Chapter Four

Lost Voices: Gender and the Artist in Timberlake Wertenbaker's Plays

Barker's portrait of female artist, Galactia, and specific pressures on woman artist finds its way in Wertenbaker's plays. Here, Wertenbaker uses artist as a character to meditate on the artist with a particular awareness of gender and feminist debate of the 1980s. So, the 1990s saw a surge of women writers such as Sheila Dewey's *Turner's Crossing* (1992), Ann Windsor's *Miss Bronte and I* (1993), and Pam Gems's *Marlene* (1996), and *Stanley* (1996) who use artists as the main characters. Interestingly, in the case of Wertenbaker, she employs those figures to highlight the lost voices of female artists as they try to secure their place in a man-dominated culture. In other words, Wertenbaker uses the figure of an artist, especially a female artist, to comment on the status of women and the dilemmas they face in their artistic trajectory.

Though the issues of women, such as marginalization and silencing are tackled by a plethora of British women playwrights such as Caryl Churchill, Pam Gems and Timberlake Wertenbaker, these dilemmas take on a new cultural dimension in Wertenbaker's plays since she is not British-born. Instead, her mixed cultural background enables her to critique big issues related to gender and the dominant ideologies of identity and nation. Susan Carlson argues that "struggling through a crisis of identity, [Wertenbaker] offers on-stage a view of late twentieth-century 'Great' Britain in which she examines the multiple and conflicting subjectivities of the world [and] brings to life the various 'others' created by hierarchies of gender, race, and nation".[1]

However, in a number of plays which cover nearly 30 years, Timberlake Wertenbaker returns again and again to the question of art and the role of the artist in society. Her works are constantly negotiating and renegotiating the type of role and the responsibility that the artist should undertake. More importantly, she addresses the way that artists are expected to speak for, and on behalf of, society. This issue sometimes becomes potentially problematic as she keeps coming back to the question: can we expect art or the artist to have the answer to society's problems? Or is that an overly high expectation to place on the artist?

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[1] Susan Carlson, "Language and identity in Timberlake Wertenbaker's plays", (eds.) Elaine Aston and Janelle Reinelt, *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Women Playwrights* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), p. 134.

4.1 Introduction

Starting at the end of the 1980s, which witnessed Wertenbaker's theatrical success with plays such as *The Love of the Nightingale* (1988), *Our Country's Good* (1988), *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* (1991), *The Break of Day* (1995) and *The Line* (2009), the issue of artists and the dilemmas faced by them through playwriting occupy a large part of the events. Here, the artists investigated are weave designers, actors, directors, song-writers and painters.

Looking closely at the above-mentioned plays, the lost voices of women artists are regained through their artistic integrity. In *The Love of the Nightingale*, the character of Philomele, who is fond of using words, tells her story by weaving a work of art, a puppet-like girl, to dramatize the horrible actions done to her by Tereus. By cutting out her tongue, Philomele's oppression goes beyond physical torture to depriving her of language. Here, Wertenbaker describes "women [who are] not … able or allowed to talk".[2] But Philomele refuses to surrender. On the contrary, her voice is heard again through the art of theatre.

Once again, in *Our Country's Good*, the role of the theatre is celebrated as a place where lost voices are regained and heard. For Wertenbaker, theatre has the incentive "to make one listen".[3] Though the play is about community, or applied theatre, it is also a journey of personal discovery. The artist figures are writers and actors. Phillip, who is aware of the power of theatre, asks Ralph to write and direct parts of George Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer* to be acted out by convicts. Though unprofessional actors, the participants prove to be genuine. Obviously, there are some fascinating female characters in *Our Country's Good*, who again find that they have acting skills. Mary Brenham, for example, who starts out as passive in the first scene, takes the main role in the play within the play. Her engagement with the theatre helps her to find her voice. Similarly, Liz Morden, an aggressive girl, finds a way to speak and communicate with other people which was impossible for her initially. For her, theatre becomes a way of expressing herself and her situation.

It can be argued that Wertenbaker is painting an unequivocally positive view of art's role in culture and society or communities in *Our Country's Good*. But then in some of her later plays this relationship between art and society becomes more problematic. Thus, the role of art is much more questioned, specifically with her plays that deal with visual artists or painters.

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[2] Quoted in Sophie Bush, *The Theatre of Timberlake Wertenbaker* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2013), p. 95.
[3] Timberlake Wertenbaker, interviewed by Jozefina Komporály (21 June 1999).

In *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* (1991) and *The Line* (2009), the discussion of art is associated with such issues as gender and the differences between female and male artists, artistic integrity versus commercial success, and traditional values versus innovation. Due to the close parallels between the two plays, it is useful to examine the two alongside each other. In both plays, Wertenbaker uses pairs of artists: male and female. In the former, we have Stephen and Fiona, while in the latter we have Degas and Suzanne who are put against each other. In both plays Stephen and Degas experience "a reclusive existence, shunning the art world with which [they have] become disillusioned".[4] They stick to traditional values in art and reject commercial success.

Being female artists, both Fiona and Suzanne are aware of the hierarchical privileges of being a male artist. According to Stephen and Degas, in order to be a successful artist, Fiona and Suzanne should sacrifice the rights enjoyed by other women such as lovers, marriage, children, money and security. They should depend entirely on men.

Another issue, which is very much connected with the discussion of art and the role of the artist in society, is the use of art as a business in such a way that the success of art depends on commercial factors. In this context, Wertenbaker was deeply preoccupied with the idea of businesses determining any artistic work that they sponsored. Though the main purpose of the Arts Council during the 1990s was to increase 'sponsorship and commercialisation', Wertenbaker believed that policy would "put writers in an awkward position". She further argued:

> If I know that a contributor to the commissioning fund is a company I have worries about, I will feel I am accepting a commission I am not comfortable with and at the very least I will have to waste a lot of time finding out what the company does exactly.[5]

As noted before, being a female artist involves many other concerns besides art. In *The Break of Day*, Wertenbaker concentrates on the character of Nina, a songwriter who finds herself unable to continue with writing because of her worries about age and children. Though we also

[4] Sophie Bush, *The Theatre of Timberlake Wertenbaker*, p. 233.
[5] Ibid., pp. 254-255.

have the character of Robert, an actor, Wertenbaker devotes a large part of the play to following Nina in her attempts to adopt a child.

For Wertenbaker, her plays about artists concentrate on the artistic and polemical relationship between two or more artists who are mostly male and female. We shall see this in the dichotomy of two pairs: Stephen and Fiona in *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* (1991), and Degas and Suzanne in *The Line* (2009). She, like Gems in writing *Piaf*, wants to focus on the situation of woman and "how that woman managed, in a male world, to survive and hang on to take the mike and sing".[6] Significantly, if we look at the works of other female playwrights during the 1990s, we see that biographical plays are popular especially among women writers.[7] This means that part of feminist project which started, during the 1970s and the 1980s was to uncover hidden female 'herstories' (histories). Taking into consideration plays such as Pam Gems's *Stanley* (1996) and *Marlene* (1996), we see that they centre around artists. The first is about the complicated life of British painter Stanley Spencer while the second is about the film star and cabaret artist Marlene Dietrich.

In this chapter, I am going to see how Wertenbaker responds to the issue of women artists by studying her plays, especially those which clearly reflect the dilemmas faced by female artists as they strive to find their place in a male-dominated culture. Although I will focus on two plays from two different decades, both share the same theme of art and the responsibility of the artist in debatable circumstances which involve male and female artists. Moreover, Wertenbaker's awareness of the importance of art in society acquires a continuing significance throughout her plays.

Earlier in this study, I claimed that one of the artist's dilemmas is how to confront the *Zeitgeist*, the general and moral tendencies of an era which can be elusive and uncertain. Here, as a female artist, you have to be strong enough to stand against the requirements of society and private needs.

The aforementioned dilemmas faced by contemporary British theatre and artists in the form of funding cuts and the prevalence of consumerism found expression in women's playwriting during the 1990s. In spite of Michael Billington's generally optimistic view of the new

[6] Cited in Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe, *Biographical Plays about Famous Artists* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholar Press, 2005), p. 76.
[7] Aleks Sierz, *Modern British Playwriting: the 1990s* (UK: Methuen Drama, 2012), p. 64.

millennium as a positive "reaction against the moral values of the 1980s",[8] he said in May 1991 that "[n]ew writing for theatre is in a state of crisis",[9] because of financial constraints and small public subsidy. Alongside these problems, women's writing was not granted an equal evaluation for a number of reasons, as we shall see. Though they all shared a dislike of Thatcherite politics, which is clearly explored in the irony of being a female Prime Minister in Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* (1982), women playwrights found themselves marginalized and under-represented.

Discussing the situation and role of women playwrights in contemporary British theatre during recent decades, we see that there is a reduction in the number of women playwrights having works produced compared to their successful roles during the 1970s and 1980s. This under-representation prompts Clare Mclntyre, an actress and writer, to lament, "If women's theatre is supposed to be dead at the moment, it's because of who is doing the judging; that is, who is running the theatres. It's directors who determine what is seen and on what stages".[10] Similarly, in her comment on the new writing in the 1990s at the Royal Court, Wertenbaker described the century as "more reactionary times and it's not the most welcoming moment for women".[11] Many factors led to the spread of this phenomenon. Among them was the predominance of men in the management of theatre and its critics who did not commend the work of women playwrights. Consequently, they continue to be under-represented in mainstream theatre.

The democratization of contemporary British theatre, following John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956), ushered in a new period of important playwriting which was crowned by the abolition of the state censorship of theatre in 1968. However, women playwrights still underwent the internal censorship imposed on them by the governing boards of subsidized institutions together with 'market pressure' which restricted them from playing an active role in the literary scene. As a result, they were marginalized and then deprived of taking a lead in key responsibilities.

In a number of plays, however, Wertenbaker determines the restrictions and problems faced by women playwrights. As mentioned before, she ascribes them partly to the fact that theatres

[8] Michael Billington, Mireia Aragay and Pilar Zozaya, "The State of British Theatre Now: An Interview with Michael Billington", *Atlantis*, v. 26, n. 1 (Junio 2004): 89.
[9] Quoted in Aleks Sierz, *Modern British Playwriting: the 1990s* (UK: Methuen Drama, 2012), p. 55.
[10] Clare Mclntyre, Winsome Pinnock, and Rebecca Prichard, "Plays by Women", ed., David Edgar, *State of Play: Playwrights on Playwriting* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), p. 56.
[11] Wertenbaker cited in Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge, *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting* (London: Methuen, 1997), p. 137.

are "still run and the scene is still commented on, by men",[12] and partly to the loss of solidarity between women themselves. In her answer to the question of the marginalization and undervaluation of female works, Wertenbaker believes that part of the problem is women themselves because, she asserts, "[t]here are a lot of women who don't particularly want to see what women are writing".[13]

However, before we go into details with Wertenbaker's plays and see how she represents these dilemmas by artist figures, it is important to shed light on the most pressing dilemmas which women playwrights faced during the 1990s to the present day.

One of the reasons behind women's marginalization is the view raised by critics that women deal with personal issues under the umbrella of feminism. Although it is to a lesser degree true, Wertenbaker has refused to take any particular feminist direction. More than that, Wertenbaker has commented on the failure of feminism "to put women into any kind of power".[14] In contrast, after so many years of feminism, Michelene Wandor, a playwright and critic, claims that the "position of women … [has] remained unchanged",[15] and still revolves within men's orbit. For Wertenbaker, feminism is acknowledged as a human identity not for gender prejudice. So, on a number of occasions, she reveals her dissatisfaction with labelling. She insists that, as women playwrights, "we all just write about humans", not only about "women's issues".[16] What is most important to Wertenbaker is to see women who can "drive their own routes to freedom, success and happiness, without merely adopting the same methods men have used to achieve these ends".[17] She repeatedly calls for women playwrights to have key responsibilities in theatre management "because they have many fewer prejudices, fewer foregone conclusions than male playwrights. [So] it's important for women to put themselves out there".[18]

The other serious type of dilemma facing women playwrights during recent decades is that of economics. As we know, funding for the arts received from the Arts Council suffered real problems in the form of changes and cuts. This situation of continued funding cuts substantially affected women's writing. No doubt, artists are always in need of outside support if they are to continue to exist. Therefore, subsidy is important for the arts to be sustained. But, as this study

[12] Ibid., p. 138.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Quoted in Sophie Bush, *The Theatre of Timberlake Wertenbaker*, p. 248.
[15] Michelene Wandor, *Carry on, Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics* (London, 1986), p. 16.
[16] Wertenbaker cited in Sheridan Morley, "Gender is not the case", *The Times*, 7 November 1988.
[17] Sophie Bush, *The Theatre of Timberlake Wertenbaker*, p. 94.
[18] Wertenbaker cited in Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge, *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting*, p. 145.

has mentioned before, the negative side of external subsidy is the fact that sometimes the artist fulfils the needs of the establishment or company. As such, she becomes a mere propagandist.

For Wertenbaker, the financial pressures on the artist cannot be denied. In the early stages of her life, she was forced to work as a journalist in order to pursue her playwriting. Sophie Bush maintains that "[h]er need for an income required her to write to commission for companies such as the Women's Theatre Group, and these experiences, and the artistic compromises she felt they forced her to make, may be the 'things you don't really want to do' to which she alludes".[19]

Historically speaking, if we look at British theatre during the 1960s, we see that one of the reasons for the absence of women playwrights has been attributed to the cultural climate of British society and the funding cuts. Also the standards of commercialism and monetarism followed by the Arts Council in granting government subsidies helped to exclude women from the literary scene. Instead of the patronage of writers, money was spent on buildings. In an article by Loren Kruger, "The Dis-Play's the Thing: Gender and Public Sphere in Contemporary British Theater", she argues:

> [t]he marginalization of women and the *legitimation* of that marginalization is central to the question of subsidy. Institutions such as the National and the RSC, but also the Royal Court, are favoured according to the circular argument in which their 'stability' and hence worthiness of subsidy is allegedly demonstrated by their conspicuous buildings (themselves the *result* of selective subsidy) at the geographical and ideological centre of metropolitan culture.[20] (Italics in original.)

Wertenbaker resists these trends and the Arts Council's policy. She, in an ironic tone, states:

> [The Arts Council's policy] is like being given the money to buy silverware, with no money to spend on food. […] Every year, fewer playwrights manage to survive on writing plays alone. […] I feel that if the Arts Council does not do something imaginative soon, in ten years […] you may have to call on lottery funds to instigate a search for the last surviving member of that rare species, the living playwright.[21]

[19] Sophie Bush, *The Theatre of Timberlake Wertenbaker*, p. 247.
[20] Loren Kruger, "The Dis-Play's the Thing: Gender and Public Sphere in Contemporary British Theater", *Theatre Journal*, v. 42, n. 1 (Mar., 1990): 30.
[21] Sophie Bush, *The Theatre of Timberlake Wertenbaker*, p. 20.

Although the early 1980s witnessed an increase in opportunities for female playwrights, there is a general consensus that their works (including those of female directors) were marginalized and minimized from the early 1990s onwards. In a survey conducted by Jenny Long, a theatre director, at the end of 1994, she concludes that "only twenty per cent of productions are by women and that … figure drops to fourteen per cent in companies where the artistic director is male". Long also "reveal[s] that women playwrights, proportionally, are less well represented the larger the size of the theatre and the larger the share of the revenue grant".[22]

Long's survey shows the beleaguered attitude towards women's writing which is clearly manifested by critics and theatre artists. Despite the noticeable success of plays by Caryl Churchill, Pam Gems, Timberlake Wertenbaker and Charlotte Keatley, these women do not receive equal status to their male counterparts. In Keith D. Peacock's 1999 study, women's theatre occupies only a small chapter out of 25 pages. Similarly, Michael Billington (1993) reduced contemporary women's theatre to two plays by Churchill, whereas Christopher Innes's 1992 critical survey is devoted only to Gems and Churchill.[23]

This limited visibility of women playwrights can be ascribed to the vast majority of male critics who approach women's work with preconceived and negative ideas to experimental attempts. As Billington says, "We're conscious that we're like a portable version of the Garrick club. A bunch of middle-aged men" and that it "could be healthier if there were a greater diversity of critics [of both genders]".[24] With that in mind, I turn to Wertenbaker's views on theatre to see how women's dilemmas are tackled.

4.2 Wertenbaker's Philosophy of Theatre

Having fought her way into the male-dominated theatre scene, Wertenbaker embraces theatre as an effective means of reflecting women's marginalization. In an interview, published in a book entitled *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting* (1997) by Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge, Wertenbaker sums up her influential views on theatre,

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[22] Wertenbaker cited in Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge, *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting*, pp. ix-x.

[23] This attitude of marginalization includes women playwrights and artistic directors as shown in Keith D. Peacock, *Thatcher's Theatre: British Theatre and Drama in the 1980s* (Greenwood Press, 1999); Michael Billington, *One-Alight Stands: A Critic's View of British Theatre from 1971 to 1991* (London: Nick Hem Books, 1993) and Christopher Innes, *Modem British Drama, 1890-1990* (Cambridge University Press, 1992). The only exception is David Edgar's *Collections of State of Play: Playwrights on Playwriting* (London: Faber, 1999) which includes nine women.

[24] Wertenbaker cited in Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge, *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting*, p. xvii.

which she sees as "a public arena [where the] writer tries to filter something in a deeper way". It is a public place through which the writer, unlike the journalist, can debate and "pull the strands together".[25] Moreover, Wertenbaker's preoccupation with theatre and acting goes further than mere showing but rather presenting "theatricality as an opportunity for people who have been atrociously brutalized and debased to discover, through the playing of scripted roles and the interactive process of rehearsal, aspects of the self that have been submerged, in some cases well-nigh obliterated".[26] Significantly, those people who are brutalized and silenced are usually women. For Wertenbaker, the theatre is a place which provokes thought and interrogation. Likewise, it is an effective tool by which "gender issues can be shown to be intricately related to power dynamics: the performance of a play, poem or story by a woman, in a woman's voice, on stage or some public space, can still be a powerful thing, made more powerful by the presence of an audience".[27] Like Barker, Wertenbaker emphasizes the role of theatre as an agent of change. She affirms that:

> I don't think you can leave the theatre and go out and make a revolution … But I do think you can make people change, just a little, by forcing them to question something, or by intriguing them, or giving them an image that remains with them. And that little change can lead to bigger changes.[28]

Accordingly, on a number of occasions, Wertenbaker refuses to put her works within the rigid parameters of a purely political or feminist stance. Rather, her plays are liable to a more open critical reaction. She prompts the individual's imagination to decide which path he should take. Moreover, seeing the theatre as 'the Court', Wertenbaker argues strongly in favour of the artist avoiding being delivered a verdict. She insists on the vital role of the audience as "the jury to make that pronouncement". So, the function of the theatre is "a metaphorical trial",[29] to use Bush's words.

As a radical playwright, Wertenbaker, like other women playwrights such as Caryl Churchill, addresses big issues such as using myths, the acquisition of a voice and women's aspirations

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[25] Ibid., p. 145.
[26] Brian Crow, "African Metatheater: Criticizing Society, Celebrating the Stage", *Research in African Literatures*, v. 33, n. 1 (Spring, 2002): 133.
[27] Lizbeth Goodman, ed., *Mythic Women/Real Women: Plays and Performance Pieces by Women* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), pp. ix-x.
[28] Quoted in Esther Beth Sullivan, "Hailing Ideology, Acting in the Horizon, and Reading between Plays by Timberlake Wertenbaker", *Theatre Journal*, v. 45, n. 2 (May, 1993): 140.
[29] Sophie Bush, *The Theatre of Timberlake Wertenbaker*, p. 71.

to find an equal place in a male-dominated culture. In the following pages, I am going to concentrate on Wertenbaker's plays, which cover three decades (1980s-2000s). In doing so, the role of theatre, the function of art and the dilemmas of women artists are revealed. Plays, such as *The Love of the Nightingale* (1988), *Our Country's Good* (1988), *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* (1991), *The Break of Day* (1995) and *The Line* (2009) reflect the function of art and the situation of artists as they live in two different worlds: Communism and Capitalism. Both worlds impose on artists a particular type of censorship. The first is tested by how artists are loyal to the ruling political party while the latter is through the market ethics.

In *The Love of the Nightingale* (RSC, 1988), the theme of violence and silencing women is pertinent. Here, Wertenbaker resorts to myth to dramatize this theme with a contemporary tone whilst at the same time showing the role of theatre in transmitting it. In her speech about the translating and transmitting of Greek tragedy and myth into the modern stage, Lorna Hardwick, a Professor in Classical Studies, states that "[p]erformed translations enable audiences to experience interaction between ancient and modern. They can also be indicators of changes in modern perceptions of the ancient play and in how practitioners use the transformative powers of theatre".[30]

Likewise, delving into the past in order to comment on the present is one of the themes in Timberlake Wertenbaker's plays. The imaginative element of the past and its potentialities give audiences an opportunity to experience and revise the ancient in order to deal with the present and make a comparison between the old and the new. So, using historical facts and juxtaposing them with fiction, Wertenbaker "invites contemporary analogy",[31] as Val Taylor has pointed out. Moreover, as a playwright, Wertenbaker repeatedly "turns to history to reveal and challenge human behaviour, depending, like Brecht, not on its universality but on its changeability".[32] In other words, the human propensity to change and adapt is a recurrent theme in Wertenbaker's works. So, eliminating this trait of human potentiality for change becomes the driving force for the ruling political system to stand against any sign of activity.

In his study of *English Drama Since 1940*, David Ian Rabey argues:

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[30] Lorna Hardwick, "Translating Greek Tragedy to the Modern Stage", *Theatre Journal*, v. 59, n. 3, Theatre and Translation (Oct., 2007): 358.
[31] Val Taylor, "Mothers of invention: female characters in "Our Country's Good" and "The Playmaker", *Critical Survey*, v. 3, n. 3, Text into performance (1991): 333.
[32] Sara Freeman, "Tragedy After Darwin: Timberlake Wertenbaker Remakes "Modern" Tragedy", *Comparative Drama*, v. 44, n. 2 (Summer 2010): 210.

> Wertenbaker's drama often ranges from the domestic to the mythic within each play, identifying social situations which depend upon dispossession and restriction of human potential. Moreover, she demonstrates how these effects are the deliberate and intrinsic effects of language systems and terms of response which define the rights of the individual in exclusively patriarchal and imperial terms. This authoritarianism is specifically paternalistic in nature; that is, it pretends fostering care whilst simultaneously eroding systematically any belief in a possible separateness and difference of individual interests. The ultimate threat of this governing system is to deprive the individual of speech, and of the right of expression of selfhood; but hope persists, in the defiant reactions of her marginalised protagonists.[33]

This marginalisation of Wertenbaker's protagonists and the role of theatre to regain their voice is a recurrent theme in the next two plays.

4.3 Healing Power of Art: *The Love of the Nightingale* (1988) and *Our Country's Good* (1988)

Once again, language is employed to penetrate into the male and female psyche. In the introduction to her collection: *Plays One*, Wertenbaker talks about *The Love of the Nightingale* asserting that "[a]lthough it has been interpreted as being about women, I was actually thinking of the violence that erupts in societies when they have been silenced for too long. Without language, brutality will triumph".[34]

The play tells the story of Philomele who is raped by her sister's husband, Tereus. Philomele's father, Pandion, who is the king of Athens, gives his daughter Procne to Tereus to marry in return for his help in the war with Thebes. Procne reluctantly obeys and accompanies Tereus to his city of Thrace. There, Procne feels alone as she cannot adjust to a less cultural life than in Athens. She also feels sad for Philomele, who is the only one that understands her. So she asks Tereus to return and bring Philomele.

On his return voyage, Tereus takes Philomele back to Thrace. At sea, he does not hide his sexual infatuation with Philomele who is unware of his intentions. After she realizes his attempts to seduce her, she desperately asks the Captain of the ship for help. To achieve his aim, Tereus kills the Captain and tells Philomele that her sister has died during his absence. When Tereus fails to win Philomele's heart, he rapes her. As a result, Philomele threatens him with public disclosure. This act prompts the rapist to cut out her tongue and put her in a secret

[33] David Ian Rabey, *English Drama Since 1940* (Longman: Pearson Education Limited, 2003), p. 138.
[34] Timberlake Wertenbaker, Timberlake Wertenbaker: *Plays One* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), p. viii. All subsequent quotations from *The Love of the Nightingale* and *Our Country's Good* will be from this edition.

prison. Years later, she is recognized by Procne during a Bacchic festival as Philomele grotesquely stages her rape and mutilation. Unlike Ovidian narrative, in which she transmits her story by weaving it into a tapestry, Wertenbaker's Philomele does this through the more public device of a puppet play-within-the-play. After Tereus admits his sin, the two sisters kill Itys, the son of Procne and Tereus. Then, during their flight from Tereus, all of them are transformed into birds: Procne, who is silenced forever into a swallow, Tereus into a hoopoe and Philomele into a nightingale.

The most significant thing about this play is Wertenbaker's use of theatre as a means by which both the characters' personalities and theatre's power are revealed. The character who supersedes the image of the artist is Philomele, through her wisdom, as is clearly shown through the events of the play.

From the beginning of the play, Philomele wins our admiration as she engages with the interpretations of the play-within-the-play, *Hippolyta*. Unknowingly, her agility with words and language captures Tereus's heart. Her view of love is connected with the power of language: "When you love you want to imprison the one you love in your words, in your tenderness", (5, 305). Little by little, these words begin to work on Tereus, who asks her with astonishment, "How do you know all this, Philomele?" All this happens while they watch the play-within-the-play.

In *Hippolyta*, Phaedra falls in love with Hippolytus, her stepson. For this sin, Phaedra kills herself. Wertenbaker uses Phaedra's tragedy to foreshadow Tereus's later horrible action while at the same time commenting on the situation of women. In an article entitled, "Re-Casting the Phaedra Syndrome: Myth and Morality in Timberlake Wertenbaker's *The Love of the Nightingale*", Joe Winston argues, "[f]rom a feminist perspective, Phaedra's desire for silence may be construed as resulting from her unquestioning acceptance of a patriarchal moral order which uses shame as a means to oppress her; and we can interpret it as indicative of a political tendency throughout much of history for the voices of women to be silenced".[35] Due to this preconceived idea about women, Wertenbaker specifies women's submission and marginalization. They are victims of old views of women as the main source of trouble. In this sense, Margarete Rubik's reading of *The Love of the Nightingale* sees that there is an "absence of a genuine female voice" because women submit "to old concepts of femininity, or they

[35] Joe Winston, "Re-Casting the Phaedra Syndrome: Myth and Morality in Timberlake Wertenbaker's *The Love of the Nightingale*", *Modern Drama*, v. 38, n. 4 (Winter 1995): 515.

imitate their male oppressors by reacting with identical forms of behaviour".[36] Wertenbaker makes this clear in the play when Philomele asks the Captain to climb Mount Athos. He reacts by saying, "No, but wild men live there, very wild. They kill all women, even female animals are not allowed on that mountain … They believe all harm in the world comes from women", (7, 310).

As mentioned before, Philomele uses theatre to tell her story. In doing so, theatre is celebrated not only as a place where big issues can be exposed but also as a place of wisdom from which one can make judgments. This truth is uttered by King Pandion when he wants to make a decision concerning Procne's marriage. He states, "I find plays help me think. You catch a phrase, recognize a character. Perhaps this play will help us come to a decision", (5, 301).

Regarding the silencing of women, Wertenbaker makes Philomele's rape and the cutting out of her tongue the most shocking scene in the play. Her tragedy is reported by Niobe, Philomele's nurse:

> Niobe: Now truly I pity Philomele. She has lost her words, all of them. Now she is silent. For good. Of course, he could have killed her, that is the usual way of keeping people silent. But that might have made others talk. The silence of the dead can turn into a wild chorus. But the one alive who cannot speak, that one has truly lost all power. There. I don't know what she wants. I don't know what she feels. Perhaps she likes being silent. No responsibility.
>
> (16, 337)

Unlike Niobe, Philomele feels that her only responsibility is to reveal the truth. She finds theatre as the best way to regain her voice and avenge Tereus. She, like Tracey Emin, an English-Turkish artist "who suffered an unreported rape at the age of thirteen and who has been commenting on that rape through her art ever since",[37] conveys her truth by manipulating the life-sized puppets made by herself. To put it differently, Philomele uses her art to report her rape. Thus, through the power of theatre, the issue of silencing women comes to the forefront of the action. Moreover, through Philomele's silence, the "other characters come to find

[36] Margarete Rubik, "The Silencing of Women in British Feminist Drama", in Gudrun M. Grabher and Ulrike Jessner (eds), *Semantics of Silences in Linguistics and Literature* (Heidelberg: Universitatsverlag C, 1996), p. 177.
[37] Yxta Maya Murray, "Rape Trauma, the State, and the Art of Tracey Emin", *California Law Review*, v. 100, n. 6 (December 2012): 1706.

parallel ways in which their language is stolen from them".[38] They begin to question the silencing of oppressed people in general:

> Helen: Why are races exterminated?
> Hero: Why do white people cut off the words of blacks?
> Iris: Why do people disappear? The ultimate silence. (20, 349)

Philomele succeeds not only in disclosing the truth but also in stimulating others to raise questions and revolt against tyranny. However, Wertenbaker is optimistic that women will be able to redefine themselves and regain their voice by their own methods. So, she is emphasizing the importance of having female role models. These role models are not just historical but also contemporary ones. She takes role models such as Caryl Churchill and Louise Page as a means of encouraging other women playwrights to continue.[39]

The role and function of theatre are taken further in Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good* (Royal Court, 1988). Again, Wertenbaker focuses on the redemptive power of theatre. Significantly, the artist figures are not as professional. They are amateurs. The play is based on Thomas Keneally's novel *The Playmaker* (1987) and an actual event during the first British exile of 160,000 convicts to Australia between 1787 and 1868 as it is recounted in Robert Hughes's *The Fatal Shore*. Wertenbaker tries to raise old questions about the revolutionary, political and social function of theatre within society. This public means of theatre, which is hailed by oppressed people, is not well received by politicians. So, artists find it hard to situate their places without being censored or obliterated. In her answer to the question about the play as "a wonderful defence of the theatre and its value to individuals and society, as well as a classic example of how in oppressive times the arts are censored, if not obliterated", Wertenbaker's argument shows her genuine belief in art, especially theatre, as an important redemptive tool because of its publicity. She states that "[i]n a society that's not very much in touch with itself, art will be uncomfortable and I think that's the situation in England at the

[38] Susan Carlson, "Language and identity in Timberlake Wertenbaker's plays", (eds.) Elaine Aston and Janelle Reinelt, *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Women Playwrights*, p. 135.
[39] Sophie Bush, *The Theatre of Timberlake Wertenbaker*, pp. 13-14.

moment. It's an extremely uncomfortable country in all kinds of ways and [consequently] art is not going to be very appealing in that kind of discomfort".[40]

Our Country's Good follows the fortunes of 18th century convicts who are sent to Australia as a form of punishment for their vile actions. As mentioned before, these people are a mixture of amateurs, thieves, whores and ruffians. To redeem their behaviour, the governor, Captain Arthur Phillip, and the young Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark, a theatre enthusiast, arrange for the outcasts to put on a performance of George Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer*. Instead of traditional means of punishment, this experience becomes an eloquent argument for the transformative power of theatre both as a means of giving voice, and a sense of communality to a group of social outcasts. This is quite clear in the character of Liz Morden, the hardened thief, who is given a new identity after the performance. From the outset of the play, their perilous situation is reported by John Wisehammer, one of the convicts, who are: "Spewed from [their] country, forgotten, bound to the dark edge of the earth", (1, 1, 185). Ostensibly, they are severed from their birthplace for the good of their country. But, in reality they are used in an experimental field.

The play as a whole focuses on actors. In other words, the figures of the artist are represented by unprofessional actors who have changed through the power of art. In my interview with Sophie Bush, dated 9 February 2016, she points out that "there are several interesting things that are happening in *Our Country's Good*; it is very much about amateur theatre in the sense of ordinary people finding their own artistic spirit rather than about artists who are artists by profession, and it's about people finding solace through art in adverse circumstances".[41]

This view is shared by Phillip, the governor of the colony, who feels that the convicts will not change unless they are offered something genuine instead of the routine process of floggings and hangings. So, for the good of the colony, Phillip suggests that the convicts should "see real plays: fine language, sentiment", (1, 3, 189). His confidence in the ability of human beings to learn makes him view theatre as an effective means since "no one is born naturally cultured? I'll have the gun now", (1, 3, 188). Metaphorically speaking, theatre is associated with 'the gun' to denote its powerful nature. On the one hand, theatre is a good means of

[40] Wertenbaker cited in Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge, *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting*, p. 141.
[41] My interview with Sophie Bush on 9 February 2016.

instilling good values and behaviours in the convicts. On the other hand, it is used to domesticate and change oppressed people.

To achieve the governor's suggestion, the Second Lieutenant, Ralph Clark, is chosen to put on a play in order to change the daily lives of the convicts and expose them to refined and sentimental language. Ralph becomes the director of George Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer*. What attracts Wertenbaker to the Irish writer is her early emphasis on the subject of theatre which is as follows:

> The argument the theatre is a waste of time and resources, pointless, silly corrupting, evil, dangerous the theatre is pleasurable, good for the mind, good for the body, enriching, humanising.[42]

Faced with this debate, a heated argument over theatre and its role in society ensues among the authorities of the 'Repressive State Apparatus' and the 'Ideological State Apparatus'. The first represents the whole state, such as the army, the government and the administration of prisons which "function by violence". The latter represents religious and cultural institutions such as churches and the arts which "function 'by ideology'".[43] Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good* witnesses the application of these two devices. In the first part of the play, the authorities inflict their policies by violent actions such as floggings and hangings as stated previously. In the second part, the authorities adopt theatre as an ideological device "to redirect the fervor and passion of dissident action into more socially accepted enterprises".[44]

The representative officers of the authorities take two opposing sides over theatre. One side views theatre as a subversive force for the social and moral fabric of society which places their authority in danger, while the other side shows no interest. The first side is voiced by Ross who is very conservative towards theatre:

> […] I know this play – this play – order will become disorder. The theatre leads to threatening theory and you, Governor, you have His Majesty's

[42] Quoted in Sophie Bush, *The Theatre of Timberlake Wertenbaker*, p. 118. For more explanation, see Wertenbaker, notes for *Our Country's Good*, 17 June 1988, *TWA* (Timberlake Wertenbaker Archive), *BLMC* (British Library Manuscripts Collection), Add 79272.
[43] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards and Investigation)", in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), pp. 96-97.
[44] Esther Beth Sullivan, "Hailing Ideology, Acting in the Horizon, and Reading between Plays by Timberlake Wertenbaker", *Theatre Journal*, v. 45, n. 2 (May, 1993): 143.

> commission to build castles, raise armies, administer a military colony, not fandangle about with a lewdy play! (1, 6, 210)

Ross, like Tereus in *The Love of the Nightingale*, reacts strongly to the production of the play because it stimulates revolution and revolt, which threatens the political system. His suspicion and fear of theatre recalls Tereus's speech: "These plays condone vice". (*The Love of the Nightingale,* 5, 303). So, "we have no theatre or even philosophers in Thrace", (5, 304). This casts a brilliant light on the Marxist-Leninist 'theory' of the state as "a [repressive] 'machine' which enables the ruling classes (in the 19th century the bourgeois class and the 'class' of big landowners) to ensure their domination over the working class, thus enabling the former to subject the latter to the process of surplus-value extortion (i.e. capitalist exploitation)",[45] to quote Louis Althusser, a French Marxist philosopher.

The religious camp, which is represented by Reverend Johnson, concentrates on the moral issues. Reverend Johnson is not completely satisfied with the content of the play. He says, "I hear many of these plays are about rakes and encourage loose morals in women", (1, 6, 207). Therefore, marriage will lose its value as a sacred bond between two souls since "actresses are not famed for their morals", (1, 6, 202). Being an Irish writer, Reverend Johnson expresses his fear that *The Recruiting Officer* will "propagate Catholic doctrine", (1, 6, 205) while Lieutenant Will Dawes views it as a waste of time, saying: "Put the play on, don't put it on, it won't change the shape of the universe", (1, 6, 204). But he sees no harm in it "[a]s long as I don't have to watch it", (1, 6, 209). Similarly, Captain Tench sees the play as an unnecessary waste of time: "It is at most a passable diversion, an entertainment to wile away the hours of the idle", (1, 6, 204). He further claims that, "It's two hours, possibly of amusement, possibly of boredom, and we will lose the labour of the convicts during the time they are learning to play", (1, 6, 209). His capitalistic thinking leads him to suggest another option which is more practical from his point of view:

[45] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards and Investigation)", in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays,* trans. Ben Brewster, p. 92. In his comment on the close relationship between the object of the proletariat and Marxism in Althusser's theory of Marxism, John Fraser states that "[i]n a socialist state this dominance by theory can be enforced only by an apparatus from which the proletariat is excluded. Scientific socialism, that is, will be produced by a form of state of which the class which makes the revolution becomes the 'object', or 'support'. See John Fraser, "Louis Althusser on Science, Marxism and Politics", *Science & Society*, v. 40, n. 4 (Winter, 1976/1977): 442.

> I would simply say that 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, teach them thrift so they don't eat a week's rations in one night, but above all, teach them how to work, not how to sit around laughing at a comedy. (1, 6, 207)

The few officers who strongly support and are motivated by the project are Phillip and Ralph. Phillip believes in the potentiality of theatre to redeem the evil-doers. He quotes Rousseau's inflammatory sentence, "'Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains'", (1, 6, 203) to refer to the fact that evil is not naturally innate but it is made by blind political policies. So "They can be educated", (1, 6, 204). To persuade other authorities, Phillip delivers a speech about the role of theatre as "an expression of civilization". Significantly, his speech shows his familiarity with the pioneers of theatre:

> We belong to a great country which has spawned great playwrights: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson, and even in our own time, Sheridan. The convicts will be speaking a refined, literate language and expressing sentiments of a delicacy they are not used to. It will remind them that there is more to life than crime, punishment. And we, this colony of a few hundred, will be watching this together, for a few hours we will no longer be despised prisoners and hated gaolers. (1, 6, 206)

Phillip, like Ralph, is motivated by the project not only for the convicts' improvement but also for his own self-advancement. So the production of *The Recruiting Officer* becomes a suitable method of rehabilitation for both the convicts and their jailers. For Althusser, the ideological state methods are used "to 'discipline' not only their shepherds, but also their flocks".[46]

Throughout *Our Country's Good*, we are told that the crimes committed by the felons are related to their poverty in their homeland. This old problem of deprivation continues in their new space as there is an extreme shortage of food. So both the authorities and the felons find themselves "at odds with each other and their surroundings, and both struggle to survive against the sometimes desperate circumstances of pioneering".[47]

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[46] Ibid., p. 98.
[47] Esther Beth Sullivan, "Hailing Ideology, Acting in the Horizon, and Reading between Plays by Timberlake Wertenbaker", *Theatre Journal*, v. 45, n. 2 (May, 1993): 142.

This is clear in Ralph's surprise at Mary Brenham, one of the convicts, and her newly acquired behaviour through the rehearsal of *The Recruiting Officer*:

> I speak about her, but in a small way this could affect all the convicts and even ourselves, we could forget our worries about the supplies, the hangings and the floggings, and think of ourselves at the theatre, in London with our wives and children, that is, we could, euh – (1, 6, 208)

Mary Brenham can barely speak in the first scene but towards the end she performs the main role in *The Recruiting Officer*. Initially she lacks confidence and does not think she has a voice. So her personal journey is very much one of empowerment and finding her voice through becoming an actress and becoming involved in theatre.

This provides evidence for the role of theatre as an imaginative outlet for the boredom of prison life. The desire of the convicts to be in reflects the modern stories of prisoners with whom Wertenbaker communicated. In a letter to Wertenbaker, Joe White, an actual prisoner who played Ralph Clark in the first production of *Our Country's Good*, writes of drama as "a refuge and one of the only real weapons against the hopelessness of these places".[48]

Eventually the play is endorsed despite some reticence. Thus, the outcasts are invited to take part in the rehearsal of the play in a transparent atmosphere without being oppressed. In other words, "ideology is not forced upon subjects; its authority and dominance are not maintained by outright or visibly repressive apparati".[49] This truth is uttered by Phillip as he theorizes about the rehearsal:

> What is a statesman's responsibility? To ensure the rule of law. But the citizens must be taught to obey the law of their own will. I want to rule over responsible human beings, not tyrannize over a group of animals. I want there to be a contract between us, not a whip on my side, terror and hatred on theirs.
>
> (2, 2, 246)

[48] Timberlake Wertenbaker, *Timberlake Wertenbaker: Plays One*, p. 166.
[49] Esther Beth Sullivan, "Hailing Ideology, Acting in the Horizon, and Reading between Plays by Timberlake Wertenbaker", *Theatre Journal*, p. 144.

Both the oppressors and the oppressed work collectively and cooperatively for their good. With the production of the play, the convicts begin to discover new areas which have not been seen before. Their active participation leads them to self-realization, to discover their potentialities.

However, much of the critical debate of *Our Country's Good* has centred around the character of Liz Morden. Our initial impression of her reveals the impossibility of redemption. She is described by Phillip as "one of the most difficult women in the colony". She is "lower than a slave, full of loathing, foul mouthed, desperate", (2, 2, 245). Consequently, as a social experiment, her hardened behaviour needs "to be made an example of" redeeming "by redemption", (2, 2, 245). Liz's taciturn and brusque nature hides her feelings of inferiority. Even when she is accused of stealing, she does not defend herself, although she is innocent. When she is asked to tell the truth, she refuses, saying "it wouldn't have mattered", (2, 10, 271). Once again, Wertenbaker uses theatre "as a place where lost voices […] can be regained".[50] Liz's disbelief that the officers will trust her is overcome by her valuable participation in the play. And, as Mary insists, "This is the theatre. We will believe you", (2, 1, 243). Liz is given two choices: either to maintain the honour code of the convict community or to continue to act in the play. She chooses the latter, sacrificing her own salvation for the benefit of the players. So, by the play's penultimate scene, Liz comes to realize that her voice will be listened to. Her confidence in her own language prompts her to defend herself and she announces, "Your Excellency, I will endeavour to speak Mr Farquhar's lines with the elegance and clarity their own worth commands", (2, 6, 272). In her interpretation of these lines, Bush, the author of *The Theatre of Timberlake Wertenbaker*, quotes the positive response of some critics concerning theatre:

> Theatre, it seems, can empower women with some degree of linguistic franchise. The ability to command many voices and to play many parts [provides] survival strategies for women. Those women, ostensibly powerful who lack linguistic versatility […], appear dramatically weak. While those who can switch linguistic codes according to context enjoy greater power whatever their status.[51]

Liz succeeds in engaging with her masters' language instead of her previous argot of thieves. Her social formation with the other spectrum of society is fulfilled when she is offered an

[50] Sophie Bush, *The Theatre of Timberlake Wertenbaker*, p. 208.
[51] Ibid., p. 131.

opportunity through theatre. In his comment on Althusser's thought of 'theory' and 'ideology', Terry Eagleton argues:

> A social formation […] lacks organic unity and is no way 'centred' upon individuals; but it cannot succeed in reproducing itself unless those individuals are permitted the illusion that the world 'hails' them, shows some regard for their faculties, addresses itself to them as one subject to another, and it is this fiction which ideology for Althusser exists to foster.[52]

Liz gets self-assurance by placing herself "within reach of the field of reflection of a mirror". Participating in *The Recruiting Officer* gives her a chance to find out the potential strengths within herself. So social formation or integration becomes possible by placing the individual into a similar situation drawn from the performed play. Jacques Lacan, the French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist, argues that:

> [T]he transition within a generation from the solitary to the gregarious form can be obtained by exposing the individual, at a certain stage, to the exclusively visual action of a similar image, provided it is animated by movements of a style sufficiently close to that characteristic of the species.[53]

Liz overcomes her passivity with the help of Ralph, who discovers her skills. Importantly, by making the characters of Liz and Ralph take the lead roles in act two, Wertenbaker intends to show the hierarchal relation between male and female artists. Ralph, as the director of *The Recruiting Officer*, chooses the cast and gives them instructions on how to act properly. More than that, he encourages them and assigns the most suitable role for each participant. His insistence on including Liz in the rehearsal of the play reveals Ralph's role in Liz's discovery. In doing so, Liz owes him a great deal.

Our Country's Good ends with Ralph's affirmation of the importance of theatre as a therapeutic experiment: "The theatre is like a small republic, it requires private sacrifices for the good of the whole", (2, 11, 280). Liz Morden finds a way to speak to other people and to communicate and interact with others in a way that is not aggressive, through theatre. It is

[52] Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1990), p. 88.
[53] Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience", in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* (4th edition), ed. John Storey (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 256-257.

portrayed as an instigator for the individuals to act. In doing so, the marginalized voices begin to be heard. This theme is clearly associated with women. In different parts of the play we see that their aspirations to be empowered are high. In *Our Country's Good*, for example, Dabby Bryant asserts, "We women have to look after each other. Let's learn the lines", (1, 8, 216). In another place, she says, "A woman should look after her own interests, that's all", (2, 7, 258). This fruitful experience, which is done collectively, recalls Wertenbaker's work with the director, Max Stafford-Clark.

Our Country's Good serves as a good example of the joint work between the director and the writer. Working with Stafford-Clark, Wertenbaker developed her playwriting through research-driven workshops. This approach was suitable for facilitating the dilemmas of time and a restricted budget which affected playwrights. Bush maintains that:

> [b]y the time Stafford-Clark worked with Wertenbaker, Joint Stock [theatre company] had defined the notion of 'workshop' within British theatre as a means of helping a commissioned writer research and develop a script by drawing from responses of performers to research, discussion and structured improvisation, and of helping the company as a whole to develop an understanding about the themes of the play.[54]

Moreover, Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good* (1988) "celebrates the discovery of resources through language and of subversive strategy through theatre, and this liberal element of celebration is arguably a principal reason for its popular acclaim and success for Max Stafford-Clark's regime at the Royal Court".[55]

Although Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good* focuses on the function of theatre in society, she raises genuine questions about the dilemma of women playwrights and artists in general.

Like other British women playwrights, Wertenbaker devotes her works to dealing with the issues of women writers in their attempts to acquire a positive status. In answer to a question about the positive attitudes to women by contemporary women playwrights, Betty Caplan, an Australian playwright and theatre critic, reports that "there are plenty of women writers confronting the dilemmas of our lives in their plays – Caryl Churchill, Timberlake

[54] Sophie Bush, *The Theatre of Timberlake Wertenbaker*, p. 146.
[55] David Ian Rabey, *English Drama Since 1940*, p. 140.

Wertenbaker, Sarah Daniels, to name but a few".[56] In the case of Wertenbaker, the dilemmas of female artists are connected with the problems of mothering and child-rearing which seem less important to male artists as we shall see in the next play, *The Break of Day* (1995).

4.4 Maternal Longing and the Figure of Female Artist: *The Break of Day* (1995)

The Break of Day (1995) is a scathing criticism of the art world in which social and cultural systems (hospitals, schools, theatres) are in a state of collapse. Verna A. Foster, an English professor in drama argues that, "Wertenbaker's characters […] complain especially about the erosion in healthcare and education and underfunding of the arts".[57] So the dilemma of the artist is represented by the question of how to find a way forward and out of this moment of paralysis and despair.

Drawing on Chekhov's *The Three Sisters*, *The Break of Day* tells the story of three middle class and 'feminist' sisters who find themselves perplexed at the edge of the new millennium. Tess is an editor of a women's magazine; Nina is a singer-songwriter who feels creatively barren, though her American husband, Hugh, is trying to push her ahead, and April lectures in classics at a university. Each of them shares the same pessimistic attitude towards the 1990s. This pessimistic feeling is aggravated by their being childless. So the play is a kind of meditation on being an artist with a desperate urge to have children. While April chooses to be childless, Tess and Nina spend the play trying to achieve motherhood: one by medical means and the other through adoption. Within three acts, Wertenbaker's characters show their immediate obsessions. Act one centres around Tess's fortieth birthday and her concern about dying without a child. Because of their inability to conceive naturally, act two follows Tess and Nina's attempts to have children. While Tess explores this through medical intervention, Nina and Hugh travel to Western Europe to adopt. Act three sums up the situation of most of the characters.

However, besides the three sisters, the play presents other characters who are also struggling, such as Jamie, a doctor, who gets fed up with the British medical system, and Tess's actor-husband Robert, who aspires to work in theatre, instead of television.

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[56] Lizbeth Goodman and Jane de Gay, *Feminist Stages: Interviews with Women in Contemporary British Theatre* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996), p. 182.

[57] Verna A. Foster, "After Chekhov: The Three Sisters of Beth Henley, Wendy Wasserstein, Timberlake Wertenbaker, and Blake Morrison", *Comparative Drama*, v. 47, n. 4 (Winter 2013): 457.

As the play begins with the three sisters, we see that Tess, though successful, looks back nostalgically to the 1970s when feminism was in its heyday. Nina feels that England, where she lives, is a wasteland which "sort of makes you silent", in a way that "you're not encouraged to look", (1, 15-17).[58] Similarly, April is disillusioned by the new principles of ideology, commenting that, "Dictatorships use force. Democracies convince you you are wrong", (1, 12).

This mental recession is felt from the very beginning of the play as the three talk about their feminist past as a utopian time which no longer exists. Accordingly, they "struggle to find feminism relevant to their lives, or, more specifically, to view it as [an] energising force".[59]

However, the dilemma of the artist in this play is represented by two characters: Nina, a singer-songwriter, as stated before, and Robert, an actor who plays the role of Vershinin in Chekhov's *Three Sisters*. Bringing together all the main characters, who are closely related, in Tess's house is meant to reveal different aspects of the artist's dilemma by comparing the past experience with the present, as we shall see.

As the play proceeds, we know that the three women come together in Tess's house to celebrate her fortieth birthday (Irina's name day in Chekhov's *Three Sisters*). There, they engage in a heated discussion about the century, which reveals their predicament. In contrast to their joyful feminist past, which was enriching and empowering, they find themselves hopeless and dissatisfied with their personal and professional lives.

Significantly, the mental recession counterpoints the biological recession of childhood. All three women are childless, as mentioned before. In their fortieth year, they discover that they cannot have children without medical intervention. This fact increases the dilemma of female artists who are torn between their dedication to art and their personal lives. Though they sacrifice their life to art, they find it difficult to confront the art market which tends to marginalize women's contributions in spite of their great efforts. This dilemma is aggravated by the new millennium as materialism becomes the only value in society. Consequently, it creates a kind of spiritual hollowness. Thus, Wertenbaker's opinions on sterility are reminiscent of the arguments in *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* which she goes on to develop in *The Break of Day*. Contrastingly, here, the dilemma of the artist is associated with other issues such as mothering and the corruption of social and cultural institutions. In commenting

[58] Timberlake Wertenbaker, *The Break of Day* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995). All subsequent quotations will be from this edition.
[59] Elaine Aston, *Feminist Views on the English Stage: Women Playwrights*, 1990-2000 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 153.

on the 1990s, Wertenbaker recalls Nina's pronouncements in which she maintains that there is "something intellectually despairing in the world, as if solutions no longer exist". As a result, this situation leads to the "increased cocooning of the senses and the mind".[60] So, the feeling of hollowness is reflected in the lives of the three women, especially Nina, who cannot make up her mind. Unlike in the past, Nina has no words for her new songs even when she is encouraged by Hugh, her husband and record producer, and Tess, to write these songs as she did in previous times where "[They] felt so powerful. There you were, an all-female band, and I was the only woman reporter on a rock magazine. Women were exploding everywhere, with their anger, hunger, confidence, all those possibilities. We talked all night, you must remember", (1, 4). Nina hopelessly states that, "Joni Mitchell did it twenty years ago: 'They've paved paradise and put up a parking lot.' You can't write that song now", (1, 4). The past achievements of feminism, which Tess joyfully refers to, have diminished with the appearance of commercialism and the market place. This bitter truth is rightly described by Mihail, a lawyer, who states in act two, "Now I see the ideals are gone. People talk freely, but only about money. Idealism has turned on its head, everyone looks after himself in a world of chaos", (2, 82).

Among other things, by beginning the play with a discussion about feminism, Wertenbaker tries to touch upon the issue of the underrepresentation of women writers. More importantly, the employment of three females as the main characters is meant to empower the role of women, whom Wertenbaker herself feels are marginalized, especially in the main stages. In relation to this, Susan Carlson argues that, "[i]n the late 1990s, troubled by the diminished presence of women writers and women characters on that stage, Wertenbaker has felt called upon to take up, again her part in re-establishing women's theatre".[61] So, inspired by Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, Wertenbaker's *The Break of Day* "examines its women's stories and the relationships among those women. Therefore, in taking stock of British Chekhov, Wertenbaker also takes stock of the position of women and British feminism at the end of the century"[62] as Stuart Young puts it.

Moreover, Wertenbaker wants to focus on the importance of solidarity among women writers. Tess utters this fact as she says to Nina, "What's feminism for if we still hate each

[60] Quoted in Sophie Bush, *The Theatre of Timberlake Wertenbaker*, p. 19.
[61] Susan Carlson, "Language and identity in Timberlake Wertenbaker's plays", (eds.) Elaine Aston and Janelle Reinelt, *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Women Playwrights*, p., 147.
[62] Stuart Young, "Fin-de-siècle Reflections and Revisions: Wertenbaker Challenges British Chekhov Tradition in The Break of Day", *Modern Drama*, v. 41, n. 3 (Fall 1998): 447.

other?" (1, 27). As such, the three women are 'sisters' not through blood relations but their feminist consciousness which they try to emphasize. So, when Nina says, "I must have met Hugh then. He was sent by his record company" (1, 4), Tess comments, "That was because they realized women even had the power to sell albums. It was almost exactly twenty years ago – a week after my twentieth birthday", (1, 4).

Tess, among the three sisters, is highly concerned with the empowerment of women. This is clearly shown in her decision to marry Robert, Nina's ex-lover. She states:

> I felt I had a right to what I wanted. It goes with the empowerment I felt all my life. Born into this heroic empire – that's what they taught us – educated, national-healthed. Then the sixties when all you had to do was be very young. Being a woman in the seventies, then being in London and clever in the eighties, making money despite myself, buying this house. And now – (1, 5)

However, the past Tess talks about has nothing to do with the present sterility of Nina who sadly says:

> Tess is raking up the past – how we stood in front of life with all those possibilities – not because we were young but because it was that moment. I don't feel powerful at all, is that because of this moment? But since you only see with the eyes given to you by the moment you live in, how can you fight it? Who'll give you the map showing the passage out? (1, 7)

This theme of sterility is highlighted by a comparison between England and America. Paul, whom we know nothing about, appears almost at the end of act one and reveals that:

> […] If it doesn't rain soon, this lawn is going to die, all the lawns of England will die, all the gardens will wither. We'll have to do what they do in California and create desert gardens, but California is yellow anyway, whereas England is deep green. That would make me unhappy, if England became yellow. I've never understood how people can leave England for Greece and Spain. (1, 8)

Wertenbaker uses botanical images or imagery to reflect this theme of sterility. To refer to her inactivity, Hugh addresses Nina, saying, "What a perfect morning. Clear, green, English. I still love this country – although it's not as green as it used to be: look at your grass", (1, 6).

Death and resurrection is a recurrent theme in Wertenbaker's plays. Here, the words 'clear', 'green' and 'grass' refer to Nina's temporal and psychological states. Even though she now feels inactive, her ideas for songs will be restored again. As in *After Darwin*, ideas of human life can be evolved and resurrected. So, Nina divulges to Robert, "I compose lullabies in my head. I can't tell Hugh", (1, 26).

Like Stephen in *Three Birds Alighting on a Field*, Nina feels alien and fragmented because society "make[s] you feel there's no value in speaking", (1, 12). To Hugh, Nina's refusal to write songs is self-appraisal for her anxiety and a reaction to society: "I know these artists. They all get mesmerized by this idea of silence, because they're angry or they want to punish themselves. It's no good. You've seen Nina in front of an audience, you know it's the closest she comes to happiness", (1, 10).

As mentioned before, the dilemma of the artist is connected with the other sectors of society to include the corruption of social and cultural institutions. In this sense, Young argues that in *The Break of Day*, "[m]otifs of barrenness and frustration" occur not only at a personal level, "but seem to characterise a whole society".[63] The social corruption of contemporary Britain is evoked by Jamie, a doctor, and Tess's brother, who bemoans the prevalence of materialism which supersedes the old tradition. For the sake of money-making, the officials "[…] want to close down the whole hospital. It's in here! My hospital, the oldest, the best. I've worked all my life to become a consultant in a big NHS hospital. There's been nowhere better to be", (1, 12). Likewise, April indicates the corruption of a cultural institution which tries "to close the classics department at my university. We fought". As a result, and to avoid the closure of the classics department, April surrenders to the capriciousness of the authorities at the expense of academic standards:

> We compromised. We no longer teach Greek and Latin. It's classics in translation, without the bone, the beauty of the original language. And the classes trebled. We thought we'd won, but I suppose really we lost. Now they

[63] Ibid., p. 450.

> want us to make the degrees easier. We take weak students, we give them a good degree, they haven't learned anything but the university looks good.
>
> (1,12)

Apparently, Tess's occasion becomes an ideological outlet for all the participants to reveal their agonies to each other and find solutions. Robert uses this occasion to ask for help in making a decision about his future job. He is offered two jobs either playing Vershinin in Chekhov's *Three Sisters* or doing "a television series about hospitals". The dilemma for Robert is how to secure money for either job. Sometimes, financial reasons can paralyse the artist and prompt them to accept everything. In his speech about acting in a television series, Robert maintains that "[….] It's badly written and the subject's been done many times before. But it's money. I feel embarrassed even saying this, the decision must seem unimportant. Being an actor is unimportant", (1,13).

Likewise, Robert complains about the lack of money and the paucity of a good audience who want to watch theatre and judge it sensibly:

> How can I tour for nine months for no money with a tiny theatre company no one will watch? And yet, last night, I opened the door on a whole world. And those three sisters suspended in an odd paralysis at the end of their century, with a cataclysm already in formation. There's something familiar about that paralysis, feeling outside history, I wanted to explore it – well – […] Being an actor isn't responsible. It might be if it were valued. I keep reading articles on why no one wants to go to the theatre. I'm convinced. (1,15)

Robert reveals the difficulty of being an actor or working in the theatre with a small budget. His concerns about money and the paucity of a good audience are reflected in Wertenbaker's words about her own career and how she has sometimes thought about giving up playwriting: "[e]very year I thought about giving it up. I mean, every year I've continued to think of giving it up. So it's not an easy life being a playwright. I mean, maybe it is for some playwrights, but it hasn't been for me particularly".[64]

Referring to Chekhov's *Three Sisters,* Wertenbaker tries to show the post-revolutionary experience in Eastern Europe while at the same time highlighting "the parochialism of contemporary Britain, *The Break of Day* implicitly argues for the need to acknowledge the

[64] Timberlake Wertenbaker, *Interview with Sophie Bush*, London, 11 February 2010.

social, political and economic circumstances of Chekhov's world".[65] For Robert, Chekhov is hailed because of his ability to "make you look, but what's the point if nobody goes to look at him", (1, 15). Unlike Chekhov's world, the new culture is filled with misery. In the same vein, Nina sees misery in every corner of society, even in the language used: "I was reading about Eastern Europe the other day, and the writer says culture is what allows society to understand itself. What struck me most was his confidence in using that word. I used to love that title: singer-songwriter. It feels meaningless. Using words, it's called chatter. Music, it's called sounds", (1, 18). Therefore, to achieve change in favour of the future, you have to make sure that there is "someone [who] will be there to listen to you, not only now – in the future", (1, 19).

The image of biological sterility associated with Wertenbaker's three sisters is expanded by the introduction of Marisa, Nick's girlfriend. Her pregnancy is poignant since Marisa has what the three sisters want. So, she is not welcomed by the other two who consider her to be an outsider to this coalition. Marisa, like Natasha in *Three Sisters,* does not belong to Wertenbaker's sisters. In other words, "she doesn't come from a family like this […] arty-farty, she's more – she's political" and a vegetarian (1, 20). She is an anti-model to the three sisters. It is because Nina and April are childless that Tess has invited them to her birthday and to "validate each other. Get back some of the passion of our early days when that was the last thing we wanted", (1, 35). Marisa's pregnancy discloses the fragility of their claims. Simultaneously, it exposes the differences among the three women. Because of their jealousy, Tess and Nina urge Marisa to have an abortion for the sake of Nick, Hugh's son (Nina's stepson). April, the most generous of the three 'sisters' defends Marisa's decision to have the baby and accuses Tess of "betraying feminism" publicly (1, 33).

The void experienced by Tess and Nina comes from their lack of children. This maternal deprivation has a strong sense of reality which cannot be eliminated. This desire for motherhood is the main reason behind Nina's paralysis. She tells Robert, "I tried to write a song about it once, this void inside us, insatiable, unfillable. You don't have it", (1, 26). Unlike the Prozorov sisters, Wertenbaker's sisters are still unhappy because "they do not feel they are working for the future".[66] This avid desire for motherhood is clearly manifested by Tess who justifies her negative reaction to Marisa:

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[65] Sophie Bush, *The Theatre of Timberlake Wertenbaker*, p. 445.
[66] Quoted in Verna A. Foster, "After Chekhov: The Three Sisters of Beth Henley, Wendy Wasserstein, Timberlake Wertenbaker, and Blake Morrison", p. 459.

> I want a child. I was horrible to Marisa because I was envious, because she has what I want. I could bring it up, I could give it love, and nature goes for an irresponsible girl who only wants a doll. I've been trying for three years, I'm forty years old. I'm in biological recession. I want a child. I've never wanted anything so badly. (1, 34)

April is still not content with Tess's justification, reminding her that "[h]aving a child isn't the only purpose of a woman's life. That was our credo", (1, 34). The three sisters have given their careers priority over having families. This fact, which is perceived later, prompts Nina and Tess to spend act two looking for any opportunity to have a baby. While April chooses to remain childless, Nina and Tess devote themselves to achieving this end.

Unlike act one, which is set in a garden, act two is set in two places: partly in an unnamed Eastern-European country, and partly in a fertility clinic in England. Both acts are linked by the theme of barrenness. In contrast to act one, "the second act follows Brechtian precedents, demonstrating that change is not only necessary but possible, as Tess and Nina become engaged in action designed to bring them the children they desire".[67]

Nina's journey to adopt a child is successful with the help of Mihail. Accordingly, the void she felt before as an artist diminishes. On the contrary, it becomes a stimulus to go on writing to secure a good future life: "I'll use some of the music we've heard here. I have to do something for the family. I want to", (2, 68). Tess continues trying with IVF even though April thinks that it "is a male conspiracy to sell women drugs", (2, 61).

The most important thing at the end of *The Break of Day* is that Tess and Nina never give up or are defeated. Despite the black vision which is presented by Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, Wertenbaker's sisters believe in a hopeful future and wait for the dawn to rise again. This theme is clearly manifested by Mihail:

> […] I loved the future, even if I feared the present, with its sudden disgraces. I refuse to recant. I still believe in history. Now, it will be in the hands of the children, possibly most of all, these cross-border children I have helped to get out. Born in one country, loved and raised in another, I hope they will not descend into narrow ethnic identification, but that they will be wilfully international, part of a great European community. I hope they will carry on

[67] Sophie Bush, *The Theatre of Timberlake Wertenbaker*, p. 189.

> history with broad minds and warm hearts. They have the complexity from their childhood: change, migration and indifference and uncertainty came to them early. Now, cherished, secure, educated. Is it unfair of me to place the responsibility of history onto them? We must not go into the next century with no ideal but selfishness. (2, 82-83)

By referring again to the role of Vershinin, performed by Robert, Wertenbaker wants "to comment directly on the links between *Three Sisters* and *The Break of Day*".[68] Wertenbaker rejects the sense of despair *Three Sisters* envisioned at the close of the century. Robert states that, "Today, I tried playing Vershinin as a pompous dreamer. It didn't work. What's difficult is to find that belief in the future, it's the most dated part of the play", (2, 70).

Like *Three Birds Alighting on a Field*, the ending of *The Break of Day* proposes the notion of the ability of theatre to effect social and personal transformation. So, Tess maintains, "That's fine for the three sisters, they come to terms with their lives, but this is the twentieth century. I won't accept defeat", (3, 90).

However, reviewing *The Break of Day* reveals that it was not well received by the critics. The English novelist, playwright and journalist Louise Doughty claimed that the play was more of "an interesting dinner party debate than a drama".[69] Similarly, it has been said that "big issues do not important dramas make,"[70] hinting that the play deals with a number of themes which are not sufficiently explored. Its theme "ranges over variously the anguish of infertility, the contemporary situation of women, the closure of hospitals, the threat to universities, the role of culture and the state of the arts today, New Labour and Bosnia".[71]

Commenting on the reviewers' reactions, Wertenbaker argues, "They didn't make the effort to understand it, which shocked me actually because I think they should have made that effort … [But] they like to give bad reviews".[72]

Again and again Wertenbaker returns to the theme of art and the nature of the relationship between male and female artists. In her oeuvre throughout the 1990s and after, this relationship is put under the microscope to examine the role of gender and its effect on women's works. As

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[68] Geraldine Cousin, "Revisiting the Prozorovs", *Modern Drama*, v. 40, n. 3 (Fall 1997): 326.
[69] Louise Doughty, Review of *The Break of Day*, at the Royal Court, *Mail on Sunday*, 3 December 1995.
[70] Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge, *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting*, p. 144.
[71] Quoted in Stuart Young, "Fin-de-siècle Reflections and Revisions: Wertenbaker Challenges British Chekhov Tradition in The Break of Day", p. 445.
[72] Wertenbaker cited in Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge, *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting*, p. 144.

mentioned before, Wertenbaker's *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* (1991) and *The Line* (2009) truly reflect the provocative relationship which is represented by Stephen/Fiona and Degas/Suzanne respectively. Although both plays share similar themes, they differ in terms of narrative and style. These disparities make it productive to examine each play individually for the sake of comparison and similarity at the end.

4.5 Individualism versus Capitalism: *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* (1991)

In her answer to my question about the role of female artists and their relationship to male artists in the contemporary art scene, as reflected in *Three Birds Alighting on a Field*, Bush states that:

> *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* is an interesting play which, amongst other things, is looking at gender and the artist because of the dichotomy between Stephen's way of being an artist and Fiona's way of being an artist and the fact that Stephen has taught Fiona. She's been his pupil. There is a hierarchical relationship there similarly to how women might have been intimidated about getting involved in art which can seem perhaps to be a man's game.[73]

Thus Stephen's journey throughout the play needs due attention to see how Wertenbaker frames the figure of the male/female artist to comment on numerous themes such as the situation of contemporary art, the gender of the artist and the social function of art in society.

Three Birds Alighting on a Field is Wertenbaker's first play of 1991 which is very much about the negative outcomes of the Thatcherite legacy during the 1980s and its unforgettable impact on the art world in the 1990s. It is a world which is highly affected by monetarism as the only recognizable value. In the 1990s, Sierz asserts "commerce proved stronger than experiment".[74] Subsequently, the dilemma of the artist may arise from his attempts to confront these values. The play is hailed by Wertenbaker herself as "[t]he most enriching aspect of writing [which] can be this exploration of an unknown world".[75] The main contest the play poses is the polemic relationship between wealth and art as a business. Esther Beth Sullivan argues that, "Wertenbaker seems more interested in focusing on structures of wealth so that

[73] My interview with Sophie Bush on 9 February 2016.
[74] Aleks Sierz, *Modern British Playwriting: the 1990s*, p. 77.
[75] Timberlake Wertenbaker, *Timberlake Wertenbaker: Plays One*, p. ix.

socialist foundations can be portrayed as 'a site of permanent political contest'".[76] In doing so, Wertenbaker explores the corrupt world of contemporary art. Like *Our Country's Good*, which is a call for the value of theatre, *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* is a call for the value of art. But while this value is discovered by the characters themselves in the former, the latter play shows "how Art is also corrupted by the price put on it by a cynical society".[77]

This contest is portrayed in the play through a heated discussion between an aristocratic lady, Biddy, and a former successful painter, Stephen. In spite of his success, Stephen finds himself out of fashion, feeling deluded and isolated in a new atmosphere which is affected by the ethics of money. He is referred to as a socialist who "hasn't recovered from the sixties", (1, 6, 380). Significantly enough, Stephen's identity as an artist is revealed by others before his first appearance in scene eight, entitled, "The Artist's Model".

The play is set in London's contemporary art scene. Its plot focuses on various characters such as artists, auctioneers, valueless dealers, a female American critic and art gallery runners who attempt to improve their social status. The most important character is Biddy Andreas, a wealthy aristocratic lady who discovers through experience the false nature of wealth which distinguishes her from others. Biddy is blinded by wealth only to be remedied again when she discovers the work of an angry, neglected English landscape artist, Stephen.

As mentioned before, the setting of the play is significant as it takes place in a contemporary London gallery. This type of setting serves as an indication of time shifts within contemporary British theatre. It is also used as a location which Homi K. Bhabha describes as the "turning of boundaries and limits into the *in-between* spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated. It is from such narrative positions between cultures and nations, theories and texts, the political, the poetic and the painterly, [and] the past and the present"[78] that the world of art is revealed. (Italics in original.) To put it differently, the nation is addressed through the ambivalent attitude towards the art world. Thus, Stephen seems shocked by these two authorities: the cultural dimension of art and the political authority of money. Here, we have two cultures: one which is represented by an aristocrat, Biddy, who is after materialistic success in art and the other which is represented by Stephen, who looks for

[76] Esther Beth Sullivan, "Hailing Ideology, Acting in the Horizon, and Reading between Plays by Timberlake Wertenbaker", *Theatre Journal*, p. 151.
[77] Quoted in Susan Carlson, "Language and identity in Timberlake Wertenbaker's plays", (eds.) Elaine Aston and Janelle Reinelt, *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Women Playwrights*. p., 138.
[78] Homi K. Bhabha, "Introduction: narrating the nation", in *Nation and Narration*, ed., Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 4. For more analysis of Bhabha's theories of hybridity, see Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, Routledge, 1994).

genuine values in art. In London's art scene, those two cultures interact to create a new hybrid one, that is, 'cultural hybridization'. The differences between Stephen and Biddy are removed when he agrees to draw her at the end of the play.

The opening scene commences with an auction where a "totally flat, authentically white" canvas is exposed to the bidders. This beginning with a completely white canvas, finds its resonance in Yasmina Reza's *Art* where Marc, one of the characters, is resentful of his friend Serge buying a white canvas for £200,000, saying "[…] I don't believe in the values which dominate contemporary art. The rule of novelty. The rule of surprise. Surprise is dead meat, Serge. No sooner conceived than dead".[79] Similarly, Wertenbaker uses the first scene to put us into the world of a contemporary auction and to show the modern trends of contemporary art which depend on individual viewers for evaluation. In this atmosphere, there is no explicit naming for the bidders. Even Biddy, the very rich lady who has won Lot 208 is referred to as Madam. This episode ends with Lot 209 which reveals: "an illuminated billboard by Laura Hellish", with pink lights stating, "ART IS SEXY, ART IS MONEY, ART IS MONEY-SEXY, ART IS MONEY-SEXY-SOCIAL-CLIMBING-FANTASTIC", (1, 1, 362). Through this gravestone-like image the contemporary mood towards art is disclosed. So, the satirical tone is felt from the very beginning of the play. Again this sarcastic tone reveals two facts: the first is the attitude of artists to dealing with the immediate issues of the 20th century related to women, such as rape and marginalization. The second is the employment of art to criticize society where materialism takes precedence. As such, art is associated with mundane ends by which individuals can ascend the social ladder. This truth is reaffirmed by Jeremy, an art dealer, at the close of act one:

> Great art … great art happens two or three times a century. But there's a fair amount of beauty around. Why should beauty be cheap? I know people come and buy paintings because they want status, but they get beauty thrown in. That's a good deal, at any price. (1, 11, 410)

This aspect of art can be seen in Tracy Emin's ugly and funny works. In her article on "Rape Trauma, the State, and the Art of Tracey Emin", Yxta Maya Murray, an American novelist, states that, "Emin reveals for us a more complete picture of rape reactions, one where the victim

[79] Yasmina Reza, *Art*, 1994; trans. YR and Christopher Hampton (London, 1996), p. 61.

resists not only her rapist, but also an uncaring society. Moreover, she does so with vigorous and ample critiques".[80]

Interestingly, all the scenes are given painterly titles to trace the identity of art and its function in society: "Portrait of Biddy in Profile", "The Artist's Model", "Black", "Black on Black" and even "Untitled". As the events go on, we are told that Biddy is married to a Greek tycoon, "a creepy foreign social climber", (1, 6, 378) who is obsessed with the behaviour of being English. Again, Wertenbaker uses women's voices as a means of empowerment. In the description of herself, Biddy says, "I was like the final touches of a well-decorated house. It gives pleasure, but you don't notice it. The sound of my voice was what mattered, it made people feel secure", (1, 2, 362-363). Yoyo admires Biddy for her pedigree and becomes her ambassador in English society "as she learns about both art and the business of art".[81] As an art collector, Biddy finds herself in a direct struggle with Stephen who rejects her market's interest in art. So he rejects her offer of buying his paintings and eventually decides to give them away to Constantin, a 'revolutionary' Romanian who believes in art as a healing therapy for the devastated Romanian people.

The discussion of art and its value in society takes different themes among the characters of the play. While Jeremy, the runner for the art gallery, denies the facts of art, Alex, an American gallery consultant, feels that "[i]t's time to look at the facts (1, 3, 365)" in contemporary art. The facts which Alex recommends are those that ignore the quality or content of artwork. This discussion is heightened by making a comparison between the English preference for avant-garde painting and the American preference for naturalistic landscapes. To Jeremy, in England, art is governed by the market's laws: "[o]ur painters aren't taught to draw any more. They wouldn't risk themselves on a tree. It's very difficult to do a tree", (1, 3, 368). As said before, the modern trend of art is connected with business by which aristocratic people show their social status. So the marriage of art and business is greatly championed by Lady Lelouche when she receives Yoyo's donation of £1 million for the opera house: "Whenever I look at a businessman I think of marriage. […] I think, that is, of the marriage of business and art. What better partnership than Art – fine, delicate and often wayward – looked after by powerful and hard-headed Business. Yes, let us wish this marriage long and lasting happiness", (1, 4, 370-71).

[80] Yxta Maya Murray, "Rape Trauma, the State, and the Art of Tracey Emin", p. 1706.
[81] Esther Beth Sullivan, "Hailing Ideology, Acting in the Horizon, and Reading between Plays by Timberlake Wertenbaker", *Theatre Journal*, p. 151.

The negative side of this marriage is the transformation of art into commerce. This is hinted at in the word 'wayward' which means the divergent path in art where Lelouche confides, "I hope some of these art people got my word of warning, we can't have too much waste and irresponsibility any more", (1, 4, 372). Thus, business becomes the controlling factor in the present art world. In other words, "[m]arket rationality inevitably enlists aesthetic values and decision-making in its operations".[82] Accordingly, the value of art is determined by the personal desire of the sponsors, not the objective ethical standards. This truth is clearly shown by David, Lelouche's colleague, when he encourages Yoyo to "state a preference for tunes" in his funding of the new opera since he is the only one who has the final decision. So, "Don't let them intimidate you with all this artistic independence nonsense", he adds, "You paid the money, you call the tune", (1, 4, 372). What matters to Lelouche and David is commercial success outside artistic value. This philosophy of evaluating things indicates a change in English values which prompts Jeremy to declare, "People change. […] We're all slaves to fashion", (2, 3, 419).

Wertenbaker was not content for sponsorship to be a substitute for public subsidy for different reasons. Firstly, the writer will lose his free will in the sense that the artist will achieve the sponsors' approval. Secondly, there will be no equality among writers in commissioning opportunities which depend entirely on those sponsors.

Though the majority of the characters talk about the ebb and flow of the art market, Stephen seems immune to this approach. This fact is uttered by Fiona, a young artist who was once Stephen's pupil and lover: "[y]ou rail against the marketplace like some effete modern composer", (1, 8, 387). Stephen, like Degas in Wertenbaker's *The Line* (2009), is unsatisfied with the hectic obsession of the present art markets. He prefers to stay away from this world, refusing to show his work. Even when Fiona reminds him of his previous preaching that art should be public, he replies that "[t]he world has changed. The public doesn't deserve art", (1, 8, 388). As mentioned before, one of the dilemmas that faced contemporary artists was the paucity of good audiences who objectively evaluate art. Wertenbaker argues that "[t]he enemy, however, is not a brutal system, but a society where nothing is valued for itself, something all too easy to internalize".[83]

[82] Monique Roelofs, *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 157.
[83] Timberlake Wertenbaker, *Timberlake Wertenbaker: Plays One*, p. ix.

Stephen spends the play looking for a way out of this commercial world in which he finds himself. Wertenbaker presents him as an artist and a model. Though the scene of "The Artist's Model" shows Fiona taking this role, it soon becomes apparent that it is not easy to turn the gendered role upside down. On the contrary, he is shown not only as an artist but also a teacher who gives Fiona constant instructions about art and life: "All those years teaching you detail", (1, 8, 385). His authoritative language towards her is shown when Fiona starts sketching him: "Assurance and speed. […] Will it be my back or a generalized back? Do it again", (1, 8, 385). After she finishes, he anticipates Fiona's painting saying, "I'm sure you've made it too elaborate. You always do. […] You've made me look old". As his pupil, Fiona reacts by saying: "I drew what I saw. You taught me not to flatter", (1, 8, 388). Fiona's answer reflects Wertenbaker's commitment to the idea of art and theatre which "should never be used to flatter, but to reveal, which is to disturb".[84]

The relationship between Stephen and Fiona is quite similar to that of Degas and Suzanne in *The Line*. Though it was written nearly two decades after *Three Birds Alighting on a Field*, Wertenbaker again and again returns to the value of art in society. Her phobia about art falling into the mire of commercialism makes her resist this attitude. As such, the artist should be loyal and committed to his art. This idea of commitment prompts Stephen to mock Fiona's decision about marriage:

> **Fiona**: […] I'd like to be faithful: a new experience. I've treated men like restaurants. You were my favourite, but I liked to try the food in the others. I'd like some stability. I know that sounds Victorian.
>
> **Stephen**: No, worse: new age. You're having your first show in a glitzy gallery. Isn't that enough? You don't want babies as well, do you?
>
> **Fiona**: Why not? You did.
>
> **Stephen**: It's not the same. Fiona, you won't paint. I know it. I'll have wasted my time. (1, 8, 386)

Stephen expresses his worries that Fiona will stop painting after marriage as she will become preoccupied with other responsibilities outside art. Unlike Stephen's static view of the world,

[84] Ned Chaillet, "Wertenbaker, Timberlake", *entry in Contemporary Dramatists* (4th edition), ed. D. L. Kirkpatrick (London: St. James Press, 1988), p. 554.

Fiona believes in her ability to change people's artistic tastes: "Maybe it's changing again. I can make it change. You can. I will make it change", (1, 8, 388).

Digging deeply into the personal life of the artist, we can see that financial and economic dilemmas hinder his mission. In act one, scene ten, the bright artistic past which Stephen talks about no longer exists in a changing era of commercialism. Marianne, Stephen's wife, tries hard to wake him from that beautiful dream: "This going back to nature stuff. It was all right in the sixties, but to do it in the eighties? It's perverse. I don't think a real artist is perverse, I think a real artist reflects the times", (1, 10, 396).

The sharp contrast between Stephen and Marianne is established by their different attitudes towards art. While Marianne insists on him going to "see other people's work" and going with the current spirit of the commercial age, Stephen sticks to his old view of art which instils moral values in human life. He tells Marianne: "I'm not interested in art taken from the art magazines, I'm interested in this, these shapes, this energy around us, these trees growing … why don't you look? Try to feel something? Forget about money for five minutes", (1, 10, 397).

Nevertheless, being loyal to a certain school of painting does not eliminate other responsibilities. The artist as a human being has other commitments which go hand in hand with his profession. These social commitments may lead the artist away from his creativity, which is a fact that Stephen and Degas try to warn their pupils against after marriage. The difficulties and requirements of life force the artist to adopt certain trends that he is not content with. In spite of this, Marianne justifiably reminds Stephen:

> I have bills to pay, Stephen. I don't throw them in the fire the way you did when those bailiffs came around and you stopped teaching. It's all very well for you to look at me with contempt and treat me like a nag, but I don't have a studio to escape to, I devoted my life to you, and now I have nothing to show for it. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. (1,10,397)

In addition to the value of art and the role of the artist in society, Wertenbaker sheds light on the dialectical relationship between the artist and the critic, which seems hostile. This reflects Wertenbaker's own life. Throughout her career, she experienced antagonistic relationships with reviewers and critics. In the play, this relationship is represented by the character of Jean, an American reviewer for *Élan*. Though Stephen does not hide his disgust towards her, Jean amplifies her role which is demanded by:

> Everybody [who] reads my magazine. I determine style. I tell people what's important. […] It's not enough to look with modern art. You have to understand. Good modern art must be difficult. And so it needs us – the interpreters. Art criticism is undervalued in this country, the English are so amateur about everything. In America you'll soon be able to get a degree in it. (1,11,403)

Again the role of the critic is highlighted through a comparison between England and America. Wertenbaker concentrates on location to delineate the dilemmas faced by the artist and the critic within the contemporary British art scene. Unlike those in England, Jean emphasises that "[…] the critic these days is the equal of the artist and without the critic to point out significance and deconstruct it, the artist's work is incomplete. Every artist needs a good critic and if you don't have one, you're nothing", (1, 11, 403). Stephen's reaction to her preaching about criticism is a kind of mockery: "[…] Why don't you write about pots and pans and stop smearing art with your lipstick mind?" (1, 11, 405). In this scene entitled "Private View", the character of Stephen gets added weight.

Stephen seems to revolt against everything in modern culture. He strongly revolts against the new ethics which value money more than genuine beauty. What ails him about the modern age is the loss of sincerity. For him, values nowadays have changed drastically. Unlike in the past, art is now judged superficially by those who look for false appearances and profit margins. When Stephen meets Biddy, he soon reveals his hatred for the rich because of their blind behaviour: "Do you know what I hate about the rich? They can't spot a compliment from an insult. You buy your way out of criticism of your behaviour and you feel you can ignore the difference between good and evil – if you even remember there is a difference", (1, 11, 407).

Biddy's character is given due attention in the play. She, like Liz in *Our Country's Good*, goes on a journey to discover the true values in art and in herself. Her profession as an art collector gives her an opportunity to be in constant touch with culture. Even though at the beginning of the play she blindly associates art with materialism, Biddy begins to acquire a new form of consciousness: "[…] I am trying to understand art, I've been rather bitten I think, it's odd, and I do like your work. It makes me feel at home … at peace …" (2, 2, 412). Her avid desire to discover the art world and have "this blur removed" is met by Stephen's disappointment. Biddy's invitation to the art gallery reveals her aspirational soul:

> I was so looking forward to this evening. I thought this world would be different, not like my husband's world, the business world, where you expect to be jostled and everything to shift. But here … I thought art would have value, I mean, real value. Something eternal, reassuring, like church when I was little, or school. I know I was only invited here because I'm very rich, but I felt honoured, like paying your way into heaven if you're a Catholic, well, why shouldn't you? (1,11,407)

Stephen's disappointment is not only with the art world but the way people deal with it. In "this filthy art world scene", art is used as a commodity and its price is determined by supply and demand. Stephen addresses Biddy, saying: "[…] Look at Jeremy. He's going to try to convince you that the inferior work of a young painter is worth thirty thousand pounds. And he has stuff he tries to sell for half a million you wouldn't want to pee on", (1, 11, 407). Stephen tries to open Biddy's eyes to the hidden corruption of the present art world. The maddening competition of capitalism makes people sacrifice the potential beauty of art for false appearances. Here, Jeremy's ethics are determined by profit margins and negotiations. He is a capitalist, and under capitalism, the overarching goal of the individual is material acquisition.

Though Wertenbaker is against cocooning in art, Stephen remains reclusive. He feels himself fragmented in a way as he cannot acclimatize with his changing surroundings. In act two, scene two, Stephen's confidence in his art seems suspicious. Though he believes that the 'wonder' is the starting point in good art, it no longer exists because "[m]oral questions have been out of fashion for ten years, maybe they'll come back into vogue. For six months … or until our society discovers it's too bankrupt to afford morals", (2, 2, 414).

Stephen comes to realize that he is out of the mainstream. And this is the beginning of the change in his personality. He confides in Biddy that he is "a modern artist, my world is as fragmented as yours. I'm in pieces", (2, 2, 415). He says:

> I'm disappointed … Twenty years ago I knew exactly what was right for the world, what art, what politics. I'm not sure about anything any more. Sometimes I'm not even sure that painting trees isn't a sign of exhaustion rather than renewal. As for my politics … a rubbed-out canvas in a corner somewhere. (2, 2, 414)

Stephen feels that his landscapes go back to the past which does not suit the modern trends in art. He states that:

> It's my contribution to history. I paint what is vanishing. As it vanishes. Sometimes I paint the memory of something that was there long ago. A shape. We drool over the aborigines because they hold their land sacred. (2, 2, 414)

Jeremy and Julia try to drive him away from his isolation: "There are galleries where people don't feel intimidated – they're warm, people are friendly, the paintings are there to be looked at, not always sold to someone rich … that's the kind of gallery you need", (2, 7, 434).

Fiona feels that Stephen's long period of isolation is a negative aspect of creativity. For her, isolation is needed for a limited period of time. She says, "You used to tell us artists needed isolation, but only up to a point", (2, 7, 434). Again, Wertenbaker throws light on the relationship between Stephen and Fiona. Fiona seems highly infatuated by her teacher to the extent that she memorizes all his notes. These notes are used by her to encourage him to get out of his seclusion:

> If you were teaching us now you'd tell us not to allow ourselves to suffer from passive anger, despair, but to fight, in whatever way we can. I was looking up all my old notes … (2, 7, 434-435)

Stephen, like Degas, finds that Fiona betrays art when she gets married and embraces her own way of painting: "As you close that chapter of your life … and move into the corrupting lights of success? And marriage, I forgot …", (2, 7, 435).

Though Stephen seems relentless, he reaches the self-realization that he cannot live in the past. He says to Fiona: "Why should I go back to that world? I don't want to play the fool, Fiona, you can give the interviews on the feminist use of colour –" (2, 7, 435). Stephen's speech is a public manifesto for the right of women artists to work independently. He admits to their ability to create and build their own future.

However, the social debate over the value of art takes a new dimension with Constantin. As an outsider to British society, he represents a 'worthy case' to those who want to invest their wealth for good purposes. He exploits the Romanian predicament under the dictatorship of Ceausescu in order to acquire the sympathy of others. Stephen is the first one to help him. He decides to give him his paintings, thinking that he is sincere: "You're the only thing that's

wrong with this country", (1, 11, 404). But when Stephen realizes that he is just like other businessmen, "look[ing] out for his own profit margins",[85] he refuses "to give his paintings to a Romanian version of Jeremy", (2, 7, 437). Constantin's reaction to Stephen's decision voices a political contest of a social critique which includes ideas of autonomy and the responsibility of the artist:

> Yes, I understand. I – We disappoint you. We are not doing things right, we are not pure. The trouble for us is we have to carry your dreams, your ideals, always. You were on the left in your country, no? You believed in socialism, even communism, no? That's what I thought. You are the worse. I don't mind the silly society ladies – I never really expect to get help from them because we Romanians are not chic, I know that. But you – you never came to Romania when we were communist. You preach communism in your country, but you let us make the experiment for you. So we have the destroyed land in co-operatives, the bread tails, but it doesn't matter, because we are your ideal. […] You forgive your own evil because you say it's built into capitalism, but we are not allowed – We have to be moral, perfect martyrs. Now you don't want me to have your paintings because I am not great dissident hero. Where were you when they were beating and killing us? You despise me because I want to live. You socialist? [...] And you, Stephen, artist, you blush, not me. (2, 7, 437)

For Constantin, the artist builds his empire on the predicaments and misery of others. He is far from autonomous. On the contrary, Stephen is portrayed as an intellectual bourgeois who depends entirely on the oppression of the distracted or the proletariat to carry on his progressive ideas. Accordingly, Stephen is a parasite who ascends the ivory tower on the backs of others. In this sense, Judith Butler doubts the existence or fantasy of autonomy. She argues that "autonomy is the logical consequence of a disavowed dependency, which is to say that the autonomous subject can maintain the illusion of its autonomy insofar as it covers over the break out of which it is constituted. This dependency and this break are already social relations, ones which precede and condition the formation of the subject".[86]

It is perhaps interesting to remember at this juncture that Adorno linked art to society in the sense of refraction. This means that "art absorbs social elements and simultaneously negates or

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[85] Esther Beth Sullivan, "Hailing Ideology, Acting in the Horizon, and Reading between Plays by Timberlake Wertenbaker", *Theatre Journal*, p. 151.

[86] Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism'", in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 1992), p. 12.

distances them, refusing the integration that is forced upon such empirical materials by a reified process of progressive instrumental rationalization".[87]

The critique of the subject does not mean, however, a negation or repudiation of autonomy, but, rather, a way of interrogating its value. In all cases, the artist affects and is affected by society. For Constantin, Stephen, like him, looks for glory at the expense of others.

As with Wertenbaker's other plays, the final scenes of *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* do not provide a resolution to the debates about art and the role of the artist in society. On the contrary, as the play develops, the social and political contestation become vehement. This is one of the themes that Wertenbaker emphasizes. For her, the playwright is not a politician who gives static opinions, but rather the one who always raises questions without certain answers. She argues that "providing answers is a job for politicians, and playwriting is about posing questions".[88] In Fiona's "Self-Portrait", she touches on this fact: "I know you, you're waiting for the sentence that is going to click it all into place. I don't have it. This is the nineties. I'm not going to pretend to have it", (2, 9, 443-444).

In the final scene, the debate over the 'art scene' has not finished. Stephen maintains, "I don't think Julia's gallery is going to last. The art market may be terminally ill", (2, 10, 444). Furthermore, he casts a light on the gendered role of the artist, which seems masculine. Biddy is shown naked beneath "some drapery", with Stephen sketching her: "When I started this painting, there were three birds, and you were a vanishing figure, but you've taken over the canvas", (2, 10, 445).

We know that *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* was written at the beginning of the 1990s which witnessed great events. Politically, the breakout of the first Gulf War (1990 to 1991) and the collapse of Eastern European communism exacerbated the sense of doubt which threw its shadow on the art of playwriting. So, addressing the role of the artist and the value of art in society needs further contemplation. This is the main reason behind Wertenbaker's refusal to give the final word about those issues. In contrast, she returns to the subject of art and artists in the 2000s as is the case with her next play, *The Line* (2009).

[87] Monique Roelofs, *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic*, p. 186.
[88] Sophie Bush, *The Theatre of Timberlake Wertenbaker*, p. 256.

4.6 Male and Females' Battle of Wills on Art: *The Line* (2009)

After twenty years after the break-up of Soviet Union, Wertenbaker returns again to the issue of art and the role of the artist in society. Like *Three Birds Alighting on a Field*, in *The Line* (2009), Wertenbaker investigates this issue through using female artist vis-a-vis with male one. Like Galactia and Fiona, Suzanne want to prove her own artistic vision of art.

To minimize the gap or breadth between male and female artists, Wertenbaker insists on the need "to look at each other" (13, 54),[89] a tendency which is hinted at in *Three Birds Alighting on a Field*. As in the previous play, in *The Line* Wertenbaker uses the visual arts as a means to dig deep into the social function of the arts and the artist. Moreover, the focus on the hierarchal relationship between male and female artists continues.

Set in 19th-century Paris, the play depicts the turbulent relationship between Edgar Degas and his talented, working-class protégée Suzanne Valadon. Apart from Degas's fierce house-keeper Zoé Clozier, the play centres around the "battle of wills across class and gender divides"[90] between these two artists. Though Degas admires Suzanne's drawings and teaches her the techniques of soft-ground etching, she leaves him for a more glamorous life and because of her concerns for her son, Maurice. The play ends with Degas feeling lonely and dying while Suzanne succeeds without achieving the same reputation. Although it is "set on the cusp of the nineteenth and twentieth century", Bush affirms that, "*The Line* poses still pertinent questions about the present role and condition of the arts, through its discussion of issues such as commercialisation, celebrity, the position of women in art, the economic pressures on artists and the respective values of tradition and innovation".[91]

The narrative starts with Suzanne's first encounter with Degas in his studio and ends with Degas's death. This period spans thirty years from 1888 to 1917. As a whole, the play consists of seventeen scenes with intervals of a few months to several years between them. Although the play is praised by Honour Bayes as "an engaging and enthralling drama",[92] it is attacked by others as "stilted, and the storytelling is jerky, insistently spelling out its themes like an

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[89] Timberlake Wertenbaker, *The Line* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p. 54.
[90] John Nathan, Review of The Line at the Arcola, *Jewish Chronicle*, 26 November 2009, http://www.thejc.com/arts/theatre-reviews/22339/review-the-line (accessed 6 August 2016).
[91] Sophie Bush, *The Theatre of Timberlake Wertenbaker*, p. 242.
[92] Honour Bayes, Review of The Line at the Arcola Theatre, http://ww.thereviewshub.com/the-line-arcola-theatre-london/ (accessed 6 August 2016).

academic lecture".[93] This view is shared by Charles Spencer who claims that "the play, which spans almost 30 years and feels almost as long, is ridiculously repetitive. Scene after scene consists of Suzanne working happily with Degas, before becoming bored by his narrow strictures, resulting in a big row and her exit to seek wider horizons".[94] Similarly, Nathan argues that "the play makes no connections outside the time in which it is set, and few connections outside the studio in which most of the action takes place".[95]

Though the poor reviews of Wertenbaker's works are not new, the main source of these reviews comes from the fact that Wertenbaker's plays are more concerned with debate than drama. This fact is applicable to the major criticism of *The Line*. While Michael Billington states that "Timberlake Wertenbaker avoids the obvious pitfalls to produce a decent, if somewhat undramatic, work about the master-pupil relationship between Degas and Suzanne Valadon",[96] Quentin Letts of the *Daily Mail* states that he rather enjoyed it. The play, he said, was "agreeably wordy" and "it has the comforting texture of rice pudding".[97]

In spite of these reviews, *The Line* still remains one of Wertenbaker's most fascinating plays which is preoccupied with the problematic function of art and its role in society. As mentioned before, the play traces the different views of art and the responsibility of the artist through the perspective of two characters: the austere and celibate Degas, who sees himself as the forerunner or successor of "Ingres and Delacroix", (7, 39) and the spirited Valadon, who believes in immediacy outside history.

Suzanne introduces herself as a model and artist. Although Degas admires her drawings, he rejects this dual role, telling her, "If you want to be a model, go somewhere else", (2, 19). For him, it is difficult to be both an artist and a model since, "An artist is single-minded, obsessed, ruthless. It's an austere life, full of pleasures not taken", (2, 19).

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[93] Kate Bassett, Review of *The Line* at the Arcola, *Independent*, 29 November 2009, http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/nation-national-theatre-londonthe-line-arcola-londonthe-priory-royal-court-london-1830348.html (accessed 6 August 2016).

[94] Charles Spencer, Review of The Line at the Arcola Theatre, 24 November 2009, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/6644644/The-Line-at-the-Arcola-Theatre-review.html (accessed 6 August 2016).

[95] John Nathan, Review of The Line at the Arcola, *Jewish Chronicle*, 26 November 2009, http://www.thejc.com/arts/theatre-reviews/22339/review-the-line (accessed 6 August 2016).

[96] Michael Billington, Review of The Line at the Arcola, *Guardian*, 24 November 2009, http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2009/nov/24/the-line-review (accessed 6 August 2016).

[97] Quentin Letts, Review of The Line at the Arcola, *Daily Mail*, 27 November 2009, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/reviews/article-1231316/Arts-canvas-accents-ropes.html (accessed 6 August 2016).

Accordingly, Degas takes Suzanne as his pupil and what follows is the development of this master-pupil relationship. No doubt, Suzanne's singular artistic talent and experience cannot be denied. Her contact with such great artists makes Degas accept her in his self-made world. She tells Degas, "I lived with Puvis de Chavannes and I watched him work. And I posed for Renoir before he married that stupid fat girl. I used to watch him. And when I was a child, I watched all the painters in Montmartre", (1, 13).

Degas, like Pygmalion, finds in Suzanne an image of the artist which can be platonic. So he teaches her the techniques of art such as soft-ground etching to instil in her the virtues of discipline and concentration.

Unfortunately, this platonic view of Suzanne is shattered by her concern for life more than art. Like Stephen in *Three Birds Alighting on a Field*, Degas warns Suzanne against the trivialities of life: "When I have a line, I hold on to it, I don't let it go. I don't let anything disturb my concentration, especially not money", (2, 20). For Degas, what is important to any artist is to keep working. The artist should devote his whole life to artistic work and not be distracted by the trivialities of life:

> I had no money for myself, but I kept working, working, and I didn't complain. And this is your work. I think I can find some buyers for these drawings, but there should be more. And don't ever think of getting married.
>
> (2, 20)

Degas thinks that it is impossible to get married and be a great artist. His rejection of marriage emphasizes the fact, stated by the critic Robert Hughes, who "thinks he may have been impotent". This opinion is supported by Rhoda Koenig of the *Independent* who argues that "the haughty, acerbic Degas was never known to have had any relations with women […], so his bachelor state is not quite the great renunciation that he makes out".[98]

To quote Spencer again, "The play explores that old theme, life versus art, with Degas sacrificing everything to his work […], while Suzanne is determined to live it to the full".[99]

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[98] Rhoda Koenig, Review of The Line at the Arcola Theatre, *Independent*, 25 November 2009, http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/the-line-arcola-theatre-london-1826783.html (accessed 6 August 2016)

[99] Charles Spencer, Review of *The Line* at the Arcola Theatre, 24 November 2009, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/6644644/The-Line-at-the-Arcola-Theatre-review.html (accessed 6 August 2016).

The contrast between the two artists reveals their approach towards art. One of Degas's teachings to Suzanne is that the artist should not only devote his life to art but also be true. He tells Suzanne, "People are afraid of realism, especially the scientific realism I'm after", (4, 22) but this is the starting point the artist should follow. For Degas, the true artist is the one who reflects reality as it is even if he is accused of inhumanity. Thus the responsibility of the artist is to present real life with its agony without beautifying it. He takes the image of women who are struggling for survival as genuine subjects to be painted and written about:

> They say we hate humanity, but we try to show it exactly as it is – bent down, straining for survival, painfully human – as you do by instinct. Those sweating women who iron all day long in their steaming rooms, bent over their work, pressing the iron down in a straight line – releasing it in a curving movement – need to be painted, to be written about. (4, 23)

Degas's admiration for Emile Zola, who Suzanne knew nothing about, is a true reflection of his knowledge of artistic trends. This quality, which Degas tries hard to impose on Suzanne, is achieved through his extensive reading, which is something that Suzanne lacks. He tells Suzanne that artistic talent is not enough to be successful. Rather, the artist should arm himself with knowledge: "You'll have to read if you want to be an artist, just as writers need to look at paintings. Zola and I are like twin brothers", (4, 23).

I find it quite appropriate to have our consideration of realism through Zola who emphasized that art should be true.[100] In *The Experimental Novel,* Zola tries to anticipate the truth of art via a scientific methodology by taking:

> facts in nature, then in studying the mechanism of these facts, acting upon them by the modification of circumstances and surroundings, without deviating from the laws of nature.[101]

Zola's view of realism is not devoid of naturalistic effects. On the contrary, it is in harmony with naturalism. Accordingly, realism and naturalism are sometimes interchangeable. In this

[100] J. L. Styan, *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice* Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 10.
[101] Cited by Russell Campbell, *Cinema Strikes Back: Radical Film-making in the United States 1930-1942* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1982), p. 5.

way, David Caute talks about the elusiveness of these two terms which seem quite similar. He argues that both terms:

> have historically a specific sense and a general sense. On the one hand they describe two coherent and fully articulated philosophies which are not only literary but also social; on the other hand they describe a general tendency, style or mood in works which are hybrids of several traditions.[102]

These traditions, which Degas believes in, do not find their way in Suzanne's art. In the scene where he is teaching Suzanne the art of soft-ground etching, Degas shows his artistic process which depends entirely on hard work and repetition. He teaches Suzanne that the enjoyment of artistic works come from these two principles:

> If there were no tedium there'd be no enjoyment. We have to do the same thing over and over again. […] Repetition makes the good artist. Art does not branch out: it concentrates. They say I repeat myself, but they don't understand I've narrowed my subjects because I'm looking for a truth, layer by layer. It's not pretty or exciting, only real. (4, 24)

Degas, like Galactia in Barker's *Scenes from an Execution*, looks for truth regardless of its beauty and excitability. So, repeating the same subject is to seek the truth and highlight it. Thus his idea of repetition mirrors the structure of his creator. In other words, in order to focus on the situation of women in a male-dominated culture, Wertenbaker makes two versions of "Zoe I" (scene three) and "Zoe II" (8, 41), as well as two scenes for Zoe and Suzanne: "Two Women I" (5, 28) and "Two Women II" (12, 51). Thus, Wertenbaker wants us "to see Suzanne and Degas's housekeeper as women expected to sacrifice themselves to the male ego"[103] to use Billington's words.

Suzanne, however, does not find solace in Degas's way of being a successful artist. Though he seems quite sure about the actual place Suzanne is suitable for, she rejects his preaching about drawings. In contrast to his insistence on her to draw "ferocious" lines, Suzanne wants to paint. She interprets Degas's rejection of painting to his hierarchical thinking. Suzanne asks

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[102] David Caute, *The Illusion: An Essay on Politics, Theatre and the Novel* (London: André Deutsch Ltd., 1971), p. 88.

[103] Michael Billington, Review of The Line at the Arcola, *Guardian*, 24 November 2009, http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2009/nov/24/the-line-review (accessed 6 August 2016).

him: “Why? Because it’s for men?” (4,25). Even though the hierarchical relationship is a fact, Degas seems far from thinking that way. This fact is uttered by Zoé later: “He never talks about men or women artists but about good and bad ones”, (5, 30). And this is clearly shown in his reference to Mary Cassatt, an American painter whose name makes Suzanne react:

> Because she was taught properly? Because she’s rich and belongs to your class and she can paint all those little domestic scenes of well-dressed mummies with their fat-cheeked babies and tan doggies? Well, I’m not going to paint doggies. (4, 25)

Suzanne is aware of her social background as the promiscuous daughter of a drunken mother and an unknown father. This inferiority complex makes her doubt the intentions of others – even her teacher. Moreover, it is a stimulus to prove herself as an artist. While Degas wants to draw her attention to the positive areas of her drawing skills, she insists on painting like Degas, even though his experience in paintings, especially those of narratives, is not entirely successful. He tells her:

> A narrative carries you along easily. But where’s the truth? You might glimpse the truth in the movement of a line, that’s all we can hope for. So I give people glimpses, but they have to stand still and pay attention. It’s too hard for them so they clamour for a story. Something noisy and emotional. As if there’s no emotion in a line, a cross-section of time. It’s like that Wagner. The music crashes over you and people feel they’ve heard something because it’s so loud. He calls it total art, but that’s typical German bombast. There’s no such thing as total art. What you get in Wagner is a lot of scenery and bad Christianity. Where’s the truth? Bach, Lully, Rameau, Gluck: they draw. (4, 25)

The above lines reveal Degas’s belief in the truth of the line. The viewers should be given glimpses of the truth by the style which engages them. He does not believe in the random effects of so-called ‘total art’, a term which originates from the German *Gesamtkunstwerk* and which was coined by Wagner in the wake of the 1848 revolutions. According to David Roberts, “If the total work of art is usually understood as the intention to reunite the arts into the one integrated work, it is tied from the beginning to the desire to recover and renew the public

function of art".[104] This function of art as a form of social and cultural regeneration of society is countered by questions of separation and autonomy. In the same book by David Roberts, he argues:

> Separation foregrounds and privileges the internal logic of the individual arts and fails to recognize the countervailing quest for synthesis, especially in avant-garde theory and practice. Autonomy foregrounds the emancipation of the arts from social controls and fails to recognize the countervailing quest for a new social role for art, especially in avant-garde theory and practice.[105]

Therefore, the responsibility of the artist becomes difficult. He should anticipate truth in arts. Though the word 'line' is repeated many times, Degas wants Suzanne to embrace one thing for the sake of creativity. Here, drawing is more apt for her than painting. However, Degas is not against Suzanne knowing painting but only after gaining sufficient experience.

The heated argument between Degas and Suzanne ends with her revolutionary rejection of Degas's teachings. Instead, Suzanne decides to work independently, claiming that she "just want[s] to do something else", (4, 26). Suzanne seems resolute. When she is dismissed by Degas, she says with indifference:

> I'm going back home and I'll spend the whole afternoon in bed with Erik and then I'll paint him again and he'll compose his weird songs to me and we'll drink a lot and it may not be your kind of art with all its 'discipline', but it's life and it's the art of Montmartre and it's mine and I'm Suzanne and – (4, 28)

Before her departure, Suzanne comes back to Degas's studio to get his blessing. Interestingly, in this scene (scene five) Zoé, Degas's confidant, tells us a lot about him. Her close contact with Degas seems beyond reach. In scene eleven, Zoé states:

> There is always a line, from him to me. Every movement of his leads to mine. It's the other way, too. Because, you see, I work as hard as he does. I don't mean cooking, cleaning, shopping, I do that too. No: I work like an artist, attentive, obsessive. He is my work. I don't mean I create him. But I watch

[104] David Roberts, *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism* (USA: Cornell University Press, 2011), p. 1.
[105] Ibid., pp. 1-2.

> him. I see him clearly. I know him in his every movement. That's my work. Isn't that what he does? (11, 51)

She also reports that Degas is committed to the old traditions, refusing to see the progress:

> He likes the painters who did. It's not his fault he was born in the wrong century. He likes all those stories where there's some magic. I read him *The Arabian Nights* every day. It's a relief after those newspapers where they're always talking about progress, change and more change, and they forget about all the people left behind. (5, 29-30)

Whereas Zoé criticizes Suzanne's decision to leave, Suzanne justifies her actions by her concerns for her wayward son, Maurice of Utrillo: "I've been working, Zoé, I've been working very hard, will you tell Monsieur Degas that? But it's not easy. I'm a mother and I'm frightened for my son. I have to do something, I have to get married", (5, 30).

Suzanne always brings the gender role to the surface. As a female artist, she feels insecure and fragmented, unlike Degas who "has the permission of society to be an artist. I'm a woman", (5, 29). She further tells Zoé about her predicament:

> And I may be a bad mother but I'm still devoted to my son, but then I want the time, I want the time to draw in peace. I'm working on a line the way Monsieur Degas showed me and then he gets kicked out of another school and my fingers freeze and I don't know who I am. (5, 31)

Later, in the play she directly addresses Degas about the obsessions she has, saying:

> [L]ook at me, look at what I am. Try to understand what it is like to live in fear, not of poverty – I don't care about that – but of disappearing altogether. My son is thirteen, disturbed, killing himself with drink and disappearing in front of me. And if he does kill himself? What will I be then? You have safety all around you, with your education, Zoé, with your friends. I have no one, nothing but what I have taken myself by force – and it can all disappear. Why do you hate me for wanting what was given to you at birth? What's wrong with a little furniture if it gives me some substance? You're Monsieur Degas, why can't I be Madame and have people take their hats off, noticed, there, solid. Can't you understand how difficult it is for me because I'm never sure I'm there? Even you, you're interested in my drawings but drawings are

> easily erased and you only want to hear about my life when I can entertain you with something amusing. (7, 40)

As mentioned before, Suzanne does not want to cling to Degas's way of teaching or to be governed by discipline. Rather, she revolts against him and draws in her own way. In doing so, Degas foretells that Suzanne will fail without him who represents the values of history and tradition. He believes that the successful artist is the one who sticks to history. It does not mean that he is against innovation but this new innovation should have its root in tradition. Metaphorically, Degas compares the artist to the horse who ploughs the new land without forgetting the original. He speaks of:

> An artist [who] doesn't appear out of nowhere. There is a history, a country, a tradition. An artist works the way a horse ploughs a field, not looking to left or right, obeying the tradition, and fitting into it the way the horse fits into the groove and then moves forward, breaking up new ground. […] I left the way a son might leave his father's house, but he continues the family values and he respects his inheritance. (7, 38-39)

These values Degas talks about have nothing to do with Suzanne who heralds new values with the coming of the 20th century, asserting that:

> I never had a father. I don't have an inheritance. I made my own way. I learned by myself and I'm going to do it differently. And I'm going to make great big canvases full of colour, and maybe they won't be Degas but they'll be Valadons. They'll be new and shocking and me! And the twentieth century is coming and we'll sweep tradition out the door like the dust it is. (7, 39)

Suzanne's ambition to be somebody else outside Degas's supervision invites us to look proudly at her. But the fact of being a woman in a male-dominated culture hinders her wish. So she decides to marry a respectable banker to guarantee a stable life for her and her son, Maurice. Her decision is highly criticised by Degas who sees it as a betrayal of art and tradition:

> Degas: A future husband – in a carriage. My dear, you must still have a fever. […] I taught you, I nourished you, I even loved you. You insult me, you betray art, you threaten France!

> Suzanne: I will never forget what you taught me, Maître, but I am ready to do it on my own now. […] I'm sorry about what I said – you know what I'm like, I don't want to argue.
>
> Degas: My curse! You won't paint. Ducks and geese are not conducive to good art. Even the plein air painters only venture out for an afternoon before running back to Paris. The bourgeoisie exists to dull the sharp edges of the soul. I'm the one saw your spirit, your talent. I treated it like the precious thing it is, and now you crumple it and throw it back in my face like a bad sketch. Go then, wallow in the torpor of your new-found comfort. (7, 35-39)

Both Degas and Stephen in *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* want their pupils to devote and sacrifice their lives to art. Another issue which is raised by both is the fact that women cannot succeed without men. Although Fiona and Suzanne express their preference to work independently, Stephen and Degas are suspicious of their ability to pursue paintings in the 'new age', affected by gender roles. This suspicion perplexes Wertenbaker herself. Although she agrees that women artists are under-represented and they should follow their own path, Wertenbaker is not sure that women will radically change the whole equation. In an interview with her, Wertenbaker argues that "[there]'s not an equal representation in terms of producers, money, newspapers and so harsh. But you can't say that if there were fifty per cent women then theatre would be radically different".[106]

The second half of the play opens with Zoé, reading the paper to Degas. She says brightly, "Here's an article by Emile Zola", (8, 41). The significance of this article is the story of Dreyfus, a young French captain who was accused of spying for the Germans. Degas's attitude to this event reveals another dimension of the responsibility of the artist. Accordingly, the artist should be loyal to his country. In other words, the artist should condemn and sacrifice for the sake of his country. It is a kind of honour to defend the country in which he lives. He tells Zoé, "The last time I was there they were talking about the two people I hate the most: Dreyfus and Wagner. Imagine liking the music of that awful German. It's unpatriotic. We must protect France from Wagner and Dreyfus", (8, 44). He feels happy to see that Dreyfus "can't be [innocent] because he was found guilty", (8, 43). Here, Degas connects art with the national identity. Therefore, he is upset with Zola's opinion that Dreyfus may be innocent. Earlier in the play, Degas tells Suzanne that he "understand[s] painting, literature, music and France. What else is there to understand?" (7, 38). This reflects his protest against Suzanne when she

[106] Wertenbaker cited in Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge, *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting*, p. 138.

leaves France. He looks at her action as a form of ingratitude to her country. Like Henry Carr in Stoppard's *Travesties*, Degas sees art as the embodiment of the nation.

Degas seems unique in having such feelings of patriotism. In a scene like a self-soliloquy entitled "Death Mask", Degas feels alone. Like Stephen in *Three Birds Alighting on a Field*, Degas is wary of the attitudes of people towards art during an age in which everything is governed by materialism. Though he is famous, Degas feels sad within himself:

> The Louvre wants a painting from me: I refuse the honour. A friend sells a painting of mine, I return one of his in the post. Mind you, I was right to do that, I gave the painting as a gift, not as an asset. My paintings sell for high prices, I insult the buyers. No one wants to see me any more and I want to see no one. Young painters come to adore me, I make fun of them. I chased Suzanne away … I used to have wit, it is gone. Old age is nothing more than the loss of joy. How did I lose my joy? How did it become arthritic? I followed a path with certainty. I didn't know it would get dark. I worked, life ebbed away. And now I can't even pee properly. (9, 46)

In this type of self-realization, Degas meditates on the long years he spent on his art. He brings to mind the old question: is it worth sacrificing life to art? To Degas, art becomes a mask which hides the true identity of the artist. After all, he remains loyal to traditions as he describes, "I'm an old tree now and my roots go deep", (13, 56) unlike Suzanne who changes.

In Suzanne's second visit to Degas, she tries to wake him from living in the past: "It's the new century, Maître. We tear down, we rebuild. I'm exhibiting in the Gallery of the Twentieth Century with a painter called Picasso", (13, 53-54). Suzanne's concerns for life and money are in contrast with Degas's ideals. He feels disgust when Suzanne talks about paintings being sold to Americans. Degas reacts, saying that, "Americans turn everything they touch into a commodity. I sell to them too, but I don't boast about it", (10, 49). Concerning art, Degas feels disappointed with the new age where, "Soon there will be no art, only commerce", (15, 58).

As far as painting is concerned, Suzanne seems highly affected by the values of the 20th century. This is clearly shown in the new painting she presents to Degas for evaluation. While Degas complains about the lack of history which he refers to as "the hierarchy of excellence", (15, 59) in Suzanne's paintings, she rejects the need for 20th century painters to be educated in history, claiming, "This is the twentieth century. I don't need education", (15, 59).

Suzanne is not satisfied with Degas's commitment to tradition, telling him she "never went for hierarchies", (15, 59). As said before, Degas is not opposed to Suzanne painting but feels that this should be done within the perspective of history. To avoid being forgotten, Degas advises her to occupy her place in "the line". Otherwise, "no one will know how to judge your work", (15, 59).

Degas's submission to the tradition of art is connected with his unquestioning allegiance to the state of France. Degas tries hard to cultivate this sense of loyalty in Suzanne, saying, "You are French. We are obsessed with our reputation. That's what makes us French", (15, 59). Suzanne, like Fiona in *Three Birds Alighting on a Field*, does not want to flatter in paintings. She concedes that, "I'm looking for the truth, not for national identity. She's not a statement, she's a real woman, solid, not beautiful because I can never flatter my subjects", (15, 60).

Degas is content that it is the duty of any artist to "take one's place in history. The age of the epic is over, this is the age of the keyhole". Accordingly, he tells Suzanne:

> Our responsibility is to show, in detail, a few people with their aspirations and their frailties. If we don't look at human beings, at their bodies, where will pity and tenderness come from? Isn't that what the world needs? Who will love human beings if we stop painting them? (13, 54)

In a scene entitled "Self-Portrait", Suzanne concludes that humanity and tenderness, the values of the past, have been demolished with the modern age where war and poverty are rife everywhere over the globe:

> The ageing woman. No, the ageing painter. I'm at the height of my powers, so why am I sad if my face is in decline? Tenderness, Degas would say. His self-portraits were always full of tenderness. But tenderness belongs to the last century. The war has ripped it out of us. I'm modern. I don't like humanity. (16, 61)

Timberlake Wertenbaker's playwriting has engaged with a vast array of topics and themes. However, the subject of art and the role of the artist constitutes a great body of her writings in the 1980s up to the present day. Though the subject has been tackled by a number of contemporary British playwrights, such as Stoppard and Barker, the way she deals with the

issues of art acquires a special trait. She discusses these issues with due attention to women artists and the dilemmas they face in a male-dominated culture. Like Barker, Wertenbaker concentrates on the power of language used by her characters to comment on the dilemmas of marginalization and the silencing of women and how they regained their voices again. Although all three playwrights focus very strongly on their respective protagonists – thus creating rewarding character roles – they also provide, in each instance, a neutral voice for each character to comment on the events.

Like Stoppard, the diversity of her cultural background gives Wertenbaker an insightful talent on how to deal with the subject of art and the responsibility of the artist. Both of them experienced living in different countries before arriving in the UK. Although Stoppard presents discussions on the role of the artist and art in *Artist Descending a Staircase*, to a certain degree he champions the aesthetic aspect of art. Moreover, in *Travesties,* Stoppard shows the role of the artist from socialist and communist perspectives without taking either side.

As far as Wertenbaker is concerned, she is influenced by Barker, especially in his emphasis on the imagination of the audience to extract the message. Like Barker, her favouring of uncertainty or an open-ended plot gives the audience an opportunity for anticipation. Even though this strategy of an open-ended plot, employed by many women playwrights, is criticized by critics, it is a good means of stimulating the audience's thinking and imagination to draw their own conclusions about the message of the play. This justifies Phyllis Nagy's opinion that women avoid 'thesis' plays and "employ sophisticated new structures, far from the linear, limited parameters of the 'well-made play'".[107]

While Barker uses cartoonists to represent artist figures in *No End of Blame: Scenes of Overcoming*, Stoppard and Wertenbaker use painters. In all cases, multiple facets of art and the artist are revealed.

Though Wertenbaker celebrates the positive role of art in society, the issue of art is questioned further in her later plays. In *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* and *The Line*, the visual artist becomes a metaphor for discussing the role of the artist in society. Here, the artist is very much tortured, particularly Stephen, who is constantly questioning the role of his work. We also have Fiona, the other artist, who has a monologue near the end where she addresses

[107] Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge, *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting*, p. xvi.

the question raised at the beginning of the chapter that we do not expect artists to know everything or to solve society's problems.

Connected to the wider issues of art and the role of the artist in society is the use of visual art to comment on the dual role of the artist as a model. In *The Line*, Suzanne argues for both. Though both Stephen and Degas are suspicious of Fiona and Suzanne being successful, the two plays, *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* and *The Line* prove contrary to this. Suzanne becomes the best painter in the 20th century. This fact supports Wertenbaker's view that women succeed if they are given an equal opportunity.

Though all three playwrights argue in favour of the importance of art, they do not give a final verdict.

However, travelling through four decades of art, all three playwrights explored multiple aspects of art. As it is seen, the three chosen playwrights reflect different trends over using artist as a character in their plays. While Stoppard uses it to highlight the social committed of the artist whether to aesthetic or society, Barker employs it to show the artistic freedom of the artist and his responsibility to his imagination. By using characters such as Beauchamp, Martello and Donner, in *Artist Descending a Staircase* (1972), Stoppard concentrates on the global importance of art. This importance of art and its function in society is further analysed through the characters of *Travesties* (1974). In the form of pastiche and parody, Stoppard brings the actual artist characters, such as James Joyce, Tristan Tzara and Henry Carr with Lenin into life to present opposing views of art and its relationship to politics.

Barker's characters show the constraint which is imposed on artists as they try to reveal their art through imagination. In *No End of Blame: Scenes of Overcoming* (1981), Bela's idea of the freedom of expression is always interfered by the policies of the ruling political party. Likewise, Galactia, in *Scenes from an Execution* (1984) faces the punishment of jail because of her belief in the freedom of the artist. She rejects the role of using art to promote women artists, at the expense of her 'truth'.

For Wertenbaker, using artist as a character is invested to shed light on the issue of female artists as they struggle to secure their place in a man-dominated culture. From the end of the 1980s to the 2000s, Wertenbaker concentrated on art as an outlet for female artists to prove their artistic creativity. In contrast to male artists, their revolutionary spirit is clearly manifested in the characters of Fiona and Suzanne. Both characters are not content with the traditional values of art Stephen and Degas want to instil.