary copies Farquhar’s play for other performers and Wisehammer rewrites some of its parts. In addition, the communication between the authorities and the criminals become more democratic than before. Ralph calls the convicts as “*ladies and gentlemen*”, which is surprising for some inmates such as Dabby, who declares: “*We’re ladies now. Wait till I tell my husband I’ve become a lady*” (Wertenbaker, 1991, p. 40). Ralph bewilders the convicts with his speech of a remarkably gentle rhetoric: “*It is with pleasure that I welcome you*” (p. 40). This scene reveals the relation between metatheatre and political satire in the play: Like a play imagined and written by a playwright in which characters do not have fixed identities, the social and political system in the colony is an arbitrary structure designed in favour of the rulers. In this respect, it can safely be argued that the fictional play the convicts are rehearsing holds a mirror to the fictionality and the changeability of the ideology of neoliberalism it aims to satirize. Thus, through its presentation of a “*theatrical make-believe*” (Rich, 1991), the play enables its audiences to realize the social and political make-believes produced by rulers for their own interests.

In addition, the process of rehearsal allows the inmates to dream for the future. For instance, Wisehammer dreams about being an author, Sideway wants to have a theatre company and Liz and Ketch desire to take part in this company. Here, it is possible to see the function of the rehearsal technique as a “*new voice for the silenced*” (Gardner, 2018). As Michael Billington remarks, the play is a “*moving portrait of drama as a means of giving voice, purpose and a sense of communality to a group of social outcasts*” (Billington, 2015). It is thanks to the employment of metatheatricity that characters can express themselves freely and this also highlights an essential intersection between satire and metatheatre: Like satire which aims to show the plight of ordinary citizens under oppressive and authoritative regimes and give voice to the silenced masses, metatheatre, which attacks the closed, unified world of a domineering main plot, aims to exhibit that there are other, hidden realities than a playwright might include in a main plot. From a political perspective, this relates to

the play's call for an interrogation of the neoliberal ideology of the period as better alternatives might be available.

Through the rehearsal process, the inmates begin to develop a sense of solidarity, even in economic terms. The play continually foregrounds the scarcity of food in the camp, where prisoners are usually under surveillance to prevent them from stealing food from the stores. As food is extremely scarce, its social value is repeatedly emphasized through the inmates' overvaluing of it. However, through the theatrical practices they work on, the inmates begin to develop a sense of sharing and sacrifice. Just before the end of the play, Sideway offers a little 'salt' to his friends, "*For good luck*" (p. 89). When asked how he found it, he says, "*I have been saving it from my rations. I have saved enough for each of us to have some*" (p. 89). This marks a solidaristic shift in economic and social relations within the camp. The rehearsal-within-the-play in this vein poses a challenge to the ideology of neoliberalism for it displays the possibility of human improvement through art and the validity of community. It also points to the emergence of a new community resting on a more democratic system than imposed by the previous structure. Again, the playwright refers to theatre's strength to challenge restrictive politics. As Frank Rich states in his review of the play, the play "*champions the theater with eloquence and, at its best, does so by example rather than by preaching*" (1991).

The turn to "*a more democratic society*" (Weeks, 2000, p. 149) becomes even more visible with the change in the communication's content. Rather than merely speaking of the daily activities in the prison, the authorities and convicts adopt a language in which they refer to theatrical jargon. Philip's humaneness is the principal motive for the beginning of this community. He believes in the possibility of humanity's redemption if they are given a chance to better their situation, as it can be seen in his treatment of Liz, a prisoner who is a difficult person to handle: "*If we treat her as a corpse, of course she will die. Try a little kindness. Lieutenant*" (Wertebaker, 1991, p. 58). Through theatre, the prisoners get an opportunity to live through another reality in prison, which showcases the efficacy of collective art as opposed to what is claimed by neoliberal thinking. This also demonstrates that a change in the social and political system of the colony can also be possible, again showcasing the use of metatheatre for satirical purposes. Here, metatheatricity allows the audiences to see that, like Farquhar's play, which is prepared before their eyes, neoliberalism, which caused many problems for the society, is man-made and arbitrary.

Wilson (1991, p. 23) and Baker-White (1999, p. 100) see a “*utopian*” potency in the construction of this new society in the colony. As Baldick defines, a utopia is an imaginative structure of an ideal society which mostly has a communistic base (2008c, p. 348), yet for several reasons, the sense of community building in the play is hardly utopian. First of all, the civilizing function of the theatre might involve colonial, even imperial, repercussions. Wilson, similarly, realizes this aspect of the play as he states that while theatre has the capacity to cause social change, it may also reaffirm the position of the dominant class (1991, p. 33). Sullivan states that rehearsing Farquhar’s play is problematic because it was the first play staged in Australia for George III’s birthday, which, therefore, becomes an exaltation of English values (1993, p. 143).

Another problematic point concerning the play’s utopian capacity is that the rehearsal-within-the-play and the play itself do not show theatre as a cure for all the problems of contemporary society. Indeed, as Dymkowski emphasizes, the play does not deliver theatre as a simple remedy for personal or national issues (1988, p. 128); rather, Wertebaker is highly realistic about its limits. For example, Dabby says that the power of theatrical experience is only limited “*Because it’s only for one night*” (Wertebaker, 1991, p. 85), indicating a more realistic evaluation of art rather than requiring a utopian thinking.

However, it does not come to mean that Wertebaker totally disregards an idealist viewpoint. Rather, the play points to a number of possibilities in building theatre as a multivocal space where various identities, experiences, histories and aesthetic expressions can exist simultaneously. Within this framework, Wertebaker regards theatre as a heterotopian possibility rather than a mere utopian design. Michel Foucault describes heterotopia as spaces like utopias where real sites found in the culture are represented, competed and inverted simultaneously. Although it might be possible to demonstrate their location in reality, such places are outside of all places (1986, p. 24). For him, heterotopias may take quite different forms (p. 24), and theatre is a principal example of heterotopia because it brings onto the stage a number of spaces which are foreign to each other (p. 25). In Wertebaker’s play, various realities, times and places are fused in a heterotopian manner that questions, and satirizes simple utopian thought. Differences – linguistic, gender, ethnic – create a heterotopian space and stage reality echoes this diversity of realities in theatrical terms. The idea of heterotopia within the play’s context suggests that, as opposed to what is foregrounded by neoliberalism, it is still possible to preserve the sense of

community in England in the twentieth century in which such a notion was severely damaged due to neoliberal enforcements of the Thatcherite government.

It is not a coincidence that the play opens with a sea voyage. For Foucault, the ship is “*a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself*”; the ship is “*the heterotopia par excellence*” (1986, p. 27). Based on this, it can be stated that from the very beginning of the play, the sea journey signifies a travel to another existence where the older ways of living can be defied. Abstaining from utopian simplicity, the play unites certain heterogeneous experiences that belong to various characters and places opening theatrical space up to a rich diversity of identities. This also shows the parallelism between the play’s form and content in that like metatheatre which rejects the authority of a main plot without multiple meanings and voices, the play rejects any imposed opinions and, within the context of the play, impels its audiences to question the ideology of neoliberalism exerted on them by the government at the time.

The process of the rehearsal underlines the heterotopian aspect of the play. Baker-White comments that with rehearsal “*all is process*” (1999, p. 15). Furthermore, he claims that rehearsal includes a “*multivoicedness*” (p. 18). What the rehearsal finally shows is the making up of “*new meanings*” (p. 100) in the lives of the convicts and the construction of “*an unfamiliar space*” (p. 103) in which the limits of identity constructed by the rigid social system of the prison dissolve (p. 104). Wisehammer is a Jewish author from England othered in his own country; Caesar is a black man from Madagascar who does not accept to “*think English*” and wishes to “*go back to Madagascar and think Malagasy*” (Wertenbaker, 1991, p. 54); and all the inmates are sentenced for crimes committed to survive. All these people come together to stage a comedy by the Irish playwright Farquhar. In Wertenbaker’s heterotopia, the “*class-based morality*” is put into question (Dymkowski, 1988, p. 122), “*difference*” is tackled as a significant “*civic negotiation*” (Roth, 2001, p. 171), the Australian colony is made an evidently international, polyglot space (Roth, 2001, p. 194). At the end of *Our Country’s Good*, the convicts appear to perform *The Recruiting Officer* and the play ends as soon as Farquhar’s play begins. Wertenbaker silences the authorial voice as she does not allow the original text to appear on the stage.

Conclusion

The interplay between political satire and metatheatre has evolved since they have acquired new meanings and aspects for centuries. Metatheatre as a means of satirizing politics has revealed its organic quality over and over. The relation between satire and metatheatre has proven an incessant existence in theatre by showcasing a considerable flexibility. It is thanks to this flexible nature of both satire and metatheatre that playwrights have been able to provide political and satirical insight into the immutable and rising problems of humanity. In Renaissance and 18th century plays, metatheatre targeted the rulers of the period and its scope was limited to domestic affairs of the periods.

Metatheatrical satires written in the twentieth century point to the fact that in spite of major changes in its scope, metatheatre's use as a tool of political satire is still relevant. However, there is a transition from satire of certain figures to the satire of universal values and ideologies. This change is related to the reproduction of meaning fostered by postmodernism. Since it became unlikely to totalize meaning because of the dissolution of traditional values and grand narratives, dramatic satire found alternative ways to challenge contemporary political problems. In *Our Country's Good*, satire is directed at the ideology of neoliberalism, rather than on Margaret Thatcher herself. The metatheatrical structure of the play functions to reveal that like the play the convicts are rehearsing, the structure of the colony and neoliberalism, which the play aims to target because of its emphasis on the individual rather than community, are imaginary constructs determined by the power-holders of the society. The basic function of metatheatre, the rehearsal-within-the-play, in the play is, by drawing attention to its own fictionality, to reveal the arbitrariness of the political system at the colony, which holds a mirror to the artificiality of neoliberalism of the time. In more general terms, it works to reveal the similarities between political structures and theatre in that both aim to create the illusion that what they present is real, and impels the audience to be critical of political ideologies.

The play displays the validity of dramatic satire as it directs a harsh attack on the disintegration of the idea of community under neoliberal ideology. While the play shows that it is still likely to generate dramatic satire in an age of ongoing annulment of intellectual positionings, it also affirms the efficacy of postmodern condition and attempts to reproduce meaning in line with postmodern touches, which can be possible through the employment of metatheatrical devices. Within this framework, the play can be defined as a postmodern satire.

Our Country's Good is a remarkable example which combines political satire with metatheatres. In her play, Wertebaker builds a satirical perspective against neoliberal ideologies that destroy the sense of community. In spite of clashing opinions on various substantial issues like colonialism, justice, crime, punishment and human improvement through art, the play underlines that society still exists, and it is still possible to build communities based on democratic values and mutual trust. It also demonstrates that collective art may help people construct a more civilized and communitarian society. However, the playwright also underlines the hardship of such projects by pointing at the difficulties that may arise during the process. To be able to deal with such challenges, Wertebaker underlines theatre's rehabilitative nature without endorsing a utopian oversimplification.

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Summary

Metatheatre, which foregrounds the fictional nature of plays through a number of tools like the play-within-the-play, has a very long history. However, the concept was theorized by American playwright and theatre critic Lionel Abel in his book *Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form* in 1963. In *Tragedy and Metatheatre: Essays on Dramatic Form* (2003), he further elaborates on metatheatre by underlining its difference from tragedy, a form which traditionally upholds status quo reinforcing the values produced by it. In *Drama, Metadrama and Perception* (1986), another critic, Richard Hornby, determines five metatheatrical strategies - "the ceremony within the play", "role playing within the role", "literary and real-life reference within the play", "self-reference" and "the play-within-the-play" - to show in what ways and forms metatheatre may appear in dramatic texts. All of these strategies underline the play's consciousness about its own fictional status. In a similar vein, in the limited number of studies on metatheatre in which the focus seems to be on plays written in the Renaissance, the concept is usually referred to as a technique which shatters the illusion created by realist and naturalist plays, breaking the fourth wall and allowing the audience to become a part of the world of the play. Yet, a close analysis of the function of metatheatre demonstrates that the concept, which gives voice to the unvoiced members of society and emphasizes the artificiality of the social and political order, has been consciously employed by playwrights to satirize political corruption. Thus, metatheatre, which questions the discourse created by the play by offering alternative points of views provided by multiple plots, can be regarded as a tool of political satire in theatre since both aim to draw attention to the restrictive and prescriptive nature of authoritative discourses and the possibility of other - and better - ways of living. Therefore, it is possible to comment that there has been an ongoing symbiosis between metatheatre and satire.

Although it is plausible to find some metatheatrical pieces in early English drama, metatheatre became popular in the Renaissance as a result of the visible rise in the number of dramatic satires and its use as means for political satire can overtly be seen in some plays such as Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (1582-1592), in which the king and his injustice is satirized and more egalitarian alternatives are offered with the employment of the play-within-the-play. In such plays, the play-within-the-play challenges the authority of the main plot and the values it upholds as it underlines their arbitrariness, which parallels the artificiality of the social-political atmosphere producing them. Thus, the intersection between satire, a timeless type of literature, and metatheatre can be seen because the ultimate aim of satire is to indicate that the social and political systems are organized in favour of the power-holders of the society. In English drama, the tendency to satirize known political figures was also common in the eighteenth century when dramatic satire was distinctly directed at the de facto prime minister Robert Walpole as in Henry Fielding's *The Historical Register for the Year 1736* (1737), where he is covertly portrayed as a fraudulent, corrupted politician whose wrong policies were evidently damaging the sense of equality and democracy in the country. Both in the Renaissance and the eighteenth century, political satire in theatre aimed to show the cause of contemporary social, economic and political ills and ignite a change in these issues.

Therefore, dramatic satire in these periods was closely bound up with the circumstances in which it was written. In the twentieth century, however, the context of satire was exposed to an obvious change since it gained new meanings and dimensions with its collaboration with postmodernism. Under the influence of postmodernism, satire in drama became more philosophical as it started to target grand narratives of modernity and weaknesses of political ideologies and stable convictions which shaped people's lives in the contemporary society. In Howard Brenton's *The Churchill Play* (1974), for instance, through the insertion of the play-within-the-play, the play reveals that, as opposed to what is foregrounded in the main play, not every British citizen thinks of Winston Churchill as a great national figure, and generates a satire of the myths created about him and, thus, the notion of national history. A similar approach can be observed in Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good*.

Our Country's Good is based upon *The Playmaker* (1987), a novel by the Australian novelist and playwright Thomas Keneally (1935-), which offers a historical narrative of a voyage in which a number of criminals were taken from England to New South Wales in Australia to construct a colony. After the convicts land in, it is decided that they perform George Farquhar's (1677-1707) comedy play *The Recruiting Officer* (1706), and the rehearsals begin. During the rehearsal process, the officers discuss crime, punishment, the education of the prisoners and rehabilitation through theatre, and the dreams and plans of the convicts about the future are revealed. Within such a polyphonic environment in which clashing perspectives of various subjects are negotiated, Wertenbaker does not foreground utopian idealism as she proposes heterotopian community as a more egalitarian and veracious alternative. The study emphasizes the synod between political satire and metatheatre in the play achieved through the technique of the rehearsal-within-the-play and analyses it as a postmodern satire on neoliberalism.