

IDEA:  
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Edited by

Evrin Doğan Adanur

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## CHAPTER THIRTY FIVE

### APHRA BEHN'S SISTERS:

#### THE (RE)APPEARANCE OF WOMEN

#### PLAYWRIGHTS IN CONTEMPORARY DRAMA

#### GÜL KURTULUŞ

In her well-known play, *The Lucky Chance* Aphra Behn makes use of the possibilities of comedy to handle the concept of sexual politics in the eighteenth century. In spite of some attacks on the lack of full and complicated character development in the play, its lyrical language and well-planned plot structure enable the female characters to express their ideas and reaffirm their place in society better. Even in its original form (not considering the 1984 production of *The Lucky Chance*) Behn's efforts to make the female voice call out for equality and attention evokes contemporary women dramatists' admiration, as well as their zeal in doing the same.

Aphra Behn can be seen as the first example of a major female dramatist for Caryl Churchill, Sarah Daniels and Timberlake Wertenbaker, who follow her with their assertion of the importance of women who yearn for independence, power, love and self-assertion. These three modern female playwrights share with Aphra Behn the same enthusiasm for probing the place of women in the social and literary world. In this paper contemporary female playwrights' endeavour to use modern dramatic techniques in reflecting the present situation of women with special emphasis on comedy, as the genre used initially by the first female restoration comedy of manners writer, Aphra Behn will be examined. Churchill, Daniels and Wertenbaker exist in a post-modern dramatic tradition that has the tendency to exclude fully developed characters, and to present non-sequiturs, to employ different settings (even ignoring the long distances amongst the countries), to play with the concept of time in the plays, with a special talent for inserting comedy into their dramas. These common points bring the four female playwrights, who mark the

dramatic world from vastly different centuries together. Talking about women, and especially seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth and finally twentieth century women with women, in skillfully designed comedies make them the topics of the discussion on theatre in the twenty-first century.

Aphra Behn's significance is not limited only to the fact that she is a female playwright who produced a vast quantity of writing in Restoration Britain, but also to the fact that her plays successfully embody farcical elements. With their abundant witty dialogues, their criticism of restoration society, and their use of disguise and sexual intercourse Behn's plays reinforce her popularity as a playwright in her time. The plays have always a special place in the world of drama, ever since. *The Lucky Chance* is set in London the seventeenth century, Caryl Churchill's play *Cloud Nine* written in the twenty-first century takes place in nineteenth century Africa in the first act and twentieth century England in the second act, Sarah Daniels' *The Gut Girls* takes the Victorian setting of Deptford, where a group of girls work under difficult conditions in the gutting shed, acting against the expected gender roles, and finally Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Our Country is Good* takes as its subject a group of convicts and officers living in exile in late 1780s' Australia. Although the three female playwrights produced works in a different century than Aphra Behn, the first notable female playwright, they take their subject matter mainly from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and this interest in the colonial and Victorian period places them close to Aphra Behn, in the dramatic world.

The oldest form of comedy contains the curious combination of obscenity, farce, political allegory, satire and lyricism. Puns, literary allusions, phallic jokes, and political jibes are the indispensable parts of Old Comedy. Fine examples of these notions can be found in the plays of Churchill, Daniels and Wertenbaker. They follow Aphra Behn's example in using art to refine hot debates of contemporary society. An interesting coincidence can be observed in increase of women playwrights in British theatre in modern times, though in the past not only as dramatists but also as actresses it was rare to see women as landmarks. It is also amazing to see them try their hand at comedy in an age full of fury and rage. Still the practice of comedy reinforces their highly reasonable and rational contribution to the subject matter and form of British drama.

As Restoration Comedy offers scope for dramatists to talk about arranged marriages, false-identities, complicated relationships, betrayals and gullibility, Aphra Behn makes use of these conventions, but at the same time with her unorthodox behaviour she manages to establish a

controversial place for herself and her art in the eighteenth century. Not to overemphasize the fact that she is the first female playwright who announces her wish to become a *woman* dramatist which she announces in the prologue to the *Forc'd Marriage* (1670), Behn at the same time indicates her aim to reveal her sexual ideology and her feminist politics in her plays. She suffers under the prejudice of male audiences who regard a woman's work with suspicion. A similar problem can still be found in the contemporary world as experienced by Churchill, Daniels and Wertenbaker. On the one hand, women playwrights want to find their ways into the theatrical world as do their male peers, on the other they do not move away from what their sex proffers. The three playwrights share similar reaction from male and female audience. Londoners have always been prepared to be entertained, soothed and enlightened, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the modern times, alike. Still, it is an undeniable fact that the plays by Behn, Churchill, Daniels and Wertenbaker have a special appeal for women, since female audiences do not find them offensive but enjoy and appreciate the moral and social presentation of women. As modern followers of Aphra Behn who can be nominated as the great talent in fusing her wit and creativity in well-established dramatic tradition and thus the best female comedy playwright of her age, three contemporary women dramatists Caryl Churchill, Sarah Daniels and Timberlake Wertenbaker achieved to draw attention of the critics, directors, producers and audience. Aphra Behn produced her works in conventional form but with a parallel in depicting women not necessarily as fools and men as rulers and judges who compose some standards.

Written by Caryl Churchill in 1979, *Cloud Nine* deals with the concept of sexual politics in two different settings. In the first act, the setting is Victorian Africa where British colonial power is at stake; the setting is chosen deliberately by Churchill as she states in her own introduction to the play that she tries to draw a parallel between colonial and sexual oppression. The second act is set in London in 1979, when the characters are able to live their sexual preferences more independently. In this way, Churchill presents the audience with two different times and wants them to see the change that society has gone through. By choosing the colonial Victorian era as the setting to discuss sexual repression, Churchill argues that oppression of women and natives result from the same outlook, which is supremacy of masculine power. *Cloud Nine* demonstrates that both patriarchy and colonialism spring from the same idea and dominate their subjects in every sense.

The play both explores sexual politics and the colonization process in the repressive Victorian era, and portrays the changing face of Britain in

the twentieth century. Churchill calls attention to sexual repression in society and emphasizes the two eras' impact on social relations and individuals' sexual identities. Employing an unrealistic time shift and cross casting Churchill juxtaposes the conventional notion of marriage and man's unquestioned authority with rising female power and homosexuality. In order to scrutinize the problem of sexual repression in the play, cross casting and different character portrayals in the two acts need close consideration.

In the first act, the colonial and patriarchal attitude can be explicitly seen in Clive; society itself is male dominated. He sees himself as the father of the natives and the head of his family, thus he has the ultimate power. He says in the opening scene: "I am a father to the natives here, and father to my family so dear" (Act I scene i). He is a racist and sexist colonial administrator who is trying to impose his ideas on his family and the African natives. Churchill's innovative technique of cross casting reveals her unique style. Betty is played by a male actor. Joshua, Clive's black servant, is played by a white actor in the play. Hence, Betty and Joshua are the living consequences of colonial and sexual oppression. Betty says, "I live for Clive" (Act I scene i) and accepts the fact that she is "a man's creation" and in a similar way Joshua says "My skin is black but oh my soul is white. I hate my tribe. My master is my light" (Act I scene i). Clive urges natives to accept white men's rules and act accordingly, so natives too lose their identity just like women. Another common point between women and natives is that they are both depicted as savage, dark and dangerous beings. Clive tries to protect his family against the ongoing native attacks, which turn out to be open threat for him. It is also clear that Clive sees women as dangerous just like natives. To illustrate, he says to Mrs. Saunders: "You terrify me. You are dark like this continent. Mysterious. Treacherous" (Act I scene ii). Likewise, Harry says to Betty that she is like a dark and unknown jungle, which indicates that male characters see women sexuality as a threat. Betty calls her sexual desire "my wickedness" and Clive labels it as "the weakness of your sex". In that sense, Clive is the representation of both British imperialism and patriarchy victimizing and patronizing natives and women.

In the second act, the suppressive mood changes; Edward and Victoria (Clive and Betty's children) can live their homosexual relationships in a freer environment, and people are able to make sexual preferences according to their desires. For example, Edward lives an affair with a man; whose name is Gerry and Victoria wants to experience a lesbian relationship with Lin. So, Churchill wants to show in the second act that in year 1979 homosexuals have established a presence in British society, divorce is now

an acceptable option for many people and eventually women have gained a status in society. These drastic changes can be connected to the literal absence of Clive in the second act, as Betty decides to leave him. So, Clive becomes a metaphor for freedom now; for in the first act he was the representative of patriarchy, male power and colonialism.

Caryl Churchill blames patriarchy for the oppression of women and in *Cloud Nine* she likens it to colonialism arguing that both of those ideologies stem from the supremacy of male power. Making Clive as a representative of those ideas, Churchill comments courageously on sexual politics and feminism. Clive, who holds the power to shape people around him according to his wishes, plays the role of the oppressor, as Kritzer states "Clive, defines sexuality and sexual standards in the way that best serves his own sexual desires..." (Kritzer 1991). Clive announces himself as the father of the natives and the head of his family. With his excessive pride, and his extremely domineering and conservative personality he stands for Victorian Britain. He imposes the obedient, silent and loyal wife ideal on Betty, thus "Everything [Betty] is she owes to [him]" (Act I scene i). He attributes evil qualities to women by saying "Women can be treacherous and evil. They are darker and more dangerous than men" (Act I scene iii). Though he is disloyal to his wife, since he has a relationship with Mrs. Saunders, he sees deficiencies only in women and the solution in repression. Similarly, Clive teaches Edward how to be a man and tries to suppress his son's sensitive nature, saying "A boy has no business having feelings" (Act I, scene ii). Also, he condemns Harry as a sinner upon learning that he is homosexual. His reaction reflects homophobic British society in the Victorian era, which forces homosexuals to deny or hide their identities.

Betty, the victim of oppression, lets her identity be defined by men. Betty is played by a man, which is rather symbolic. She declares: "The whole aim of my life is to be what he looks for in a wife" (Act I scene i), so she cannot find what she really wants. She seeks Harry's affection and wishes to run away with him, yet she never attempts to liberate herself in Act I. For his part, Harry idealises her as an exemplary wife and mother. Failing to be a proper wife for Clive, Betty finds the fault in her sex's innate inferiority, mimicking the way Clive sees it. Humour arises as a result of Harry's reserved manner that seems totally weird and unexpected in a male who is approached by a woman. His timidity causes laughter. Relationships are interwoven as the young son Edward is interested in Harry, whereas Ellen, Edward's tutor is in love with Betty. Such complicated web of love relationships is reminiscent of those in Restoration comedy of manners. In Aphra Behn's *The Lucky Chance* the gallant lover

Bellmour, who is in love with Leticia leaves her, since he kills a man in a duel. Sir Feeble declares his love to Leticia in the absence of Bellmour. Gayman, who is a close friend of Bellmour's, aspires to be with Sir Cautious Fullbank's wife Julia in an attempt to save his estate that is mortgaged by the old banker, Sir Fullbank. As the play ends the marriage bond is seen between the maids and servants: Bearjest marries Pert. In comparison *Cloud Nine* exhibits freer and more varied sexual preferences.

Edward, the young son is awfully troubled as a result of the notions imposed on him by his parents. He is continuously scolded by Betty (his mother), Ellen (his tutor) and Clive (his father) for playing with Victoria's (his sister's) doll and for his feminine behaviour. Clive forces him act like a man, which leads Edward to develop a twisted personality. Edward says that he does not want to be like his father and insists that the doll belongs to him, though afterwards he apologises to his father and tells him that he loves him. Thus, Churchill depicts the injuries inflicted upon children by forcing them to adopt conventional gender roles.

Harry and Ellen stand for the extremes. Both seem to be troubled by their homosexual impulses. Harry's frantic sexual activity can be explained by his inability to come to terms with his sexual identity. As he fails to satisfy his desire, he seeks sexual relationships with many different people throughout the act. He is the one who accompanies Edward as he enters into the world of adults and experiences his first sexual awakenings. He regards his homosexuality as a disease and confesses that he has even thought about suicide. Ellen's unrequited love for Betty introduces the lesbian subtext, which comes to the surface in the second act. Her marriage with Harry exemplifies the absurd way the Victorian society tries to deal with homosexuals.

In the second act, the domineering power symbolised by Clive fades away while the effect of the sexual liberalism of the 1960s is felt. Although the characters discover their sexual identities, relationships are still problematic. Edward is in a relationship with Gerry. However, he fears social pressure and avoids revealing his homosexuality overtly in order not to lose his job. Also he does not adopt the feminine role that he aspires to in his relationship with Gerry. He is scolded by his partner because of "getting like wife" and "playing the injured wife" (Act II scene iii), where humour is evident. Finally, Edward, though having a very confusing relationship with Lin and Victoria, seems relatively happy acting like a housewife.

Betty is played by a woman in the second act, in contrast to the first act, which is a sign of her psychological transformation and the end of her former subservience. She declares at the beginning of the second act that

she is going to leave Clive; in the following scenes she finds a job and begins to live alone and embarks on a journey of self-discovery. The suppressed Betty of the first act also comes to terms with her children's decisions in the second act. For instance, in regard to Edward's sexual preference she states that "Well people always say it's the mother's fault but I don't intend to start blaming myself. He seems perfectly happy" (Act II, scene iv). Throughout the second act, Betty has several brave actions such as inviting Gerry over and relating her sexual awareness. Yet, these radical attempts are interrupted by Maud or Clive, which leads us to question the success of Betty's liberation.

The silent, dumb child Victoria turns into a powerful woman in the second act. Victoria, though having a husband and a son, is liberated enough to experiment with a lesbian relationship with Lin. Still, she finds herself in between her family and career, heterosexual and lesbian affairs. Since the concepts of marriage, husband and wife are upside down, her relationship with Martin seems to be tense and sexually unsatisfactory. Even Martin's supportive and understanding attitudes make Victoria feel guilty about not trying hard enough to save her marriage.

*Cloud Nine* deals with the sexually repressed individual of the Victorian era and his/her controversial liberation in the late 1970's. Churchill depicts the transformation British society has gone through, and the rising power of women and homosexuals, which paves the way for the redefinition of the roles in personal relationships. Thus, characters who are nurtured by heterosexual, bisexual or homoerotic fantasies and desires are presented freely in the play.

*The Girl Girls* by Sarah Daniels is set in Victorian England and tells the story of a group of girls who work in a slaughterhouse in London. As their work at the slaughterhouse is really hard and filthy, the setting reveals the way these working girls live and how they become hard to cope with these situations. As is the case with Churchill's characters, Daniels' characters, too make a point about the way Victorian society sees and treats women. By emphasizing the harsh and inhuman conditions under which the girls work and revealing how meanly men treat them, Sarah Daniels suggests that attitudes towards women have not changed much by the 1980s – the time the play was written. Thus, she shares the same aim as Churchill and Aphra Behn in revealing women's situation.

In an interview, Sarah Daniels points out that in the world of drama women are not given enough chance and opportunity, and asks "The Royal National Theatre does have the word 'national' in the title – so where is half the population?" (Stephenson 1997) meaning women. Daniels tries to draw people's attention to sexual politics through her works, and explains

her aim of focusing on women and revealing what really is going on in society, how it feels to be a woman.

According to Gabriele Griffin violence against women is a persistent topic in Daniels's work and it is notoriously difficult to deal with since it is such a gendered phenomenon and indicts men. Many of the Daniels' female characters are the objects of domestic violence, sexual harassment and verbal bullying. In *The Gut Girls*, Annie and her friends, aged from 14 to 18 live under such work conditions, which suggest that they live very close to the idea of violence as they literally rip out the innards of dead animals. The situation is so horrible and pathetic that they usually need to dream in order to survive. When she is first introduced to this sight, full of filth, blood and smell, Annie is told by Maggie; "Don't think about it. Think about getting paid; think about buying a new hat, being the Queen of England, anything" (Act I scene i). Likewise, Polly says "Of! by nature, awful by name" (Act I scene i). Moreover, Maggie says of Jim, whom she is dating: "I feel sorry for him an' all. It's not right at that, that a frail young lad like that should be having to do this sort of work" (Act I scene i). Maggie's words add humour that ironically refers to the fact that only strong, brave, young girls can cope with these, not someone like Jim, who is young and fragile. So, it is quite obvious that the situation has ultimately hardened them up. They do not question things and see no wrong in them. There seems to be no actual physical violence or bullying in relation to them at first; however by creating such a filthy atmosphere, Sarah Daniels wants to show that violence is part these girls' nature. Taking guts out of animals' bodies symbolizes the fact that violence is living with them as flesh and blood. What is worse, the girls accept things as they are, which again symbolizes the idea that the violence against women is taken for granted and there is no need whatsoever to reform such a mentality.

In *The Gut Girls*, men appear rarely, but these few appearances provide enough evidence for the idea that they abuse women's sexuality and violate their bodies. Annie tells her life story before working at the slaughterhouse to Ellen to indicate that she has been raped by one of the sons of her mistress and got pregnant. Annie's story shows how women easily become subject to violence and how unfairly they are treated afterwards. After that incident, she tells how difficult the life was to her: "I walked the streets and I was picked up and taken to be examined – six months gone I was – for diseases; to them I was a prostitute and the way they treat you and the way they look at you, and the way they hate you, and they way they blame you and everyone blames me" (Act I scene v).

Annie's touchy story reveals that how women are easily subjected to violence and how unfairly they are treated afterwards.

Maggie's experience is another case, which involves violence; on her way home through the dark streets of London, she is attacked by Edwin, who is a friend of Lady Helena's. The way Edwin treats her is very shameful, for he considers her as a tool to fulfill his sexual desires. The fact that Maggie manages to get out of the situation just in time does not cover the ugliness of the sexual abuse. The scar on Priscilla's face, which she tried to conceal with powder, is a sign of domestic violence. Although the text does not clearly reveal that her husband Arthur did it, it is a very high possibility that she is beaten up by him. As the third scene in the second act begins, the stage direction reveals that "Priscilla has a bruise on her face which she has tried to conceal with powder." When Lady Helena realizes it Priscilla tries to pass over the matter and hide it; she says, "Oh, Helena, I walked into the door. Very clumsy and very stupid. Serves me right for wandering round in the dark, tripped and banged myself. I'm quite all right, thank you" (Act II scene iii). Here, Priscilla feels shame and tries to cover up the reality with some excuses. What is more interesting is that the excuse she makes up put her in an inferior situation. She blames herself for being clumsy and stupid hiding the fault of her husband. The text does not reveal clearly that it is made by Arthur; however I such a context, it is a very high possibility. No matter which class they come from women are abused. Annie's or Priscilla's situation is pretty much the same.

Sarah Daniels relates the story of a group of girls working in the gutting sheds of a slaughterhouse in the late Victorian era and their reformation by an influential and wealthy widow, Lady Helena. Like her contemporaries Churchill and Wertenbaker, Daniels turns to the Victorian age for a reconsideration of the woman question. *The Gut Girls* offers vivid characterizations, which illustrate lower class women's condition, the judgemental approach of society towards them and their struggle for survival in a strictly patriarchal system designated to turn women into submissive and dumb creatures. *The Gut Girls* by Sarah Daniels is a twentieth century play that narrates the lives of the five girls who work in a slaughterhouse being responsible for gutting sheds. Through the play, the reader can easily follow the transition of these girls from free individuals to limited servants. The portrayal of the girls in the beginning and in the end are very different, that is, while in the beginning they are physically strong and emotionally decisive characters who survive from the harsh working conditions and social impositions, in the end each has to make choices that force them to certain limitations.

The reader can witness from sexual violence to oppression and limitation through certain stereotypical roles in the face of gender difference in this play. Sarah Daniels successfully directs her criticism about the position of women in modern world. So, it can be argued that, *The Gut Girls* is a play that reveals the impossibility of escape from certain gender roles.

Initially, it can be observed that the gut girls are deliberately portrayed as strong characters, who live self-sufficiently. The girls, although they are very young, endure very harsh working conditions in the play, which is most clear when Ellen says: "Oh, do you want to go on working a thirteen hour day in terrible conditions?" (Act I scene 1) Besides, these conditions make them obtain manly manners; the speeches among the girls are very manly and especially their going out to drink after the work is quite unconventional for the women. However, it seems that they enjoy their freedom and self-sufficiency to some extent, because they can enjoy themselves however they want, which is obvious in Polly's speech: "We might have a drink after work, go to the music hall occasionally." (Act I scene 1) They are even brave enough to deny social stereotypes of women. When Eady says Maggie that: "Get married, have children, half kill yourself trying to mek ends meet, that's our lot. That's life and there's no denying it" (Act I scene viii), Maggie decisively rejects this idea saying: "It's not going to be my life" (Act I scene viii). Therefore, the strong characteristics and unconventional qualities of the gut girls help them survive in society, in the beginning of the play. Throughout the play, though, gradually their first-hand experiences of abuse are unfold, thus it becomes clear that no matter how strong and segregated they may seem, they suffer from gender differences. It can be propounded that the self-sufficient, strong lives of the girls are destroyed step by step through the imposition of certain roles and Victorian conventions. The girls, in the end, either become dependent on their masters or they turn back to stress labeled as fallen women, which prove that the Victorian classification of women as whores and angels is still valid in the twentieth century and women are still oppressed by these impositions.

The reader is introduced to the impositions upon the girls, the transition, which Daniels deliberately makes to criticize the oppression of women in general, clearly. As for the impositions, firstly the girls are imposed the idea of Victorian categorization of women as whores and angels; they are perceived as equals to whores in society; Edwin says: "You will forgo your own happiness for the sake of the lowest of the low. Oh yes, Helena, even by their own kind they are seen as marginally better than whores" (Act I scene iii). So, the imposition of Victorian

values in relation to women, that is women are either angels or whores, is quite obvious here. Thus, these girls, no matter how strong they are, cannot escape from being labeled as fallen women in society. In the play, the entrance of Lady Helena forms another important imposition in the girls' lives, that is the attempts of Lady Helena to improve the manners of the girls limits their freedom. Lady Helena, upon seeing the bad working conditions, decides to open a club, in which these girls can learn social manners. Although they resist in the beginning, the girls, except Ellen accept to attend the club regularly. So, they learn how to behave properly, how to deal with housework, thus, how to become a stereotypical woman. Through the end of the play, it can be observed that many of the girls lose their resisting, decisive, powerful manly instinct and obtain lady-like manners. In a way, the powerful sisterhood ties among the girls are loosened and they are alienated to each other especially after they lose their job in the slaughterhouse. For instance, when Kate has a new job as a servant, she totally rejects to speak to her friends for fear of losing job. So, when the free lives of the girls are considered, it is obvious that they become completely limited; Kate is not even allowed to read magazines (Act II scene xi). This change is a deliberate choice of Daniels to reveal that there is certain gender discrimination and women, no matter how they seem powerful, are oppressed by the Victorian expectations and values.

Finally, in the end, upon losing their jobs, the girls are forced to make choices, which are very limited. They have been anathemas to the rest of the society. Some of the girls including Kate, Annie and Polly get their new jobs as servants in upper class families and in order to maintain their positions they have to behave in a lady-like manner, which makes it clear that they are assimilated. Ellen, the most rebellious one, has to turn back to streets; although she begs Lady Helena to find her a job in the end, it is useless. Maggie, who is totally opposed to marrying, is ironically married. So, the limited choices of the girls force them to fit into some social conventions and roles. Their free will does not last long; they are oppressed by the values of society. Daniels, by portraying this transition of the lives of the girls, openly criticizes these values that oppress women.

The play reveals that women have very few options in life: getting married, being prostitutes or going to jail. Under the circumstances, working in the slaughterhouses becomes an unpleasant but preferable alternative. However, society, expecting the women to be lady-like, polite and submissive, is repelled by "rough and unladylike" manners of the girls (Act I scene ii). Even the men around them, Jim and Harry, seem to be intimidated by them. This helps to dissolve the gloom and to enhance



comedy. The young girls make fun of Jim and Harry when they need to enter their territory and get closer to the girls. Edwin sees the girls as "the lowest of the low" states that "even by their own kind they are seen as marginally better than whores" (Act I scene iii). Daniels in this play ponders on the phenomenon of the Fallen. As Victorian society's perception of women is rather shallow, any woman who does not fit virtuous Madonna figure stereotype is regarded as fallen. Maggie's joke that "Oh no, we are all fallen women" (Act II scene i) is in fact a clever reference to the imposition of the Victorian society on females. Even Lady Helena, when it comes to the fallen women, exhibits judgemental and hypocritical behaviour. Although she refers to Jesus' treatment of Mary Magdalene and states that she's one of her favourite figures in the Bible, she declares that she wants no "loose" women in her club.

Lady Helena embarks on transforming the gut girls into the ideal of Christian womanhood, decent ladies accepted by the society. She believes working in service is far better than working in the cutting sheds, which is quite unwomanly. Being trained to be lady's maids, attending bible readings and learning to be obedient, the gut girls adopt the ideal traits attributed to middle-class women by patriarchal society. In other words, they lose their social and economic independence, and become weak and submissive. Kate states that her training has given her "sort of respect" (Act II scene xiii) as no one can call her "common" anymore and men are embarrassed to swear in front of her. However, Arthur's attempt to hit Polly, saying "I can do what I like to you, I'm paying for you" (Act II scene x), reveals that this respect is only on the surface. In fact, the whole social system is based upon the subservience of women as Polly states, "It struck me this morning that I've always been at someone's mercy" (Act II scene xiii).

Only Lady Helena is treated with respect, as she is member of aristocracy. Lady Helena, though a widow, is very powerful and influential. She is not only respected by women, but also by men. Using her influence, Lady Helena easily persuades Arthur to let the girls leave work early. Edwin, who does not refrain from assaulting and insulting Maggie, is very polite and respectful in the presence of Lady Helena. On the other hand, even middle class women can be exposed to men's cruel treatment as Priscilla's case shows. Her unwillingness to do the bidding of her husband, and her intimacy towards servants are seen as the "values of a mad woman" (Act II scene x).

In her interview, Sarah Daniels clearly states that she is a feminist dramatist and "set out to write a play about violence against women and the issue of pornography from a feminist point of view" (Stephenson

1997). Daniels tries to catch people's attention to women through her works, and says "It is not about hating men; it's about putting the focus on women and trying to say, 'Hey, look, this is going on. This is how it feels from here'". She defends feminism saying that it has put different perspective on things that are accepted as taboos such as incest and helps people to name it as sexual abuse now, no longer as incest.

Consequently, Daniels' play demonstrates how women struggle to survive in unfair conditions and how the underprivileged are stigmatised by society. Lady Helena's plan to convert the working girls into refined maids backfires as she is unaware that she is leaving the girls in the mercy of the male-oriented society. Obviously, it is the behaviour of men such as Arthur and Edwin, which requires reformation, and the real problem lies in the patriarchal values entrenched in people's minds.

Timberlake Wertenbaker's appearance in the twenty-first century drama is best seen in *Our Country's Good*. Based on Thomas Kenneally's novel *The Playmaker*, with some material taken from Robert Hughes' history of the penal settlement, *The Fatal Shore*, and the workshops of the Royal Court actors, the play is about a group of convicts and officers living in exile in the late 1780s' Australia. The play won the Laurence Olivier award for best new play in 1988 and it has been revived many times since then. It dramatizes two clashing approaches towards the theatre. While Governor Philip and Ralph Clark appear as the champions of theatre, Major Ross and Captain Tench regard it as a trivial human endeavour. Philip believes "[the convicts] can be educated" and that such reformation is only possible through art, not punishment with exile, hunger and violence. He stands for the humanitarians who believe in civilizing power of art, as his quoting Rousseau's famous statement "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains" (Act I scene vi) highlights. Similarly, Ralph shares Philip's enthusiasm, though initially the hope of promotion causes him to embark on the play project. On the other side, Ross and Tench vehemently objects Philip's idea of staging a play performed by the convicts. Obviously both Ross and Tench regard Philip's plan as a threat for their authority since they are determined to keep their relations with the convicts based on fear. Representing practical, matter-of-fact men, Tench states "...if you want to build a civilization there are more important things than a play. If you want to teach the convicts something, teach them to farm, to build houses, teach them a sense of respect for property" (Act I scene vi). Although his argument seems to make sense to some extent, he fails to realize that firstly human beings should learn to think and to empathize. Also, it is seen that Tench does not object the idea of staging a play since it includes the convicts. In fact, he

condemns the notion of theatre on the whole referring to the play as "words written no doubt by some London ass" (Act I scene vi). Reverend Johnson represents another point of view concerning theatre. Although his stance is not as clear-cut as of the others, representing the conservative sphere, he continuously expresses his "concern about the content". Apparently he appreciates theatre as long as it does not encourage immorality or "propagate Catholic doctrine" (Act I scene vi).

Wertenbaker concludes all these arguments by portraying the change the convicts undergo through the rehearsals. Although the play ends just before the convicts are able to stage the play, the audience has already witnessed the positive influence of the theatre at work. As Wiselhammer says "a play should make you understand something new." (Act II scene vii) The play enables the convicts to liberate themselves from their criminal identities and to live other lives. Wertenbaker presents different approaches towards theatre voiced by Governor Arthur Philip, Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark, Major Robbie Ross, Captain Warkin Trench and Reverend Johnson. The play exhibits transformational and redemptive power of art as the convicts come to terms with their past and become reconciled with each other, get closer to redemption and turn into better human beings. Theatre gives them the chance to change their unfortunate situations for a while and release them from their boundaries. At least in the play they overcome class distinctions, by acting and speaking like aristocrats. They ponder on injustice not by targeting the rich purses but by words like Wiselhammer observes: "It's not normal when others have nothing" act I scene xi). The play portrays the clashing viewpoints in society regarding the significance of the theatre, as well as of women. Against the matter-of-fact, anti-humanitarian mentality that argues that the arts, just like women, are not capable of any improvement, Wertenbaker offers a superb defence of both through the portrayal of the remarkable change in the convicts' outlook on life. Not less important than arts and males, female characters attract attention with their features and expression: Especially Liz Morden described as "lower than a slave, full of loathing, foul mouthed, desperate" (Act II scene ii) undergoes a dramatic change. Her saying "Thank you, Lucy, I do much appreciate your effort" (Act II scene i), though the lines are not written in the script, shows how she improves her manners. She also comes to terms with her past telling about how she has been abused by her father and has had to sell her body to survive. The power of self-expression that she gained through theatre, releases her from hatred and anger. Moreover, the convicts resolve the conflicts among themselves during the rehearsals. Liz who is disliked even by her fellows establishes friendly relationships. Kench the hangman, seen

as a traitor and hated by the other convicts, proves that he is indeed a caring man. Theatre gives Duckling Smith a relief from her suffocating relationship with Harry Brewer and consolation after Harry's death. Love between Ralph and Mary blossoms like the symbol of theatre's power overcoming all the obstacles, class differences and the past tragedies. Although Arscott's and Kable's attempting to run away and Dabby's planning to escape to Devon after the play points out the possibility that true redemption may not be experienced by all, these setbacks are not enough to overshadow theatre's general success. Above all, the play gives all convicts hope as Ralph's statement of "dreaming future success" (Act II scene xi) hints. Sideway's planning to start a theatre company in Australia, Wiselhammer's decision to become a writer, and the other convicts' expressing their willingness to follow careers as actors and actresses illustrate a phase which can never be reached through physical punishment.

Timberlake Wertenbaker consolidates the role of the theatre in social and cultural milieu, commending drama for the way it cultivates and improves individuals in *Our Country's Good*. Of the subjects Wertenbaker explores in the play are "the value and meaning of art, the quest of power and the seductive appeal of corruption, the effects of enforced silencing, the definition of crime and civilization" (Stephenson 1997). How brilliantly Wertenbaker embodies the themes of criminal versus civilized man and corruption versus cultivation in the theme of the importance of drama deserves to be discussed closely.

In an interview, Wertenbaker explicates her perspective about *Our Country's Good* being a wonderful defense of theatre and valuable to individuals and society: "I think art is redemptive and the theater is particularly important because it is a public space...It is an extremely uncomfortable country in all kinds of ways and art is not going to be very appealing in that kind of discomfort. In terrible times you want to learn, which is why art does flourish in appalling circumstances, but in uncomfortable times, in times when people are quite ashamed of themselves, it is not a good time" (Stephenson 1997). Considering the plot of *Our Country's Good*, Wertenbaker's arguments point out the core concepts of the play. The play takes place in havoc and discomfort, just as Wertenbaker implies, in a colonized land Australia where convicts and soldiers signify two different classes: the corrupted and the civilized. Moreover, in accord with the playwright's comments about the play, it is a terrible time for the characters, which makes the miserable and desperate ones eager to learn and the superior ones aiming to defy their motives. The convicts yearn for flourishing in appalling circumstances, in Wertenbaker's

words. The events and circumstances are very proper to stage a play, to perform art, nevertheless it is not a good time either. That is why a conflict between officers, convicts and a couple of officers who oppose the other officers creates the main problem of the play. The question is: Can people from lower classes be educated?

Whereas Trench, a soldier boldly claims "criminal tendency is innate," (Barnet 1997) Philip voices Wertenbaker's optimism about the role of the theater: "They can be educated" he says (Barnet 1997). The change in the convicts through the theatre is implied by the use of language. Although the focal role of the language is to problematise the class distinction, the change in the convicts' use of language reflects the improvement in their manners. Susan Carlson in her essay "Language and Identity in Timberlake Wertenbaker's Plays" asserts this idea, highlighting "the civilizing empowerment of theater" (Aston 2000). In the play during the rehearsals, the convicts undergo an alteration, behaving kindly to one another and collaborating whereas in the beginning they almost hate each other. Ralph's observations of the convicts justify cultivating effect of the theater. He tells Philip that the convicts "seemed to acquire a dignity, they seemed to lose some of their corruption. There was one, Mary Branham, she read so well, perhaps this play will keep her from selling herself to the first marine who offers her bread" (Barnet 1997).

As a contemporary playwright, Wertenbaker attempts to emphasize the invincible power and place of the theatre in *Our Country's Good*, reminding the reader of "An Essay on Dramatic Poesy" by John Dryden (Greenblatt 2006). Although Wertenbaker does not lay out a literary manual on the defense of theatre, her play becomes a sublime manifesto on the ennobling effects of drama. Nonetheless, by revealing some abuse of the play by some convicts, Wertenbaker also does not want to ignore the dark, unredeemed nature of humankind, which sometimes confuses the audience and decreases the redeeming power of the art. When the abuse and the redeeming power are considered, it is for certain that the art has more place for redeeming. As Philip exposes his wish in the beginning of the play, some officers, especially Trench, opposes telling that: "the criminal tendency is innate" (Barnet 1997). Besides, Ross argues that the theatre may cause insubordination, disobedience, revolution, so it may be harmful (Barnet 1997). Throughout the play, there have been cases that justify their claim. For instance, during one of the rehearsals, Arscott and Kable escape with three other men and also they steal food and what Ross says to Ralph is that: "this is what your play has done" (Barnet 1997). What is more, Dabby makes a plan to escape after the play; because she thinks the play is momentarily and what will be left to them is nothing but

the ongoing injustice again: "... it is only for one night. I want to grow old in *Demon*", she says. These two cases confuse the audience and bring the question whether the convicts may not really be redeemed completely. However, in the end, there is resolution for each case. Arscott reveals his belief in the redeeming power of theatre when he says that: "When I say my lines, I think of nothing else" (Barnet 1997). Besides, Dabby does not escape because now as Mary suggests they are family and as Sideway suggests he will start a theatre company and Dabby will be a part of it. So, as in the two cases, although Arscott and Dabby want to abuse this play, in the end, the power of theatre overweighs and the harmony and unity among the convicts are achieved thanks to the play.

Wertenbaker's portrayal of the convicts illustrates her talent in relating the characters from different walk of life. Male and female convicts' foul language and manners reflect that of the eighteenth century lower class people. Female convicts will be part of the performance, which will affirmatively change the relationship between men and women, as well as the set ideas of the officers about them and the atmosphere in the penal colony. All convicts learn to work together in accordance with the requirements of a community. Acting together requires communication, communication requires understanding each other, and this eventually leads to breaking their prejudices. Midshipman Harry has a relationship with Duckling states that there are good women among the female convicts. Similarly, Ralph, who believes in the sinfulness of the female convicts in the beginning, declares his love to Mary in the end. He does not see her as a whore any longer, but a woman whom he can love, next to his wife. Wischhammer and Liz begin to plan their future lives together and are filled with hope. Wertenbaker sympathizes with the female convicts, who have turned into whore since they have no other choice. They are the victims of the patriarchal society; Liz Morden has been harassed by her father and forced to sell her body in order to survive. Mary as a result of love affair becomes a fallen woman; such examples indicate women's suffering and discrimination. Wertenbaker shares the similar view with Sarah Daniels as both playwrights argue that gender roles, class differences and all other discriminations are constructed by society.

In addition to the deep exploration of the experiences of real life on social, political matters, as well as art's healing effect, Wertenbaker also questions the uses and abuses of language. She interrogates theatre and language as instruments of cultural imperialism. Her sensitivity of language is evident in that she tries to draw attention to different uses of language by different characters who represent distinct social groups. Language can be a symbol of power as well as an indicator of the educated

mind. The officers and the convicts make use of various forms, like dialects, colloquial expressions, slang, obscene words, taboo words and informal language, that reveal their position and literacy or illiteracy. Formal, correct and good use of English represents power. Officers conduct a more appropriate way of talking, but depending on the context of the conversation they speak informally when they address the convicts. Wertenbaker does this deliberately to stress the difference in the educational level of the characters. As Carlson phrases "language becomes a site of cultural and institutional power struggle, for at the heart of this play is a debate over the power of theatre and its heightened language to civilize or control" (Aston 2000). Philip's words advocate a similar idea: "The theatre is an expression of civilization... 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 life than crime, punishment" (Barnet 1997). Language does some good in the convicts, indeed, so does theatre: "Wiselhammer, for example, is encouraged to develop his linguistic talents and even writes a prologue for the production of Farquhar; convict Mary Benham and goaler Clark use Farquhar's love scene to give voice to their own love; and 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" (Aston 2000). Through theatre and refinement in their language, the convicts learn to control and use their language accordingly, since this is the only way to challenge officers' power. As Carlson indicates "the only way to challenge such power is to become fluent in the very language which oppresses you" (Aston 2000).

To sum up, it can be concluded that, through *Our Country is Good*, Wertenbaker reveals a promise, a future for the whole convicts through the redeeming power of arts. In a very wise way, he gives some abuses as a part of a process of redeeming; however in the end, the reforming power defeats the apt of criminals to abuse and to crime proving that the apt for crime is not innate. So, this play is of great importance in revealing the positive effect of arts for the development of humanity and it opens a place for the rights of the convicts to be educated and reformed. Wertenbaker, in this play, aims to overcome the brutalities of the prison system and colonization through the civilizing empowerment of theatre and its appropriate form of language. She emphasizes the "regenerative power of English" as a means of authority and power.

In *Our Country's Good* Timberlake Wertenbaker consolidates the role of the theatre in its social and cultural milieu, praising drama for the way it cultivates and improves individuals. Among the subjects Wertenbaker

explores in the play are "the effects of enforced silencing, the value and meaning of art, the quest of power and the seductive appeal of corruption, the definition of crime and civilization" (Stephenson 1997), and the last three are also handled by Behn, Churchill and Daniels. They all argue that women are not sex objects, they have a capacity to place themselves in better places if chance is given.

Consequently Wertenbaker's words, taken from an interview with her that explicates her perspective on *Our Country's Good* as a wonderful defence of theatre as being valuable to individuals and society, can be said about the other three female playwrights without any reservations: "I think art is redemptive and the theatre is particularly important because it is a public space..." (Stephenson 1997). Captain Philip voices Wertenbaker's optimism about the role of the theatre, in one part of the play: "They [lower class people] can be educated" (Barnet 1997). "The theatre is an expression of civilization... The convicts will be speaking a refined, literate language and expressing sentiments of a delicacy they are not used to" (Barnet 1997). Such a claim is common to all, who consider women's situation with a touch of comedy in their plays.

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## CHAPTER THIRTY SIX

### "MUSÉE DES DEUX ARTS:."

W.H. AUDEN'S DOUBLE-EKPHRASIS

BERKAN ULU

#### I. Commencement and the Tardition

Blake's watercolour *Ancient of Days* was created in 1794 by using relief etching, an acid-based colouring technique invented by Blake himself (Anon. "Etching" 2010). As to how the original copy of *Ancient of Days* came down to ornament W.H. Auden's New York apartment wall is not known but it is true that Auden had a great interest in paintings and images. Just like the Romantic poets of the previous century, Auden was a museum lover and he spared a considerable amount of time for the works of art in the museums during the intensely chaotic atmosphere of the Great War in Europe (Carpenter 1981, 4). Apart from a National Book Award winning book, *the Shield of Achilles* (1955), his poetry collection focusing on the *locus classicus* of ekphrastic tradition, Auden's interest in painting, or rather in combining painting with poetry, won him the title *the writer of "the most widely known... [and] the most influential... ekphrastic poem..."* "Musée des Beaux Arts" (Hollander 1995, 249).

First published in 1940, "Musée des Beaux Arts" could be regarded as the modern symbol of the link between the so-called "sister arts." It is often thought that visual arts and verbal arts may sometimes share structural, contextual or methodological similarities such as technique, style, or subject matter. More precisely, the idea of sisterhood, defines a particular relationship between painting and poetry. This relationship, which may be at work on various textual and contextual levels, is designated by the word *ekphrasis*. Deriving from Greek, *ekphrasis*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The word *ekphrasis* (also spelled *ekphrasis*) derives from the Greek root *phrazien*, meaning "to tell, to pronounce, or to declare." With the prefix *ek-* (or "ec-" and "ex-"), meaning "from" or "out of," the verb *ekphrazien* literally means