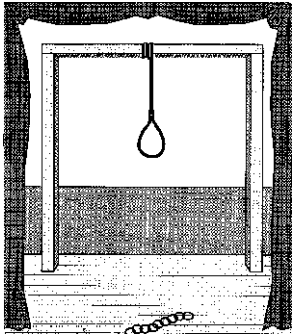


Our Country's Good



by Timberlake Wertenbaker

– a playgoer's guide –

In May of 1787, 750 convicts, mostly single men age twenty-five, were sent from England to Botany Bay, Australia. The journey over was horrible. Prisoners were kept in small flooded cells for the entire duration of the voyage. The human stench was said to have been unbearable! They ran out of hay and as a result the majority of their livestock died.

About the author

Timberlake Wertenbaker was born in 1951. She is a writer, journalist, teacher, playwright, and translator. The plays that she has written include *This is no Place for Tallulah Bankhead*, *The Third, Second Sentence*, *Case to Answer*, *Breaking Through*,

New Anatomies, *Inside Out*, *Home Leave*, *Abel's Sister*, *The Grace of Mary Traverse* (which won her the Plays and Players Most Promising Playwright, 1985), *Our Country's Good* (which won her the Evening Standard Most Promising Playwright designation, and the Lawrence Olivier Play of the Year Award, 1988 and in 1990 she won Drama Critic's Circle Award for Best Foreign Play), *The Love of the Nightingale* (which won her the Eileen Anderson Central Television Drama Award, and Mrs. Giles Whiting Award in 1989), *The Children*, *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* (won her the Critic's Circle Best West End Play, Writer's Guild Best West End Play, and Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, 1991-92), and *The Break of Day*.

About the play

Our Country's Good is based on Thomas Keneally's novel *The Play Maker* which in turn uses the 1789 production of George Farquhar's dramatic comedy *The Recruiting Officer*. This was the first play ever performed in Australia, and it was performed by the first male and female convicts to arrive there -- with the goal of rehabilitating the prisoners.

The Theatre

Our Country's Good premiered at the Royal Court Theatre, London, in 1988. The English Stage Company at the Royal Court opened in 1956. It was set up as a subsidized theatre producing new British plays, international plays, and classical revivals. The goal was for the theatre to be aimed at writers -- a theatre in which the play was more important than the actors, directors, set, etc. The theatre shapes contemporary drama in Britain, and Overseas with plays in New York, Sydney, Brussels, and Toronto.

The Company's policy, as found on their Web page, is:

"To produce the best in new writing from this country and abroad, to bring serious writing back to the stage, to create a theatre that is both vital and popular. Still a major focus in the country for the production of new work. Scores of plays first seen at The Royal Court Theatre are now a part of the national and international repertoire."

"A theatre of this name has existed in Sloane Square since 1871. The first outstanding period of its history was between 1904 and 1907 when, under the management of J. E. Vedrenne and Harley Granville Barker, the work of new writers such as Shaw and Galsworthy was presented, as well as works by Euripides, Ibsen, Hauptmann and Maeterlinck. Since 1956, when John Osborne's *Look Back In Anger* was performed by George Devine's company, the English Stage Company, the theatre has consistently supported the work of new writers, helping to establish, amongst others, the reputations of John Osborne, John Arden, Edward Bond, Christopher Hampton, Caryl Churchill, Bill Gaskill, Peter Gill and Max Stafford-Clark.."

[from "XRefer: the web's reference engine, a unique service providing free access to the world's largest collection of encyclopedias, dictionaries, thesauri and quotations"]

Previous productions

A performance at the Hartford Stage Company in 1991 was particularly memorable, boasting impressive props such as a massive, broken hull of a ship, spilling out cargo and the like in a cornucopia effect, and displaying over two hundred nooses hanging from the ceiling. Max Stafford-Clark directed another London production in 1998, followed by a big U.K. tour. The director has remarked that in many respects the play is a

significant departure from the novel, *The Playmaker*, (for instance, the marginalization of the Aborigine's character) and from previous productions (for instance, the rearranging of Beethoven's musical accompaniment, from the opening to the end scene).

The interesting thing about previous productions is the fact that there are so many differences in the ways this play has been produced. For example, productions in Boston University and Brown University had many actors playing more than one character. Stantonbury Campus Theater took up another challenge and produced two plays back to back: *Our Country's Good* and *The Recruiting Officer*. The set was created to accommodate both plays and took less than an hour to change. Notice that *The Recruiting Officer* is the play that the convicts practice in *Our Country's Good*.

This guide was produced by
The *Our Country's Good* Task Force
Gen Hillsburg, Tina Fraser, Elizabeth Hancox
Cheryl MacDonald, Sylvie Frenette, Andrew Hachey,
Geordie Andews and Russ Hunt

St. Thomas University
English 2223: The Page and the Stage
visit our Web site, at:

