CRIMINAL JUSTICE

IN

BRITISH PLAYWRITING AND THEATRE PRACTICE, 1979-2017

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I certify that this thesis has been compiled and submitted in accordance with the Regulations for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theatre Studies,

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Dedication

To everyone in my narratives

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Abstract

This thesis explores narrative-construction in criminal justice through the art of playwriting/dramaturgy and theatre practice. It investigates how playwrights, and theatre companies have created and curated these narratives by employing a spectrum of techniques from the conventional to the immersive play, from forum theatre to cognitive behavioural therapy and mask work in both mainstream spaces and in marginalised and site-specific locations. The thesis examines what these narratives and practices reveal about the theatre's developing role in uncovering and articulating attitudes to crime, criminality and justice, and in providing routes to rehabilitation.

My project moves between the analysis of play-texts, to an investigation of how the three specialist British theatre companies: Clean Break, Synergy and Geese – at the forefront of making theatre in and about prison, and with, and for prisoners have questioned and debated narratives about crime and punishment. A recurrent question in prison theatre practice of all kinds is the extent of the impact theatre might have in the rehabilitation and resettlement of offenders. The thesis moves from the textual analysis of plays about criminal justice, to look at the writerless practices of Geese, who work without playwrights but nonetheless still engage in narrative construction albeit without any end-product of script or formal performance – through mask work, forum theatre and improvisation, all of which are employed to support processes of self-reflection and transformation.

This thesis therefore identifies how the narrative of the British cultural theatre practice and criminal justice has evolved from 1979 to 2017, and how alternative theatre has shifted from the margin to the centre. In tracing and analysing the progress of British prison theatre, it engages with the centrality of narrative-construction as crucial to

transformative processes – whether for audiences, writers and practitioners or for those incarcerated within or emerging from the world of criminal justice.

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Introduction

> Theatre has had an historic role in society as providing a relatively safe way of talking back to power. Across many cultures and traditions over time we trace patterns and instances of groups of people using the stage as a space and place to tell their stories and their lives. This aesthetics and emotional outlets allow for potential catharsis, a safe way for citizens to express their concerns, criticisms and frustrations to each other and to society at large.
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> -Monica Prendergast & Maeve Connolly. *Applied Theatre: International Case Studies and Challenges for the Practice* (2009:7)

The purpose of this research is to investigate how narratives about crime and justice are (re) constructed in British playwriting and theatre practice, and specifically to understand how theatre is used towards supporting the transformation and rehabilitation of individuals in contact with the criminal justice system. This thesis demonstrates how "prison theatre"[1], but also wider mainstream theatrical treatments of crime and its aftermath, have explored the social and emotional consequences of crime. I look at prison theatre as practised by three specialist British theatre companies – Clean Break, Synergy Theatre Project, and Geese Theatre Company, but also in parallel, and in dialogue with this, I consider how "mainstream" spaces in British theatre have staged stories and ideas about justice, society and recovery from crime. This thesis is historically structured to indicate how the narrative of prison theatre has changed over the years from 1979 to 2017. 1979, and the advent of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister, marked a sea-change in attitudes both to criminal justice and to the arts in the last decades of the 20th century. I look at the progression of prison theatre from marginal to the mainstream and explore the variety

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[1] I am using the term 'prison theatre' in a broad sense to mean theatre – whether actual performances, training events, or workshops – that is made by, with, or for prisoners, or people with experience of the criminal justice system, or by, with, or for those at risk of offending.

of techniques and approaches taken by playwrights in tackling the topics of crime and the criminal justice system, from historical drama to immersive site-specific performance.

The idea to embark on a research project in the field of applied theatre and particularly prison theatre stemmed from a combination of my studies in contemporary theatre and subsequently my experience working with clients who were undergoing recovery from drug and alcohol misuse under the Westminster Drug Project (WDP). Through their recovery process, the clients were engaged in different activities especially storytelling which explored their past experiences, circumstances and their motivations for becoming involved in drug and alcohol abuse which brought upon them different consequences, such as robbery, violence, mental illness and ultimately imprisonment. Through the application of storytelling techniques to explore and deal with the clients' emotions as part of the rehabilitation process, I began to reflect on the impact of storytelling in exploring thoughts, needs and emotions of the clients within the group; the positive change in behaviour, (re) imagining of self, the feeling of remorse, relief, healing or recovery, as well as dealing with the fear and anxiety of relapse when they leave the rehabilitation centre. After listening to the stories of the clients, they were asked how they felt or how their individuals stories have affected each of them, but they responded differently to the impact of telling and listening to stories to their general mood and mental well-being. Some said that listening to others' stories or telling their own stories have made them feel better, while others confirmed that it made them feel worse than they were before telling or listening to others' stories. This is to say that storytelling affects individuals differently, it can lead some to healing and recovery but can lead others to a catastrophic moment or reigniting of past traumatic experiences.

I likened such space to a prison setting as the clients going through detoxification and rehabilitation programme had to remain in the house for certain period of time depending on the duration each client was signed up for the programme. I later thought about what role theatre as an active process might play in helping offenders in prison to tell their own stories and explore activities that might aid a behavioural change within the prison, and their reintegration when they return to their communities. In this research project, I explored many different areas of this thesis as applied theatre for rehabilitation, focusing mainly on the role of theatre in helping the transformation and resettlement of individuals who have come in contact with the criminal justice system. The process of achieving this involved an array of techniques and methods which included analysing plays about criminal justice, especially the works of those that have been used by the theatre companies to explore the issues about crime, punishment, rehabilitation, and raising debates about the essence of incarceration.

I was particularly concerned with the choices people made, their motivations and consequences of their actions. In order to explore these individuals' choices, I engaged in observation and practical participation in prison theatre workshops, interviews, and the use of secondary materials, but I was mainly interested in theatre process as a platform for exploration, reflection and the reimagining or reinventing of self. I view offenders as arguably the most marginalised individuals in our society whose voice are not heard, who are misrepresented and negatively portrayed. Looking at theatre as a practice that permeates the physical, emotional and psychological aspects of our beings, I identified it as a tool that can be used to explore the experiences and circumstances of individuals that might have influenced their behaviour to commit crime and ultimately became imprisoned. Increasingly, I became

interested in using narrative as a framework to investigate how stories about crime and justice have been (re) constructed. In order to explore how offenders' stories are told, I focused on a variety of approaches to investigate playwrights' works about prison and prisoners, as well as the training and drama workshops approaches employed by the theatre companies who work with offenders and ex-offenders. I looked at texts on stage as used or created by theatre companies as well as texts that did not come from theatre companies or prison, therefore I started with one of the most influential and now canonical 'prison plays', *Our Country's Good*, which was written by Timberlake Wertenbaker, produced by the theatre company Out of Joint, and premiered at the Royal Court Theatre, London in 1988 as directed by Max Stafford-Clark. The play was not only performed in mainstream theatres, but was subsequently taken into prison and had its first prison performance in HMP Blundeston in 1989. It is a text about prisoners in Australia, a play that embodies the themes that reverberate in this thesis, of theatre as a redemptive tool, an instrument of transformation, that tears off the masks crafted for individuals to allow them to tell their own stories, to recreate their personalities and change their identities. The audience seeing the convicts rediscover their sense of humanity gives them a relief.

My original ambition at the beginning of this research process was to investigate the role of theatre in the transformation, rehabilitation and resettlement of offenders. This includes exploring the already existing works on prison theatre, observing, engaging in and analysing the practice of the key British theatre companies working in criminal justice, as well as observing and participating in theatre workshops and performances in prison. I was hoping to work directly with offenders in prisons, to coordinate and facilitate workshops and other theatre-based programmes within the prison. I also made contacts with some theatre companies

who carry out projects and facilitate workshop in prison, to get involved as a researcher, participant or observer of their works in prisons, but such requests were not granted. However, as my research evolved, the direction shifted somewhat from the ambition of going into prison to focusing on the investigation of narrative-construction and the story-making process within the role of arts; my focus became specifically the place of prison theatre in criminal justice as explored by some British playwrights and theatre companies. During this research process, I increasingly discovered that investigating the role of theatre in the transformation and rehabilitation of offenders appeared to be wider in scope, and, therefore I decided to look primarily at the works of playwrights, theatre practitioners, and theatre companies who have worked and still embark on projects with and about prisoners, and make their works the focus of my investigation. Most playwrights whose works I explore in this thesis have worked with offenders in and outside the prison and the theatre companies I discuss have also engaged and are still working with offenders within the prison and outside prison (ex-offenders). My analysis therefore is centred on playtexts that have been inspired or informed by the experiences of playwrights who have worked with offenders within and outside prison, to understand how they have told and shared the stories of offenders as they become the re-narrators of offenders' experiences in criminal justice system.

I also drew on the wealth of experience that underlies the practice of the three British theatre companies Clean Break, Synergy Theatre Project and Geese Theatre Company. All three companies have carried out numerous projects both with offenders and ex-offenders within and outside the prisons. Through these theatre companies, I had the opportunity to interact first-hand with ex-offenders and hear them narrate and explore their own experiences in and outside of the prison. I also

look at how practitioners in this field have questioned and debated the issue of what role the arts might have in the rehabilitation and resettlement of offenders. The ethical implications of working with offenders in prisons are potentially complex. One negative implication could be for example the argument that they are telling the stories of the offenders whom they seek to represent in order to promote their own politics and ideologies, or that their work brings personal gain for the company members, or that their organisation profits from the work, by attracting funding for socially worthy projects. However, I found that the artists and companies themselves were interested in exploring these nuances and implications, and their work was often self-questioning and aware of the ethical implications – I explore how writers have at times self-satirized and questioned the validity of the work they do in prison. – for example, Rebecca Lenkiewicz's satirical portrait of the 'writer in prison' in her play *That Almost Unnameable Lust* (2010), which questions or criticizes the role of the artists or theatre practitioners in criminal justice especially those whose research or projects are focused on working with offenders. The figure of the playwright in prison theatre is a contested and problematic one, since coming from outside the prison, they may always be considered as potentially invasive, and in danger of appropriating the voices and stories of prisoners, whose experience they might not have shared but are nonetheless seeking to represent, as "we are only visitors within the disciplines into which we apply our theatre" (Thompson, 2003:20). Philip Taylor asserts that 'interventionists, by their nature are not part of the community in which the problem has been diagnosed. They are strangers to the community and are invited as experts with established patterns of working… (2003:87), but Jenny Hughes (2005:10) recognises the efficacy of arts in prison as a tool for rehabilitation but opines that it is

relevant to establish or disclose the relationship between intervention approaches, reoffending and desistance.

As I reflected on the journey of prison theatre from 1979 to 2017, and the techniques or styles employed by playwrights and practitioners, it became clear that prison theatre has moved from the most marginalised spaces to the centre of mainstream theatre spaces. I employed location to explore the progress of prison theatre, using the lavish production of *Our Country's Good* on the Olivier stage at the National Theatre in 2015 as an example of a play that has straddled alternative and marginalised spaces. To underline the point, in 2015 Clean Break's miniature production *Sweatbox* was performed in a bus parked outside the National Theatre at the same time that *Our Country's Good* was being performed inside the National Theatre, proving the extent to which prison theatre has travelled from the margins to the mainstream. Another example is the staged reading at the Victoria and Albert Museum of plays written by ex-offenders working with the Synergy Theatre Project. Such events speak volumes about the place of prison theatre in the mainstream spaces, and its reach to a wider audience.

In working with these theatre companies, I gained deeper insight into their politics and ideologies upon which their practice is based. I participated in Clean Break's workshops which involved a mixture of participants who have experienced criminal justice and were going through theatre in education programme, ex-offenders who have graduated from Clean Break's education programme, as well as students who have interests in using theatre to address issues relating to criminal justice. I interacted with ex-offenders and was able to engage in their stories. I also worked with ex-offenders who were going through rehabilitation with Synergy Theatre Project, I participated in several drama workshops, training and rehearsals

with them, and I was able to understand and connect to their stories, and appreciated their commitment and desire to retell their stories and rewrite the script society has written about them. My interview with Ester Baker of Synergy Theatre Project, an active and devout practitioner of prison theatre created that room to engage in a critical conversation about their trade and practice, their ideology and politics in pursuit of their goals of establishing a positive future for the ex-offenders. Also, I was privileged to interview Andy Watson, the Geese Theatre Company's artistic director in order to understand their practice and ideology towards rehabilitation of offenders. I participated in training programmes organised in collaboration with Clean Break and Geese Theatre company where I engaged and was exposed to the techniques and processes of facilitating workshops, dealing with feedbacks and post-performance discussions. Participating in these workshops and trainings as well as conducting interviews with these practitioners working with the theatre companies, and listening to the stories and experiences of the ex-offenders culminated in an understanding of the impact of prison theatre practice on the transformation and resettlement of offenders, as well as appreciating the journey of prison theatre from the alternative space to the contemporary British mainstream theatre spaces.

Although, I have not been able to visit the prison to carry out part of this research, the multi-layered aspect of this thesis has been relevant to the overall research process as it brings together my experiences of working with clients in drug projects, analysis of plays about prison and prisoners written by playwrights, some of whom have a wealth of practical experience in working with offenders within and outside the prison and some of whom have not worked in prison but who drew inspirations from their avid interest in writing about theatre and criminal justice in Britain. Also, attending workshops and listening to the stories of offenders,

interviewing practitioners and working with the theatre companies, exploring prison theatre both in marginal and mainstream spaces have all offered me a wealth of research evidence to assess the role of arts in criminal justice and particularly prison theatre in rehabilitation and resettlement of offenders.

The theoretical underpinnings of this research draw from the theory of the Good Lives Model of Offender Rehabilitation, as well as narrative and tragic dramaturgical theories to explore the interconnectedness between offenders' conflict of desire to achieve their goals in the face of internal and external challenges, and how telling their stories reconstructs their identities and affects the audience' sense of judgement and societal perceptions about crime, punishment and justice. The Good Lives Model developed by Tony Ward (2004) focuses on offering a holistic approach to offenders' rehabilitation based on the ground that offenders' experiences, strengths and capabilities need to be developed and enhanced so as to deter them from reoffending behaviour. The Good Lives Model suggests that the chances of offending exist mainly because of people's desire to add positive values to their lives. To highlight the interdisciplinary nature of this research, the Good Lives Model as expressed in the field of Psychology, connects with the offenders in prison theatre and the narratives of how they came in contact with the criminal justice system. In an attempt to pursue positive goals, individuals engage in unlawful and antisocial behaviours which could be linked to certain social, biological and environmental factors. These negative factors create a background which militates against offenders' desire to achieve their goals in a socially acceptable way. The Good Lives Model as a rehabilitation approach sets out a framework that responds to the skills, desire, hopes and aspirations of the offenders and encourages prison theatre practitioners to develop intervention programmes that will help and support offenders in pursuing and

achieving their positive personal goals. Intervention or rehabilitation platforms are used to develop offenders' knowledge and skills as well as offering them opportunities and providing relevant internal and external resources required to achieve their goals and potentials, as lack of support may lead offenders to engage in antisocial behaviour or other negative means to attain their goals and values in life (Ward and Steward, 2003). The Good Lives Model is based on the assumption that all human beings, including the offenders, deserve a good life, and that meeting human needs promotes and improves human psychological wellbeing (Ward and Brown, 2004).

However, empowering offenders to achieve their goals and values will appear difficult or impossible without first understanding their internal and external struggles or the challenges they face to meet their needs, goals and aspirations. And to understand their challenges and sufferings, we must listen to their stories because narratives help to construct and re-construct individuals' identities. Monika Fludernik (2007) writing in her essay 'Identity/alterity' states that, "in order to create continuity between past and present, in order to lend meaning to the experiences that we have undergone, we construct a story of our life. In this story, we may be victim of external forces that kept intruding on us… (262). Therefore, this research adopts the theory of narratives to understand how storytelling becomes a channel for healing, empowerment, empathy, and creating a dialogue about constructing and reconstructing offenders' identities. Storytelling is about human agency – understanding what motivates individuals to take action and how those actions and motivations play out – outcome. Individuals' stories and circumstances revolving around their actions or behaviour as well as the outcome or judgements affect us as humans when we put ourselves in their shoes. Listening to stories or watching human

suffering helps us to understand their motivations, frustrations, weaknesses, values, aspirations, as we relate their stories to our experiences and circumstances, regarding the choices and decisions we make. Narrative is about the healing of wounds; the storyteller is healed on a personal level by the act of telling a story, society is healed through the narrative process - the audience becomes more active in seeking social change, a progression from re-telling personal stories to social narratives.

This thesis also makes use of traditional dramaturgical notions, including those of tragedy and tragic structure, and examines how these play out, or are challenged, in a range of play texts on criminal justice. Playwrights create their work to affect audience in a particular way through words, techniques, forms, conventions, dialogue and monologue. These playwrights' choice of design affects how audience responds to their texts. According to Jeffrey Sweet (1993), "we write in the hope that what we create will be performed by actors for an audience and will stimulate a reaction in that audience. We must accept that part of our responsibility is to give serious consideration to what reaction – besides applause – we stimulate" (128). This research shows how theatre has grappled with the bigger philosophical questions about crime and criminal justice; such as why do people commit crime? Who is to blame for crime? Who is the victim and how does the victim cope with the consequences of crime? Tragedy, at the most basic level, stimulates audiences' emotions, and traditionally shows how a scapegoat is punished in such a manner that society or a community is purged. These plays often implicitly employ tragic concepts of hamartia (error) and catharsis to explore questions of who is to blame for a disaster, and the question of 'evil' or being 'born bad' versus the social causes of crime, such as poverty, inequality, neglect, social injustice. I use the idea of catharsis in prison theatre because most of the offenders I have heard their stories share some

cathartic experiences of moments and a progression of chains of incidents in their lives that have defined who they are as offenders, and these incidents can happen to anyone and affect them in different ways. Jessie Thompson re-echoes in her review of Clean Break theatre company in the *Evening Standard* (24 August, 2016), that, "an understanding that women's risk of offending is often down to a tapestry of trauma that may snake through their entire history, even before they were born, is a crucial part of what Clean Break's work tries to pass on". Many offenders narrativize their traumatic memories and experiences of being trapped in what could be viewed as a type of 'tragic inevitability' even before they were born. In other words, they had no control over their fate; for example, some offenders were born the children of drug addicts who engaged in all sorts of substances misuse before, during their pregnancies, and even after the birth of their children, and these circumstances unavoidably affected the offenders' behaviours and became part of their narratives. Through tragedy, audience is purged of emotions (catharsis) and in psychoanalysis, "through analytic transference, the patient overcomes his psychological resistances and works through his painful memories" (Wallace, 2007:178), but this emotional process does not always lead to healing or relief. Brecht questioned the issue of empathy which tragedy excites in the audience in theatre, and its impacts on social action. He is of the view that tragedy as an art form will consume the audience by engaging them empathetically with the characters' actions and through catharsis or purgation of emotion, audience will feel relief and pleasure, and unable to challenge the injustices and inequalities outside of the theatre world. As a reaction against Aristotelian tragic sympathy, Brecht created epic theatre's alienation technique which detached audience from emotional engagement with the character and encouraged them to think rationally about the onstage dramatic events or actions. The essence of

prison theatre as it concerns this research is not to solicit for audience emotional response by pitying the offenders, but to create the opportunities for offenders to have a voice and be able to tell their stories, not only to rewrite their narratives but to change the perception of society about offenders, by creating awareness, taking social action and making offender's personal narrative into societal narratives – in this sense, issues affecting offenders will be seen as issues affecting society.

During my research, I found mostly that the identity or the image of the offenders is framed by the narratives put on them by society, the criminal justice system, theatre professionals, the playwrights, as well as the media. Through prison theatre practice, offenders are empowered to take back control by giving them the platform to be able to tell their own stories and carve a new image for themselves through playwriting, drama workshop, improvisation and participation in play productions. Clean Break, Synergy Theatre Project and Geese Theatre Company create opportunities for offenders to control their own narratives and reconstruct their identities. Although, they all practise theatre in prison with prisoners and ex-prisoner, they adopt different styles and have varying philosophies, ideologies guiding their intervention practices. Caoimbe McAvinchey's comment:

> Theatre offers many different interventions into the prison system – both directly and indirectly – but these actions do not necessarily share the same politics. Some practices seek to interrogate and critique the ideology and practice of prison, while some, in their casual complicity with institutional and government agendas, fail to acknowledge the wider political and economic landscape in which their work is enmeshed (2011:80).

Some practitioners oppose or challenge the agendas of the government or institutions because they have their own political agenda or argument, while some tend to support

wider political and economic activities that gave them the platform to operate; I will examine these opposing attitudes and ideologies in relation to the theatre practice and practitioners I discuss.

The essence of taking theatre to the prison or making theatre for, and with prisoners is also to counter – or at least modify - the notion that prison is an edifice for the incarceration and punishment of offenders. Theatre in prison is generally tailored to provide a space for individuals perhaps to examine their past experiences, so that they may be able to deal better with their present life within and outside the prison. Most of the theatre companies I have worked with and studied, see their role at least partly as one of facilitating and enabling people in prison to express themselves in a constructive and perhaps (to use tragic terminology) cathartic way; to come to terms with what has happened to them; perhaps to explore their own responsibility for their past and to work out ways that will help them prepare for a new life in the future. Andrew Coyle (2005) in his discussion of offenders outside the prison walls, suggests that,

> …when offenders have completed their sentences, they should leave prison with a sense of purpose and ready to contribute positively to society, rather than with a sense of bitterness and alienation which will make it likely that they will commit further offences. This sense of commitment to society will be strengthened if prisoners are given an appreciation of their worth as persons and of what they can contribute to society (8)

This suggests that the experiences of the offenders in prison should prepare them to take social action when they return to the community. When offenders are given a sense of purpose and hope that they can take back control of their lives, that may raise their self-esteem as they reflect on their past experiences and the need to integrate

when they return to the community. Many practitioners within the prison theatre setting see their goal as contributing to a better and more positive future life for the prisoners and through various processes of working together with the prison personnel, focus on rehabilitating the prisoners. The process of rehabilitation through theatre in prison reflects the positive impact of collaboration evident in theatre practice where all efforts are focused on instigating a behavioural change amongst the participants and audiences. To ensure that there is cooperation and understanding in the whole process of rehabilitation, all investigations and exploration should not be channelled towards the offenders alone, but also to the stakeholders in theatre practice – theatre companies, playwrights, audiences, and the criminal justice system despite any political or economic challenges.

The context for this thesis is the economic and political landscape of the late 1970s which gave rise to the founding of perhaps the most influential prison theatre company in Britain: Clean Break which was founded in 1979. I therefore take 1979 as the starting-point of my thesis; not only is it the year in which Clean Break came into being, but it is also the year in which the Conservative party came to power with Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister – which had particular consequences for the arts in Britain. The British political and economic atmosphere in 1970s and 1980s marked a dramatic and remarkable cultural shift which affected the business of theatre and arts in general. Due to the political and cultural shifts in theatre engagement in Britain, companies and theatre practitioners began to focus more on finding means of taking theatre beyond the conventional stage to the community and other non-traditional settings as "alternative theatre paved way for the explosion of women's playwriting in the 1980s… During the decade, the contents and formal conventions of established theatre were challenged, creating an appetite for innovative and

experimental work" (Megson, 2012, unpaginated). There was an increase in the number of women writing plays and making theatre such as Timberlake Wertenbaker, Caryl Churchill, Winsome Pinnock, many of whom wrote in Thatcher and Thatcherism. However, other male dramatists such as Howard Brenton, Tom Stoppard and Alan Ayckbourn were all motivated or influenced by the social and economic circumstances created by Thatcherism.

The emergence of Margaret Thatcher as the British Prime Minister in 1979 had an impact on the theatrical climate of the period which can still be felt today. The introduction of 'short, sharp, shock' punitive system to deter offenders from reoffending was considered a dehumanising approach by some theatre practitioners and playwrights such as Timberlake Wertenbaker who contrasted that ideology in her play *Our Country's* Good (1988), suggesting the transforming power of the theatre as opposed to punishment. Keith Peacock asserts that "the election of the Thatcher government affected not political and economic discourse, but also cultural discourse, and had a clear influence on the drama and theatre of the 1980s" (1990:7). It was this financial and economic austerity that led to the rise or formation of some alternative theatre companies as well as keeping others out of business. Left-wing drama and political theatre groups or companies sprang up to challenge and respond to the political and cultural environment created by the Thatcher's administrative policies. Peacock further explains that "new constituency theatre companies formed by women, blacks and gays also considered it important to discover theatrical forms which proclaimed their identity, appealed to their particular constituency and conveyed their philosophy and values" (9). This is to say that cutbacks in funding to arts organisations prompted existing companies to disband and ironically motivated others to be created. Jane Milling (2012) confirms, "yet the 1980s did find a host of

resistant voices from the stage in the communities, and school halls, in fringe and alternative venues, in regional theatres, as well as on major subsidised national stages" (not paginated). Thatcher's economic policies affected the operations of the subsidized theatre. Public subsidy was increasingly replaced by corporate sponsorship and theatre companies closed down because of lack of funds to operate. *The Guardian* theatre critic, Michael Billington summarises that,

> Margaret Thatcher may not have cared passionately about the arts, but she left her emphatic mark upon them. Under her watch from 1979 to 1990 we saw a shift away from public subsidy to corporate sponsorship, a transformation of the Arts Council from the independent agency to an instrument of government, and the growth of siege mentality in arts organisations (*The Guardian*, 8 April 2013).

Thatcher's administration and cultural economic policies therefore in some senses led to the emergence of resistance and counter voices, and the kind of political theatre companies some of which, are still operating today, such as Clean Break. The political and economic situation in Britain under Thatcher's administration sparked off competitiveness amongst arts organisations as they struggled to cope with the economic austerity that came as a result of the cut in arts funding, for example Mrs. Worthington's Daughters - a women-only collective touring and staging plays in alternative theatre spaces was founded in 1978, but disbanded in 1982 because of lack of funding. Although various theatre groups and companies making theatre in, for or about prisons and prisoners existed in 1970s, there was none specifically targeting prisoners or ex-prisoners as Corinna Seeds suggests. One of the theatre companies affected by 'Thatcherism' was Stirabout, which was established in 1974 by Corinna Seeds. As recorded in *Unfinished Histories* (www.unfinishedstories.com), an online

project by Susan Croft that focuses on the work of theatre companies existing from 1968 to 1988, Corinna Seeds' "Stirabout was the first British theatre company formed specifically to take theatre performances and drama workshops into prison". *Unfinished Histories* tells the story of how Corinna Seeds, the Stirabout founder emigrated to Greece, and according to her, on the official emigration tax form, she wrote 'Thatcherism' as her reason for leaving for she said she was shattered when the arts cuts came and there was no sign of continuity for the company, because nobody was willing to take over.

In 1979, under the new government and in the context of this new era in British theatre practice, a women-only theatre company Clean Break was established which clearly means that Stirabout was already in existence before Clean Break, but disbanded in 1981 due to the austerity measures imposed on theatre. Clean Break is particularly focal to this thesis, as it exemplifies the combination of theatre practice and training with special emphasis on new writing, the role of a contemporary playwright and the "writer-in-prison" as a central part of its mission. According to the report in *Unfinished Histories*, Clean Break's founders Jenny Hicks and Jacqueline Holborough first met as inmates in Durham prison; the story goes that while in the exercise yard, they began to rehearse *Jesus Christ Superstar* and tried to stage *The Trojan Woman*, but the show couldn't continue because they were restricted from staging performances. Jenny Hughes asks:

> What is the experience of prison by women? There has been some excellent research on the discriminatory treatment of women both within the criminal justice system as a whole and within prison. They describe a general experience of women that is frustrating, isolating, dangerous, mind-numbing, depressing, demystifying and humiliating (1998:46).

Codd and Scott (2010:34) quotes (Carlen 1983) as saying that "it is well documented that women experience the structured pains of imprisonment differently from men, with many penologists concluding that incarceration is much harsher for women than their male counterparts". For example, Chris Tchaikovsky's experiences in 1980 as a prisoner in HMP Holloway exposed her to the level of sufferings and negative impact of prison on women that were rarely raised in political or public debates. Chris Tchaikovsky having witnessed the condition of women in incarceration founded Women in Prison (WIP) in 1983 and campaigned vigorously against the penal system and raised awareness especially on the condition of women in prison. The Women in Prison (WIP) comprises mainly of women ex-prisoners, and in 1983 called for a reform agenda in women's prison, prison in general and ultimately drawing attention to the plight of women in prison. The level of abuse and assault experienced by women in the hands of the prison officers expanded Chris Tchaikovsky's criticism of the criminal justice system and she viewed women as victims who are punished by being sent to prisons for unjust circumstances society subjected them to such as poverty, negligence and abuse. Her focus was on community outreach to support women who have left prison with the opinion that punishment exposes women to the experiences they are already familiar with due to their experiences before coming in contact with the criminal justice.

What stands as Clean Break today developed when the duo met again at Askhams Grange open prison where they gained the support of Susan McCormick the prison governor. According to Jenny Hicks (Hicks and Carlon, 1985: 134,136) as cited by Pat Carlen (1990:101), "we decided to do plays written for women by women and fortunately, we were lucky to have the support and encouragement of the

woman governor and a feminist teacher". Different groups within the prison wrote short plays which were brought together into a full play known as *Efemera* slated to last for two hours which was staged in the prison before being performed outside in such venues as the York Arts Centre and the Goodricke College at the University of York. When they were released from prison, they (Jenny Hicks and Jacqueline Holborough) chose to establish a theatre company for women ex-offenders to support themselves and to use theatre as instrument of change, skill development, learning and means of expression. Clean Break is a theatre company that works with women whose lives have been affected by the criminal justice system; it criticizes the activities of the prison system and the treatment received by women in prison, with the view that the support and treatment given to women in prison are disproportionate to that received by their male counterparts.

Despite the fact that Clean Break is a women-only theatre company and employs only women playwrights, that does not imply that men do not exist in their environment. In 2015, I participated in Clean Break's workshop, and there have been some other artistic collaborations involving men in such projects. In 2016, I also participated in Clean Break and Geese Theatre master class titled 'Staging Rehabilitation', which will be discussed later in this study involving Geese Theatre Company's director, Andy Watson. Clean Break provides education programmes for women offenders and those at risk of offending, to encourage them to take back control of their lives through participation in theatre. In "Working with Women" (2014) by Naomi Joseph, she quotes Clean Break's Executive Director Lucy Perman as saying, "our opportunities provide the women with a clean break from their past experiences and help them to move forward positively". Lucy Perman reaffirms that as she speaks to *OpenDemocracy*, (www.opendemocracy.net), "our education and

training programme is integral to the theatre project. We are nurturing independence. We are trying to look at the whole woman…". She is of the view that incarceration does not help in crime reduction or offending behaviour, and that the best approach is to divulge the bulk of financial investments to community-based projects and support good initiatives capable of creating a viable platform that will help in reducing the rate women come in contact with the criminal justice system and instigate change in behaviour.

Jean Troustine, a director who works with women in prison and a co-founder of 'Changing Lives Through Literature' writes that, '… in prison classes, drama enabled the women to believe more deeply in their abilities, to use their risk-taking natures in ways that were productive and to create a community where they value themselves and others' (2004:236). The more women are equipped to engage in theatre activities within their community, the more likely they are to succeed in re-telling their stories and reinventing themselves in a positive direction towards change. Lyn Gardner in *The Guardian* review (8 November 2010) titled "Clean Break and the Invisible Women" states that "it costs £45,000 to keep a woman in prison for a year, but it costs that woman a great deal more". This re-echoes the effects of imprisonment on women offenders which cannot be quantified and can create a web of long-term complications in all aspects of their lives.

The expression of feminist views through alternative theatre in 1980s is evident in Timberlake Wertenbaker's writing in which she frequently adopts Brechtian narrative or historic techniques to deal with the issues of the period. In 1980 and 1981, Wertenbaker was writing plays for the Women's Theatre Group and in 1984 to 1985, she was a writer in residence at the Royal Court. The re-election of Margaret Thatcher in 1987 coincided with the publication of Thomas Keneally's

novel *The Playmaker* (1987), and in 1988 Wertenbaker wrote *Our Country's Good* which I shall discuss as a mirror in which we can see the idea about narratives of transformation central to this research. *Our Country's Good* is a play about storytelling, that explores the meta-theatrical effects of a community of convicts staging a communal theatre project of narrative making that transforms their identities. Jane Milling (2012) in her essay on *Our Country's Good* writes that '…the play was so successful in advocating the potential for inclusion of otherness to transform a nation for the better that fed the general affirmation of arts as a means for making that change' (not paginated). While on the same note, Sophie Bush (2013) in her essay titled "Theatre of Timberlake Wertenbaker", reiterates that 'one of the transformations that Wertenbaker achieved was creating a metaphor from the narrative of *The Playmaker* to demonstrate the redemptive nature of theatre-making for convicts…' (not paginated). Cerys Mathews who was approached to compose the music for the National Theatre production of *Our Country's Good*, says that "at the heart of the story is a play within a play: while the story is specifically about the convicts' journey, it is also about the revolutionary idea of redemption through art…" (www.theguardian.com 14 August 2015). Historically, the play explores the issues of crime and punishment in 1780s, and becomes a mirror that reflects the issues of criminal justice system in the contemporary British society, exposing injustices by employing historical and political metaphor through artistic narratives. Timberlake Wertenbaker's play *Our Country's Good* was instrumental to the exploration of the political and cultural climate of the 1980s by employing historic technique in dealing with the here and now of the then British criminal justice system, which suggests how "…historical events shaped performance practices" (Nicholson, 2015:22). I discuss the play in some detail as it is a major piece of later twentieth-century British

playwriting, widely studied in schools and still alive in the contemporary British repertoire; and it spans the whole spectrum of spaces, from productions within prisons, to revivals on the main stage of the National Theatre. In this way it is a piece which has travelled widely from the most elevated mainstream production space of the Olivier, to the most marginal spaces of prison performances. The spatial positioning of prison theatre within British theatre is another key concern of this dissertation.

This dissertation initially focuses on playwriting and its engagement with criminal justice, exploring how plays about crime and criminals have been positioned to a wider audience in mainstream spaces. I then expand this examination of narratives within dramatic literature to look at the storytelling and story-gathering techniques of three specialist British theatre companies: Clean Break, Synergy Theatre Project and Geese Theatre Company. I explore their workshopping practices and look at how they engage with playwrights in delivering prison theatre projects.

My opening chapter, reviews related literature in applied theatre, which covers discussions in community theatre and prison theatre. Chapters two and three focus on the questions of dramaturgy and dramatic structure; playwrights' styles and different theatrical modes of writing plays about prison. The later chapters of my thesis moves from questions of playwriting to questions of practice more generally. The thesis moves on from the analysis of the writer's role and the text, to examine the use of 'no play texts' in contrast with more conventional sole-authored, dramatic literary theatre, and I analyse what this approach brings to prison theatre and the rehabilitation of offenders.

Chapter one highlights some critical thoughts and discussions about the idea of community and what that means in a prison context, and some scholars' views on the issue of rehabilitation. This chapter reviews research and interrogation already existing in the field of applied theatre and criminal justice, and asks further, how contemporary British applied theatre practice is informed by critical and socio-cultural discourses, in particular, how the critical conversation about prison theatre has developed. I explore the theoretical and critical views and opinions of scholars whose works focus more specifically on the issues, debates and criticism around the narratives in prison theatre. Roland Barthes in his 1966 essay 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative' raised issues about how the idea about narrative character is influenced by some kind of ideological understanding of identity. He points that storytelling is numberless, in the sense that storytelling can be used as a way of connecting disconnected events or experiences; furthermore, to tell a story is to perform a relevant personal or social act. However, individuals construct their identities by telling and retelling their personal narratives in relation to others' experiences in order to articulate their own experiences. In his passage, Barthes describes narrative as being "able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting (…) stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news item, conversation (Barthes, 1977:79). This highlights and sums up the versatility of narrativity as enshrined in this thesis, pointing to the fact that "human life is a process of narrative interpretation" (Widdershoven, 1993:2) and that "stories are narratives people tell about their experiences, events, personal or collective memories, or aspects of individual biographies. They may be shared orally, through

the written word, or through other modes of communication" (Vannini, 2009). Chapter one also explores the historical, political, and cultural atmosphere of the British theatre from 1979 – 2017, and examines how the narrative about applied theatre and criminal justice developed within this context.

The second chapter focuses on theatre about crime and criminals, the playwrights writing about prison and the treatment of crime through dramaturgical and narrative strategies. It demonstrates and examines the wide spectrum of techniques and styles used by British playwrights to explore many aspects of criminal justice. In this chapter, I will analyse Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good* (1988), and the use of distancing technique through the historical adaptation of Thomas Keneally's novel *The Playmaker* (1987), and I discuss Chloe Moss' *Sweatbox* (2014) as an immersive piece of work, considering the critical distance and immersive experience each of these plays respectively evokes. The study of these two stylistically opposing performances was made particularly clear at the National Theatre London during the conference on Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good* in 2015; where *Our Country's Good* as a conventional mainstream play was staged inside the National Theatre, while Chloe Moss' *Sweat Box* in a contrast was performed in a van outside the National Theatre with the audience being immersed in the total experience.

The third chapter focuses on writing about victims and justice. It explores how notion of tragedy and dramaturgical "tragic" concepts contribute to our understanding of justice in the theatre. It also interrogates how playwrights employ tragedy as a genre and how tragedy has a particular resonance with questions of criminal justice. This chapter critically analyses Bryony Lavery's play *Frozen* (1988), and David Williamson's *A Conversation* (2001), performed at the Royal Exchange Theatre,

Manchester (2007) to demonstrate how playwrights bring tragic structures and concepts to bear on contemporary questions of crime and justice. The play explores a conversation as narrative of tragic experiences and a debate about who controls the narrative when it comes to reaching a judgement about who is right and who is wrong. Through the dramatic narratives in form of a conversation we are made to understand the culpabilities of the characters in the tragic and cathartic experiences of others as well as some familial, social and environmental circumstances that form their narratives and define their identities. This chapter also examines Alecky Blythe's play *London Road* (2011) which combines documentary, verbatim theatre techniques with music to explore community redemption from the trauma of a tragedy. The major theme of this chapter focuses on how individuals can cope with the tragic experiences of being victims and offenders by coming to terms with the circumstances through forgiveness and reconciliation; the works in this chapter insistently engage with the themes of the tension between punishment, mercy and retributive justice.

Chapter four specifically focuses on Clean Break's theatre practice and its workshop approaches towards both making theatre, and supporting women who come in contact with the criminal justice system. This chapter examines the feminist ideological perspectives of Clean Break as an organisation that since its inception has been critical of the prison system. This chapter asks, how does Clean Break respond theatrically, in the work of its writers, and in its theatre practice? This question will be investigated through the textual narratives of some of the women playwrights who work with Clean Break such as Vivienne Franzmann's *Sounds Like an Insult* and *Pests* (both 2014), Rebecca Prichard's *Dream Pill* (2010) and Rebecca Lenkiewicz's *That Almost Unnameable Lust* (2010), which explores the issues about who controls

the narratives of the offenders, as professional narrative-makers question their role and right to control the narrative as opposed to autobiographical narratives coming from the offenders.

Chapter five looks at Synergy Theatre Project, the narratives it has staged, and, more generally, its approaches to the rehabilitation of offenders. It explores what Synergy does in terms of practice, and its philosophy about transformation of offenders through participation in theatre. Synergy's approach is practical and focuses on the pragmatic and personal reformation of the individual prisoner, through building employability, instigating behavioural change and generally encouraging and empowering offenders and ex-prisoners to take back control of their lives, by having a voice and being able to change their narratives and discover a new meaning in reconstructing their identities. This chapter also studies Synergy from a commercial production perspective. I examine the staging of Evan Placey's *Girls Like That* (2014), and analyse Shelagh Stephenson's play *The Long Road* (2008). I explore how Synergy's mission and practice is very focused on creating an enabling environment that will help offenders reintegrate into the community, and I examine this approach in contrast to the ideological critique of society that underpins the work of Clean Break.

Chapter six looks at the work of Geese Theatre Company which takes a different approach from the first two companies in that their work mainly focuses on engaging offenders through creative processes without relying on the use of play texts or even staging theatre productions in front of audiences. This chapter investigates Geese Theatre Company's devising techniques and methods in working with offenders, exploring the use of masks and story-telling, cognitive behavioural approach and the place (or absence) of the audience in the creative process. The

chapter examines Watson's claims that theatre offers a space to interrogate and explore behaviour as a crucial step towards offenders' transformation, and considers the no-text approach to the more writer-led, text-focused work of Clean Break and Synergy. Despite the 'writerless' approach of Geese, there are narrative-construction strategies clearly at play in the work they do with masks, improvisational forum theatre and character creation.

To conclude, then, this study sets applied theatre practice in Britain in a historical context and looks in particular at how critical discourses about prison theatre have evolved amongst playwrights and practitioners, and scholars. Prison theatre today takes many diverse forms, and occurs in mainstream West End theatres as well as in prisons and non-mainstream venues. This study aims to explore a combination of playwriting and dramaturgical analysis (play texts), with personal experience (participant observation), documentation and discussion of actual current theatre practice (British theatre companies), to create a holistic examination of the current state in Britain of making theatre about, for and with prisoners and those at risk of offending. This study aims to evaluate theatre as a narrative instrument for engaging, healing and rehabilitating offenders, to compare and contrast the practices and ideologies of the makers, and to examine the worth and value of prison theatre for participants, audiences, and society in the broadest sense.

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Research Methodology

Storytelling naturally is part of human development and existence. Through storytelling, we make sense of the world around us by encoding and decoding meanings depending on the channel of the narrative and approach we adopt. C. Taylor (1989) is of the view that a 'basic condition of making sense of ourselves is that we grasp our lives in a narrative' and we understand our lives 'as an unfolding story'. Our stories are our identities subject to how we interpret our past, present and future. Telling stories is what makes life worthwhile. Stories are what make our condition human (Kearney, 2002:3).

The essence of narrative inquiry is to respond to the "questions of meaning, significance, and purpose… of who, why, what, how, context, and form" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:121). I explore playwrights and theatre companies' engagements in arts in criminal justice and how their works have responded to above questions, and why the world they create are recreated through narratives for new meanings and identities. An individual "creates his identity by forming an autobiographical narrative – a story of his life" (Schechtman, 1996:93), and when involved in drama, an identity is shifted (Jones, 1996:202). I use play analyses and interpretation as a way of collecting information, basic drama games – activities, improvisation, storytelling, discussions and feedbacks, review of secondary materials, interviews and participant observation. Therefore, this thesis looks at the offenders' narratives from multiple perspectives – from playwrights, playtexts and textual analyses to performer (narrator), performance, audience and researcher as a narrator. I draw upon narrative research methodology as a holistic approach to explore the multi-layered framework of this research.

Narrative methodology delivers a perspective that supports responsiveness, reflection (reflexivity), aesthetic detachment, critical thinking and reporting of narrative construction. I make reference to Barnett Pearce's LUUUTT-model to explore stories lived, unknown stories, untold stories, unheard stories, stories told and storytelling (Pearce, 2004). Our creation, understanding and interpretation of narratives relies on the environment where the story is told, the context of the narrative and the relationship between the storyteller and the audience. This model explores disparities in how lived stories are told for a new shared meaning to be created. And through the process of re-narration, stories unheard become stories told, and identification of unknown stories paves the way for a new shared discoveries. Although, Galen Strawson (2004) kicks against narrativity by suggesting that one can reflect on life without seeing it as a narrative, without linking past experiences as coherent incidents that frame identity. Strawson is of the view that autobiographical memories can be distorting, and we may fall into the trap of getting our stories wrong.

My own view is that there are told and untold stories of our lives that make up who we are, that define our identities. Storytelling as an artistic engagement empowers the storyteller to make choice for his story, and how he tells his story. My personal work experience in Passmores House, a branch of the Westminster Drug Project informed my role as a researcher-observer in this project – I witnessed first-hand as a workshop participant, the teasing out stories, role-play and experimentation with fiction that all these companies use. As a listener and participant-observer in the narrative dynamics of prison theatre, my role in this thesis is to investigate the stories that have been created in relation to prisoners, using engagement and disengagement as a technique - an involvement and detachment from a deeper emotional connections in the research process to re-narrate my findings and experience, because "when you

read or listen to a narrative, you leave yourself and become someone else and you see the world through their eyes and feel what they feel. When you finish, you are no longer the same person you were before. You have learnt something" (Gebler, 2014). I use my research to document and process new narratives about theatre and criminal justice.

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CHAPTER ONE

Critical and Practical Contexts:
An Overview of Applied Theatre and Criminal Justice in Britain, 1979-2017

> The act of telling or listening to a story is not only a research into problems that are revealed, but an affirmation that the story is important. Telling and witnessing that telling is transformative in the moment, as well as providing inspiration or research information for the future.
>
> Thompson, James. *Applied Theatre: Bewilderment and Beyond* (2012:144).

Applied theatre is a broad subject which covers a wide spectrum of practices, but in this review, I intend to look particularly at prison theatre. This chapter will explore the key ideas within the critical discourse on prison theatre: issues of transformation, the political and socio-economic aspects of the criminal justice system, the effects of prison theatre on the audience, Boal's forum theatre and the idea of audience active engagement, storytelling, empowerment and the historical development of applied theatre practice in Britain. I will discuss how some of the key scholars and practitioners in the field of applied theatre have engaged in the critical debate; and in particular, this chapter will position storytelling and story-making – the construction and reception of narratives – as central to prison theatre practice, and its aspiration towards transformative power.

The first key aspect of this review is on the ideas of transformation through participation in theatre. Helen Nicholson is of the view that, "applied drama has emerged in a period of cultural change in which the long tradition of the arts being seen to have inherently transformative and universally redemptive qualities has been troubled by new insights into the cultural production and representation of knowledge" (2005:11). This implies that theatre has moved from the universally

accepted notion of politically or culturally motivated mode of practice to a theatre of uncertainty in which new meanings and understanding keep evolving. These new insights prompt a kind of re-evaluation by practitioners, theorists and critics of how applied theatre can be used in different social, political and economic circumstances in dealing with issues confronting society, as well as the fluidity, hybridity and versatility of the practice. The underlying target of applied theatre is to create alternative methods or platforms to encourage participating individuals either as actors or spectators to share their direct experiences and stories through theatre-making as a transforming or healing process. Anthony Jackson (2007:1) in discussing the versatility of applied theatre practice states that 'most are intended to signify forms of theatre practice that aim to effect transformation in people's lives, whether that be the activation of a process of attitudinal or behavioural change', while Esther Baker of Synergy Theatre Project during an interview I conducted with her confirms that Synergy's view is that "theatre can be transformative both for the participants and audience" (Interview, 18 December 2014). But Nicholson (2005:12) argues that "the metaphor of social and personal change that I find most appropriate for applied drama" is "transportation" which upon return, brings back new feelings and understanding, enabling participants to view life in different ways. Nicholson goes further to state that,

> … the idea of transportation suggests greater scope for creativity and unpredictability than that of transformation. Should transformation occur, it is a gradual and cumulative process, the result of learning and negotiation with others, a progressive act of self-creation. In the process of transportation, the outcomes are clearly focused but not fixed, and change may take place gradually, a collaborative and sustained process between participants and often in partnership with other supportive agencies (12-13).

For Nicholson, ‘transportation’, a term prescribed by Richard Schechner, implies that transformation is a gradual process which defamiliarizes the world and thereby offers fresh perspectives: “it is about travelling into another world, often fictional, which offers both new ways of seeing and different ways of looking at the familiar” (Nicholson, 2005:13). Brent Buell (2011) in his assessment of the ‘Rehabilitation Through the Arts’ project in Sing Sing Correctional Facility concurs with Nicholson on the transformation aspect of prison theatre by asserting that theatre can be transformative, but it takes a gradual process as “the process of making up one’s story is a process of making up one’s self” (Benson, 2001:49). Every offender has stories to tell and narrating or constructing those individual stories from direct experiences becomes a powerful and effective means of releasing hidden or suppressed experiences, taking control of the stories they share and being transformed through the process of narrative-construction. Critics and practitioners continue to propose that prison theatre assists in this process of ‘making up one’s story’ and coming to a new understanding of oneself and one’s history – that such narrative construction, through prison theatre or via other creative therapies or interventions in prison, may instigate a change in attitude in participating individuals - albeit that such transformation or change in behaviour is unquantifiable and not fixed. I suggest that through ‘making up one’s story’ based on direct experiences, participants in the art of storytelling are elevated beyond the actual space, exploring their emotions, feelings, imagination which are not fixed but immeasurably slippery and fluid.

Prison theatre is inevitably concerned with story-making and narrative-construction. Engaging with stories involves setting a framework of when, where, who, how, why and what motivates individuals or characters, and how their actions

influence or affect our understanding of the narrative of transformation. Prentki and Preston (2009) reveal, “applied theatre as a term describing a broad set of theatrical practices and creative processes that take participants and audience beyond the scope of conventional, mainstream theatre into the realm of theatre that is responsive to ordinary people and their stories, local settings and priorities” (9). Philip Taylor (2003) sees applied theatre as a “transformative encounter” (3), an agent of transformation and awareness creation which breaks the rules of the stage and theatrical protocols to embrace performance outside the traditional theatre setting to encourage participation and rehabilitation. According to Rowe and Reason (2017), “the arts practitioner invites the participants to plunge themselves into an immersive pool of creative experience, trusting that this will have an effect that cannot be fully predicted at the outset and is likely to be difficult to define” (15). Narrative changes, a rehabilitated offender can relapse or reoffend, and a good citizen can become an offender tomorrow, nothing is fixed or static and there is always something to change. The aesthetic and emotional effects of theatre on both the participants and audience remain unquantifiable but offer a unique experience to each individual.

The effect of narrative on the audience is a crucial aspect of prison theatre and its rationale, aims and objectives. It is a concern of all theatre. In applied theatre, where theatre is being made often towards a political or social goal, there can be some tension between the twin goals of aesthetic effects and political outcomes. James Thompson in his ideas on the use of affect and effect, argues for the aesthetic experience of theatre rather than the focused outcome, - in order words, how we engage with the meaning behind narrative as well as how we experience it. In his book *Performance Affects: Applied Theatre and the End of Effect* (2009), which is based on his experience in applied theatre projects in time of disaster, Thompson

argues that the essence of participatory performance is to inspire and create a sense of joy and beauty. He explains that affect "refers to emotional, often automatic, embodied responses that occur in relation to something else – be it object or observation, recall of memory or practical activity" (119). His critical work on prison theatre suggests that prison should not be for punishment but a place where offenders are prepared to lead better lives when they are released into society, and from the performance perspective, he argues that affect is the spontaneous, immediate responses gained through immersive experience of the total performance from process to product. While Nicholson, Buell, and other critics point to the gradual theatrical process of transformation, Thompson bases his argument on the theatre aesthetic experience that is instant and spontaneous. He goes further to say that these aesthetic responses would be shortened or weakened if the sole target of applied theatre is the outcome or the results (effects) in a social context. He maintains that engaging offenders in prison theatre with the sole aim of solving target problems will deprive theatre of its essential aesthetic merits or values. Thompson calls that attention should not only be on the social impact of the theatre, but also, crucially, on the beauty and aesthetic experience of the participants and audience. Thompson asks for a prison theatre that creates "a new meaning-making environment – an environment that insisted on and valued participation, fun, debate, physical action and creativity" (2008:96), to enhance aesthetic experience and deliver social outcome. In the playtexts I discuss, and the practice of the theatre companies I analyse, there is often much creative tension in this area, and some of the materials I discuss overtly set aesthetics in counterpoint to the political argument and content of the work.

However, there are critics who counter Thompson's view, with its emphasis on aesthetics, such as, Prendagast and Saxton (2009) who note that, "by participating

in building and performing a fictional or parallel world, audience (and players) gain the kind of distance from their own bodies, specific situations, and lives. It is this distance that allows participants to explore areas that, in real life, may have remained hidden or unexamined, perhaps through ignorance or fear" (191). Like Nicholson's 'transportation', distance becomes a narrative technique through which participants move away from their past and become engaged with the present and by taking social actions, change their identities through their own narratives.

Nicola Shaughnessy (2012), however, supports Thompson's affective idea that the experience of engaging in theatre in prison should be emotional and empathetic. Shaughnessy argues that the ultimate purpose of applied theatre is to effect change through affect because change comes from within. It is upon this notion that theatre is taken to prisons to tell affective individual stories in a theatre space, and these individual narratives help in (re) constructing the image of offenders and the perception of society, which according to Helen Nicholson creates "points of connection between lived experiences and theatrical representation" (2011:5). According to James Thompson (2012), "theatre invites: it belongs to all and is costless, familiar, fun and easy to alter and is the process of people exploring, debating, searching and changing their own lives. It is where people's own stories can be presented, heard and transformed" (122). Above all, prison theatre offers a space for stories to be told and listened to – a platform for the stories of offenders, who are some of the most marginalised members of society. Their stories can be told for the benefit of themselves, but also for the benefit of victims of crime; the gathering and exchange of narratives is something that many of the texts I will explore (*A Conversation*, *Frozen;* etc) dramatize, and it is at the heart of the practice of all the companies whose work I analyse, whether this work is destined for mainstage spaces,

such as the Royal Court (in the case of Clean break and Synergy) or whether it stays purely within the rehearsal room (as practised by Geese).

Offenders' participation in prison theatre gives them the platform to tell their stories and share their experiences in different ways. Marij Rahnema argues that 'the instrumental function of the participatory approach was to provide the 're-empowered' actors of development with new alternatives, with a view of involving the 'patients' in their own care' (2010:142), which implies that participants in prison theatre are given the opportunity to explore their behaviour and take back control of their lives. Through this process of engagement, Thompson argues that an offender can become more aware of others' feelings, thoughts, and imaginations, thereby understanding more about their own life experiences in relation to their experiences on stage because "imagination is the foundation for that change in understanding" (Cooper 2013:52). It is through imagination that an individual will begin to question his actions as to why he is engaging in criminal behaviours; imagination opens the possibility of accepting change and becoming a better person through rehabilitation, as well as creating a space for a change in behaviour. When offenders in a theatre process or rehearsal room engage with character, they can imaginatively begin to live in the world of that character. Brent Buell is of the view that,

> A theatrical production is like a microcosm of the world. In a production a person encounters everything from the group decisions to occasionally having a bow to director…A person has to learn how to take orders…and give orders, all for the good of the show. A person learns to have a spirit of cooperation (something usually missing in the daily life of prison where it is everyman for himself) (2011: 59).

Imagination is an experience that is not fixed but unique to individuals, which uncovers new ways of knowing; and theatre can be an agent for creative imagination and learning. It is a process of development and change. It offers the opportunity for the offenders participating in theatre to explore the behaviour of dramatic characters and step out of their emotions to analyse and reflect on their own narratives.

However, as I have indicated at the very start of this chapter, with Nicholson's caveat about 'new insights into the cultural production and representation of knowledge', many critics and practitioners have in more recent years become deeply concerned about the ethics of the retrieval and processing of personal stories. Thompson (2004) raises a concern as he asserts,

> The forms by which stories are retrieved and told reveal complex value systems that need to be considered closely in any analysis of this work. When creating theatre with vulnerable or marginalised communities, the ethics of the practice must be a paramount concern and I believe some of the most difficult issues arise within the structures by which groups tell stories or are invited to participate in that telling… (163).

Thompson's concerns are about the aspects of telling private personal stories for group consumption and the caution to be applied in controlling and managing personal information. Whose story is it and who exercises the cultural privilege of telling or representing it? Whose voice dominates? These are questions that cannot be ignored in any applied theatre practice but especially so in the case of prison theatre. Thompson argues that there should be an awareness of the need to cultivate ethical values and principles. This poses a question of trust on how do those who come in contact with individuals' stories within prison theatre practice manage these stories? Are the stories used for rehabilitative purposes or for the individual's

personal gain? The researchers, facilitators and those involved in prison theatre are bound to understand the need for professional ethics and integrate the narrative, aesthetic and political values in their practices as "the values of the practitioners obviously have a major impact on the processes of working" (Nicholson, 2005:28). However, "personal story telling expressing what people in different walks of life know from the authority of experience is appropriately the signature methodology of community-based performance" (Cohen-Cruz, 2005: 129).

Nonetheless, despite the sensitivity of storytelling and, the ethics involved, James Thompson asserts that "theatre in prison can be a powerful place to reinvent the present and imagine the future", and "the unity of form and content to bring about change in understanding remains the function of theatre and drama" (1998:40). Nicholson (2005) argues that, "the idea that theatre has the potential to 'address something beyond the form itself' suggests that applied drama is primarily concerned with developing new possibilities for everyday living rather than segregating theatre-going from other aspects of life" (4). There is a reason for telling stories (narrative), every action must have a motivation, and interpreting the act of narration implies that the audience share the feelings (affects) of the environment with the narrator. Michael Balfour (2004) is interested in the social application of theatre in different contexts such as community, prison theatre and storytelling, and focuses on the engagement of the arts in response to contemporary issues ranging from prison theatre to understanding of the relevance of theatre in prison.

Besides the transformational, narrative, aesthetic and ethical aspects of prison theatre, the critical debate has of course been frequently very concerned with its political and socio-economic goals and contexts. Caoimhe McAvinchey, (2011), a significant specialist in the area of prison theatre, in her book *Theatre & Prison* looks

at how theatre and performance can be used to explore the socio-political and economic circumstances of the prison system in the 21st century. Her ideas are based on socially engaged performance practice outside the mainstream stage, arguing that it brings communities together, and interrogates ideas about the politics and aesthetics of social justice and representation. Prison theatre can be viewed as a specialised extension of community theatre, a concept which is founded upon the ideas of Paolo Freire and Augusto Boal[2]. Boal (1979), in his *Theatre of the Oppressed*, states that 'theater is change and not simple presentation of what exists. It is becoming and not being' (28). Boal is of the view that the act of becoming implies the process and being is the product. The emphasis is on how transformation is achieved (process) and being transformed (product). His theatre approach is focused on the emancipation and liberation of the oppressed from the forces of oppression, and "in order to understand this poetics of the oppressed, one must keep in mind its main objective: to change the people – "spectators", passive beings in the theatrical phenomenon – into subjects, into actors, transformers of the dramatic action (Boal, 1979:122). In this case, Boal and Kershaw want a theatre that adopts a radical approach as a means of intervention and encourages the audience to get actively involved to help them deal with issues concerning them physically and mentally, so that the community of the oppressed will regain freedom and be reconstructed as agents of social change, as Peter Abbott suggests that "we are always called upon to be active participants in narrative, because receiving the story depends on how we in turn construct it from the discourse" (2008:22). Govan, et al (2007) also suggest that "rather than being passive spectators, members of the audience are acknowledged as active listeners and the

[2] The concept of critical pedagogy as developed by Paulo Freire (1970) in his text *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* became influential to the development of Applied Theatre as a tool for liberation from oppression.

authentic nature of the material often draws the audience into an active engagement with the performer" (68). Many of the plays and productions I will discuss in subsequent chapters make active demands on the audience – as listeners, sometimes physical participants in immersive contexts, but always co-creators of narrative and meaning.

It is pertinent to look into the aspect of applied theatre development in the UK to understand how the practice has developed within the historical and political contexts. Prison theatre in the UK has grown very fast and new initiatives are arising, for example, some theatre companies are collaborating with organisations in criminal justice to embark on alternative theatre projects (Hughes, 2005). When prison theatre is taken over by companies and arts organisations who follow the policy set out by the government or other agencies, the theatrical activities in prison or about prison are inevitably streamlined to suit those agendas. Helen Nicholson (2005) states that the use of a term applied theatre became prominent and gained popularity among practitioners in the 1990s and Kershaw (1999) notes that there has been a 'paradigm shift' which affects our perceptions of theatre and performance practice (23). Kershaw points to the developments in British theatre in the 1980s and 1990s under Thatcherism, arguing that it was invaded by a new alternative theatre culture which propelled variety of styles and venues, increasing pressures on marketing and consumption of theatre. Jane Milling (2012) records that 'during the 1980s, theatrical culture was subjected to a range of policy, political and economic pressures' (not paginated). Such pressures spurred most theatre practitioners and companies to respond to the political realities of the period through their works. And Baz Kershaw (2004), asks, "how do the practices of drama and theatre best engage with systems of formalized power to create space for radical freedom"? Thompson (2004) critiques

the prison system as being in a sense a coercive and de-humanising form of 'theatre', using the language of 'scripts' and 'roles' thus:, "a system that de-individualises the criminal, in order to break down the body and mind, to strip the self into component parts and then reconstruct it, re-socialise it with new role and a learnt script to the satisfaction of the tax paying public and policy makers" (60). Here, Thompson is of the view that the prison system may itself become a kind of performance of punishment according to the dictates and guidance set out by the policy makers, and makers of prison theatre must be aware that "if we engrain our practices deeply into institution of oppression and punishment, we become contributors to the oppressive environment" (Thompson, 2003:29). Here, Thompson agrees with Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed and his call for audiences' active participation and social action. Although, theatre has the capacity to perform social roles, it should be carried out within the aesthetic parameters, therefore, social theatre and aesthetic practice should not be wholly separated, rather, it is worthwhile to view "theatre in the service of social change" (Prentki and Preston, 2009: 12) and not to allow "aesthetic engagement being eroded in the service of pragmatism" (Balfour, 2009: 351).

Prison theatre, as I have argued, exists within the continuum of applied theatre, which broadly has always had the remit of promoting community cohesion, collaboration and cooperation (Cohen-Cruz 1998, Kershaw, 1992, Kuppers 2007 and Nicholson, 2005). Theatre can be used as agent of development and change by encouraging participation. Applied theatre has become a way of outreach to the community of offenders who may need support to reflect on their past and through participation can be encouraged to take back control of their lives. Palmer J. and Richard H. (2008) assert the relevance of theatre in addressing issues in the society,

> Many practitioners in community theatre – and, more generally, community arts – held and still hold dear to the notion of some sort of political content or purpose, primarily through allowing participants the chance to develop enough confidence to speak publicly about issues overlooked by mainstream debate, and by providing forums in which it is possible to do so. The best of such work is able to act as a catalyst for lasting change rather than an isolated intervention. (21)

Such participation can be rehabilitating, as the participants are offered a platform and a means to 'speak publicly', empowering them to tell their stories to the mainstream audience about issues which may not be visible or articulated in the mainstream debates. Contemporary prison theatre practice tends to focus on creating a platform to deal with issues affecting offenders and their community, to "inform, illuminate, entertain, raise awareness" (Michael Billington, 2012), to share common goals, deal with related issues or solve problems. According to Petra Kuppers, (2007),

> The concept of community remains difficult to pin down but depends in large part on borders of inclusion and exclusion. Community members define these borders in both perceptual and material ways, noting shared values, interests, and territories differentiating themselves from others who don't share these defining features (36).

There is a boundary within the community setting that promotes the notion of 'self' and 'other' and to understand who the victims and offenders are, we should understand who we are by questioning selves, "helping offenders to re-evaluate their values and goals and to construct practical identities that are truly redemptive in nature necessitates creating dialogues based on mutual respect and openness" (Laws & Ward, 2011:226). Thus, prison theatre has the potential to bring about open mindedness which fosters cooperation, understanding, and dialogue between self and

other, between offenders and the victims, but also between the offenders and society which defines their behaviour as unacceptable. Advocates of prison theatre argue that creating opportunities for offenders in the community to interact and think about offending, rehabilitation, and integration into society will help in reducing the rate of which offender become responsible for crimes, (Maruna, 2001, McNeil, 2004).

However, prison theatre can also impel audiences to reconsider and question the operation of crime and punishment in society, and can challenge the complacent assumption that 'justice' is always being served, because "theatre can redirect gazes, shift perceptions and change the display. It can debate the serious pain in the system" (Thompson, 2004:74). This implies that theatre can be instrumental in challenging the negative aspects of the socio-cultural, political or criminal justice system as well as raising debates on the major issues. McAvinchey (2011), describes the relationship between theatre and prison thus:

> Thinking about theatre and prison provokes an inquiry into the relationship between the individual and the state, forcing us to consider how prisons perform within the economy of punishment, and compelling us to question narratives of crime, punishment and justice that are believed to be true and effective. This is the terrain of theatre and prison (3).

Prison is therefore a contested space, where competing narratives place it in different lights: there is the dominant narrative from society where prison is a place of punishment and justice; but there are other narratives, many of them explored through prison drama, that function as troubling counter-narratives about how just our justice system is, about whether prison is appropriate or efficacious or whether it reproduces all the iniquities and problems of society. Many of the plays discussed in this thesis

question the narrative of fault, blame, crime, punishment, forgiveness and transformation, etc.

Another crucial aspect of prison theatre that this thesis explores is that of the offenders' readiness to accept intervention strategies such as prison theatre. According to Joe White, an actor, writer and director, and a serving prisoner (1985-1997),

> No matter how many times one is told to change, or whatever coercion can be brought to bear, lasting or genuine change cannot be made until an individual has reached a point of personal discovery that holds real significance in his or her own emotional and psychological life. Theatre in prison provides a realistic arena for such growth and development" (1998:188).

The question becomes, how ready are offenders to take advantage of the benefits theatre can offer by participating in theatre processes within and outside the prison? It may depend on the offenders' willingness and readiness to understand the relevance of the theatrical process in their desistance journey.

> To be treatment ready, offenders must not only recognise that their offending is problematic, but also make decision to seek help from others. This implies a belief that they are unable to desist from offending unaided. Once an offender makes a genuine commitment not to reoffend, he or she may then be taught the relevant skills and strategies in treatment to help achieve this goal (Day, Andrew et al 2010:8).

This readiness is a major factor in the desistance process (Maruna, 2001), and the offenders should understand and recognize that there are issues or problem facing them as long as they are in prison, which becomes part of their narratives and identities. They can contribute in rewriting their stories by accepting circumstances

and challenges facing them within and outside the prison. Ralph C. et al (2010), describes his process as "problem recognition" thus:

> Problem recognition assesses an offender's awareness that specific criminogenic problems do exist and that have contributed to their involvement in offending behaviour. In this manner, intent need not be deliberate and criminal behaviour could be perceived to be accidental or circumstantial; nonetheless, the offender accepts that there is a problem (20).

This suggests that theatre process can provide a space to explore those aspects of the offender's circumstances or character that may be leading him or her to offend. In his introduction to *Performing New Lives: Prison Theatre*, Jonathan Shailor (2011), points to the fact that "theatre in prison programme "can be a place of sanctuary, a crucible for transformation, and a vehicle for (re) integration" (22). Theatre can help offenders develop and promote a great sense of imagination, reflection, and the capacity for self-evaluation. Shailor further states that,

> Prison theatre programs are places of refuge where imaginations, hopes, and humanity of the incarcerated can be more fully expressed. In this context, the transformation of identity becomes a real possibility, as inmates rehearse new realities, develop new skills, and explore a wide range of roles in a content of discipline, commitment, and teamwork (24-5).

This creates a platform for offenders to tell their stories in a place they consider to be safe to "form positive identities, build new narratives and build positive relationship with peers, staff and family" (Caulfield and Ridley, 2013:6). Alexandra Sunderland facilitating prison theatre projects in male prisons in South Africa gives an account of

the relevance of theatre in building relationship and preparing the participants for a life outside the prison; she describes how:

> The theatre programme frames the participants as theatre-makers and centres around using theatre to extend creativity, means of expression and performance possibilities which might relate to how these men see themselves in relation to each other and their world outside of the prison context (122).

Participation in theatre is a way of giving back powers to the offenders and allowing them to tell their stories. Empowerment in this sense becomes a process of providing support to offenders to enable them to readapt and reintegrate into society with a view to encourage them to embrace a change in behaviour or more so, it could be defined as a restoration of dignity and integrity in the lives of the offenders by creating a socially enabling environment to support and help them readapt and reintegrate into society, equipped with relevant social skills to help them succeed. Empowerment according to Susan Haedicke (2003) 'is a term that is very difficult to define but it is closely tied to notions of self-esteem and self-reliance, to the belief that one has worth and that one can make things happen, either as an individual or the community level' (76). But theatre creates a space that can equip offenders with the relevant social skills to transform themselves in society. The notion of social skills deficit suggests that a process of social education has not transpired 'properly' in an individual, and that rehabilitation seeks to redress the balance and enable offenders to adapt or readapt more successfully into society (Balfour 2004:9).

However, circumstances and environment play a huge part in why people find themselves in prison. Offenders' narratives do not start with their crime, rather their stories could be traced back to the social, personal and economic circumstances

affecting their lives, even before they were born, in most cases, such as the genetic, heredity, family or parental factors. When President Barrack Obama[3] visited the Federal prison in El Reno Oklahoma, he argued that, "these are young people who made mistakes that aren't that different than the mistakes I made and the mistakes that a lot of you guys made. The difference is they did not have the kind of support structures, the second chances, the resources that would allow them to survive those mistakes". It may be likely that when offenders are given a second chance, they may reflect on their past and reimagine their future and take back control of their lives through rehabilitation as opposed to punishment. Katya Buchleitner (2010) is of the view that, "most prison inmates have gone through some kind of traumatic experience in their lives before being confined. A long history of pain and frustration might lie behind them and there is often the need for therapeutic healing. Certain theatre methods work with analysing and releasing the past in order to learn lesson for the future" (18). Balfour stresses that, "the notion of rehabilitation of offenders tends to be linked to the image of the determined actor, who while having some degree of agency, is propelled by social misfortune or biological deficiency" (2004: 8). However, "the truth is that of course there is no one explanation; people do contribute to their own downfall by acting in ways which shape and select the environment they experience, which then feeds into shaping their behaviour in response to that environment" (Mounford and Farral, 1998:110). But, advocates of rehabilitation theory believe that the punishment of offenders through incarceration, hard labour, and solitary confinement should be replaced with educational, vocational and other rehabilitation-based programmes as better approaches to the transformation of offenders.

[3] President Barack Obama visited the Federal prison in El Reno Oklahoma. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3hGZ7AMk39Q. Accessed 24 July 2015.

The critics, scholars and experts discussed in this review have used different platforms or media to express their views and challenge some perceptions around the terms applied theatre, and more specifically prison theatre, giving accounts of their own positions and understanding about their practices in form of narrative. They engage in the stories and experiences of others in their information or data gathering, in order to form opinion and take stands in certain issues and debates around prison theatre. Nicholson draws our attention to how engaging with stories can provide access to the world outside the physical space of the narrative events using the term 'transportation', catapulting us to the realm of transformation. Thompson raises issues about the affective and effective nature of narrative in connection with the participants' feelings and experiences, and he looks at the ethical implications of listening and sharing of other people's personal stories. Kershaw calls for a theatre that is radical and outreach in nature, taking over different unconventional spaces and venues in order to convey personal stories to social actions. We have seen how engaging in personal narratives can affect others and instigate social action, how participation in theatre can create a platform for dialogue, and may even sometimes bring about social cohesion, empowerment and transformation. Boal urges the audience or members of society to take urgent social action to free themselves from the shackles of oppression and take the centre stage in telling their own stories, while also, McAvinchey and Kershaw believe in socio-political engaged performance practices, where participants are empowered to tell their stories, and Balfour highlights his interests in social application of theatre and the use of narrative technique or story-telling.

Having explored the critical literature, it is evident that theatre is centrally involved in the production and consumption of narratives, whether in drama

workshop or performance productions. Nicholson's states that "the impact is often demonstrated well, and the contribution to specific learning outcomes, well-being or social inclusion agendas, is often well made, but somehow vivid accounts of theatre practice – the aesthetic strategies, dramaturgies, their aural and visual qualities or sense of emotional engagement – is often strangely absent" (2013:1). This thesis undertakes to contribute to the filling of this gap or absence in critical discourse – precisely because it engages with the 'aesthetic strategies and dramaturgies' of play-texts, and seeks to bring to life the 'aural and visual' aspects of those dramas and theatre companies it explores. In this thesis, my own theoretical position in relation to the opinions and views of the critics and scholars discussed, is to consider questions of narrative theory (looking at whose story is being told and who is the listener?), and apply it to both written playtexts, and dramaturgical strategies of playwrights. I also explore these narrative theories in relation to the practices (workshops and productions) of the three notable British theatre companies, Clean Break, Synergy Theatre Project and Geese Theatre Company in working with the offenders. For example, I use Nicholson's idea of the "gift" of theatre and interrogate it further by looking at the power relations between the theatre practitioners and the community of offenders being given a gift. This leads us to the opening of next chapter which analyses Timberlake Wertenbaker's play *Our Country's Good*, - it is a text which very much exemplifies Caoimhe McAvinchey's (2011) argument that "thinking about theatre and prison" can make us "question narratives of crime, punishment and justice that are believed to be true and effective". Wertenbaker's celebrated, but at times controversial play, does just this by employing a historical lens to examine and question "the economy of punishment" (ibid, 3), and to examine the transformative effects, not just on convicts but on society itself, of making theatre.

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CHAPTER TWO

Narratives of Identity and Transformation in Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good* (1988)

Our Country's Good (1988) is an iconic and foundational text of British theatre in the 1980s, which tackles many of the themes this thesis addresses, – of theatre as a redemptive tool – a communal, narrative-making activity, where the playing out of fictional roles and the enacting of story, can make transformation – both of offenders, and of society seem possible. This play explores how role-play and 'mask wearing' can have a redemptive effects on prisoners, and open up their sense of agency, and the chance to change, and not to stick to the script which has so far governed their lives and choices. In considering the (now canonical) status of *Our Country's Good*, I will argue that prison theatre has come on a significant journey since Joint Stock created this piece with Wertenbaker over thirty years ago. Prison theatre, like many other 'applied' theatres viewed as marginal and alternative in the 1970s and 80s, has moved into the mainstream. I discuss a culminating example of this from 2015 when Chloe Moss' *Sweatbox* attracted audiences on the South Bank at the same time that *Our Country's Good* conference and production was being performed at the National Theatre on the Olivier stage. I briefly discuss *Sweatbox* at the end of this chapter because the two plays represent two opposite ends of the spectrum of what could be included in the umbrella term 'prison theatre' – both plays explore the feelings and experiences of the audience in sharing a common space, though one is a conventional play (*Our Country's Good*) and the other, *Sweatbox*, a site-specific piece of immersive theatre – but both were given a platform on London's

South Bank, at the National Theatre, arguably the highest status venue for theatre in the UK.

The socio-economic and political climate of the 1980s and early 1990s prompted reactions from different playwrights and critics, notably Timberlake Wertenbaker who responded through a play *Our Country's Good* to the negative impact of economic austerity unleashed on arts by the Conservative government under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher. Through its message of the theatre as a humanising force, the play addresses the failure of the criminal justice system and suggests that there is a relationship between poverty and crime as a result of the soaring inequalities across British society in 1980s. Although historically set, the play deals with contemporary issues, but at the time of its first production, focused specifically on "the condition of 1980s Britain" (Dymkowski, 1997). In the 1980s and early 1990s, some theories suggested that individuals are to blame for their criminal behaviours and not society (Coleman, 2000:51). The Conservative government blamed individuals for criminality and introduced a tough policy of "short, sharp, shock" as a punishment regime to deter young people from engaging in criminal behaviours. It was this hostile and tough punishment strategy that Timberlake Wertenbaker's implicitly questions.

Our Country's Good addresses the political argument and the narrative that people are naturally born criminals. It explores the criminal justice system, raising questions about the efficacy of incarceration and punishment, and also considering rehabilitation through theatre as a rewarding alternative process. This play explores compassion and the limits of compassion in the (mis) treatment of criminals, and asks us to consider how compassionate a society we are in response to crime and justice. It also explores the relevance of theatre in offenders' transformation, and how the

narrative of criminal justice has changed from the past to present, - themes that the rest of this thesis interrogates. This play dramatizes convicts taking part in an act of story-making and creation. Being involved in the narrativization of fictional characters in Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer*, brings them to a new understanding of their own stories – they acquire more self-knowledge and agency, to change the direction of their own story. In prison theatre, such as that practised by the companies whose work I explore in subsequent chapters, offenders are given a platform and space to frame their own narrative as they explore issues relating to their past experiences. Through this narrativization they are given tools to understand their present circumstances and to increase control of their own stories. In my analysis of the play *Our Country's Good*, I focus on Wertenbaker's poetic depiction of the way in which offenders can gain agency through sharing their own experiences, and imaginatively living in the world of others. Within this depiction of constructing a narrative, *Our Country's Good* examines the social causes of crime versus the possibility of an innate criminal personality; and the role of play and imagination in the redemptive process.

Our Country's Good was first performed in the 1980s during a period in which narratives about the state of the nation and Thatcherism dominated literary, theatrical and political discourse (Hilton, Moores & Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 2017). It was also a time, as I have discussed, when alternative theatres and ideas about the educational and even redemptive power of theatre were being explored and promoted. Wertenbaker explores how British national identity is bound up not only in its imperial past, but also in how we respond to crime, and how we treat criminals. The 1980s were a time when the 'short sharp shock' military style of treatment of offenders was promoted by the Conservative government – a punitive approach

designed to curb criminal behaviour amongst young offenders (Dearden Lizzie, *Independent*, Jan; 2018*).* It was a policy to which many in Britain objected, finding it antithetical to the liberal values that even many conservatives saw as inherently 'British'. Some of this attitude is expressed by Captain Arthur Philip in (Act 2, scene ii) of the play. Captain Philip asserts the "civilising" power of culture, and points to the power of literary imagination describing a play as "a world in itself, a tiny colony we could almost say". Phillip further redirects our minds to how theatre has influenced societal development, arguing for the 'delicacy' and 'refinement' of the arts as a way to combat criminal impulses:

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

Phillips's speech suggests that participation in theatre by the convicts will prove the cultural relevance of the power of artistic expressions and indicate the value of theatre as opposed to punishment. The process of participating in storytelling and constructing fictional narratives highlights theatre as a powerful instrument through which people may be able to step away from their individual circumstances, but through creativity and imagination begin to see themselves in other people's positions or circumstances. Richard Schechner (2002) identifies seven functions of performances thus: "to entertain, to make something beautiful, to change identity, foster community, heal, teach/persuade/civilize, to deal with the sacred and/or the

demonic" (37). Wertenbaker stages this argument, showing how the convicts' participation in a play becomes a rallying point for learning, enhancing creativity, finding solutions and hope for success and achievement, developing a sense of judgement, strengthening patience and endurance from the creative process to the finished product, and beyond the play stage to the world's stage. Captain Philip articulates the argument that there are so many social virtues to be learned or inculcated in the convicts and the audience through participation in theatre. Characterisation and interpretation are being learnt through rehearsals. Wertenbaker's play shows in detail how the rehearsal space may be a good environment for learning new words, behaviour, attitude, cooperation, tolerance, endurance, communication. The convicts gradually throughout *Our Country's Good* come to embrace rehearsal as a route to changing behaviour, and begin to understand the need to respect the director, the necessity of following and abiding by the theatre ethics which may be seen strong and reliable approaches to moulding character, shaping perspective and building cooperation. Through rehearsal, the convicts begin to understand freedom of artistic expression, a sense of imagination and improvisation, which makes them appreciate the imaginary existence of characters in a play and the opportunity that 'play-making' offers them to step outside their own experiences in order to inhabit the world of the characters in the play.

Transportation of the convicts to Australia was part of a project of the acquisition of colonial territory. The main victims of colonisation are the Australian Aborigines, but the irony in the play is that a single and lonely Aboriginal character appears in the play as a representation of the entire Aborigines. The emphasis on colonialism is not focused or laid on the Aborigines, rather the British authority represented by the officers is mainly interested in exercising powers on the convicts.

This lack of recognition of the Australian Aborigines in the play suggests the nature and level of suppression of the British colonial era – the play thus exposes some of the crueller aspects of the British colonialism. However, the play is selective in whose stories it tells – and this selection of only white European characters – but at the same time the absence of the Aboriginal characters has been criticised, and for arguably re-enacting the erasure of the Aboriginal voice in the 'story' of Australia. The fleeting appearance of the one Aborigine in the play is nonetheless Wertenbaker's attempt to acknowledge this erasure and to indicate her authorial awareness of how the historical narrative is framed and how colonialism affected their narrative and changed their identities.

The first production of the play *Our Country's Good* was in 1988 at the Royal Court Theatre, London and was directed by Max Stafford-Clark, who commissioned Timberlake Wertenbaker to write an adaptation of Tom Keneally's novel *The Playmaker* which tells the story of the early period in the British penal colony in New South Wales, Australia. Stafford-Clark's company Out of Joint based at Royal Court was a radical and left-wing company playing at a theatre known for its radicalism and social comment through theatre. *Our Country's Good* developed through workshops where the playwright and the production team carried out a research about the theatre of the 18th century, mastering its style and technique. They also explored the socio-economic, political and the justice system as regards poverty, crime and punishment, and these workshops inspired Timberlake Wertenbaker to write *Our Country's Good.* The play has become a modern classic and it is studied in schools and has subsequently been produced in prisons and mainstream stages, such as the Royal Court and most notably in 2015 at the National Theatre, London, which attracted

wider reviews amongst writers in the national dailies. Laura Thompson writing in 2012 gives credit to Stafford-Clark by saying that,

> It was his original idea to create a drama from Thomas Keneally's novel The *Playmaker*, about the real-life transported convicts who staged a Farquhar's The *Recruiting Officer* at the Sydney Cove in 1789. Stafford-Clark sensed – and Wertenbaker realised – the power of a play that is all about the nature of theatre, that sets the life force of theatre against a living death, and allows art its redemptive triumph (The Telegraph Sept 28 2012).

This is to say that Stafford-Clark conceived the idea of the play and commissioned Timberlake Wertenbaker to write it. He has directed many productions of the play right from its first production in 1988. *Our Country's Good* is concerned with the creation of narratives, on many levels. The play starts with the staging of George Farquhar's the *Recruiting Officer* by the convicts, exploring the narratives of how power plays out in our social system as portrayed within the performative space in a play within a play. Wertenbaker uses the structure of a play within a play to investigate the theme of crime, punishment, colonisation, class, gender, and the power of theatre to transform not only the convicts but society. The play thus foregrounds the social and historical construction of criminal, exploring the power relationship between the officers and community of offenders in giving them a 'gift of theatre', and through this, depicts power and control in the criminal justice system. The offenders' participation in theatre gives them the platform to change their own narratives and identities, but some of the officers are worried that the change in narrative will give the convicts a new potentially disruptive power, and if they allow the offenders to engage in a play production, they may lose control of the group. Ross articulates this fear thus: "… but I know this play – this play – order will

become disorder. The theatre leads to threatening theory…" (Act 1, scene ix). The officers are anxious about the fluidity of narrative and identity that 'play-making' may be opening up. Theatre prompts change in narratives and fluidity in role-playing. Ross points to the question of social identity – the image of the offenders playing the officers will conflict with the officers' positions because offenders will experience and place themselves in different roles and responsibilities, changing their narratives and identities. The image at the centre of the play – convicts staging a play – foregrounds how uncontrollable circumstances can affect us and change our identities, and through performing dramatic roles, we are able to tell our own stories that can change our lives. The critical debate on power relations is based on the ideas of whether the convicts' participation in a play might be to conform to the authority of the superior powers or to challenge them. This power relation is created by social, cultural and gender roles and evident in the interaction between the officers and convicts through audition, rehearsal and performance of the play. This involves imposing a particular approach or task on the convicts who have no choice than to obey the authority that dictates for them. This portrays a cultural colonial manipulation, as the convicts are being subjected to the whims and caprices of those who oppress them. But the fact is that some of the officers understand the relevance of theatre in transforming behaviour and hence they apply it to control and manage the behaviour of the convicts to create changed individuals for a better society. But some of the officers are of the view that the image of the offenders should be constructed by their crimes, and that offenders are in prison to be punished and not to be entertained. They believe that associating with dramatic characters changes the perceptions of the offenders as they view those characters as a mirror through which they see their lives, as opposed to how they are constructed through societal

narratives. This reflect the argument in the contemporary British society about the relevant of arts in transforming offenders and what offenders are allowed to do while in prison, - whether to be punished, educated or entertained? In Plato's Republic, he argues that theatre or drama should be removed from his ideal republic because its make-believe overwhelms the audience's emotion and makes them lose sense of objective assessment or judgement of the real life situation (Plato:2007), and theatre captures, consumes and traps us between the physical world of existence and fictional realm of the performance, (Conroy 2010:37-38); - the "aesthetic space" (Boal, 1995:20-23) between the performance and reality. In prison theatre, the way offenders tell their stories and their stories are told by others are crucial in their identity construction. Telling stories to the audience creates a sense of self-reflection based on the narrative – the story to tell, what to tell and what not to tell, how to tell the story and who tells the story (who controls the narrative?).

One of the techniques employed in *Our Country's Good* is the art of characters playing different roles (doubling). The technique of doubling reminds the audience that we could play different roles, that the convicts and officers all share the same humanity. For example, in the premiere production of *Our Country's Good* under the direction of Max Stafford-Clark, at the Royal Court Theatre, the actor that played Captain Philip also played as John Wisehammer; the actor that played the Aboriginal character also, played Black Caesar and Tench, while the actor that played Mary Brenham, played the Priest (Freeman, 2017). This depicts fluidity of identities, and presents the opportunities for stories to be told and retold through different perspectives and imagination. According to Annie McKean (2019), "… it is important for people to play parts outside of their experience, as allowing them to do so gives them opportunities to explore different identities and alternative experiences

to their own. *Our Country's Good* enables this, as it provides opportunity for doubling roles so that prisoners can play both convicts and characters from within the officer class" (29). This doubling technique shows that both the convicts and officers suffer the same fate in the same environment and the same circumstances. The doubling of characters in the play suggests that everyone can feel pain and joy and whatever challenges one faces are not peculiar to that person and that there are possibilities and chances of others being in that same situation no matter the social strata. The officers as well realise that the convicts can be transformed and become responsible citizens when given the opportunity for change. According to Paul Taylor in his review of the performance of *Our Country's Good* in St. James's Theatre London, he highlights that "pointed doubling, executed with tremendous vigour here, is built into the nature of the play, with the same actors portraying both the oppressors and the oppressed" (The Independent Feb. 5 2013).

Act 1, scene 6 "The Authorities Discuss the Merit of the Theatre" encapsulates and stages the main debate of the play *Our Country's Good*. Through this scene Wertenbaker stages competing views and contesting narratives about the place of prison in contemporary British society, and the argument among critics, scholars, practitioners and wider society about the purpose of imprisonment – whether it is for punishment or rehabilitation. It is left within the powers of the authority to create a kind of community of offenders they want and by extension, what kind of society they want to create in this new territory of Australia. *Our Country's Good* implores the audience to view the historical narrative through the perspectives of the convicts, the Aborigines (to a partial extent) and the authorities as embodied in the officers. Timberlake Wertenbaker applies Brecht's epic techniques in structuring the plot of the play. The play consists of two acts and twenty-two scenes;

some of the scenes transcend time and space, sometimes taking the audience forward and back in episodic manner. Each scene explores a main theme upon which the events and actions of the characters revolve, such as “punishment” in (Act 1, scene 3). This dramatic style leads the audience to the unfolding stories and through distancing reveals the power relationship between the officers and the convicts. The play takes us to the past and brings us to the present through historical documentary and metatheatrical production and reflects the power of theatre in transforming individual narratives to social narratives – hence, rehabilitating individuals and transforming society. Just as theatre critics and scholars debate on the impact theatre may have on individuals, the officers in this play engage in a theatrical discourse about crime and the economy of punishment. It showcases the value system imbedded in the actions of the colonial powers in order to question whether their intentions are to deliver a theatre of elevated language and noble sentiments; or to promote a theatre of punishment; or not to encourage play production at all. The four officers engage in the argument about the essence of imprisonment, what constitutes criminal behaviour, whether it is a genetic and hereditary tendency, or a learned behaviour. Governor Philip decides to stage a play to explore the efficacy of theatre in changing behaviours. Focusing more on the social relevance of the theatre, Phillip, calls our attention to the Greek theatre and the importance of the citizens’ participation in theatre.

> Phillip: The Greek believe that it was a citizen’s duty to watch a play. It was a kind of work in that it required attention, judgement, patience, all social virtues.
>
> (Act 1. Sc. VI).

He argues that the convicts' participation in a play is a way of civilising them, as they will speak a "refined literate language" as well as deliver "sentiments of a delicacy they are not used to". (Act 1, sc. vi). And he asks, "what is the stateman'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 to tyrannise over a group of animals" (Act 2, sc. ii). While the play rehearsal is going on, the officers still engage in a conflicting argument about criminality and punishment, as some believe in the transforming power of the theatre while others oppose the idea of staging a play. In a play within a play, the characters also engage in discussions about the aim of staging a play – whether it is to educate, satirize or to entertain?

The theme of punishment is present from the opening moments of the play when the convict Robert Sideway is being flogged by a naval officer counting up to 50 strokes. This scenario exposes the level of punishment meted out to the convicts by the officers ranging from physical, emotional, psychological, and sexual abuse. This level of abuse is not one of the measures set out to correct or punish offenders, rather it portrays the inhuman and barbaric nature of those who are in a position of authority and trust, engaging in acts worse, frequently, than the crimes the convicts committed that led them into prison. *Our Country's Good* addresses social injustices as reflected in the treatment meted out to the convicts and their appearance in dirty rags as costumes. This re-echoes the question about whether the essence of imprisonment is to transform or to punish offenders as mentioned above and in the last chapter. There is a conflict of views among the officers in the play as some officers are of the opinion that there are some cruel and barbaric traits in the convicts which suggests that punishment will not make them learn new ways of positive behaviour. Tench argues that "Justice and humaneness have never gone hand in hand" (Act 1, sc. iii), and that

prisoners are naturally criminals and will never depart from their old ways. But Phillip still believes that there is a way out through transformation. Collins argues that Philip and Ralph are misguided and that they should revert to their old ways of punishment instead of educating the convicts, since most of them cannot read. For some of the officers in the colony, the emphasis is not on the education of the prisoners as they view them as "illiterates", born criminals who are hard to be transformed. Ross does not believe in the transformation of the prisoners. He calls them "filthy, thieving, lying whores" (Act 1, sc. vi), and he is against them coming on stage to perform the play. He maintains that prisoners are here in the colony to be punished and their duties as officers are to make sure that they are punished. But Philip counters that by saying that being in a long exile is enough punishment for the prisoners, and he stresses the belief that they can be transformed. Tench doubts the possibilities of such transformation because he thinks it is their natural habit. He says that once a criminal is always a criminal. He maintains that it will be an act of foolishness to rehabilitate or transform offenders. He likens convicts to the savages whom he assumes know nothing and will never learn anything as the effort to educate them will be a waste of time and resources.

> Tench: A crime is a crime. You commit a crime, or you don't. If you commit a crime, you are a criminal. Surely, that is logical? It is like the savages here. A savage is a savage because he behaves in a savage manner. To expect anything else is foolish. They can't even build a proper canoe. (Act 1, scene vi)

Philip insists that change is possible, and that exposure to culture could make positive marks in the lives of the convicts:

Phillip: I would prefer them to see real plays: fine language, sentiment.

(Act 1, scene iii).

In a further conversation between Tench and Philip about the merit of the theatre and the place of nature in moulding behaviour,

Tench: We are talking about criminals, often hardened criminals. They have a habit of vice and crime. Habits are difficult to break. And it is more than habit an innate tendency. Many criminals seem to have been born that way. It is in their nature.

Phillip replies "man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains".

(Act 1. Scene 6).

Eighteenth-century convicts were loaded onto a ship and sent into a forceful exile against their wish with a bid to get rid of them from the face of society. In Act 1, scene iii, Tench ironically comments that transporting the prisoners to a faraway location will make them feel much at home:

Phillip: Was it necessary to cross fifty thousand miles of ocean to erect another Tyburn?

Tench: I should think it will make the convicts feel at home

Collins: This land is under English law. The court found them guilty and sentenced them accordingly….

(Act 1, scene iii)

Tyburn is a place of execution, and it is bitterly ironic for Tench to say that a place of execution will make the convicts feel at home. But he is reminded by Collins that even though they have left England, the land of Australia where they are, is still under English law. The officers' discussion about crossing of thousands of miles to get to Australia to build a colony that will probably contain the horrors of the mother country reveals their own sense of detachment and disconnection from England. This shows the pains of the convicts who have been separated from their homes, families, and country. Michael Billington in his review of the production of *Our Country's Good* praises Wertenbaker's artistry in showing how, "naval officers felt themselves as much prisoners as the convicts in the remote colony" (*The Guardian*, 28 September, 2013). This is evident as Ralph Clark composes and reads his diary in memory of his wife Alicia.

> Ralph: Dreamt, my beloved Alicia, that I was walking with you and you was in your riding-habit – oh my dear woman when shall I be able to hear from you –
>
> (Act, scene iv).

Here, the essence is to make emotional connection with Alicia which proves that even as an officer, he is more or less a prisoner as he has no freedom to reunite with his wife back in England. In Act 2 scene v, Sideway's lines clearly points to the direction of the prison condition back in England;

> Sideway: What pleasures I shall meet abroad are indeed uncertain; but this I am sure of, I shall meet with less cruelty among the most barbarous nations that I have found at home'. (Act 2, scene v).

Our Country's Good also explores the social causes of criminal behaviour versus the individual's innate personality, and suggests that the impact of family or parental upbringing on a child cannot be overemphasised. It treats the theme of crime and causes of criminal behaviour and raises a debate about the influence of nature and nurture in identity or personality narratives. Liz's monologue proves the fact that criminal behaviour is not innate but can be influenced by social factors. For example, Liz Morden's poor childhood upbringing as well as economic circumstances such as poverty affected her personality and became part of her narrative and identity.

> Liz: Luck? Don't know the word. Shifts its bob when I comes near. Born under a ha'penny planet I was. Dad's a nibbler, don't want to get crapped. Mum leaves. Five brothers, I'm the only titter. I takes in washing. Then. My own father. Lady's walking down the street, he takes her wiper. She screams, he's shoulder-clapped, says it's not me, Sir, it's Lizzie, look, she took it. I'm stripped, beaten in the street, everyone watching…. (Act 2, scene 1).

In the play, we learned that when Liz Morden was a child, her father who should be caring and protecting her, was in fact, the one who destroyed her. He stole something in their neighbourhood, but instead of facing the consequences, blamed his own daughter for the crime. Liz was humiliated and beaten up on the street, and these traumatic childhood experiences affected her sense of trust and belief in herself. She felt betrayed, developed fear, anxiety, feelings of rejection, loss of connection and sense of meaning of existence. She was saddled with low self-esteem having been betrayed by her family. Her brother instead of being supportive, accused her of being

ugly and advised her to sell her body to men so she could raise money for herself as such men would not mind her ugliness. As a young and confused girl growing up, she succumbed to his advice and had a traumatic impact on her life as a part of the chain effects of child abuse and neglect. As time passed and her income became affected, she was further advised by her pimp to resort to pick-pocketing, thus following in her father's footsteps as a petty thief. Linking her actions to her father's raises a question about the influence of nature versus nurture in personality development. Philip mentions the impact of childhood experiences in individuals' personality development, and through his meditations the play explores the social and psychological origins of behaviour:

> Phillip: We learned to love such things because they are offered to us when we are children or young men. Surely no one is born naturally cultured…?
>
> (Act 1 scene 1).

Phillip's view that no human being is born naturally civilised leads him to consider the different levels of opportunity people have in life and how a childhood environment may affect an individual's behaviour and personality development. The early childhood experiences of Liz Morden demonstrate how those circumstances influenced and affected her behaviour. One of the striking messages – and achievements - of the play *Our Country's Good* is to educate and enlighten the public about the relevance of theatre in changing lives and affecting behaviour. Its theme is centred on the power and possibilities of change, stressing the fact that human beings are dynamic, and no behaviour is static. And people – criminals – can change if they are enabled, like the convicts in this play, to perceive themselves as authors of their

own narrative – that they are playing a role, and therefore, they can change that role. By engaging in narrative construction, through theatre-making, they can take charge of their own narratives and have more agency and choice about their behaviour, and see themselves in a different light – not as victims of circumstance but as active makers of their own story. There is no fixed pattern of behaviour, rather human social interaction evolves based on the role of nature and nurture in personality development. Human behaviour is bound to change and reflects the understanding, circumstances, opportunities available and the actions of society towards the individual. According to Governor Philip, redemption or rehabilitation makes more positive impact than punishment. He believes that theatre is a way of civilising the convicts. This point to the relevance of theatre in the British contemporary society especially during the 1980s when funding for education and rehabilitation programmes were stopped by the government. *Our Country's Good* responds to these cuts through this powerful historical fable, and makes audience understand that theatre can be a powerful tool for transforming offenders. As we have seen, Captain Phillip articulates the conviction that human beings are born equal and there are some elements or traits of positive behaviour in everyone which need to be harnessed and transformed to a much more positive use. He believes in the transformative power of the theatre, and that the way an individual is treated has an impact on the person and determines the individual's response or reaction to such treatment. Philip points to the social aspects of criminal behaviours as opposed to biological traits, and makes reference to the social values of the Ancient Greek culture and social system, arguing for the possibility of change in human behaviour in a speech with which – despite its mock eighteenth-century assumptions about 'gentlemen' - contemporary practitioners in prison theatre would probably have little argument:

Phillip: In the Meno, one of the Plato's great dialogues, have you read it, Lieutenant? Socrates demonstrate that a slave boy can learn the principles of geometry as well as a gentleman

Ralph: Ah-

Phillip: In other words, he shows that human beings have an intelligence which has nothing to do with the circumstances into which they are born.

Ralph: Sir –

Phillip: Sit down, Lieutenant. It is a matter of reminding the slave of what he knows, of his own intelligence. And by intelligence you may read goodness, talent, the innate qualities of human beings.

Ralph: I see – Sir

Phillip: When we treat the slave boy as a rational human being, the boy becomes one, he loses his fear, and he becomes a competent mathematician. A little more encouragement and he might become an extraordinary mathematician. Who knows? You must see your actors in that light.

(Act Two, scene 1).

In his conversation with Harry Brewer, Harry notes the chances and possibilities that they could suffer the same fate as the prisoners. This stirs up more

reflection on how opportunity and influence can affect one's behaviour and personality.

> Harry: …Sometimes I look at the convicts and I thinks, one of those could be you, Harry Brewer, if you hadn't joined the navy when you did. The officers may look down on me now, but what if they found out that I used to be an embezzler?
>
> (Act 1 sc. IV).

If the opportunity had not arisen to join the navy, Harry would probably have remained an embezzler. He had a second chance for transformation, to redirect his motives in life to positive ventures which prisoners may not have had before committing the crime that landed them in prison. What drives *Our Country's Good* as a play is the notion of the possibility of change – for society, for individuals – through artistic expression in the theatre:

> Ralph: The theatre is like a small republic, it requires private sacrifices for the good of the whole. That is something you should agree with, Wisehammer.
>
> (*pause)*
>
> And now, my actors, I want to say what a pleasure it has been to work with you. You are on your own tonight and you must do your utmost to provide the large audience out there with a pleasurable, intelligible and memorable evening.
>
> (Act 2, scene xi)

Using theatre as a mode of communication and self-discovery is one of the concepts explored in the play as Ralph discovers his true self by directing the play, and Liz her hidden self by speaking to the officers about her innocence in the stealing incident. Her statement becomes words of liberation, hope and change.

Liz: I didn't steal the food

Collins: Were you there when Cable stole it?

Liz: No. I was there before.

Ross: And you knew he was going to steal it?

Liz: Yes

(Act 2, scene x)

When Phillip asks Liz why she was not speaking up before, she replies,

Liz: Because it wouldn't have mattered.

Talking about her role in the play, she goes further to say

Liz: Your Excellency, I will endeavour to speak Mr. Farquhar's lines with the elegance and clarity their own worth commands.

(Act 2, scene x)

Liz's line above implies that she believes that taking part in the play offers her the opportunity to place herself in a higher class delivering the lines of Mr. Farquhar to the audience; her identity changes from ordinary convict to a lady with class and elegance. Whilst we may reject the classist assumptions that Liz has internalized, nonetheless through her own sense of 'transport' or empowerment, we can see a

benefit to her and the other convicts through the 'playmaking' experiment. For all the convicts the process opens up new levels of self-awareness. Dabby strives to be herself based on her own interpretation and understanding of her role as an actor. When Sideway sobs, and says he is being melancholy, Ralph makes him understand the effects of gestures and facial expression as means of communication and interpretation in theatre. Ralph tells Sideway that he can "try simply to stand normally and look melancholy". (Act 1, Sc. xi). He helps him to understand the need for an actor to be aware of the other actors/characters on stage in terms of their relationship with other characters. Ralph points out that the audience would not hear Captain Plume's lines if he sobs loudly, making him aware that the place of the audience is paramount in theatre. Ralph helps Liz Morden to understand that learning the lines in a play is important but the most crucial aspect in a play is to act the lines. This is all about the transformative power of theatre – acting, living the character in flesh and blood as well as the relevance of imagination in character development and cultivating behaviour.

Ralph: When acting, you have to imagine things.

You have to imagine you're someone different.

So, now, think of a rich lady and imagine you're her.

(Act 1 scene xi)

Through rehearsals, the convicts are able to encounter new words and give interpretation to actions and situations. These are some of the skills being learned by the ex-prisoners working with Synergy Theatre in drama class sessions I observed during my field research to Synergy's acting class (this will be discussed fully in chapter five), during which the participants become more open in their interactions

and relationship with one another uniting as a team to achieve the rehearsals' main objectives. Wertenbaker explores the relevance of drama and language in transforming offenders and exposes the ineffectiveness of the criminal justice system in re-integrating offenders into society.

In Act one, scene 1, Wisehammer uses words to express how he feels about the forced transportation of the convicts, Liz Morden narrating her life story and speaking up to defend herself. According to Michael Billington, "The key character is the thieving Liz Morden…who views life with thin-lipped detestation until given the new identity through the process of performance: the moment when she saves herself from hanging out of loyalty to her fellow actors remains the high point of the play" (*The Guardian*, 27 August 2015). The play suggests how theatre might transform individuals by opening up channels of imagination and empathy, which can be activated by the creation, of and immersion within characters and story. Ralph advocates redemption of the prisoners through education and theatre, and he believes in second chances and the possibility of change. Play can educate the convicts and bring out the best positive qualities in them, but it is not just the convicts who are changed, but society - and indeed the officers who lead the project. Through participation in the play, Ralph gains eloquence as he takes charge of directing the play, managing the cast as well as representing the convicts and defending the process to the more sceptical officers:

Dawes: We are whiling away precious hours here. Put on the play, don't put it on, it won't change the shape of the universe.

Ralph: But it could change the nature of our little society

> Tench: My dear Ralph, a bunch of convicts making fools of themselves, mouthing words written no doubt by some London Ass, will hardly change our society. (Act 1 sc. VI)

Linking Ralph's line above to the work of Synergy Theatre Project, Esther Baker who is the artistic director of Synergy, in an interview (18 December, 2014) mentioned that one of their aims is to find ways of reintegrating prisoners into society when they leave prisons. They achieve this by offering employment to ex-prisoners as well as engaging them in their projects and developing their artistic skills. Their ways of supporting prisoners and ex-prisoners involve education, creative writing and participation in performances. Christine Bimberg (1998) states that,

> Seeing the convicts' prospects as future playwrights, theatre managers, actors and actresses on the new continent as well as their ensuing denationalised identity, against the background of the Shakespearean stage at the time of nationalism replacing feudalism, Wertenbaker focuses on the shift of identities along with cultural transfer in general" (414).

In connecting to that, Philip, reiterates the need to prepare offenders for reintegration into society.

> Phillip: Some of these men will have finished their sentence in a few years. They will become members of the society again, and help create a new society in this colony. Should we not encourage them to think in a free and responsible manner? (Act 1, sc. vi).

The suggestion that working class characters must watch what bourgeois characters consider to be 'fine language' implies the treatment of individuals in our society according to their social strata. *Our Country's Good* addresses the theme of class division as we encounter it today in our society. As the gap between the rich and poor widens, the negative impact flares up against society such as crime and violence. In the play, it is obvious that in eighteenth century Britain, there was a wider gap between the upper class and the lower class and Farquhar's *Recruiting Officer* reflects this. The convict actors reflect on the gulf between their own experience and that of the characters they are being asked to play; Dabby is of all the characters, the fiercest critic of Farquhar's play; in a dialogue with Mary, she offers the following;

> Mary: I like playing Sylvia. She's bold, she breaks rules out of love for her Captain and she's not ashamed.
>
> Dabby: She hasn't been born poor, she hasn't had to survive, and her father is a Justice of the Peace. I want to play myself.
>
> (Act 2, scene vii)

Dabby goes further to say,

> I want to see a play that shows life as we know it
>
> (Act 2 scene vii).

David Graver in his analysis of the actor's bodies on stage states that the,

> Theories of theatre commonly claim that actors exist both as characters in a drama and performances on stage…. This traditional dichotomy in the actor's existence rests upon a

> questionable distinction either between artifice and reality or between representation and presentation (2002:157).

It could be deduced from the above that even though there is a gap between the rich and the poor, there are still those like Dabby who want to remain who and what they are, instead of committing crime in order to be like others. The class system puts some individuals and families at the top of the ladder, while some are regarded as the wretched of the earth. Dabby wants to play herself based on her own real life which she understands and is familiar with, instead of learning or trying to be others above her class in the name of depicting a character in a play. Dabby is not keen in identifying with the character, rather, she likes to detach her real self from the dramatic character and by interpreting her role tries as much as possible to establish the facts regarding her socio-economic background, thereby emphasising the character's socio-economic status. In the light of the above, Dabby saying she will read Ralph's dream indicates that she has improvisational and imaginative skills. But Ralph makes Dabby understand that drama is not real but pretence and Dabby believes in the rational assessment of a play rather than being intuitively involved. She knows that a play is unreal and has unreal characters played by actors who present themselves as real. She tries to detach herself from that deep emotional involvement, when she says, "I think 'The Recruiting Officer' is a silly play. I want to be in a play that has more interesting people in it" (Act 2, scene vii). Dabby's critique of Farquhar, her dismissal of its 'silliness' and lack of relevance to her, is an important note in the play which counters the perhaps rather elitist views of the officers who assume the 'civilising' power of Farquhar's eighteenth-century 'elegance' and 'refinement'. The creation of more authentic voices in prison theatre is a theme that I will explore in subsequent chapters in my consideration of prison theatre play-texts where making

heard the voices and experiences of those normally erased and silenced in our culture is a central aim.

In the play, we also see how women are (mis) treated, which affirms Clean Break's feminist philosophy in defence of women and argument that women are treated differently from men. Ralph and Harry in their conversation relish their sexual fantasies as they discuss the female prisoners. Their mind-set is that women should not be treated with kindness. Harry confirms that "not all the officers find them disgusting" and he asks Ralph if he has never been tempted. Ralph labels women convicts as whores, and in his own opinion, they cannot perform a play, he asks "…But how could a whore play Lady Jane?" but Harry on the defensive side says that "some of those women are good". He believes that his Duckling is good and in his sexual euphoria, asks "who wants to fuck a corpse?" (Act 1 Scene iv). This situation is not far from the identity construct given to offenders in prison theatre and represents what is happening behind the prison walls in this present society where prisoners face the ordeals of attacks, assaults and different levels of abuse, as Jessica Sondhi et al recently report in Ministry of Justice Analytical Summary 2018 that, "the number of sexual assaults reported in prison saw a notable increase between 2012 and 2014, from 113 incidents in 2012, to 170 incidents in 2013, and 228 in 2014".

The convicts' participation in the play helps in the transformation and reformation of their characters and manners, gives them sense of focus and belief in community as they care about one another, promote self-worth and stand not to be discouraged in working hard to become good citizens despite the oppression from the authority. There is an element of individual psychological transformation as participation in the play puts the convict-actors in a happy and positive mood. Ascott says, "… when I speak Kite's lines, I don't hate anymore, I'm Kite, I'm in

Shrewsbury" (Act 2, sc. vii). Ketch Freeman now establishes good relationship with the convicts as he was initially not allowed to play a part in the play. Mary carried out her role as Silvia Balance while Liz Morden learns how to speak Farquhar's lines and that attracts respect and self-dignity to her "your Excellency, I will endeavour to speak Mr. Farquhar's lines with elegance and clarity their own worth commands" (Act 2, sc. x). Participation in the play makes a big impact on Dabby and Wisehammer as they are seen to be compliant and obedient to the rules of society. The officers are also transformed as Ralph's theatrical relationship with the convict-actors enables him to understand, accept others and respect their views, opinion and personality. He believes that some good values can come out from the convicts. He also gains eloquence in defence of the play. Major Ross's breach of privacy during the convicts' play rehearsal and his indecent request for Mary to reveal the tattoo up her thigh, and the convicts focusing on their rehearsal and ignoring Ross signifies the triumph of theatre over oppression. Major Ross is diverted and blocked from promiscuous voyeurism and instead becomes a spectator of the theatrical scene as controlled by the convicts. This indicates a shift of power.

As we have seen, convicts in Timberlake Wertenbaker's play *Our Country's Good* use George Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer* to instigate and actualize change. Wertenbaker depicts theatre as having a positive function in encouraging and promoting communal relationships, compassion, love, growth, understanding and above all transformation of the most disempowered, marginalised and silenced members of society. In the play, we see that the relationship between the convicts and officers increases in understanding and empathy (Act 2, sc vii) as they start working on the play production. There are elements of growth in emotional, social and physical relationships which evaporates the thin line between leadership and

followership, and they all become unified as individuals with feelings, needs, hope and aspiration; now existing and operating in the same environment under the same conditions. Timberlake Wertenbaker creates a play which suggests that theatre is for everyone and not just for professionals or for the upper classes, but for all society. Through the rehearsal of the play, Wertenbaker's convicts question and analyse the criminal behaviour that led them into prison, they reflect on their actions and circumstances, and tell stories that enable them to change their identities and develop a greater sense of self-worth.

In 2015 a new production of *Our Country's Good* took place at the National Theatre, 27 years after its premiere. During the run, Clean Break brought a new piece of 'prison theatre' to the Southbank to sit alongside the production: *Sweatbox* was performed in a van outside the National Theatre with the cast of one prison officer and three prisoners narrating their stories and experiences with the criminal justice system. This play adopts a totally different theatrical style from the traditional or conventional play such as *Our Country's Good.* Josephine Machon believes that "the lived experience of immersive performance colludes in a continuing, immediate and interactive exchange of energy and experience between the work and the audience" (2013:28). *Sweatbox* was originally conceived by Imogen Ashby and written by Chloe Moss; it was produced by Kirstin Shirling, directed by Chloe Moss and performed by Carrie Rock as Steph, Eddy Emenike as Nina, Jade Small as Rachael, and Sarah Dent as Prison Escort Officer. These are three female prisoners locked up in three tiny cells within the van, who narrate, with visceral power, the individual stories of their journey within the criminal justice system. Their narratives of harsh experiences and voices of pains to my hearing brought heart-breaking and unending memories of brutality and inhumanity to humans. Through the immersive experience, it tells us

what happens in prison which people outside do not see. Steph is pregnant, and through a dramatic monologue, she takes the audience through the narrative of her childhood memories and baby names. She points to the contemporary British criminal justice system where one is being sentenced to prison for two years for stealing a pack of biros. This connects to the experiences of the convicts in *Our Country's Good* which also tells a story of people who were sent to jail for stealing a loaf of bread. The character Rachael tells a family story about her three-year-old son. Although, these three women tell different individual stories, what connects them is the fact that their identities are socially constructed as prisoners which reflects the experiences of women in criminal justice system. Their stories reflect the power relationship between the prisoners and those who work in the criminal justice system. The writing and the intense staging inside a van created a touching and empathic atmosphere of anxiety, stress and frustration, for the performers and the audience alike. The immersive approach brings home with power and clarity those hidden aspects of criminal justice – such as the transportation of prisoners from one location to the other, from court to prison, prison to court and back to prison, and from prison to prison, routinely in handcuffs while boarding and disembarking from the van. *Sweatbox* makes viscerally clear the de-humanizing effects of the control of prisoners' bodies, through the physical processes of restraint, transportation, control and punishment – all themes that we have seen staged via more conventional theatrical methods in *Our Country's Good.* The discomfort of the van, besides the comfortable and expensive seats of the Olivier theatre, brought home this message all the more powerfully.

In conclusion, *Our Country's Good* presents drama and performance as platforms through which the convicts may have the possibility of exploring and reshaping their own stories. It explores – and implicitly critiques - the political choices

of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government as regards to cuts in arts funding and the austerity measures that affected arts in general. The play attacks this practice and points to the fact that theatre can be transforming for both the criminals and society as an alternative process to punishment. I examined how the playwright Timberlake Wertenbaker employs distancing or alienation technique by setting her play in the historic past to draw parallel with what is happening in contemporary society. As a historical play, it addresses socio-economic and political issues in 1980s and early 1990s and points to the idea that British criminal justice is historically and culturally contingent, and that the offenders' identities are not fixed but fluid as they change according to who controls the narratives. Through replaying history, Wertenbaker challenges the audience to understand how the modern-day criminal justice system has changed compared to the past. While individuals faced capital punishment for minor offences in eighteenth century Britain, such is no longer the case in contemporary British society. Through the rehearsal process, the convict-actors can view and interpret their character's behaviour as external bodies in a more objective manner without getting emotionally attached, in order to understand themselves and others, and be able to criticize or evaluate characters. The characters become a mirror through which the convicts see a reflection of themselves, and in that way, examine and understand their own behaviour and through engaging in dramatic narratives are able to change their identities. Having examined Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good* from the conventional playwriting perspective which uses history as a distancing dramatic technique, we can then juxtapose it with the immersive staging techniques of Chloe Moss's *Sweatbo*x which suggests that it is only when the audience has been immersed and transported to this realm of the characters, that they can fully appreciate the effects of the coercive physical treatment

of prisoners - prisoners whose crimes may spring from economic disadvantage and social injustice in ways that are not so dissimilar to those portrayed by Wertenbaker.

The next chapter deepens and extends my analysis of storytelling and listening as a process through which questions of crime, responsibility, punishment and justice can be critically examined both by perpetrators and victims of crime. However, the plays I discuss next employ tragic narrative as a technique to dramatize the traumatic experiences of individuals on both sides of the criminal justice system both as victims and perpetrators of crime, bringing fictional characters face to face with their crimes. I examine how the lenses of tragedy or catharsis can be narrative strategies that open up debate about who is responsible for crime and the tensions between crime, punishment and justice.

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CHAPTER THREE

Tragic Narrative and Criminal Justice in David Williamson's *A Conversation* (2001), Bryony Lavery's *Frozen* (1998), and Alecky Blythe's *London Road* (2011)

> But tragedy also asks us to observe the ways in which people reach judgments about who is to blame: the pressures they are under, the motives that impel them, the satisfaction they seek…Not that tragedy makes us feel we are all to blame, and certainly not equally to blame. It is rather that we are connected, even interconnected, by complex system of course and consequences, in which questions of innocence and guilt are all caught up and embroiled, and from which no one should be exempted.
>
> -Adrian Poole, *Tragedy: A Very Short Introduction* (2005:54-5)

Tragedy, and tragic dramatic structures, have a particular relationship with questions of justice, error, punishment and the restoration of social order; and it is for this reason that in this chapter I turn to concepts of tragedy to look at how prison theatre in Britain makes use of the most ancient tragic structures, especially in narratives that focus on recovery, healing or catharsis in the aftermath of crime. Tragedy's main purpose has been for centuries forensically to examine narratives of transgression, and to show how this has led to suffering and catastrophe. It has also been the artform in which emotional purgation, and cathartic release, both for the individual and for society, has been ritualized and put centre stage. These Playwrights mirror society from different angles or perspectives, and their approaches construct narratives about crime and justice through varying lenses. In the previous chapter, my focus was on the contrasting narrative lenses provided by two very different playwriting techniques employed in two important contributions to British prison

theatre: historical distancing in *Our Country's Good* and close-up immersion in *Sweatbox*. In this chapter I employ tragic theory to examine the dramaturgy of three contrasting plays which reached mainstream theatre audiences during the period of my study – *Frozen* by Bryony Lavery, *A Conversation* by David Williamson and *London Road* by Alecky Blythe.

Where *Our Country's Good* and *Sweatbox* focused on making audiences see afresh the plight of criminals and their treatment by society, the three texts that I discuss in this chapter have a different emphasis. They are all deeply concerned with the aftermath of crime and the suffering it causes, but also the processes of healing. Using the vocabulary of tragic theory, we could term this catharsis or emotional purgation, though in each case, this cathartic purgation – experienced both by characters and by the audience – is created through wildly differing dramaturgical techniques. The playwrights I explore in this chapter tell fictional stories of human suffering and the circumstances that create that suffering, and through dramatization, turn those experiences into narratives that offer the possibility of change, both for the individual and for society. Jennifer Wallace (2007) is of the view that, "narratives and plays draw upon aesthetic frameworks to organise their material and that very organisation becomes part of the meaning of the tragedy. The representation of suffering on stage offers some kind of explanation for the suffering" (165).

Therefore, this chapter turns to the vocabulary and concepts of tragic theory to examine how mainstream prison theatre writing in Britain has explored relationships between victims and perpetrators in the aftermath of crime. Through the narrative lens of tragic theory, I examine how playwrights have found sometimes innovative ways to stage moments of reconciliation and forgiveness, and community redemption, as well as examining the more complex areas of crime such as bystander

guilt or complicity. This chapter focuses mainly on tragedy's classical, central dramaturgical equation of 'fate versus will' to examine what it offers Playwrights as a structure for depicting the motivations or determining factors in what might be viewed as the 'tragic arc' of a transgressing character. However, I also look at the tragic elements embedded in the plays, as well as exploring how tragic narrative theory offers us an insight into how these plays create or evoke pity and fear in the audience. I investigate how traditional notions of tragic 'fate' (which suggests that forces beyond a character's control propel them into crime or error), versus the 'will' or 'agency' that tragedy explores, can be animated within the context of prison theatre, to examine where responsibility for crime lies. In this chapter, I examine how these playwrights have dramatized the 'nature versus nurture' debate in character development and actions, and the extent to which playwrights use tragic structures to show how the environment, circumstances and experiences with which they endow their characters, affect their personality development and determine their social relationships with other characters. I will be looking at how the process of digging deeper into a tragic character's innermost being and external actions can lead to other characters questioning their own actions and mistakes, apportioning blame, and understanding that tragic characters are mirrors through which audience and characters in a play see their own flaws or errors, and realise that they are fallible. I will therefore examine the place of the audience in theatre, their role in tragic processes of 'recognition' ('anagnorisis') and 'catharsis', and the significance of the act of witnessing or participating in the tragic encounter.

Discussing tragic theory brings us to touch upon Sigmund Freud who compared the process of psychoanalysis to that of theatre, – a process by which the subjects seek the truth about themselves through building a kind of narrative. Freud's

psychoanalytic theory is also dependent on narrative-building and storytelling. Through the creation of a narrative, the patient in psychoanalysis explores the relationship between action and motivation, the unconscious and conscious mind which determines human behaviour and personality. In this way, psychoanalysis can be argued to explore much of the same territory as prison theatre, which most frequently also examines action and motivation; and questions of justice, blame and responsibility. Peter Brooks (1994:47) regards psychoanalysis as a "narrative discipline" – retelling of patient's stories through memories or remembering of the past experiences in order to understand the motivations behind individual's actions. Through telling stories of individuals' past experiences, those experiences are consciously relived, and insight into them is gained through this staged re-telling in analysis - leading to a healing of the mind or purgation of emotion. The aim of psychoanalysis is to externalise the internal thoughts, to bring the unconscious to conscious by releasing suppressed or unarticulated emotions and experiences, and it is through having a cathartic experience that an individual can be healed. However, catharsis can be problematic sometimes, as it does not always offer healing or recovery as an outcome, rather it can create an uncomfortable experience. There is always unavoidable inner conflict that affects individual's emotional balance and narrating stories about these conflicts may become a healing process to both the narrator and the audience. This could be seen as related, or analogous, to the way in which theatre operates, which constructs narratives that are played out so that an individual's anxiety, psychic hindrances and painful memories are overcome in a cathartic way. In prison theatre as practised by the three theatre companies explored in this thesis (Clean Break, Synergy and Geese), offenders are enabled to talk about the pressing issues and challenging circumstances in their lives, and through

narratives bring to light those complex experiences that from a psychoanalytical perspective may be hidden within their unconscious; hence, using narrative as a tool to "redress or explicate the imbalance that prompted the telling of the story in the first place" (Bruner, 1996:121). For Clean Break and Synergy, the process of 'bringing to light' hidden stories, is also for the benefit of the audience and society.

David Williamson and Bryony Lavery employ elements of tragedy in their plays *A Conversation* (2001) and *Frozen* (1998) respectively to examine the process of apportioning blame and taking responsibility for actions, in both plays leading to a measure of forgiveness and reconciliation between victims and offenders. The Playwrights suggest that past experiences and circumstances determine a character's behaviour, and through this, we find that, "theatre permits the subconscious mind to communicate with the conscious mind, that it can transform our hearts and minds" (Karampetsos, 1995: 128-9). Exploration of the offenders' narratives in theatre is not mainly focused on the result or product, but the process of healing through an encounter between characters and the audience in a ritualistic environment to seek truth, and justice.

A Conversation is a play by an Australian playwright David Williamson, originally premiered in the Ensemble Theatre, Sydney (September 5, 2001) and subsequently staged in the Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester (2007), and as such it can be considered a play within the mainstream of British theatre production. It explores how narrative is used as a technique for mediation and a process of healing between the victim's and perpetrator's families. In this play, the perpetrator's family arranges for a facilitation meeting staged as a conversation with the family of the victim through Jack Manning, a community conference convenor who specialises in the use of community conference approach to deal with issues of anger,

misunderstanding, and disputes arising among family members, friends, and groups associated with a criminal act. The title of the play gives us an insight about a conversation as narrative. According to Neal Norrick (2007),

> Conversation is the natural home of narrative, and the most familiar context of storytelling for most of us. Storytelling is a common part of conversation between friends and family members. We tell stories to make a point, to catch up on each other's lives, to report news, and to entertain each other. And one story opens the floor to other participants for stories of their own. Our conversational stories are embedded in their local contexts, the forms and functions developing and reflecting these contexts (127).

A conversation is explored here as a storytelling technique and a healing process. Jack initiates this idea to help in reconciling the families of Williams and Milsom over the rape and murder of Donna, the daughter of Barbara and Derek Milsom, by Scott the son of Coral Williams. Jack contacts Derek and Barbara Milson, and invites them for a conversation with the Williams family, aimed at bringing about a face to face encounter, exploring stories and experiences through which deep wounds may perhaps begin to be healed, despite the truly horrific nature of the crime which has been committed.

The rape and murder of the victim Donna, by the perpetrator Scott, brings shocking and unbearable memories to both families. Each suffers the consequences of the actions of Scott Williams whose psychological, environmental and socio-economic circumstances are probed in the play; the play asks what it was that led him to rape and murder Donna, leading to the questions about exploring the story of his life from childhood to adulthood. This reminds us that "the idea that our identity is formed on the basis of a story has the fundamental implication that we become the

stories that we tell ourselves and the stories that we sometimes must live without our having explicitly consented to the plot" (Kenyon & Randall, 1997:29). Uncontrollable circumstances and experiences form part of our narratives and define who we are and the reasons for our actions. Therefore, the play asks to what extent should we blame Scott given the influence on his behaviour of psychological illness, his social-economic background and his parental/childhood upbringing? Lorin, a psychiatrist treats Scott for what she believes to be a psychological disorder, while the Williams' family believes that there are lot of factors such as environment, poverty, poor parental upbringing and so on that led Scott to commit such a dreadful crime. The play exposes many factors that may in part be responsible for Scott's criminal and violent behaviour. Through the process of unravelling these factors, both the family of the victim and that of the perpetrator finally understand that they have all been affected and undergone traumatic experiences due to Scott's actions; they find the beginnings of common ground for forgiveness and reconciliation. In particular, the play hinges on the desire that Scott may be sent to a lower security prison, but the permission of the victim's family is a prerequisite for this; thus, the play makes a plot imperative from the desire to seek understanding and even a degree of mercy for their daughter's killer from the bereaved parents.

Frozen by Bryony Lavery was first produced in Birmingham by the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in 1998. Since then the play has been produced at the National Theatre and by other theatre companies across United Kingdom, and in other major international cities such as Paris, Dublin and Amsterdam. It has also been widely produced in United States of America. The play revolves around the kidnapping, rape and murder of an innocent ten-year-old child by a serial killer, Ralph. It explores adult ruthless and barbaric crime against a child and questions

freedom and protection a child enjoys and the responsibility of an adult in ensuring a child enjoys such freedom and protection. It also asks, can we forgive such an atrocious crime by a psychopathic child-killer and how do we achieve redemption? The play moves from darkness to light revealing three characters frozen in their own world and linking them together as traumatised individuals. As each character tells his or her story, and their stories are unveiled, the audience may begin to see the link, the blend and interconnectedness between them. Lavery shows us Agnetha, an American Analytical Clinical Psychologist from New York, arriving in London to investigate the life of the serial killer Ralph. She challenges the audience with the findings that violent criminal behaviour can be traced to psychological disorder resulting from brain damage. She therefore questions the extent to which Ralph is 'to blame' for his actions, which include the abduction, rape and murder of an innocent ten-year-old child. In parallel with Agnetha's investigation, the play follows the journey of Nancy, the mother of the murdered ten-year-old girl, towards accepting what has happened and ultimately forgiving the murderer of her daughter.

Looking at structure and form, the play has two Acts and thirty scenes, employing both monologue and dialogue as dramatic narrative tools. In act one, each of the three main characters through narratives reveal their traumatised state of mind which stir the audiences' imagination as to who the characters are, their motivations, experiences and sufferings. Act two creates dialogue which shows connectedness and relationship – each character has a driving force which motivates them as they are all traumatised by their past experiences. Nancy's husband Bob is in a state of midlife turbulence, her daughter Ingrid is an introvert and unpredictable, which culminate in Nancy's web of challenges and suffering in her life. In Nancy, the audience see determination, despair, desire for intervention, spirit of revenge, but above all, the

need for forgiveness. Agnetha pursues a serious argument through her research thesis in the play but her character appears comic in some instances, such as her monologue in the opening scene and her subsequent actions aboard the airplane, and sending email to a wrong recipient. Through her monologue, the audience can see that she is not free from her past experiences and that she is troubled with memories of the past, the death of her academic partner David. Through the monologue of Ralph, the perpetrator, the audience nevertheless sees a tyrannical and violent father whose actions damaged, and had a catastrophic impact on the development and behaviour of his son Ralph.

In *Frozen,* we see the turning point that triggers forgiveness is Nancy's recognition and realisation (anagnorisis) of her own frailty and the acceptance of love and forgiveness in place of hate and revenge as preached to her by her daughter Ingrid. The Playwright explores the idea of forgiveness thereby leaving the audience with such questions about their own coping mechanism and sense of forgiveness. Ralph, a child molester and killer understands the impact of his atrocious act on the victims and becomes remorseful, then through acceptance of the responsibility of his actions, asks for forgiveness and is forgiven by Nancy, and the play ends with this moment of acknowledgement of his crimes from Ralph, and Nancy's finding of some degree of forgiveness. The sense of reconciliation is made bitter-sweet by the impossibility of bringing back Rhona, the dead child, and by the suggestion of Ralph's suicide. In the light of the questions about whether the child abuse suffered by Ralph has substantially caused the warping of his personality and the destruction of a moral sense, his death poses many questions to the audience, about justice, redemption and who is to blame.

It is pertinent to state that the characters in these plays, *A Conversation and Frozen* whether they are victims or perpetrators, are not, to begin with, conscious of their actions to a very high extent; for all the characters, the play's journey is one that leads towards greater self-awareness, and greater insight into what has happened, why and how some form of recovery, redemption or at least survival may be possible. Both Playwrights use the structures of tragic drama to uncover moments of 'hamartia' (error), and from those, moments of discovery and reversal. Like Ralph in *Frozen,* Scott in *A Conversation* is also perceived potentially as a sociopath, who lacks empathy and a moral compass, but the question is asked whether the causes of these sociopathic tendencies can be traced to external factors, and circumstances – whether the seeds of unlawful behaviour have been sowed long ago in a neglected or underprivileged childhood: Gail, Scott's sister points out that there might be mitigating circumstances to explain the attitudes that Scott imbibed growing up, which played a part in his later criminal behaviour:,

> Gail: If a kid like Scott can roam free at any time of night, who do you think he is going to be roaming with, given we lived in the suburb with the highest crime rate in the city? … Combine parental neglect with a high crime area and you've got an epidemic of young offenders. And this is exactly the word Weatherburn and Lind use. Epidemic. What kind of attitudes and values do you think Scott was going to pick up? (p.76).

Williamson addresses the relevance of environment in child's personality development. Environment matters a lot in determining what kind of attitude or behaviour a child cultivates in life which informs his personality. To understand the motivation behind a character's actions in a play, environmental factors should be put into consideration as it could be influential in the character's offending behaviour, which renders him helpless in making positive and acceptable choices. Environmental factors can lead to a downfall of a character in a play, it can inculcate in the character a negative perception and lack of understanding in making informed choices; or it can make close to inevitable a decision capable of bringing him to a catastrophic moment. Both Lavery and Williamson are interested in delving deeper beyond a character's actions to find out the hidden or unknown circumstances that may have shaped his personality, be it mental illnesses or childhood experiences. Vipan Kumar (2010) defines personality in a theatre term by focusing on the origin and development of a dramatic character;

> The word personality has been derived from the Latin word "persona", which was used for the "mask" utilised by actors to change their appearance. But in Roman times it was taken as a particular character itself. Since then, the word, personality, is used to refer not only to one's character but also to those aspects of an individual's behaviour that sets him apart from other individuals (6).

What sets Ralph and Scott apart from the other characters are their seeming lack of social norms of empathy and morality. Both plays examine whether these moral and emotional deficits, and their violent tendencies, could be the result of physical, psychological, biological and sociological factors beyond their control. In *A*

Conversation, Derek puts across his research findings and argument in order to establish the impact of heredity in personality development.

> Derek… 'Behavioural and Brain Sciences'. Volume 18, Number 3. (*He reads*) In every known culture 'sociopath comprise three to four percent of the male population'. They're 'egocentric, aggressive, impulsive, and underneath a superficial veneer of sociability and charm, experience, no love, shame, empathy, guilt or remorse'. And the evidence shows there's genetic factor.
>
> Lorin: Some genetic influence
>
> Derek: Every twin study that's been done shows up to half of it is
>
> Lorin: The other half is what I use my professional skills to work on
>
> Derek: There are people who are born bad. Or at least halfway bad. And he was one of them. (P: 76)

Linking this to Timberlake Wertenbaker's play *Our Country's Good*, Tench, a character in the play believes that criminal tendency is innate;

> Tench: We are talking about criminals, often hardened criminals. They have a bit of vice and crime. Habits sure difficult to break. And it can be more than habit, an innate tendency. Many criminals seem to have been born that way. It is in their nature.
>
> (Act 1 scene 6).

However, Agnetha opposes Derek's findings in *A Conversation* and Tench's understanding in *Our Country's Good* as stated above;

> Agnetha: …I find no evidence that people are born evil. To be evil is, dictionary definition, to be 'morally depraved'. To my mind, that bespeaks having conscious control over something. The serial murderers I have tested are not in that category. The deeds themselves are bizarre, grotesque but not evil. They are driven by forces beyond their control. The difference between a crime of evil and a crime of illness is the difference between a sin and a symptom. (Act Two: Concluding My Address)

Agnetha's lines above direct our attention to the fate of a tragic character whose downfall is as a result of some uncontrollable circumstances surrounding the actions that shape his personality. The totality of a character's experiences through the process of development and upbringing (nurture) combined with the biological or genetic factor (nature) make up a character's personality. Sometimes, what defines the personality of a character goes beyond genetic factors or nurture in terms of general childhood experiences due to some forces or illnesses that trouble the character's inner most part of being. Although, one factor can trigger another and helps in shaping the personality of a character in the sense that a character that suffers early sex abuse as a child may be psychologically affected, which can play a part in how he socialises or relates to other characters.

Both Lavery and Williamson through fictional narrative construction ask us to consider whether the terrible criminal acts at the heart of their plays are cases of premeditated intention, willingness to commit crime, psychological disorder or

neurotic illnesses. According to a German philosopher G.W.L Hegel's 'Tragedy as Dramatic Art' in Drarakis and Lieber (1998), collection of essays on tragedy, he writes about the philosophy of tragedy, and argued from the moral perspective of criminal activity,

> The problem here is concerned with the claim of alertness in our intelligence, with the nature of obligation implied in that which a man carries out with volition fully aware of its acts as contrasted with that which he has done in fact, but unconscious of and with no intention of doing what he has done…" (40).

Crime and violent acts are carried out as a way of letting out suppressed steam within struggling sub-consciousness of a character, as a channel to externalise his internal thought, worries and general traumatic experiences. In *Frozen,* Agnetha proves and defends Ralph's crime as a symptom of illness, rather than a crime or even a 'sin'. What feelings does Ralph evoke in the audience in the end after his confession and acceptance of his atrocities? How would the audience react to this feeling of character's discovery or recognition of error, which the Greeks calls "anagnorisis", and which Freud saw as one of the purposes and aims of psychoanalysis, and which Aristotle defined as one of the key ingredients of tragedy in the theatre? Discussing what constitutes uncontrollable circumstances in the tragic life of a character, Drakakis and Leiber (1998) put it in this way:

> In tragedy the protagonist acts in ignorance of the larger context of his actions, and this lack of awareness is frequently folded back into psychological motivation. Acting in ignorance becomes the external manifestation of a deficiency within the character of the protagonist, thus betraying what is often labelled a "flaw" in his inner life, his psychological makeup which effectively causes the tragedy (8).

Even negative physical experiences can lead to negative psychological trauma in the life of a character as seen in Ralph whose early childhood experiences influenced his actions, and these experiences were physical not just psychological; Agnetha through her narratives posits that physical brain damage can result from physical as well as psychological mistreatment which Ralph has experienced both as a child – we are told that he fell off a roof, fell down a mine craft, and that his mother threw him in a sink. Similarly, we witness the narrative about Scott in *A Conversation* which form his identity – he suffered a deprived upbringing, without a good education, in an underprivileged suburb, with poor parental guidance from his single mother. In *Frozen,* through Agnetha, we see that negligence during a child's early stage may affect behaviour and determine a child's future actions, as she argues in her thesis;

> Agnetha: …. The second critical argument in my thesis is that the mental abuse of children causes profound and pathological changes in the structure of the brain as surely as does physical injury…
>
> (Act One, sc. Eighteen)

In *A Conversation,* Gail points that there were some factors that contributed to Scott's criminal behaviour. She argues that Scott was not born a sociopath, but that circumstances of life reshaped his thinking, belief and understanding of life in a negative direction. In defence of Scott's actions, Gail responds to Derek's statement,

> Derek: If I was given the chance I'd be happy to kill him myself. I'd like to put a gun to his head and shoot him. (p.68)

As the conversation ensues, Coral tries to call Gail to order but she responds,

> Gail: Mum, I didn't come here to crawl on my belly. A terrible thing happened but Scott wasn't born a monster. No one is born that way. If he turned out that way, then there've got to be reasons. (p.68)

How does this affect the audience's involvement in questions of justice – who is to blame, and what is the appropriate punishment? In *Frozen,* Agnetha defends Ralph by saying that he is not to blame because his actions are a 'symptom' of the damage he has suffered, that his behaviour is the result of incapacitating circumstances. In like manner, in David Williamson's *A Conversation,* Gail Williams defends her younger brother Scott, articulating the factors that contribute to Scott's behaviour. Gail is of the view that poverty, social and environmental factors conspired against her brother pointing that Scott was not born bad. She is bold to push across the circumstances surrounding Scott's criminal behaviour. She is often in contest with Derek Milsom over issues relating to factors affecting them. She maintains her opinion that there is a class division in society, and states that Derek should be aware of things happening on the other side of life. In defence of Scott, in relation to uncontrollable factors, which influence his actions, we could see how his early childhood experiences play a role in shaping and reshaping his personality,

> Derek: So, what are you saying here? Scott wasn't to blame? It was all due to the fact he wasn't brought up in the right suburb?

> Gail: You are very good in research and that supports your stance, Derek. Why don't you read a bit on the other side as well? Weatherburn and Lind, 1998. Parental neglect is the single most important factor in creating criminal behaviour in children (p.80)

In view of this, it is worth saying that early childhood development, parental relationship and support strongly contribute to the personality of a child, even later in life as an adult. Childhood experiences inform a person's perception of existence and response to society unless adequate rehabilitation or educational measures are in place to redirect, relearn and reform. This will help in breaking the chain effects of the impact of negative experiences of offending behaviour. An adult who suffers abuse as a child may exhibit negative behaviour ranging from a lack of love and trust in relationships, to full-blown criminal activity. Hindle and Vaciago, child psychologists, further clarify this as they assert,

> Development is a continuous process; each stage being influenced by the previous one. In the ordinary course of maturation, if things are to go well, the infant will establish within himself secure figures who will be source of strength for his developing ego and will provide inner containment for powerful feelings and anxieties that threaten to overwhelm him (48).

These powerful and uncontrollable feelings within the psyche of a character lead to his tragic experiences. Overwhelming and threatening feelings, which the characters cannot grasp, but dictate their actions uncontrollably, can result in negative behaviour. The construction of narratives about the circumstances that inform a

character's actions is based on the mitigating factors that drive him beyond his control. The fate of a character is determined by the combination of nature and nurture which form his personality in relation to the social setting in which he finds himself. Prison theatre, no less than classical tragedy, is frequently deeply involved with attempting to understand these processes; and tragic concepts (hamartia, anagnorisis, suffering, catharsis) are often the means by which this understanding is attained.

The aim of tragedy is to expose human frailty by finding ways for truth to prevail through reversal and recognition, in such a dramatic encounter as shown both in *A Conversation* and *Frozen*: the face to face encounter between victim and perpetrator, or between their closest family members. Audiences watching the play *Frozen* would imagine that a face to face encounter between Nancy and Ralph will lead to a disastrous result, judging from Nancy's initial temperament and emotional management;

Nancy: I said 'If I go to see him,

I'm taking a gun.

blow his brain all over the wall

I'm taking a knife

slice his thing off

stick the blade through his eyes

and take out his brains that thought

what he thought to do what he did…

(Act 1. Scene 19)

The above lines tell the audience the extent of the anger and thirst for vengeance that have possessed Nancy. This raises tension in the audience as the action builds up towards her final, climactic encounter with Ralph. Also, in *A Conversation*, characters are placed face to face in an active theatrical encounter, in the presence of the audience, witnessing the confrontations and conflicts, as the characters work through a moment of resolution. Mick's failure to inform and advise Donna about the impending danger; Lorin's failure of professionalism in her unhealthy infatuation and obsession with Scott; Derek's negligence and lack of duty of care to maximise safety; failures on the part of the families (and even failures on the part of the victim – as Donna's snobbery and lack of empathy are explored too) - and of government to provide essential needs for a stabilized society, are all animated and played out through this fraught conversation, which is laden with so much emotion, and so much context. David Chadderton (2007) captures this in his review of the performance of *A Conversation* in Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester,

> Each has a different stance on what happened: Derek has pages of statistics to try to make Scott's family understand what his daughter went through; Coral blames herself for being a bad mother; Gail puts part of the blame on their poor, single parent upbringing in a tough neighbourhood; Mick believes his brother has always been bad and his nasty actions were treated with amusement rather than punished. Each ends up taking part of the blame. (*British Theatre Guide*, www.britishtheatreguide.info).

Through this 'conversational narrative' process, all the characters acknowledge their own complicity or involvement in the tragic death of Donna. Lorin, for example, a Psychotherapist in her early forties hired to see to the treatment and assessment of

Scott's case, failed in her profession by signing Scott off, without maintaining or adhering to the strict rules or ethics of the job. She was infatuated with Scott, and therefore Lorin accepts some blame for her professional negligence and the misplacement of priority that put the life of others in danger. She becomes emotionally affected in the rituals of the narratives and opts to confess;

Lorin: Barbara, I haven't told the whole truth.

There is silence

The night before I gave testimony I went over all Scott's test scores again. His Hare, his MMPI, and I remember thinking, 'This is a textbook sociopath. This is a dangerous young man'. But I saw him again in the morning and…

Jack: And?

Lorin: He could be charming. God knows he could be charming. And funny. He knew I'd been having a hard time with the prison governor. A troglodyte if ever there was one. And he imitated him brilliantly. Brought tears to my eyes.

Coral: I even used to laugh when he did me

Derek: What are you saying, Lorin?

Lorin: I should have known what he was doing. I did know what he was doing.

Derek: You lost all your objectivity because he charmed you?

Lorin: I lost my objectivity for whatever reason.

Derek: You are paid to be objective. You're paid to be professional!

Barbara: You don't forget the basis of your craft because someone makes you laugh.

Lorin: No you don't.

There is silence.

This moment of silence is used here by the playwright to break a boundary, a space and moment of thought about the right and wrong, the reasonable and unreasonable, and to expose the weakness and failure in Lorin. This a moment of interrogation and establishment of the power of silence in communication. Then Barbara breaks the silence with further questions as shown below:

Barbara: What are you saying? You are infatuated with him? A rapist and killer?

Lorin: I don't know what I was. All I know is that I wanted to believe in him. More than I should've.

Barbara: Sounds suspicious like infatuation to me.

Lorin: Call it what you like.

Derek: Infatuated?

Lorin: Yes probably. And I shouldn't have been. And I've ruined your life. What do you want me to do? What exactly do you want me to do? Kill myself? I have

> felt badly enough about this to just about contemplate it. I've driven my partner away for good cause because he couldn't stand me obsessing about it any longer. I could have stopped this tragedy, but I didn't.
>
> (P.96)

This confession points to one of the factors in the play that bring about the tragic death of Donna which may trigger empathetic response from the audience knowing that there is flaw of infatuation or romantic attachment in Lorin, who is placed in a position of trust, but becomes incapacitated by the forces which she cannot control – love taking place of duty, an inner conflict between intuition and rationality, self and other. As discussed earlier on the theory of Good Lives Model, sometimes a character's sense of judgement becomes self-centred and guided by a selfish motive to satisfy or actualise innermost desire, which is not within his or her control, but within the dictates of certain physiological, biological and psychological makeup. However, Lorin is not alone in the construction of the stories about the factors which contributed to the tragic death of Donna in the play.

Mick, Scott's brother, also contributes to the death of Donna. He is the son of Coral Williams, and in his early 20s. He works in his uncle's store with his elder brother Scott and confessed that he would have averted the death of Donna if he had advised her to stay away from his brother Scott, and so blames himself for not speaking up leading to his brother's brutal act against Donna; however the moment in which he fails to warn Donna is explored in the play for its full complexity. He partly fails to warn Donna because of her own arrogance and social snobbery towards him,

and thus this moment becomes more morally ambiguous. It is a moment of hamartia (error), but the error is not just Mick's, it is also Donna's:

Mick: (*to Lorin*) You are not the only one to blame

They look at him

> I could've save your daughter, Mrs' Milsom. I knew she was goin' t'get raped. I saw it building up day after day. I told my brother I'd kill him if he tried it, but he's not scared of me…. I went up to your daughter and I was goin' t'say, 'See that guy over there. Take bloody precaution. He's raped two women already and he's looking at you.' And then she would've phoned you and then you would've had guarded and had her live back home and she'd still be alive. But when I said, 'Excuse me, can we talk?' she looked at me, and turned on her heel. It was like 'Don't come near me, scum'. (p.96)

Even though, in defence of Donna, Derek argues and challenges Mick for his heartlessness, for seeing an impending danger in the face of their daughter and failing to stop it. But it is a moment of truth, a moment of heightened spiritual involvement that will lead to a transformation. Barbara has to face the truth which is the essence of tragedy, a channel of healing and forgiveness through recognition of flaws and confession of sins. It is still part of a turning point in the play as Barbara speaks the

truth about the character or attitude of their daughter as Derek accuses Mick of causing the death of Donna for his omission to act.

Derek: (*angrily*) You wanted her to be raped? Out of sheer spite? Here you are presenting yourself as better than your brother, and you know what? You're worse. Ten times worse. He was in the grip of compulsion. A sick, sick compulsion, but what were you in the grip of? Spite. Nothing more than spite. You wanted her to be raped because she turned away? Because she was understandably a little cautious.

Mick: It wasn't that, she just thought I was shit.

Derek: Barbara, support me. You know damn well the last thing our daughter was a snob.

Mick: Sorry. I've seen that look a thousand times. 'Who does this guy think he is, trying to hit on me?

Derek: Barbara, tell him. Our daughter was not a snob

There's a silence

Barbara: Derek, our daughter could be a horrible little snob.

Derek: For that she deserves to die?

Mick: Of course, she didn't. She deserved to be warned. And let my anger get the better of me. I'm really sorry. I am.

(p.97)

Further down into the narratives, Bob speaks up the truth about his own error in failing to save Donna's tragic death. Bob, a businessman in his mid-50s is a brother to Coral Williams, and an uncle to Gail, Mick and Scott Williams. It was in his store that Scott spotted Donna Milsom. He is blamed by Gail and Coral for not paying attention to Scott's wellbeing and so failed to give him adequate guidance. He later blames himself for not being able to advise Scott, and failing to give attention to young Scott by not directing or guiding him to the right paths.

> Bob: A few months later he said something to me when we're driving some equipment out to a customer. But I'm thinking business and I only half heard it. And just say, 'yeah'. And at the end of the day I think, 'What? What did he say? And it comes back to me jus' as if it's tape recorded in my brain. 'It's more fun when they struggle'. And I think, 'Shit, I've got to talk to this kid', but of course business, embarrassment – whatever. I didn't. So, Derek. I guess I'm one of Gail's factors. Just like all the rest of this family. Get a gun and shoot us. (p.98)

Then Derek takes his own portion of the blame:

> Derek: She was followed once before. About six months before she… I promised I would get her one of those

> panic buttons. Little pendants you can hang around your neck. They look like a real neckless. You press it and its radio relayed and goes straight to a patrolling security firm. But I didn't do it, did I? I was too busy with my bloody useless career. She wanted her boyfriend to move in with her and I told her I didn't think she should make that sort of commitment just yet. 'Give yourself some freedom. Give yourself some time', that's what I said. My real objection? He was a musician in a rock band. And he hadn't been to a private school and he hadn't been to university. If there's a bit of the snob in our daughter, then I guess she got it from me.
>
> *There's a silence*
>
> I knew she was at risk living alone in that area. Barbara kept asking me if I'd arranged for that panic button, and I kept getting irritated and saying, 'I'll do it soon'.
>
> (p.100)

Derek reveals to the audience the role of family in influencing the behaviour of a child as he confirms that Donna got her snobbish attitude from him and he neglected his duty of care for his daughter by not keeping up or providing adequate measure to

ensure her safety, by failing to get a panic button, knowing fully well the risks his daughter is bound to face.

Although, Derek believes that his family has been shattered by the ruthless and barbaric acts of Scott, but his own family contributed to the tragedy in their own way. He is bent on revenge as a remedy and never intends to forgive or reconcile with the Williams family. He later blames himself for contributing to the death of his daughter Donna for not giving attention towards her security because he did not provide security alert device for Donna. He also talks about his over-protective approach to Donna by interfering in her relationship, and not allowing her to live with her boyfriend because her boyfriend never attended a private school and didn't go to a university. Thus, class conflict and social deprivation, and lack of empathy for the poorer-off in society, all played a role in the catastrophe of Donna's death.

In the play, there are statements of confession and acceptance of guilt and responsibilities that triggers forgiveness and renewal of spirit; that brings about change in perspective and attitude amongst the characters. This depicts errors or flaws in the characters and recognition of guilt in their behaviours and actions which led to Donna's fate. Based on the failure of the characters in their respective roles and duties, there is a shift in focus from Scott being the perpetrator of the act, to a more collective sense of implication and responsibility: from the acknowledgement by the Williams family that they did not raise their son well; to blaming heredity or socio-economic factors; to the sudden realisation by some of the characters of the ways in which they contributed to Donna's tragic death. It is worthy to note that Scott and Donna, the two characters around whom the actions and questions of the play revolve , are not present or seen onstage as Scott is in prison and Donna is already dead, but the whole idea of the play, and the 'conference' approach to reconciliation

is to use the platform of ‘a conversation’ to place the central criminal act at the centre of a web of contexts, and to investigate the people around the crime.

Within the hyper-naturalistic, real-time staging, the audience are nonetheless asked to witness and engage in a kind of ritual: the ‘conversation’ happens within the carefully stage-managed ‘sacred’ space where this charged encounter between the victim’s and perpetrator’s families takes place. The play lasts for about one and half hours of real-time conversation without a single break, and yet the tempo and form sustain the audience. This is because the play adopts a dramatic form and structure, having a beginning, middle and end as a unified whole, not breaking in parts, thereby giving the characters and audience a sustained and relentless immersion in the play and characters. Through their increasingly mutual exploration of guilt and responsibilities in the play, the characters arrive at a point of catharsis where emotions are purged within the sacred space; through the contesting narratives and personal testimonies, a process of finding who is to blame leads to the exposure of their innermost feelings and to a kind of catharsis, both for characters and for the audience.

In *Frozen*, the element of collective guilt is also a key theme: Ralph, Agnetha and Nancy, all have flaws or have committed errors (hamartia). Here, the boundaries of blame and guilt move and close swiftly as all become part of the narrative process of exploration of guilt, judgement, healing and transformation. Paul Woodruff (2008) states that,

> ...Transformation may be good theatre and theatre itself may be transformed into something better than theatre. Actors may become audience, audience may become actors, and a theatre piece may become a ritual that is shared among all present. That happened when the performers invite the audience to become

> part of the action and the audience accept. At such a moment, everything is changed; everyone has found the grace to be allowed to enter the sacred space. What begins as theatre and passes through transgression may end as sacrament (113).

The audience has to enter into this sacred space, participate in the ritual process to be transported to the spiritual realm through breaking of theatrical boundaries in order to discover the truth and be transformed. There are smaller acts of transgression and guilt that the play encompasses: Nancy realises and confesses her unfaithfulness to Bob her husband which happened due to life forces beyond her control, Agnetha confesses her adulterous act with a married man (a husband to her friend). Both characters need to find self-forgiveness as well as the forgiveness of others, to recover from the wound of trauma. There is pressure in both plays regarding how forgiveness can be handled, pressure for Derek to forgive, pressure for Nancy to forgive and pressure to reconcile with what has happened by moving on and accepting the circumstances. There is also pressure on the audience to explore their own coping mechanisms. Derek realises and confirms that;

Derek: That's not going to bring her back. (p.98)

This is the culminating point of submission and helplessness on the part of the Williams family which breaks the ice in the heart of Derek Milsom, as they push the boundary of uncontrollable circumstances and fate which leads every human to a point of recognition (anagnorisis); a point of turnaround where Derek accepts the fate of his daughter's death and believes that nothing will bring her back; a moment of reversal and recognition, a sudden change in direction. This is the moment of realisation of the need for forgiveness and reconciliation.

In a dramatic twist that reverses the whole perspective, in *Frozen,* Nancy meets with Ralph, a serial killer, rapist and murderer of her ten-year-old daughter. This encounter is what the whole play has been building towards:

Ralph: She was your kid…
One of them.
This…
Nancy: Rhona
Ralph: Rhona.
Funny you coming.
Pause
Nancy: I want to know you
I forgive you for killing my daughter.

(Act 2. Scene 25).

In the words of Michael McCullough (2000), 'when someone forgives a person who has committed a transgression against him or her, it is the forgiver (specifically, in his or her thought, feelings, motivations, or behaviours) who changes' (9). While Malcolm and Greenberg (2000), buttress the point that:

> Initially, the injured person blames the offender and wants the person to make restitution or be punished for the offense. The injured person is also likely to see the offender in wholly negative terms. In the process of forgiving, however, the injured person often experiences a shift in his or her view of the offender (180),

This is evident in the cases of Derek in *A Conversation* and Nancy in *Frozen*, where there is a moment of face to face encounter between the victim and the perpetrator. Theatre teaches the audience to embrace the tragic moment of the characters and learn from their heroic or tragic spirits in accepting their circumstances and striving

for change in order to become a better people. And to confirm the point that acceptance of guilt and responsibility for a crime and pleading for forgiveness is a giant stride in the life of a courageous character, Leo Montada (2007) affirms that:

> Feeling of guilt about one's own aggression, for instance can inhibit further aggression and motivate honest apologies. Anger and outrage about a norm violation, on the other hand, can dispose agents to punish the perpetrators. On the other hand, anger and moral outrage can be reduced when subject sees that the perpetrator admits his blameworthiness. Likewise, humour can reduce anger (27).

There is a moment in a play whereby a character realises or discovers the need for truth to prevail, the value of recognition and acceptance of one's fate; it is this cathartic moment that elicits pity in the heart of the audience. It is within this sacred narrative space and time that the character recognizes this uncontrollable situation and asks for forgiveness. Just as in David Williamson's *A Conversation,* the three main characters in *Frozen* find a common ground for understanding, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The impact of suppressed emotions is psychoanalytically highlighted by Ingrid when she says that pain will consume Nancy if she keeps harbouring her feelings and not giving room for forgiveness. Nancy in her narratives, reveals how Ingrid advises her to learn to forgive, to free her mind and let her spirit be renewed;

Nancy: …Me and …bloody Ingrid

She says 'Mum…

You're in a very Bad Space.

You've Got To Let Go Of Your Anger.

You've Got To Move On.

If You Hold On To Your Rage,

It Will Consume You.

Let It Go.

Make Space For Other Things To Enter Your Heart'……

'I think what we Have to Do

is Forgive Ralph Wantage With Our Hearts'……

She said 'You should go and see him.

Tell him you forgive him'.

(Act 1. Sc. Nineteen)

Looking at the above lines, it is worthy to note the playwright's choice of words. In this form, the playwright integrates everyday language with poetry. Most of her words above have capitalised letters which means that she is humanising the art of forgiveness. Life is full of forgiveness and to forgive is to live, as power of forgiveness outshines the power of revenge and punishment. Nancy's poetic rhetoric triggers another moment of change in perspective in the play and draws audience' attention to the need for forgiveness. Here, Ingrid advocates the relevance of forgiveness in transformation of a character. Forgiveness of the offender by the victim (or as in both *Frozen* and *A Conversation,* not the victim themselves but someone whose pain is of a great magnitude – in these cases, the surviving parents of a murdered child) purifies the mind of both the victim and perpetrator, it brings a new wave of feelings of repentance and regret as Ralph writes to Nancy to apologise for the murder of her daughter.

Ralph: …I am sorry.

I am sorry from the bottom of my heart

I am thinking about what I did.

I am thinking about what I did

I am realising

I am realising in abusing and killing your daughter

…Rhona…

I hurt her

You

(Act Two. Scene Twenty-Six).

His language and sentences break down as he reaches this moment of acknowledging the hurt caused to Rhona and her mother ('You').

There is need for forgiveness to free the minds, for renewal of spirits and relationship, and above all for purification and transformation to a better life. When the tragic circumstance of the character draws the audience to step into the world of the character, knowing that they are not exempted from such situation, their emotions are heightened, and they become terrified. At this high point of emotional turbulence, the audience become purified as tension is released and expectation dwindled, the audience feel better through the catastrophic result. As characters in the play are cut up in the web of guilt and regrets, it points to the audiences' understanding of the fallibility of human nature and the need to empathise, to realise one's mistake and to be purged towards transformation. Scott is the main focus in the play due to his brutal

rape and murder of Donna Milsom even though he never appears on stage. His crime created a kind of enmity between his family and the Milsom's, leading to the conference which is targeted to bring face to face the family of the victim and the perpetrator. Scott also apologises by saying 'sorry' through his recorded voice played to the hearing of the victim's family and his own family.

Through recognition and discovery (anagnorisis), the play moves towards forgiveness, where meeting between the families of the victim and perpetrator becomes a land of theatrical encounter, a space where conflict is faced and explored, through ritualised performance that heightens the characters' and audience's sensibilities as witnesses in this encounter to achieve purgation of emotion. Woodruff also points that "justice too needs witness. A body of witness makes possible a communal healing of wounds as opposed to the sort of private revenge that leads only to a cycle of violence" (23). This is confirmed in the last lines of dialogue between Barbara, Jack and Derek;

> Derek: (*nodding*) There's a weight of some kind been lifted. (p.102)

Through confrontation, the characters become able to reach understanding in making suggestions and finding a common playing ground to help each other cope with the circumstances. Barbara cooperates with the family of Coral Williams and takes their suggestions on how to rearrange Donna's photographs into a non-chronological order to break the chains or stream of memories which in chronological order all seem to lead inexorably to her murder, so that the entire narrative is suffused with pain. Putting the photos into non-chronological order allows the grieving mother to take possession again of happy memories and moments as complete in themselves, rather than as steps towards the inevitable catastrophe of Donna's death. Photographs

thereby become objects of storytelling and a potent symbolic embodiment in the play of how constructed narratives shape time – but can also be revised, reshaped, and re-ordered. Through taking control of the narrative of Donna's life, as expressed in photograph albums, Donna's mother finds a space in her heart to express her feelings, accepts a plea for forgiveness and the need for reconciliation. Rearranging the photographs in essence breaks the coherent narrative about Donna's life and memories. It points to Galen Strawson's (2004) argument 'Against Narrativity' to suggest that our lives are not dependent or made up of linear stories but patches of events and experiences which are incoherent and episodic. It shows that not following a scripted or narrative pattern of life brings about healing as seen with Barbara's reorganising of the photographic images that remind her of Donna's life stories leading up to her painful death. Photographs, physical fragments and evocations of the past also play a role in *Frozen,* when Nancy brings Rhona's photographs to Ralph and asks if he would like to see Rhona's photographs. Going through the photographs with Ralph tells a story and stirs another sense of realisation and processing of past and present, it becomes a way of healing through memories and stream of consciousness. The two playwrights employ photographic images in their works as a way of linking the past with the present and using the past to deal with the present as a coping method both on individual and on community levels. According to Duggan and Roger (2007), in their book titled *Imagination, Identification and Catharsis in Theatre and Therapy*,

> It is our willingness to invest ourselves in the experience which makes it vivid and emotionally satisfying. Our willingness, however, depends on our ability to let ourselves take this step into the unknown. Catharsis, the healing release of self towards another, is always a kind of negotiation between opposing forces…. In fact, it is the intimacy of the story that

> encourages us to open ourselves to experiencing the vulnerability of others (79).

Both *A Conversation* and *Frozen* explore the 'healing release of self' – the unfreezing – of characters who are stuck, paralysed and frozen by anger, guilt and despair or in Ralph's case, 'frozen' into psychopathy by the abuse of his childhood.

Narrative as a coping mechanism and an instrument of community redemption is also powerfully explored in a very different dramaturgical way in Alecky Blythe's *London Road* (2011). The community's coping with the psychological and physical impact of violent crime is at the heart of *London Road*, a verbatim play written by Alecky Blythe with musical lyrics composed by Adam Cork. Its setting is in London Road in Ipswich, Suffolk in England in 2006. The play is an event-based narrative – recreating or re-narrating the stories of the interviewees towards changing the tragic narratives of the event that happened in their community. Stories of appalling and horrendous murder bring darkness and shame to the community, but the narrative changes as the community is transformed through community's social action – their narratives moved from ugly to admirable as their identities changed. The opening song - "Everyone is very, very nervous" - depicts the mood of the play and feelings of the audience (emotion, pity, fear). This creates a dramatic effect that helped develop the structuring techniques and the narrative. It is all about giving voices to those that their voices are not often heard, and through verbatim techniques, we gain perspectives of individuals' different sides of stories. The circumstances informing the play are the serial murders of five women and the trial of the killer. The playwright employs verbatim technique as a way of giving a voice, as words of the characters in the play are taken exactly as recorded during the playwright's interviews with the residents in London Road, and after the sentencing of the murderer Steve

Wright. The musical lyrics are also based on the recorded interviews with the residents. Michael Billington (2012) comments in his *Guardian* review that "conventional musicals, even at their best, take us into a world of fantasy. This miraculously innovative show finds a way of representing reality". He reiterates the extent in which the play elevates the spirit and transports the audience to the world beyond the theatre space, and returning with the feeling of reality.

The play focuses on the recovery and healing process of the community; the stress, anxiety, pity and fear of the London Road residents, but as they struggled to cope with the intrusive media attention and narrative, and also keep alive the hope of rebuilding and restoring the image of their community. In the play, we see the community spirit in the following lines,

> Julie: It's – we thought well with everything happening over the Christmas period with the prostitutes goin' missin' an – and being murdered an' so forth – we needed to get together as a community…. (Section One)

The attention of the play is not mainly on the murders but on the community's efforts to reform and redeem their neighbourhood – to change their story. However, the critical reaction to the play was mixed, and some saw the play's message as problematic. According to Helen Warner (2011), "what seemed to be argued over the course of '*London Road'* is that, as a unit, the community did not care for the prostitutes, and that, ultimately, the killings improved their lives". In a similar vein, Simon Edge (2011) picks up on the challenging aspects of the play's emphasis on community re-building in the wake of the murders, in his review of *London Road,* "...

one neighbour says she would like to shake the killer Steve Wright by hand for cleaning up her street. The power of the play is that it asks us to examine our own feelings in her place…". Critics were therefore divided on the play's message and its impact on audiences, some questioning whether the optimism of the community's success in re-building itself somehow did not adequately acknowledge the tragedies of the women who were killed. The women's status as sex-workers and drug-addicts led them to be regarded by some of the inhabitants of London Road as a social problem, and whose deaths could be read in this play as having a 'beneficial' effect for the residents of London Road as their deaths were the trigger for its reinvention as a flower-filled, happy community. According to Alan Fitter (2016) in his review of the play production in Bridewell Theatre,

> The residents of London Road had struggled for years with the soliciting and kerb-crawling on their street. When Steve Wright was arrested, charged and then convicted for murders, the community grappled with the media frenzy and what it meant to be at the epicenter of this tragedy. (LondonTheatre1.com, July 2016).

It is the emotion that tragedy stirs that propels the residents to let go of the memories and put themselves together to overcome the challenges and use the situation as a motivation to create a new spirit in their community. But how can tragedy create a new wave of positive atmosphere in the community? In *London Road*, it is the spirit of resilience, community cohesion and the determination to succeed in the face of challenges which wrestled the residents. There is the feeling of empathy which makes the residents imagine being in the shoes of the five murdered prostitutes, as well as the fear that grips them while wondering who the killer was and who the next victim would be. It is the sudden realisation and recognition that such tragedy has attracted

much attention, that they seize the opportunity to be strong and find solutions to cleanse their neighbourhood. Charles Spencer (2011) in his review of the play in *The Telegraph*, take a more favourable view of the play's message, commenting that,

> those living in London Road gained a far stronger community spirit as a result of the murders in their midst, and in most cases, there was genuine compassion for the dead girls, most of whom were working on the street to sustain their drug habit, though one woman cannot find it in her heart to sympathise with them.

That is to say that while some people blame the authorities for not caring enough in response to social issues threatening society, some blame those individuals who fail to conform to societal norms and values, and see them as responsible for their own tragedy. But the boundary between authorities' responsibilities and individuals' choices of action is very fluid and blurry. According to Michael Coveney's (2011) review in *The Independent*,

> Doubters can be assured that there is no 'cashing in' on the tragedy, rather a deep, abiding sadness that it happened at all and even a slight, knowingly shameful admission that something good has come out of it: a reborn community and a renewal of civic pride in an area that became unjustly known as a red-light district…

The essence of tragedy is to elevate the spirit and alleviate the soul so that sad feelings would be purged for a new reflection. The playwright Alecky Blythe recreates the situation on stage to draw attention and raise awareness on the plight of a group of individuals who despite the challenges they faced decides to be their own voice, tell their own stories and transform themselves and their community, and that is the theatre's impact on transformation, rehabilitation and building cohesion.

Alecky Blythe uses verbatim techniques and music to explore pressing contemporary issues. Blythe's idea is to distance the play from its geographical location to give it more universal connection. She recreates events to show that an ugly situation can be turned to a positive and inspiring experience – changing the narratives. Blythe also maintains distance by representing neither the victims nor the perpetrator onstage, rather she uses verbatim and music as techniques to help the audience focus on the people whose lives were affected by the crime, and the regeneration of their community, creating an ensemble of characters – a kind of Chorus - whose roles and interactions help them to recount their stories and step out to assess their circumstances and understand the cultural relevance of social inclusion, community identity and the redemptive power of theatre. The play reflects contemporary British society and the need for community cohesion in the face of all challenges.

The stage is a frame through which the audience see and imagine the real world; through the lives and actions of the dramatic characters on stage, the audience see the reflection of their own lives. When justice is meted out to the perpetrator of a crime the audience feels satisfied that appropriate measure has taken place but the event of a character confessing his sins or crime, being remorseful and pleading for forgiveness gives the audience the feeling that justice has taken place and that is what leads to a release of emotions, forgiveness and reconciliation, as opposed to revenge or punishment, which will never be measured equally with the gravity of crime committed. Mario Gollwitzer (2007) cites Solomon (1999) as saying that,

> Strong passionate emotions accompany a revenge-related social episode: witnessing acts of injustice makes us angry, morally outraged; sometimes we also experience anxiety or disgust. But as soon as revenge is carried out, as soon as the offender got

> what he deserves, we experience satisfaction, contentment, and gratification. On the other hand, we are deeply frustrated when the injustice cannot be redressed and when evil prevails (115).

In this, I will argue that the beauty of theatre is not to set out parameters for revenge, rather theatre for the audience creates narrative as a process of healing, a platform for learning and change, a channel for self-assessment and a medium for purification, forgiveness and reconciliation. For the audience to be aware of the moment of catharsis in a play, there should a process and form of engagement between the characters, audience and onstage happenings; there should be a broken or blurred boundary between the characters and audience which creates a channel that allows the audience to enter into the sacred space and partake in the ritual moments with the characters.

According to Homan (1989),

> The union of actor or character and audience, which is also a dichotomy, is inseparable from the concept of theatre itself. By definition, the medium is one of presence, the fictive onstage enactment occupying the same space and time by the real spectators witnessing the production. We ourselves are at once engaged and disengaged – experiencing Aristotle's "fear" and "pity" – by what we both see and hear (52).

The relationship of characters and audience in prison theatre matters in the sense that the audience has to penetrate into the world of the characters in order to discover the physical and psychological motivations behind the characters' actions, which in the case of violent crime, may seem incomprehensible or beyond redemption.

In conclusion, both *Frozen and A Conversation* stage investigations of the well-springs of criminal intentions and behaviour: through these theatrical staging we

can be empathetically shown all the contributing factors or people that allow or encourage crime to happen. In prison theatre, narrative structures, and tragic concepts offer traditional routes for the exploration of crime, and for meaning-making to occur. It prevents offenders from being regarded as evil, rather storytelling provides a platform for their individual cases to be examined and for audiences and participants to ask crucial questions about criminal behaviour and criminal justice; an evaluation of the role of fate or will, environmental or social circumstances. Through personal narratives, offenders relive their experiences and reflect on their behaviour and their journey into prison, and are able to change their narratives and recreate their identities. When the root cause of a problem is detected, or certain illness is diagnosed, that is when it becomes possible to find a solution to the situation or treatment to the illnesses that lead individuals to offend. That is how theatre can instigate change and brings transformation. In the next three chapters of my thesis, devoted to discussing the work of three major British prison-theatre companies: Clean Break, Synergy Theatre Project and the Geese Theatre Company, I shall look at practical applications of these principles of storytelling and tragic dramaturgies of crime and punishment.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Fractured and Self-Critical Narratives: Exploring Clean Break's Workshop Approaches and Playwrights' Strategies

> Clean Break's artistic mission is to create bold new plays by the best women playwrights. It aims to tell the stories about women and crime that are not being told anywhere, taking their work into prisons and onto stages across London, the UK and the world.
>
> -British Council *Theatre and Dance*, (1 January 2017)

We have already seen in chapter one how Clean Break was founded and the philosophy surrounding its formation, and in chapters two and three, how playwrights employ different narrative strategies and dramatic forms to treat themes of crime and justice. Chapter two examined the use of a distancing historical setting in Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good* (1998), and in contrast the creation of physically and psychologically gripping immersive experiences for the audience in Chloe Moss' *Sweatbox* (2015). In chapter three, I examined how playwrights have dramatized stories of criminal justice using tragic narrative structures such as hamartia and catharsis to interrogate the causes and contexts for criminal actions; to stage processes of forgiveness and reconciliation between victims and perpetrators in David Williamson's *A Conversation* (2001) and Bryony Lavery's *Frozen* (1998); and to dramatize community recovery in the aftermath of trauma in Alecky Blythe's *London Road* (2011).

In this chapter, I move from solely textual writerly strategies in playwriting, to look at applied processes of dramaturgy, in relation to the British theatre company, Clean Break. This chapter focuses on how Clean Break creates a narrative platform for women through working with participants in prisons to construct fictional stories,

through improvisation and workshop facilitation techniques which explore issues around criminal justice and the rehabilitation of offenders. This chapter examines Clean Break's approaches to drama games and exercises and shows how the company deploys narrative techniques to explore individuals' behaviour as witnessed during my participation in Clean Break's workshops (2015 & 2016). It also in parallel looks at women playwrights' contributions in pushing Clean Break's political agenda through fictional dramatization and narrativization of the experience of women in the criminal justice system, and how this gendered and feminist approach contributes to the interrogation of the issues of crime and justice. This involves exploring different narrative structures and strategies employed by women playwrights to respond to women's marginalised world through their writing and performance as Clean Break recognises and focuses on the relevance of gender in narratives. Therefore, this chapter explores a suite of related questions: who is telling the stories about women? What attitudes to questions of culpability or criminal responsibility do we find in Clean Break's work? How does Clean Break negotiate the difficulty of speaking for someone or representing them, whilst maintaining the authentic voice of those they represent, and how does this authenticity reach a public audience without breaching the privacy of contributors to the writing process?

These questions will be answered from a spectrum of different perspectives: through discussing my experience in participating in Clean Break's workshops, and my observation of the stage performance of Vivienne Franzmann's play *Sounds Like an Insult* (2014) by some women who have gone through Clean Break's education programme. Also, by examining Rebecca Prichard's *Dream Pill* (2010) which focuses on girl-child trafficking, abuse and imprisonment, I will show how Prichard questions and challenges society's indifferent attitude to the plight of women as

victims of crime. I will look at Rebecca Lenkiewicz's *That Almost Unnameable Lust* (2010) to explore how Clean Break turns the spotlight on its own practices and questions the ethics behind the whole endeavour of prison theatre; and finally, Vivienne Franzmann's *Pests* (2014) will be part of a playwright's answer to the question of how compassionate we are to the victims of social injustice in contemporary British society. Central to all these different analyses of the work of Clean Break is the fact and practice of story-making, story-telling and story-listening.

Clean Break, according to its own website, is a theatre company working to transform and empower women who have experienced the criminal justice system and those at risk of offending (www.cleanbreak.org.uk). Clean Break was founded in 1979 by two women ex-prisoners with the idea that through theatre, the untold stories and experiences of women in criminal justice system could be brought to the public. Clean Break also runs theatre-based educational and training programmes to encourage and support women who have offended or who are at risk of offending to engage in personal development, skill acquisition that will enable them to get into education, employment and to take responsibility for their actions. It relies on funding and donations to run its programmes. Through rehearsals and theatre productions, Clean Break explores ways in which to articulate for a general public the experiences of women in relation to crime, punishment and the criminal justice system.

Clean Break takes an avowedly feminist and political stance on the criminal justice system by pointing to society as responsible for the social iniquities and deprivation that cause some of the women's involvement in crime and offending behaviours. Clean Break employs feminist narrative approach to pursue its political agenda and the idea that social inequalities are as a result of culturally motivated differences. The feminist approach to evaluation of the relevance of prison theatre is

based on the question of who benefits from the work, who is it for as the playwrights commit to changing the narrative of women within the cultural and socio-political status quo and project positive image of women in society. Clean Break is a vocal critic of unequal and unfair treatment meted out to some women, and throughout all the company's work, the argument is pressed that women who participate in their programmes are not just perpetrators but also victims of crime as a result of poverty, lack of education, inadequate social support, racism, as well as mental health issues.

Clean Break in their mission statement argues that they aim "to produce ground breaking theatre which puts women's voices at its heart and creates lasting change by challenging injustice in and beyond the criminal justice system" (secure.thebiggive.org.uk). In this case, they set out to pursue a clear agenda of social equality and justice, alongside the aim of rehabilitating women through theatre, arguing that women have a unique experience of the criminal justice which is markedly different from men's. Clean Break offers support to women through their theatre-based education programme capable of leading and motivating offenders through their desistance journey as they reflect on their past experiences, explore their creative skills, employ their imagination, build their skills, confidence and communication, enabling them to take back control of their lives. Johnson, Hanna et al, have written about theatre as one of the forms for working with offenders, and in their essay titled, "Unlocking Value: The Economic Benefit of the Arts in Criminal Justice", discuss the relevance of arts in criminal justice system, and comment more precisely that:

> The arts can accompany and encourage people on a personal journey from being an offender to being a responsible, contributing member of society. They offer practical, professional and often innovative ways they had not expected, or even in ways they

> had thought were impossible. They accomplish this by engaging people, helping them to develop new skills and responsibility and helping them to improve relationships (2011:9).

The above assertion reflects the function of theatre practice as an art form employed by Clean Break in rehabilitation of offenders as witnessed in the joint training programme organised by Geese Theatre Company and Clean Break (2016). According to Arts in Criminal Justice.org:

> Arts and creativity in criminal justice settings can support improved wellbeing, awaken an interest in learning and can help people build new positive identities. Engaging in the arts can also lead to new skills and employment opportunities as well as equipping participants with a desire to actively engage in the community and culture.

During a workshop, tagged 'Staging Rehabilitation'[4] (2016), aimed at theatre and drama students who are interested in gaining fresh or more knowledge in theatre practice and criminal justice system. – (this workshop will be discussed later in this chapter), Clean Break engaged with the student participants (mainly students from the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, London), through exploration and experimentation into various ways in which they deal with their clients' individual cases and needs, to address the problems and challenges faced by women offenders. Through creative writing and drama workshops, they employed storytelling techniques to explore the thoughts, feelings and needs of the participants, illustrating how the workshop programmes encourage women offenders to reflect on their

[4] Staging Rehabilitation is a Clean Break and Geese Theatre Joint master class exploring theatre's practical approaches to rehabilitation of offenders.

behaviour, and take positive and responsible actions that will help them take back control of their lives.

During this workshop which I attended, as a participant-observer, researcher, and a re-narrator or reporter of women's narratives – (I saw my role in this space as being to listen to the stories of women and to re-tell them through the analysis of my thesis). Anna Herrmann, Head of Education at Clean Break pointed out that women offenders and those at risk of offending require a safe space to tell their stories, explore their circumstances, interrogate issues, and challenge opinions regarding their lives. She argued that theatre gives that safe space to explore one's world, a safe space to deal with issues surrounding one's life. Theatre offers unconditional positive attitude to women offenders to examine their own choices, and to be self-critical about the choice they made, as they feel safe, and not judged within the safe space[5] of the theatre.

> Theatre has had an historic role in society as providing a relatively safe way of talking back to power. Across many cultures and traditions overtime we can trace patterns and instances of groups of people using theatre as a safe space to tell their stories and their lives. This aesthetic and emotional outlets allows for potential catharsis, a safe way for citizens to express their concerns, criticisms and frustrations to each other and to society at large (Prendergast & Connoly, 2009:7)

In this safe space, women begin to tell their stories and through the process, gain confidence and develop positive attitude to life, learn new skills, rebuild relationships, make connections to society outside, and ultimately take back control of their lives

[5] Anna Hermann stated this during a workshop session in Staging Rehabilitation master class, 11 November 2016. A safe space is a non-judgemental environment where participants can confidently explore issues and share experiences revolving around their individual circumstances.

and renew their identities. Evaluating Clean Break's project 'Miss Spent', a drama project for young women at the Josephine Butler Unit, HMP Downview. Mannen (2010) reports that

> Miss Spent convincingly demonstrated the value of drama exercises, creative education and the use of role play in teaching personal skills, increasing confidence and self-esteem, and enabling young women to consider their role in society, including looking at their offending behaviour as well as determining their own strengths and weaknesses (4).

The project focused more on the youth offending risk factor, and engaged them on the issues they may face as young women while they are in prison or even when they are released to integrate within their community. Through 'Miss Spent' project, they are encouraged to explore their roles in society and are instigated to take back control of their lives and future. Through creative drama processes, exercises and games, it becomes easier for the participants to learn and remember what they have gained from participating in the whole process. It encouraged them to reflect on their behaviours, assess their strengths and weaknesses, what causes them to offend, as well as what can help them stay away from re-offending. This statement points to the theory of desistance and maturity as offenders become able to reflect on their behaviours that would help them make positive choices in their lives. It was made very clear how crucial narrative-construction is to the working practices of both Clean Break and Geese during the 'Staging Rehabilitation' training programme. The participants were divided into two groups and each group had a facilitator for the two sessions. The group that started with Anna Herrmann later joined Andy Watson and vice versa. These sessions explored kind of player-driven narrative where participants create or

tell stories through role play or improvisations. I will discuss the session with Clean Break below.

The aim of the session was to look at the techniques that Clean Break adopts in creating theatre programmes while working with women offenders or those at risk of offending. Anna Herrmann started the activity by asking everyone to sit in a round circle formation. She asked the group "If you were to be sweet, what type of sweet would you be and why?" She started off by telling the group she would be a chocolate creamy bar because she looks strong from outside but soft inside. All the participants mentioned the sweet they would be and why. The game created a good atmosphere to start the activities, the background to know and familiarise with one another, and opportunity that gave room for further interactions. I observed that the activity enabled participants to tell the group in one short sentence what they may not ordinarily know about them. Participants felt free and laughed as each person mentioned the kind of sweet he or she would be. This was relevant because at that introductory stage into the activity it helped the participants to come out of their shells and feel confident interacting with others. However, it also began to introduce elements of metaphor, creative-thinking and symbolic self-representation that are the building blocks of thinking through story.

In the next stage of the activity, the facilitator explained that in life, there are things every individual wants to achieve (goals), but sometimes there are bumps (obstacles) on the way between individuals and their goals. She instructed each participant to randomly identify one person objectively within their minds, without any prejudice or emotions attached, as a goal and try to get closer, the identified person should move away from the person getting closer. There is element of realism in the facilitator's approach to observation and objectivity as Theodore Hatlen (1987)

talks about realism in theatre and suggests that, “the plot must be allowed to develop where an honest treatment of the characters takes place; the environment and atmosphere must be depicted with utmost fidelity; emotions must be employed without artificiality or sentimentalism; the writer must be faithful to the facts as observed” (162). Within the space, there appeared what seemed to be an honest, authentic and hitch-free involvement as participants were striving to get closer to their goals (identified person). This created a more disorganised group as each person moves closer to the chosen person, the chosen person moves to his or her identified person because each participant must identify one person he or she had in mind. It was a fun game that kept the space buzzing with random criss-cross movements, and sometimes a bit of laughter. I observed in this game that as the participants got closer to their goals, their goals moved away from them and the game continued in that pattern until the facilitator instructed the participants to stop. I imagined and likened the game to a real-world situation where individuals strive to meet their goals which may not be readily available or easy for them to attain. So, this instils in the participants the spirit of hope, endurance, commitment and perseverance in pursuit of their goals. The value of this game in theatre for rehabilitation is to make participants aware of the skills required to pursue their dreams and the ability to cope with the circumstances when it appears the hope of actualising their goals are not forthcoming – (when your goals move away from you). Also, along with so many theatre games, it helps to develop self-confidence and build the spirit of cooperation and team work.

The second part of the game was for each participant to identify one member of the group as an obstacle and try to move away from him or her as far as possible. Here again, each participant identified one person as an obstacle and moved away from the person. There was a random haphazard movement within the space as

participants moved away from the identified obstacles. As everybody moved away from everybody, the space became chaotic and at one point, each of the participants had moved to different ends of the room as all separated from each other. What I learnt in this game was that the process of interacting with others through theatre teaches us to be bold and confident and to understand that there are possibilities of obstacles and hurdles to cross in life. I also observed that through exploration of these games and activities, participants learned how to identify who they are, their goals in life, and the obstacles hampering the possibilities of reaching their goals. Emphasis was laid mostly on how to identify and deal with those obstacles such as drug or substance misuse, alcohol, poverty, violence, robbery, murder, mental health issues and above all, incarceration as a result. The game was all about bodies in space, play, and the pursuit of a goal as a dramatic structure.

The third stage of the game was for the participants to identify one person as an obstacle and use another person as a barrier or shield between him and the obstacle. In this game, once a participant identified an obstacle, he tried to make sure that someone stood in between him and the obstacle. When the game started, everyone was running helter-skelter, trying to have someone shielding him or her from the obstacle. It was fun and running around the room became a bit of exercise. Eventually, at the end of the game, everyone was in a single line formation to the amazement of the facilitator as she pointed out that she has never witnessed the game ending in a straight-line formation since she started facilitating workshops and engaging with participants in the game. During the feedback session, while still in that straight-line formation, the facilitator asked the participants to say openly who their obstacles and shields were. Each participant mentioned who their obstacles were and who they used as a shield between them and the obstacles. The value of this game

was to teach and encourage offenders to be able to tell their stories, identify their problems, challenges and difficulties, to reflect and find solutions or positive approaches to deal with them. Such positive values are ethics, knowledge, understanding, cooperation, love and a healthy relation; and the barriers that shield them from these values are insecurity, abuse, and, at times, criminal behaviour.

"Analysing thoughts, feelings and needs" was the title of a part of the workshop session at Clean Break. The facilitator asked the participants to imagine or think about any incident in their lives where something went wrong as a result of their failure to obey the rule (breaking rules) – due to their actions or inactions (commission or omission). The participants within the group were divided into smaller groups of two persons in a group. Each participant within the small group should tell each other the stories about the broken rules and what happened as a result: their thoughts, feelings and needs. All the mini groups were called back by the facilitator to openly narrate the story regarding what their actions of breaking the rules were, who was affected, what thoughts do they have about the impact, what are their feelings, what do they need that would make them not to go back to breaking rules which would impact negatively on others, and stir their thoughts and feelings. During this process, some participants became very emotional as they opened upon their past and went through those memories and experiences. This exercise brought a cathartic moment as participants dug up their repressed past experiences to a point of emotional release that brings about a healing process. In this game, I observed the use of Stanislavski's technique of emotional memories in character development where an actor reflects on his past experiences to dig out emotions that will enable him to live his role. The facilitator forewarned the group that such an exercise is likely to bring up memories that could be disturbing or uncomfortable. The facilitator

was writing the group's feedback on their actions, impact, thoughts, feelings and needs. In the end, these were gathered:

Thoughts: suicide, escape, death, danger,

Feelings: sadness, rejection, anger, loneliness, remorse, abandonment, hope, worried, isolated, worthless.

Needs: relationship, family support, social services, art organisation such as Clean Break, connections, support group, love, care, self-acceptance, reassurance.

Through this 'Staging Rehabilitation' workshop process, it became clear how Clean Break uses autobiographical narrative techniques through theatre activities to explore issues and behaviours regarding rehabilitation of offenders. Some of the games and exercises made clear how Clean Break employs tragic narrative structures and concepts (characters having goals and obstacles, for example) as techniques to separate individuals from their stories as they turn personal stories into social narratives, making it issue-based rather than personality based. The Clean Break workshop process asks the participants to construct their narratives, reflect on their actions and behaviours, and to think about the impact of their actions on others. It also asks participants to pause a moment, step back from their immediate concerns, and have a think about the impact that all of our behaviour has on other people – and through this reflective process, thoughts and feelings are stirred or awaken, and within that process catharsis achieved through purgation of emotion.

The stories of the women Clean Break works with do not end where their thoughts and feelings end, rather, that is where Clean Break begins their works with women offenders. This is to say that Clean Break intervenes in issues arising from the stories of the experiences women encountered in their lives. Clean Break's ideology

may be linked to Bertolt Brecht's, who "felt that the most important human experiences were no longer personal stories of individuals but rather significant social events and the forces that caused them" (Hatlen,1987:190). Brecht's argument stems from the point that there are social issues that should affect the audience most rather than the stories of individual whose sufferings and frustrations are as a result of traumatic experiences triggered by social problems. Therefore, the theatre space should be used to expose and address those social issues that create individuals' stories. Clean Break believes that women are trapped in criminal justice because of the socio-economic circumstances, social injustices and inequality and they welcome offenders and those at risk of offending as human beings capable of learning from mistakes, and hope to support them in changing their narratives and transforming their lives through engagement with drama and theatre as a healing process. Jessie Johnson (2016) in her review of Clean Break, quotes Roisin McBrinn on the relevance of theatre "in terms of potential for transformation, for offering confidence" (*Evening Standard,* 24 August 2016), and she says that it is the overwhelming belief in the power of theatre to transform offenders that Clean Break still exists. Through exploration and understanding of their actions, thoughts and feelings, Clean Break helps women offenders by training, supporting, encouraging and linking them to their various needs, offering the opportunity for them to construct their own narratives, and be able to pick up their lives, become functional and beneficial to themselves and society. To achieve this, Clean Break embarks on theatre projects or programmes using storytelling, role-play, rehearsals, exercises, games, improvisation, reading, and acting, to educate, enlighten, and promote confidence, skills, and reintegration into society.

The aim of engaging women in prison theatre is not exclusively to entertain the audience or participants, but also to create a process of healing. It is through participation in theatre activities where women are given the platform to tell their stories and reflect on their behaviours through exploration of their experiences, thoughts, and feelings which theatre generates. I observed that Clean Break uses these techniques to probe beneath the innermost being of the participants to discover who they really are, what their thoughts and feelings are, what their drivers and motivations are, and what their failures and challenges are. Through exploration of behaviours, they re-enact the outcomes using improvisations, and in most cases collectively contributing to the creating or writing of a script that develops into a full-length play. Anna Herrmann, during the workshop, mentioned that at times they can take a scene from a play and explore the fictional characters by engaging the participants in the creative process. I observed during the training sessions that Clean Break makes use of already existing scripts which have been developed or created through improvisation and exploration of behaviours in some of their projects. They also use plays written by other playwrights such as *Sounds Like an Insult* (2014), *Dream Pill* (2010), and *Pests* (2014), among others; but the treatments of issues in these plays are focused on dramatizing stories of what may lead women to commit crime, their experiences of the criminal justice system and the responsibilities of society.

In line with the exploration of goals, obstacles and needs, the facilitator asked the participants to form groups of four individuals, each group was to read and study the script, noting down the goals and obstacles as presented and represented by characters in the script. Later, participants were asked to create static photographic re-enactment of the scene portraying the character (offender), goal, and the bump

(obstacle) and the needs. The group members used their bodies to create still images. This was done without movements or words. Each participant group displayed a motionless image of the group. This act explores the story about a character who comes out of prison, her goal is to return to her family, but she faces the challenges or obstacles of rejection because her family does not want her back in the assumption that she has not changed. The participants were told to explore the same scene again but changing the narrative, focusing on the support the same character gets from her family as opposed to initial rejection. The scene was also demonstrated through displaying dramatized static images of the members of the groups. This throws more lights on the stories of how offenders who return from prisons may be treated by some families, communities, and society at large. Some ex-prisoners may face rejection from their families and communities after being released from prison.

The third stage of the scene exploration was to demonstrate in words and actions the choice or decision made by the character as she is rejected by her family members. The character pleads with her family to accept her, and promises that she has become a changed person and that she will strive to live better and adopt a positive lifestyle. But still, the audience watch her feel rejected as the door shuts against her. Such rejection by her family generates feeling of pity and empathy in the audience as they process the tragic experience of suffering rejection and abandonment. The aim of the drama game which focused on a prisoner returning to her family, was to enable the offenders to make choices that are positive, that will lead them to transformation and rehabilitation.

However, there are mitigating circumstances that determine the choices individuals make and the impact those choices may have on the individual and others. Theatre probes into situations to explore motivations behind characters' action in

relation with other characters. Through participation in theatre, offenders may develop skills to construct their own narratives, reflect on their behaviours, access choices and become mature in dealing with thoughts and feelings arising from looking inwards and by interrogating their own behaviours. But participating in theatre does not affect everyone equally; a group of individuals can engage in theatre activity, but the understanding and impact of such theatrical engagements may come in different shades and affect the participants as well as the audience in various ways (as we have already seen portrayed in Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good).*

I visited Clean Break in 2015 in Kentish Town, London, to gain a practical understanding of what writing and working with ex-prisoners involves. It was a gathering of the students from Central School of Speech and Drama and MA students of the University of Essex in Playwriting class. It was a good ground to meet, interact with others, explore and share ideas. It was a rewarding experience seeing the staging of a play *Sounds Like an Insult* written by Vivienne Franzmann which is focused on the story relating to issues of personality disorder. The production of this play was originally commissioned by Clean Break in collaboration with National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and the Department of Health and it was directed by Rebecca Manley. The play was performed by ex-prisoners whom Clean Break has helped to get back on their feet through their education and theatre programmes after being in prison, but who often find they are then struggling to cope with life on the outside. These are women who have gone through Clean Break's Theatre Education programme, and have graduated, but still work with Clean Break in some of their projects. Franzmann researched into the lives of some women whose lives are marked with traumatic, cathartic and chaotic experiences and she re-tells their stories through fictional dramatic characters. Through a dramatic monologue, the character Brenda

shares the story of her diagnosis with the audience, and reveals how relieved she felt when she received her diagnostic result from the psychiatrist. She was relieved because she understood the root cause of her problems in order to be able to treat it. Digging up her past experiences and memories, and bringing these to her consciousness marks a process of healing as she shares her stories with the audience. The play explores the stories, experiences and challenges of women who have mental health problems, the difficulties they face with diagnosis and treatment and how they are affected by these issues within the criminal justice system. It exposes a lot of social and psychological issues relating to personality disorder as they affect women who are in contact with the criminal justice system. The performance reveals the internal struggles of the characters whose negative behaviours are portrayed to have been exacerbated by drug addiction and rape. The play can be performed in various contexts and it appeals to a wide variety of audiences due to its focus on mental health issues. It can be relevant to any group or organisation working in the criminal justice system, policymakers, and can be used in workshops, seminars and conferences to demonstrate the impact of mental health or personality disorder on women offenders within the criminal justice system.

During the post-show discussion, one of the actresses told a story about the way she was bullied by her parents, family members, friends, and classmates. This experience clearly affected her general perception or understanding of the world: a world where she thought that everybody was against her, a world where she believed no one was to be trusted, a world where she saw herself as a solitary figure standing in a desert as depicted in the character Emma in the play *The Long Road*. Many women are going through a similar personality disorder which according to Caroline O'Keefe "is often rooted in deprivation, neglect, or trauma in childhood, which can

result in inability to function effectively as an individual in society" (2013:6). Maud Clark, a co-founder of Somebody's Daughter Theatre, an Australian theatre company working with women who have experienced drug addiction and criminal justice, speaks up for women and condemns the impact of prison on women. She advocates for theatre as an alternative approach to explore issues and to promote discussion and education about the negative effects of prison on women. Clark argues;

> Theatre is about creating a world woven with women's own stories – that's the bridge, that's the meeting point. Not moving away from who they are, where they have come from but claiming it – not having their experiences dissected for meaning but finding their own knowings. (2004:104).

This expresses a shared viewpoint, held by many working in the field of prison theatre for women: that such theatre should be crafted around the narrative of women and their experiences where their voices are staged to be heard and are encouraged to be bold and take back control of their lives when they return to the community

My experience of working in Passmores House[6], a branch of Westminster Drug Project has made me very aware that some clients going through detoxification and rehabilitation programmes tend to worry about their fate when they leave the house, and face society again without being supervised, without being monitored and reminded of the laid down rules and regulations that they obtained which kept them safe while they are going through recovery. According to the Project's mission statement, they "place an emphasis on transition, ensuring that a person is ready and supported to move from one phase of treatment to the next. Our vision is to help

[6] Passmores House is a community comprising of men and women who are going through detoxification and rehabilitation programmes of recovery from substance misuse. Some of the inpatients have been in contact with criminal justice system.

people develop full and active lives, whether they choose to return to their communities or make a fresh start somewhere new" (www.wdp.org.uk). I have worked with clients who towards the end of their recovery programme, asked many questions, such as, where am I going? What am I going to do? How will society accept me? How will my family and friends treat me? Has the government got any plans and programme designed for me to reintegrate into society? Am I able to get a job? Am I sure I am not going to reoffend? Have I got the coping skills to stand the pressure and challenges I am going to face outside? Some cases have proven that after graduation, some went back to their world and engaged in the same or related crime. The question then becomes, why is it so? How do we tackle this relapsing phenomenon? Listening to the stories of some clients in the drug recovery project influenced my position as a researcher-observer in this project. Their experiences and narratives reflect the attitude and feelings of some offenders in prison theatre who tend to worry about their fate when they leave prison, the psychological conflicts an individual may have when facing transition or changing narratives and how playwrights create their characters through experimentation, fiction and embroiling their characters in conflicts. My experience with these clients made me to understand the connection between reality, and fiction as dramatized in Chloe Moss' play *This Wide Night* (2009). In this play, we see two characters Marie and Lorraine established a relationship in prison which cannot function in another context when they are both released from prison. They struggle to support each other as their relationship changes from prison to outside of prison. This portrays the inability of some offenders to reintegrate into society when they return to the community. In *This Wide Night,* we see the importance of story – the character Marie believes that moment right from the womb that all odds worked against her. She sees her identity as

following unchangeable script (predestined, fate, inescapable). Some offenders in prison theatre do conceive their lives as stories which is often times damaging because things do not always work out like that – (life can be non-narrative) argues Galen Strawson (2004). *This Wide Night* makes us to understand that there are women in contact with the criminal justice who are locked inside stories they feel they cannot change. However, this play is a kind of anti-narrative just as Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953) as the character Marie and Lorraine feel a sense of loss, non-order, isolation and lack of love. The play *This Wide Night* do not offer them much hope as they remain where they are at the end of the play. It is not going through rehabilitation but retention and management of the behavioural patterns and transfer of learned or acquired skills in the day to day life outside the prison or rehabilitation centres. How can this fear of going back to society be managed? I can say that it is the fear of not being able to cope that makes coping difficult and creates that feeling of insecurity and anxiety which makes vulnerable people in this position reoffend. I thought about the possibility of incorporating within the project a theatre programme where the service users would have the opportunity to share their experiences, tell their stories and explore issues as they relate to their fear, anxieties, failures, and reoffending. Rehabilitation through theatre may be an alternative approach to dealing with individuals trapped in alcohol and drug misuse.

After the performance of Vivienne Franzmann's *Sounds Like an Insult* by the graduates of Clean Break Education programme, there was a post-production question and answer session where the actors introduced themselves to the audience, explaining who they are, their experiences in life and more so, how Clean Break has helped them to readapt and reintegrate into society. Feedback was given from the audience, questions thrown to the actors concerning their experiences as prisoners and

how theatre has impacted their lives. The session was facilitated by a staff of Clean Break as the actors tell their personal stories in an interactive platform. They shared some personal stories and experiences which would require some ethical approval for a practitioner or writer wishing to recreate their stories for public consumption. According to Kuppers (2007),

> one of the challenges of working with personal stories and small, gesture-based movement work is sharing: how can you as a facilitator bring something of the intimacy and content of your sessions into material aimed for public consumption, without endangering the privacy and integrity of your participants (156).

Even though the play focused on the issue of personality disorder which the actresses had faced at some points in their lives, the post play interactive session gave them the platform to discuss the real issues they faced in society. Listening the authentic personal stories from the women themselves as opposed to the fictional stories of the dramatic characters was very powerful in understanding the challenges and traumatic experiences they faced. There were positive responses and reactions from the actors which re-echoed how powerful theatre can be in transforming individuals within the criminal justice system. Clean Break claims to be the voice of the voiceless, but question remains, how does Clean Break manage these personal stories of the individuals with whom they work, and even bring them to the stage, without the women feeling exploited, betrayed or any sense of a breach of confidentiality or privacy?

According to Roisin McBrinn as quoted by Jessie Johnson (*Standard*, 24 August 2016), in her review of Clean Break, that "it's the vulnerability of women who are in those situations when we work with them – that's very central to it being

women only. But also, there's a whole political element to those choices, which is based around the female voice, ownership, feminism….". I suggest that women who work with Clean Break, are in one way or the other made to comply to whatever creative process or approach Clean Break offers them, as they believe Clean Break to be representing them and speaking up for them. Johnson again highlights opinion over taking women's personal stories to the mainstream theatre as she cites Roison McBrinn,

> I was excited that a story like that is becoming mainstream, and more of that the better. We definitely want to be involved in those conversations, but also champion organisations who are continuing to tell stories that might not be easy to consume but are so important and vital (*Standard,* 24 August, 2016).

It is through telling individual stories about social injustices, imprisonment, abuse and neglect; and raising awareness about these stories as issues of public concern, that attention is drawn, and voices are heard in the mainstream platform. I can see that theatre has been a very instrumental form of dealing with certain issues and problems as they affect people and society. Theatre is put side by side in discussing the roles of other agencies or bodies like the medical, social or public service system, the psychiatrists, social workers, doctors, behaviour therapists, family members, friends, local councils and so on. With all these mentioned, the women who have gone through change processes in Clean Break narrated with authentic voices that what affected them and made the most positive changes in their lives is participation in theatre activities, so they are able to tell their stories themselves through performances. Further in her line of argument, Clark, who criticises prison policies

and structure, and uses theatre as a tool to raise the voice women who experienced imprisonment, states,

> Theatre is about voice – this is very important in prison situation where women don't have one. Having your own voice, not someone speaking for you, about you and defining who you are, be it lawyers, judges, psychologists, policy makers – but speaking your own truth and being heard (2004:104).

This gives women offenders a kind of relief and reassurance that their voices are being heard and they are getting some psychological and physical healing by engaging in theatre which gives them a better platform to externalise their internal thoughts. They also earn money and get rewards through participation in theatre, in other words they have employment. However, the question remains – how does 'ownership' of the story remain with the woman offender who has voiced it, when a professional writer transforms and fictionalizes that raw material into a play? This is just one of the ethical questions that playwrights working with Clean break have to engage with, as workshopped material is transformed into a script, and a professionally staged production for a public audience. Voicing – the stories of the voices brings with it weighty responsibilities.

Dream Pill is a play which can certainly claim to be the voice of the voiceless – voice in a political term is viewed based on the issue of personal power and taking control. This play dramatizes the story of modern-day sex-trafficking, child abuse and imprisonment. It tells a story of the horrific experiences of young girls being trafficked against their will and understanding in a contemporary society. This play exposes the abuse of innocence and naivety as it happens in our world today and draws our attention to the responsibility of society for allowing such crime to occur.

Dream Pill's first performance was at the Soho Theatre in London (November 2010) as one of the Clean Break's collection of plays *Charged.* The play has since been performed in several venues, such as the Edinburgh Festival, Greenbelt Festival, and Latitude. Rebecca Prichard as a playwright carried out thorough research into sex trafficking and used Nigeria as a place of origin for the characters in her play. In developing the choice of language for her characters, the playwright identifies the local slangs and the native accents (pidgin English) in Nigeria, to tell a story of both the cultural identity and the dislocation of the characters. The characters in the play are made to live in fear by a man whom they regard as an uncle and who brutally feeds them with "dream pills" (psycho-active drugs). This male character never appears on stage, but lives in the minds of the characters, and therefore the audience, with painful imaginative force. According to Stuart Hall in his review of *Dream Pill,* titled 'Dream Pill' in *BroadwayBaby* (August, 2011), "the triumph of *Dream Pill* is that the girls do not describe the horrors inflicted upon them in any detail or with any real understanding". This proves how young, innocent and naive these characters are under the cruel hands of a man who should be a father figure caring for them. They believe the world they are in, and terrified to make their way out as they remain in the basement under the assault of a man who feeds them with dream pills and subjects them to all kinds of abuse. The man staying upstairs above the two girls suggests position of authority, superiority and oppression. The position of the girls under their oppressor suggests subjugation, intimidation, and degradation. The girls' present situation makes the audience to imagine what horror and terrible experience they must have had in the past and their inability to escape from the horrific hands of the man shocks the audience with the thoughts and feelings of what may happen to them in the future as they remain in the same place facing abuse and brutality. Rosanna

Hall says in her review of *Dream Pill,* (*Exeunt Magazine* 4-28thAugust, 2011), that "the climax of the piece provides a startling reiteration of what has happened to these girls and what is going to continue happening to them".

Although this play focuses on sex-trafficking of girls, it draws attention to the plight of women who are facing challenges and ill treatment that may go unnoticed by the majority of people and the authorities. It points to the story of transportation and commodification of women bodies. A lot of women suffer in silence, face torture and are sexually abused, which affect their overall perception of society and how they respond to it. Child abuse and neglect exist in our environment every day, and in the case of the two characters in the play, their experience portrays that people may have deaf ears or be indifferent to the horrific experiences of others. I have noted earlier in this thesis that childhood experiences and environment impact on individual's personality and contributes in shaping their identities. Ashley Doherty in her review of the play *Dream Pill* comments that, "our silence is suffocating. *Dream Pill* is far from a cathartic theatrical experience but its ability to ask us why we revel in complacency when it comes to a collective, widespread freedom is beyond worthwhile" (*The Wee Review*, 19 August 2011). This connects to the issue raised in chapter two about how compassionate we are as a nation to the plights of others. Although the play is short and, in its circularity, and lack of hope or resolution may not adopt the structure of a conventional tragedy, yet it arouses powerful feelings in the audience and is a clear call for political and individual actions to end the horror of child-trafficking. Lyn Gardner in her review of *Dream Pill* 'Clean Break and the Invisible Women', (*The Guardian*, November 8, 2010), refers to Lucy Perman as saying that, "There's often disbelief thing such as child-trafficking does actually happen. A play like *Dream Pill* can make the audience aware that's happening and

also that they can take responsibility for it". *Dream* Pill calls on society urgently to provide intervention strategies to tackle the dreadful act of sex trafficking. The situation as depicted by the playwright in the play occurs because not enough active efforts are being made by governments to stop the sex trafficking of young girls across the globe. The issue of sex trafficking of young girls is not only a moral outrage but also creates problems such as prostitution, diseases, lack of education, drug addiction and many criminal offences. These social vices are what lead some women to prison and the root cause may be child abuse or poor parenting and sex-trafficking which call for the attention of the authorities. But frequently, authorities may ignore the need to crack down against those antisocial behaviours that are creating havoc which affects individuals in society. The characters in the play *Dream Pill* are in no way responsible for their circumstances, so we blame society that raised the people who are involved in the crime of sex trafficking as products of society. It is this uncertainty in the plights of the girls that disturbs the audience and makes them more uncomfortable, but theatre asks the audience to take action, it encourages them to redefine moments of catharsis through intervention to make things better with the understanding that nothing separates the victims from the rest of us, because we share the feelings and thoughts of the experiences of the victims which makes us to ask, what if it happens to us?

In *That Almost Unnameable Lust* (2010) the playwright Rebecca Lenkiewicz turns a critical lens on the role of the writer in prison who decide to embrace the making of a play with prisoners. The play was first performed at the Soho Theatre, London as part of a collection of plays *Charged* (2010). Lenkiewicz examines the ethical questions thrown up by a naive Writer going into prison to work with women prisoners, listen their stories and re-narrate those stories. Her play captures the

hidden truth about being in prison and the stories of the events or incidents that may lead women into prisons, and furthermore depicts moments of struggle by a researcher or facilitator (Writer) to cope with personal stories of two women serving life sentences and their experiences prior to coming in contact with the criminal justice system. *That Almost Unnameable Lust* makes minimal use of characters as two women Liz and Katherine represent a group of women. Both characters in the play have suffered abuse and embody the spirit of resistance as Liz confesses that due to a long-term abuse in the hands of her husband, she took the law into her hands and murdered her husband. The character Liz demonstrates the impact of imprisonment of women; believing that staying behind bars eats deep into the lives of women. The act of narrating their own stories becomes a healing process as it helps them to relive their tragic experiences and be able to reflect on what circumstances that brought them into prison, and through that platform take back control of their lives and recreate their own identities.

The setting of the play is a modern prison and the playwright depicts how prison cells are marked out in square shapes as occupied by Liz and Katherine, and words are shared between them from their respective cells as they tell their stories. There is another character who is a writer and workshop facilitator in prison, who thinks that she has what it takes to understand the problems or issues women in prison are facing, by invading their space and probing into different aspects of their lives to find solutions to their problems. The character Writer is facilitating a writing workshop in the prison; but she finds it difficult to understand and struggles to cope with the narratives of Liz' and Katherine's past and present. This play reflects a research approach to writing about women and criminal justice, as the writer

Lenkiewicz visited the prison as part of her writing and information gathering exercise.

Some playwrights working with Clean Break write plays that are inspired by the stories of women offenders, and in other cases, they visit prisons to interview women offenders for the purpose of gathering research and material for their own creative writing. Information gathering in this situation as shown in the play goes beyond social issues to a more focused attempt to elicit information and personal stories. Narrating these experiences can trigger some feelings that may affect the person telling the story and the audience, but what matters most is how to manage these emotions. The two inmates narrate their stories randomly by reflecting on their past through memories or stream of consciousness and moving to the present. Lenkiewicz is self-critical in the sense that she problematizes the invasive nature of a researcher or writer who goes into the prison to organise workshops with the offenders, - whilst that is exactly what she does. Rebecca Lenkiewicz applies the technique of meta-criticism as she uses her play to criticise what she does among women offenders by organising workshop in prisons and carrying out interviews with women offenders. This is art about – or even against art which re-establishes the relationship between theatre and prison by asking a question: have the artists or workshop facilitators in prisons always been successful in their goal of making the voices of offenders heard? Have their practices raised ethical issues? Rebecca Lenkiewicz's answer is that the practitioners or playwrights who try to, arguably, 'appropriate' the women's voices by hearing their stories do not always succeed in carrying out their roles. The approach a theatre practitioner adopts in working with offenders is: I am a practitioner, here is your problem, share your stories with me and

I will find solutions. According to Nancy Groves, in her review in *WhatsOnStage*, titled "Re-Charged", she says that,

> The beauty and truth about Lenkiewicz's play is testament to the whole Clean Break project. In having the courage to question the place of arts in the criminal justice system, it actually confirms theatre's potential to give these vulnerable women a voice and whatever small justice that voice affords them (25 March, 2011).

Clean Break brings the issues of gender or femininity into play and the idea behind its formation is to support women who have been affected by criminal justice system. They believe that women have been marginalised and oppressed by men and neglected by the social system. But this play, *That Almost Unnameable Lust* critically investigates Clean Break's processes in working with women in prison, and also examines the assumptions of arts work in prisons, and its impact on these women offenders when they leave prison.

The essence of prison is punishment, and within the period of serving a prison term, the offender becomes another body inside the prison (imprisoned body). There are programmes within the prison aimed at rehabilitating the imprisoned body, in readiness to embrace the outside world, but there seems to be fear and worry about how to cope with the world outside after being in prison as evident in the words of Liz, a character in the play,

> Liz: Make me nervous moving. Like starting a new school. Stupid. It'll be better for Clara. Means she can get back to Gideon, doesn't need to leave him for the night. Much better…. 'Are you rehabilitated?' they ask. No. I'm just a lot tireder [sic] than when I came in. (p.134).

In Liz's lines above, it is assumed that the purpose of prison (reintegration into society) is defeated since prison only increases the challenges of integration within the community. Some may think about the circumstances that led them to prison in the first instance and become anxious about coping or how to sustain themselves outside the prison. Some of the women in prison experienced domestic violence and all sorts of abuse in their relationships which may trigger the repetition of some negative behaviour capable of landing them in prison. The impact of domestic violence or abuse on the victims can lead to depression, self-harming, suicides, murders, drug addiction, and homelessness. In *That Almost Unnameable Lust,* the character, Katherine resorts to self-harming as an escape from domestic violence and abuse:

> Katherine: I have a book. I have carved the pages out of it to make it hollow. To keep my tools in. a lot of the youngsters here do it. I asked the Doctor about self-harm. Told him I have flirted with it a little during my marriage. I burnt a cigarette onto my hand when that seemed the only thing to do. And one night, I banged my head against the kitchen wall. And I realised that pain could be displaced. That it was mobile. I told him, 'when I cut myself, there's no pain. Only relief. And actually, a bit of rush.' 'Endorphins,' he said. 'they are natural pain killers.' Dr Pi prescribed pills. I didn't take them. I preferred the razor. (p.132).

From Katherine's lines above, the content of a book does not matter to her. She has a book which she has hollowed out to store her tools. This in effect may mean that writing, reading or participating in a workshop does not instigate her to change. She believes in escapism and self-harming is the route to that escape from unbearable abuse from her husband. She resorts to self-harm as a way of responding, resisting and escaping from her troubled experience and hurting the body becomes a means of freeing the soul. The body becomes an object of torture, pains and abuse. The physical and psychological pains she inflicts on herself become worse than the pains she suffered in an abusive marriage. Katherine is locked up in her own world filled with traumatic experiences and unable to externalise her pains and sufferings but through her monologue addressed to the audience, she opens up to tell her stories about her life in prison and the childhood abuse she suffered from her own father. Through her dramatic monologue, she regains the confidence she lacked in her normal life and becomes able to tell her own stories with authentic voice and in a cathartic way.

In prison theatre practice, women tell similar stories of past traumatic experiences and through their narratives are purged of their emotions and may become healed of their psychological conflicts in the process. During my participation in Clean Break's workshop (2015), I observed women in Clean Break's education programme who shared their experiences of resorting to self-harming as a way of coping with stress, abusive relationships, domestic violence or mental health issues. Some women respond to whatever life throws at them with harmful or anti-social behaviours as a way of expression or response to society or coping with their circumstances. But at the end of the programme and during the feedback session, they confessed that telling and re-telling their stories brings about healing. Maddy Costa in

a review of *Charged* as performed in Soho Theatre, examines the plights of women as evident in the plays and points that "it forces you to question how many women are in prison because they have untreated mental health problems, or because they momentarily stood up for themselves". (*The Guardian*, 15 Nov. 2010). Clean Break's philosophy regarding women and criminal justice system is that it is the failed social system that makes women turn to crime and other antisocial behaviour. Untreated mental health problems may be due to circumstances beyond the patient's control and can lead her to crime, and Clean Break, through their plays and workshop approaches indicates that more should be done in support of women to enable them to live meaningfully, rather than facing imprisonment. Rebecca Lenkiewicz examines the impact of prison on women offenders, and through a dialogue between the characters Writer and Liz, indicates that imprisonment may not be the best pathway to rehabilitation for women offenders.

Writer: Do any of you feel you've benefitted from prison in any way?... No. but Gina, you said you felt it had given you time.

Liz: (to Gina) You'll say anything you think the other person wants to hear… Yes you will. And then you say stuff about us. Which isn't true.

Writer: Okay… Let's go back to this idea of time. Lou, you said that you felt prison had sort of punctuated your life.

Liz: Yeah. Given it a big fucking major fucking full stop.

Writer: You think it's a mad idea, Liz? That prison might give some women just time on their own. To break patterns. Aisha?

Liz: And start new ones. Like drug dependency. Clinical depression, Self-harm. Smoking. You can't get through prison without fags. You just can't.

Writer: I suppose it's comfort, yeah?

Liz: No. You're not listening to me. It's not comfort. It's necessity.

(p.127 in *Charged*)

The Writer in this play believes that prison ought to bring a new wave of meaning and understanding in the lives of the prisoners which will help them when they leave prison. Paul Taylor in his review in *The Independent* (November 17, 2010), comments, "*That Almost Unnameable Lust* by Rebecca Lenkiewicz, which slyly satirizes a prison writing workshop, contrasting the tactless exercise set by the well-meaning but naive young dramatist with the painful depth of the inner lives of two long-term inmates". With this play, Clean Break fearlessly satirised and interrogated its own practice and created a telling piece of meta-theatrical debate on the effects of 'punishment' of offenders: a meta-theatricality in a very different mode to *Our Country's Good,* but with similar concerns and interests in both sides of the prison theatre equation: the offenders and the theatre-makers; pointing out the blurry line between the beneficiaries and the benefactors.

Pests (2014) by Vivienne Franzmann originally commissioned by Clean Break, returns to the more familiar Clean Break territory of examining the social,

economic and psychological contexts for offending behaviour. The playwright explores the experiences of two young women in the grip of poverty and drug addiction. Though this play focuses on the level of issues of decadence or degradation that have enveloped the offenders, it also reflects the failure of society or social system to care and provide for some of the vulnerable individuals in our society as they struggle to cope with mental health issues, addiction, crime, imprisonment and rehabilitation process. In his discussion of the role of Clean Break in creating an enabling environment for women to share their experiences and stories of the criminal justice system, Patrick Marmion states that "…the relentlessly bleak story – developed with Clean Break Theatre Company – condenses many women's experience of the criminal justice system and offers respect and understanding where outrage and incarceration normally prevails", (*TimeOut London*, 3 April 2014). This may suggest that no matter the circumstances relating to women who are in contact with the criminal justice system, Clean Break believes that women commit crime due to personal and social challenges frequently beyond their reasonable control and as a company, they support rehabilitation rather than imprisonment.

The condition of the characters in the play portrays how they have been neglected and condemned as pests by society, which evokes feeling of pity and empathy for the characters. But Clare Brennan in her review titled, "Pest review – real drama struggling to get out" criticizes the play and argues that, "This is lazy dramaturgy: it offers behaviour patterns instead of encounters, narrative instead of choice and antagonism in place of conflict. It evokes pity not empathy". (*The Guardian*, 23 March 2014). Brennan suggests that the characters in the play are presented in a way that the audience may think or feel that the power lies in their hands to change their circumstances, as Rolly and Pink are two separate individuals

who can step out of their dark corners and take responsibilities of their actions and work towards seeking outside help. The characters' circumstances evolved from being vulnerable, neglected children to being vulnerable adults, and the play suggests that society or the authorities have not responded to their plight in the entire time from their childhood to adulthood. The play implies that society is to blame for whatever crime these characters committed that led them to prison due to lack of adequate care and intervention in time of needs. However, I do not agree with Clare Brennan's argument that the play *Pests* evokes pity and not empathy. Augusto Boal, in his *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979) states that,

> Empathy is the emotional relationship which is established between the character and spectator and which provokes, fundamentally, a delegation of power on the part of the spectator, who becomes an object in relation to the character: what happens to the latter happens vicariously to the spectator (102).

In my view, empathy is a personal feeling that connects one's sensibility to the other. It affects individuals differently and comes in various ways. Therefore, I would say that Brennan speaks from her own experience in connection with the way the characters' circumstances in the play have affected her or her reactions to the feelings which the characters in the play generate. These are characters undergoing multiple challenges in their own world, which may also reflect what the audience as humans are going through or what can happen to the audience. So, stepping into the shoes of the characters evokes not only pity but empathy because when you see a character bleed, you bleed psychologically as well because you also have blood running through your veins. The audience connects to the sufferings and challenges of the characters, and thinks, this could have happened to me, I could also be in that situation.

Clean Break through the playwright employs theatre to interrogate issues relating to crime, justice, and points directly at the government and society for lack of responsiveness and sensitivity to the plights of the most vulnerable women in our society. The two characters in the play, Rolly and Pink are on the margins of society and have been let down and betrayed by the educational and social system, they seem to have lost hope, controlled by alcohol and drugs, tortured by the memories of their past and present experiences and their uncertainty about the future, as they remain stagnant and trapped in their hopelessness and misery. Rolly has just come out of the prison and she is pregnant. She returns to stay with her sister Pink who also cannot find her s in the outside world. They live in terrible conditions, facing hunger and malnutrition, struggling with poverty and drug addiction with no intervention strategies or rehabilitation programmes in place to help them overcome their challenges and become useful to themselves and society. Most women who are in Clean Break's education programme may have experienced similar situations to that of Rolly and Pink, and Clean Break's aim is clearly that participation in their Theatre in Education programme may help women like Rolly and Pink to become empowered to tell their stories and change their lives. This play also questions how compassionate a nation we are in response to social issues which affect others negatively. Elise Gallagher in her review of *Pests* in *WhatsOnStage,* sees Pink's character in all of us,

> Pink's character contains every feature of humanity. She is just as jealous as vulnerable. In a way she is more human than most of us. Many of us look upon people like this with disgust, as if they are literally "pests". The play explores the idea that they are human and contain just as much humanity as you and me" (15 March 2014).

Society may be viewed as being unfair in recognising all humans as equal, but not bridging the gap between the rich and poor, able and disable, and by not creating opportunities for vulnerable individuals such as the characters Rolly and Pink to thrive.

In conclusion, we have looked at how Clean Break's use of story-telling permeates every area of their practice: from workshop drama games, and improvisation, to the employment of professional playwrights to transform the stories of women who experience criminal justice into texted, mainstream theatre. There is a story behind every woman's imprisonment in which Clean Break suggests that society is not responding empathetically or effectively to the plight of women, and that women in prisons have specific experiences that are different from those experienced by men. By hearing the stories of women offenders, playwrights go a long way in documenting their experiences, thereby giving them a voice as the circumstances surrounding their stories are artistically documented in a way that their plights are positioned to gain attention and become accessible to everyone. Through workshop facilitations, interviews and story-telling, issues are raised about abuse and neglect, poverty, mental health, sex trafficking, injustices, imprisonment, punishment and other social circumstances that may lead women to crime. And through the characters in Rebecca Lenkiwicz's play *That Almost Unnameable Lust*, it is evident that Clean Break takes a self-critical view of its own work in prisons and the arts. Clean Break has blamed society or social services for not delivering adequate intervention plans to help women stay away from crime or criminal behaviour. In as much as they hold society responsible for creating fertile environments of poverty and inequality for crime to occur, Clean Break in working with women offenders, listens to, tells, writes and rewrites their stories, creating the opportunity for women to share

their own stories, take back control and change their identities. They do not present an individual in connection with her stories to the mainstream theatre, but they transform stories and personal experiences into plays which address general issues affecting women in contact with the criminal justice system. In this I echo the position of Elaine Aston, a drama, theatre and performance blogger and a Professor in Theatre Studies at Lancaster University, who in *Drama Queens Review*, 28 April 2014 states that, "characteristic of Clean Break plays is the attention to the stories of social hardship and vulnerability that allow audiences to understand why women might turn to crime". Where Clean Break is avowedly identified with a feminist and socialist analysis of crime and its causes, Synergy Theatre Project is less overtly politicised in its outlook and adopts more pragmatic approaches in working with offenders, focusing on individuals and what theatre can do to transform or rehabilitate offenders rather than following Clean Break's example of using theatre both as a tool of rehabilitation, but also to educate, and to pursue a passionately-held political agenda. Synergy is the focus of my next chapter.

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CHAPTER FIVE

From Marginal to Mainstream: Performing Narratives of Rehabilitation and Empowerment through Synergy Theatre Project

> … the rehabilitation of offenders depends not just on them changing as individuals but also on us changing. They can reform themselves and have all the best skills and all the correct attitudes that we might want them to have, but if society does not make its educational, employment, community, family and other opportunities available to them, …then they can't rehabilitate. So, there is an issue about how we change the views of who offenders are.
>
> -Tim Robertson, (Prison Reform Trust 2011) [7]

Looking at the value of arts in general, Peter Renshaw (2013) a British researcher and creative writing consultant, in his book titled Being in Tune…, asserts that, "there is no doubt that arts can be a source of inspiration, a celebration of the human spirit and can enhance the quality and meaning of lives "(4). Renshaw's assertion reflects the ethos of Synergy Theatre Project which aims to give their participants the voice and opportunities to tell their stories, to explore their creative talents, and gain the endurance, discipline and motivation to seize those opportunities. The main focus of this chapter is to explore the pragmatic approach of Synergy Theatre Project in working with offenders and giving them the platform to tell their own stories, thereby enabling them to change their identities and the perception of society about them through their own narratives. Like Clean Break, Synergy employs

[7] Tim Robertson, former Chair of the Arts Alliance and Chief Executive of the Koestler Trust. In the minutes of All-Party Parliamentary Penal Affairs Group. Prison Reform Trust (June 2011). www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk. Tim is currently the Chief Executive of The Anne Frank Trust UK.

narrative-construction at the heart of its practice; however, Synergy is arguably primarily practical rather than idealistic in its approaches and goals, and places a high value on production, professionalism, and the employability of their graduates.

This chapter highlights the philosophy guiding Synergy Theatre Project's practice, and analyses their techniques – which I was able to observe in practice when I attended Synergy's acting class (2015). This chapter also examines Synergy Theatre Project's engagement with playwrights and new writing, and the narrative exploration and dramatization of issues about criminal responsibility, revenge and forgiveness, through analyses of Shelagh Stephenson's *The Long Road* (2008), and the production of Evan Placey's *Girls Like That* (2014) at the Unicorn Theatre, London. In this chapter, I also draw on an interview which I conducted with Ester Baker, the Synergy Theatre Project's artistic director, on the 18th December 2014, where she speaks about her experiences working with offenders. Her words gave me direct insight into the stance she takes on the role of Synergy in offenders' transformation. I will also highlight Synergy's involvement in projects outside prison theatre spaces, such as the participation in a photographic exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London on the 15th May 2015 where photographs were displayed as objects of story-telling and historification. Through an exploration of Synergy Theatre Project's practice in working with offenders, playwrights and other practitioners, this chapter asks, what is distinctive about the narrativisation processes conducted by Synergy in their approach to prison theatre, and how do they differ from those of Clean Break? And what kind of questions, problems or ideas are raised by the plays they produce?

Founded in the year 2000, Synergy's artistic mission is geared towards the creation of theatre works and projects with the aim of constructing narratives that will make a positive impact on both convict-actors and audiences. Synergy Theatre

Project is one of a handful of British theatre companies engaging in debates and story-telling about the criminal justice system through drama workshops, play productions, and participation in other education and learning projects outside theatre. Discussing the main focus of Synergy Theatre Project, Esther Baker states,

> The central aim of the company is using theatre towards the rehabilitation and resettlement of prisoners, ex-prisoners and young people at risk of offending, and to challenge the public perceptions of those engaged with the criminal justice system, - to create a dialogue about it. But, also, a key to our values is the idea that artistic quality matters, and art is at the heart of all our projects. (Personal interview, 18 December 2014).

Synergy's belief is that theatre has the power to transform, to interrogate the understanding and perceptions of prisoners as well as those of society. Society should be a part of the narratives of the offenders' transformation by also taking part in the theatre as participants or audience because theatre engagement or participation helps to build a bridge that connects victims and offenders, actors and audience and creates the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation. Through play productions, workshops and trainings, Synergy encourages offenders to tell their own stories, and through story-making processes, enable them to step out of their own shoes, view life from different perspectives and thereby, to take control of their lives and achieve, in Baker's words, 'rehabilitation and resettlement'. This situation challenges and changes the narrative that prison is about punishment for a crime, and instead proposes that the purpose of being incarcerated is for the offenders to be transformed and return to society. Caoimhe McAvinchey (2011) has summarised the role of prison in the 21st century thus:

> The role of prison within the criminal justice system has shifted overtime. In the twenty-first century it is considered to be a state strategy for crime control, a deterrent for those contemplating crime and a punitive response for those who have broken laws. It is also supposed to have a rehabilitative purpose, preparing inmates to be reintegrated into life beyond the prison walls – a life where it is hoped, they will not re-offend (10-11).

Synergy Theatre Project considers theatre and theatre-making as a sometimes very practical tool for offenders' transformation, and they tend to take theatre into prisons, and work with offenders and ex-offenders to help them tell their own stories, reflect on their behaviour, and think about the choices they make, but also to learn skills and open up employment possibilities. In this way the company aims to offer pathways through which offenders may successfully reintegrate into society. James Thompson (2012) has argued that "prison for governors, probation officers and criminal justice commentators has been understood as the rehearsal site for life outside. A place where men and women can learn skills, habits and attitudes that can be enacted back in free society" (55). Synergy not only goes into prisons but also uses different space or venues to engage and expose their beneficiaries in creative and artistic projects, such as mainstream professional theatre spaces, studios, classroom spaces for actors training, and even exhibitions in museums and galleries. Using these public spaces for narrative-creation and construction brings offenders from a marginalised position of voicelessness, onto a public platform where they may not only speak, but also be listened to.

I was invited by Synergy's artistic director Esther Baker to observe the performance created in response to the photographic exhibition at the Victoria &

Albert Museum in South Kensington London on the 15th May 2015. Based on the V & A's exhibition titled 'Take the Stage: Staying Power' in collaboration with Black Cultural Archives funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Synergy Theatre Project invited writers to respond to the exhibition, and in a rapid response, in April, playwright Michael Bhim facilitated sessions exploring narratives of identity, history, power, and minority status. Each writer that participated in the sessions responded by writing a play unique to the writer's personal stories, experiences and interpretations. Synergy's artistic director Esther Baker directed the reading performance of the plays, and the cast included Jason Barnett, Tiana Benjamin, Darren Hart, Catherine Nix-Collins and Danielle Vitalis. It was a powerful rehearsed reading; the actors were able to bring the text alive completely and at the same time retain the tempo of the performance. This is a strategy through which Synergy teaches ex-prisoners on how to build and develop their confidence in communicating with the public through reading and acting skills. The performance gave the participants a (literal) public voice and platform through which to express themselves, narrate their experiences and engage with the audience in relation to what history or the past has handed down to them. Hence, through the performance, they became the interpretative narrative voice that carried the message of the exhibition straight to the audience.

Synergy also engages in mainstream commercial productions, giving offenders and their actors the platform to tell the stories about their experiences in criminal justice and to reach out to a wider audience in a public space on the issues and circumstances that may lead offenders to commit crime in the first place; for example, I observed the production of Evan Placey's *Girls Like That* (2014) at the Unicorn Theatre London. This was an example of how Synergy Theatre Project works with their participants in fully commercial theatre productions, where they

work with professional actors and playwrights, some of whom have never been to prisons but tend to 'speak for' the voices of the offenders through their playwriting and dramaturgy. Esther Baker, in an interview with Catherine Greenwood (2014:11) on the production of *Girls Like That*, states that, "one thing we'll want to look at as a company is what are the actors trying to do to the audience? Are they trying to justify themselves? Are they confiding in the audience? Are they trying to collude with the audience? So, we'll play around that with the performers". As a researcher, observer and listener to the stories of the women who participated in the production of the play *Girls Like That* at Unicorn Theatre London in 2014, it became clear to me that some performers working with Synergy Theatre Project had traumatic childhood experiences which influenced their behaviour or put them at risk of offending. This is based on the post production discussion and feedback, as the performers share their personal stories and past traumatic experiences with the audience. Esther Baker comments:

> The one you saw (*Girls Like That*), there were two of the women in the show that were at risk women, the others are professionals we normally have. In prison it would be predominantly prisoners, with a couple of may be professionals. And with an ex-prisoners' show, and shows for young people, it would be half and half usually and we also have those working behind the scenes as well. But in terms of quality on all our shows, it is really important to have a really strong professional team, and to spend money on design, costumes, lighting etc. Everything supporting needs to be really professional to have production values. (Personal interview, December 2014).

During the post-show discussion between the audience and performers, some of the performers gave personal narratives and testimonies of their experiences during early

stages in their lives. This reflects and relates to the experiences of women working with Clean Break, as well as the fictional narrativization and dramatization of the experiences of offenders explored through dramatic characters and offenders in prison theatre practices as seen and discussed in earlier chapters. Most of the performers, such as Domnique Olowu, Carrie Rock, Shazia Nicholls, and Danielle Vitalis are trained actors; in addition, April Hughes, a single mum who has gone through Clean Break's education programme, also took part in the post-show discussion. Lynette Goddard (2013), comments that, "Synergy's aim to bridge the links between prisoners and the general public and work towards changing public perception of prisoners is fulfilled by inviting a public audience to their productions and facilitating post-show talks" (343). The actors told stories of how they developed their characters in the play, and how understanding, cooperation and pragmatism helped them to make the production a success. Catherine Greenwood (2014) in her analysis and interpretation of the Synergy's production of Evan Placey's *Girls Like That*, points to the ensemble nature of the production and storytelling as a social skill that enhances cooperation, and she is of the view that; "this shared storytelling underlines the theme of collective responsibility as the girls take cover in the group" (5). This key element of the dramatic narrative is explored more during the post-production discussion for better understanding of the rehearsal process and technique, which Howard Loxton (2014) in the review of Synergy's production of *Girls Like That* (2013) in *British Theatre Guide*, comments that,

> From an open discussion session after the performance, I learned that they developed their characters in rehearsals as they sorted out who would deliver which statements. As characters become more established, they might reject some more lines as wrong for that girl and they would go to another.

Through this level of exploration or interrogation of the dramatic characters' actions, performers can use the rehearsal process to interrogate their own behaviour, and reflect on what they might have done wrong in the past, how their actions may have impacted others, and how they could have behaved differently or made different choices. The process helps actor-participants to step aside to understand their characters and roles as well as looking deeper into their own lives.

The three main areas of Synergy Theatre Project's operations are in education, new writing and professional theatre productions. Education is at the heart of what Synergy does in engaging people who have experienced life in the prison and those who are at the risk of offending. This is mostly achieved through the involvement of theatre professionals with the assistance of ex-prisoner facilitators who have direct experiences of the impact of criminality on individuals. Synergy also encourages and inspires the creative talents of prisoners through writing where offenders explore their own experience and relate them to the characters they create (www.synergytheatreproject.co.uk/courses). The involvement of prisoners and ex-prisoners in new writing is encouraged through short courses, and competitions. Baker goes further to say,

> We believe that theatre can be transformative both for the participants and audience as well. The organisation has three main strands of activity. We do productions in prisons and with ex-prisoners in theatres, schools, PRUs and prisons. We have a new writing programme through which we are interested in cultivating scripts written by prisoners and ex-prisoners some of which we produce. And I guess, some of the thinking behind that, is that it gives people a voice who are not often heard in the mainstream theatre stages. There are a lot of middle-class writers who write about

> the world of people you work with, but you don't often get to hear their voice. (Interview, 18 December 2014)

Theatre creates a platform for authentic narratives, not just from 'middle-class writers' but from those within the criminal justice system who have experienced its effects as offenders. Synergy's play-writing for prisoners ranges from a one-day taster to a much more intensive writing project that can last up to ten weeks led by professionals, and which usually ends with the presentation of their works by professional actors. There is also an annual playwriting course for ex-prisoners tagged 'Tales of the Unexpected' led by professional playwrights and directors. The course is a practical introduction to playwriting designed to give participants the skills and craft to bring original stories to life on stage. Synergy creates productions which inspire and challenge prisoners, ex-prisoners, young people and the audiences, and their play productions involve offenders who are still serving prison terms as well as those who have come out of prison, and in most cases some professionals. Through the exploration of play texts, new understandings and perceptions are created and developed, which can potentially affect the behaviour of offenders in positive ways. This exploration of actions and behaviours by the characters and audiences through imagination may bring about transformation, as Della Pollock (2015), explains that participating in theatre brings, "imagined worlds into being and becoming, moving participants and audiences alike into palpable recognition of possibilities for change" (1). Synergy's productions in prisons are open to all the prisoners and involve a five-week rehearsal and training, employing the techniques and ethics of professional theatre practice. In our interview, I asked Esther Baker how the company measures the success and achievement of Synergy Theatre Project and I also asked her to

explain why the company puts such a high value on professional theatre-making skills as a valuable experience for participants. She responded:

> One of the strong ways in which we do it is that we do workshop facilitation training course in which they look at leadership, they look at using their own testimonies and they run exercises. We give them opportunities to assist on workshops and projects and we give them more responsibility. The way I work as a director is very much about giving them a voice in the rehearsal room, giving them a voice on stage and encouraging them to do that and giving the responsibility on productions including on stage and in post-show discussions. I think that's an area which we have been quite successful about giving back to the community. (Interview, 18 December 2014).

Some of the ex-prisoners that have worked with Synergy have gone to engage in various artistic disciplines, and those who are still with them are contributing meaningfully towards self-development and achievement. A considerable number of Synergy's 'graduates' have ended up writing their own plays and becoming theatre professionals: as evident in Erwin James' article in *The Guardian* (14 April 2010), titled "Theatre Project leads to West-End stage for ex-prisoners". James points to the success of Synergy in transforming Ricky Copp, an ex-offender: "just before he was released, Copp auditioned with Synergy Theatre Project and won a part. Now he is on stage in the West End – in a leading role as a prison guard in a new production of Stephen Adly Guirgis' *Jesus Hopped the 'A' Train*". This is evidence that Synergy's engagement with offenders in theatre can present them with the opportunity to excel in the arts, and can help in boosting their confidence, developing their reading and presentation skills as they overcome the challenges of performing in front of the audience. According to Synergy's sample case studies, which record that "Lloyd was

cast in Synergy's production of Fallout at HMP Brixton in 2009. On release he worked for the company as a workshop facilitator and assistant stage manager and is now working backstage at the National Theatre". (www.synergytheatreproject.co.uk). Also, to prove how theatre can help offenders in breaking the cycle of offending, another Synergy case study records that:

> Frank was a cast member in our production of *Elmina's Kitchen* in 2006 and on release he worked for Synergy as an actor and workshop facilitator. He has been in and out of prison for 20 years when we met him but has now been out for seven years and has broken the cycle of offending. (www.synergytheatreproject.co.uk).

It further states that Frank developed his own company known as Hard Talking Ex-Cons, where he uses his personal experience, narratives and testimony to help young people to stay away from criminal acts. This suggests a possible impact of theatre in the rehabilitation and transformation of offenders, through providing training and skills that can lead to employment.

During Synergy's acting class for ex-offenders on the 24th February 2015, at Morley College in London which I was a participant-observer, the issue of being a victim was explored and participants were asked to air their views or opinion on how they would react or respond to a similar situation if they become victims. Based on my personal experience participating in the acting class, the sessions help offenders to understand the importance of working in a group. The acting class was led by an actor-trainer, Dominic Grant whose focus was to impact the lives of the ex-prisoner through process of actors' training. Collaboration, discipline and working within the rehearsal rules are at the forefront of what they do. On my day one of joining the group, I noticed that through the rehearsal process, participants were encouraged to

develop the control of emotions, levelheadedness, and also the zeal to learn and reflect on experience and behaviour. Through the rehearsal process, they engage in exercises, read scripts and learn new words and meanings. They interact and share experiences through the exploration of ideas geared towards developing acting techniques as well as building and strengthening their confidence. I could see lots of energy being channelled into creativity. This participation in the creative exercise mirrors the engagement of the convicts in rehearsals as dramatized in Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good* and demonstrates the relevance of theatre in helping participants to gain confidence, build cohesion and to prepare them for integration into the community with a different narrative – a new identity.

The session started with an open chat for the participants to get to know one another. The participants helped in setting up the space such as the arrangement of seats. Most of them came early apart from one who came in when the session had started but he apologised to the trainer and explained his reason for coming late. Later, there was a formal introduction by all participants in which everyone gave some information about himself or herself. There were two women and about eight men. One of the women, Gemma Stone was a co-facilitator and a student from the Central School of Speech and Drama who was there to support the trainer; the other woman present was an ex-prisoner participating in Synergy's programme. The participants were engaged in a warm-up exercise where the trainer directed them to hold hands in a round circle formation. This scenario created a kind of familiar atmosphere for the participants to make that connection and feel that they are united towards achieving a common goal. There was a voice exercise in which we were asked to howl a sound that would start from a lower pitch and rises to a crescendo. Each participant created a vocal sound and was asked to stretch the tonal pitch as far

as possible. It was a good exercise which elicited fun and laughter amongst the participants, and a sense of togetherness in the group. Also, there were some vocal exercises that involved the repetition of words that sound alike, a tongue twister which improves articulation, such as 'Betty Butler bought a bitter butter, a bitter butter Betty Butler bought….' The voice exercise was so engaging, and everyone was filled with laughter. There was also a memory task exercise – we were asked by the trainer to mention our names from left to the right. It went round as all the participants gave their names and the game began. We were given some lines to say and at the end of the line, the person saying the line would stop and pass the last word to the next person by calling the person's name. In this game, a lot of individuals struggled to remember each other's names, but it was very exciting and challenging. Later, the trainer helped by asking the participants who struggled to remember to identify the person they are giving the last word by mentioning the colour of their clothes if they cannot remember names, such as saying a red shirt, blue top, blue blazer etc. This scenario was clearly geared towards making participants understand the relevance of developing and building social skills. There was effort and commitment by the participants to remember each other's names and a sense of encouragement from the group as well as the trainer in helping each other have a sense of belonging, commitment and support. After the voice exercise, we were asked to make use of the space and do anything we would like to do to get us in the mood for the rehearsal. Some chose to jump up, some chose to do more voice exercise, some got on the floor facing down, some facing up, while some read out the lines memorised from their scripts. This was a moment of freedom to explore yourself in your own way and this helped to release tension and energy generated during the structured exercises. After a few minutes, the trainer asked the participants to jump

up, shake off and take a seat for the class session to begin. The seats were rearranged by the participants and everyone sat down for the session feeling happy and ready. Exploring the relevance of games and exercises in theatre process, Petra Kuppers, (2007), asserts, “new games, getting-to-know-you exercises, clarification of goals and preparation of space and people, for collaborative work: these are all important functions of workshop warm-ups” (108). From my observation, these games and exercises sessions are rewarding processes of reintegrating the ex-prisoners into society. This is because they learn how to relate and connect more with people which they have not met before, they play, they laugh, and I could see the zeal to learn new roles and tasks which will boost their social skills. Frank Idoko, (2004), in discussing his work with prisoners in Nigeria, states that ‘a conducive atmosphere was created through exercises, to enable a situation of trust and rapport with the participants which facilitated easy discussion, data collection and analysis’ (180). Theatre gives this freedom to learn and understand life more through group participation and entertainment. It inculcates in the participants the spirit of tolerance and acceptance of failure, as well as giving the ability to forge ahead even if something goes wrong along the line reflecting Umberto Eco’s (1989) idea about ‘open work’ which implies that work has room for interpretation, collaboration and further interpretation. However, the acting class training session focused on understanding your role as an actor in relation to the character. The trainer discussed the following key areas in character development:

Who am I?

Where am I?

What am I doing here?

What is my relationship with the other characters/actors?

Synergy's goals of using theatre as a means to develop social and reflective skills became clear in this workshop, in the way that the workshop facilitator talked about the actor's job of character creation, and inhabiting the 'role'. The trainer explained that an actor relinquishes his real personality and assumes the role of a character he represents as we have seen among the convicts in *Our Country's Good*. He stated that once an actor takes up a role, he is no longer the person he used to be, rather he represents another being, another entity who exists in an imaginary world of the playwright or its creator. Thus, the trainer's discussion of the actor's job emphasised the possibility of using the notion of the 'role' as a way of reflecting on behaviour and identity – and the potential for individuals to step out of one 'role' and assume another. The trainer then affirmed and likened the actors on stage to footballers in a football pitch. He described the actor's job as 'not a one-man affair' but instead suggests that the cast of a play can be viewed as multiple players with one purpose in mind, just like a football team, and to achieve their unified purpose, they must understand one another and not be self-centred. Thus, the language used within the workshop to describe theatre and the actor's role in collective narrative-making made connections with sport, and with other activities that workshop participants might see as desirable, even heroic activities. Participants work together through collaborations and making contributions from varying perspectives, culminating in what Sawyer (2000) calls a "collaborative emergence". In other words, as a participant observer in this whole process, I can say that Synergy's message about theatre was expressed in ways that would speak most powerfully to their participants, and the skills developed in professional theatre-making were articulated very clearly: that the process was supporting the group in learning how to work like a team, how

not to be self-centred, and how to come together to achieve a common goal. The participants were encouraged to be independent interpreters - by the trainer asking them to constantly read their scripts to understand their characters and the whole essence of the play. The trainer created some scenarios based on the script, and asked the participants to respond to the scenarios as actors. Asking them how would they handle the situations as actors? How would they interpret the situation and be able to deliver the actual message or intention of the scenarios created? There were various responses from the group which triggered further discussions on character development and interpretation of roles. The participants were taking notes and asking questions which opened more and more sharing of ideas and experiences as a group.

On the second day of the acting class, 25th February 2015, we were divided into groups and play scripts were shared among the participants to study their individual roles in which they will come out to tell other participants about their understanding of their roles. The scripts are some extracts from different plays such as *Been So Long* by Che Walker, Stephen Adly Guirgis' *Jesus Hopped the 'A' Train* and *Speed the Flow* by David Mamet, etc. Then they began to analyse those characters by discussing their behaviours in relation to other characters and what they deem appropriate or acceptable manners. Some of the participants raised questions about the actions of the fictional character and condemned the character's behaviour, arguing that they would not behave in such manners if they find themselves in the character's situation. After the character analysis, through discussion, the participants were asked to play their characters according to the scripts and then other participants who act as audience will interpret those actions and point out what they may deem to be odd or unacceptable behaviour as acted by the character. Here, Augusto Boal's

forum theatre technique was applied, where a particular participant tells his or her story to the group and the story is being dramatized by some participants in the group. Dramatization of these experiences and stories becomes a medium for re-telling and reliving those experiences as a way of intervention and finding alternative solutions. In forum theatre, the power is given to the audience or observers to intervene and make some changes or suggestions to the story or actions of the characters who are deemed to be in oppressed situation. The participants in Synergy's acting workshop engaged in this kind of character representation to explore how re-narration of stories may enable a change in behaviour. They were asked also to view the scenario from another perspective of cultivating culture of forgiveness rather than revenge. The scene was explored through improvisation, finding and delivering of new lines and devising of various techniques of being in control of emotions, anger management and building the attitude for forgiveness. In response to the scenes, some of the participants aired their views with the comments such as 'it is not good to be quick to anger' 'most times, we do things that we end up regretting' 'it is good to forgive and move on', 'we all need to love one another'. This indicates that life experiences can be relived through rehearsals process, and become a mirror that reflects participants' behaviours, creating a platform that takes them to a "point of connection between lived experiences and theatrical representation". (Nicholson, 2011:5). Through this process, everyone is made to understand that forgiveness is a better and healthy approach to peaceful co-existence between the victims and perpetrators as opposed to revenge or retaliation. The participants expressed that they feel pain and remorse when they remember the pains they have made their victims go through and when they are connected to the stories that led them into prison. This confirms Craps and Rothberg opinion that "both victims and perpetrators can suffer trauma" (2013:15).

The perpetrator of a crime may feel traumatised for his experience in carrying out his crime on the victim, and the sudden realization or recognition of the impact of his criminal behaviour on his victim. But the question which the victims wants to ask the perpetrator is, what is the motivation behind their actions? This may be socially induced or an act of personal willingness to commit crime.

Through Synergy's play productions and workshops, participants learn the need to explore situations through improvisation, character analysis, the expression of thoughts, and the sharing of feelings. This process can encourage forgiveness in place of revenge, to break the cycle of oppression or offending. But this theatre engagement does not imply devising permanent strategies or a solution to the oppression they get from society; rather what theatre does is to stir feelings and emotions, and encourage reflection by engaging with the dramatic characters. According to Glynnis Moore (2014), writing about applied drama and theatre interventions, in her essay 'Drama as a Tool for the Development of Cultural Competency Among Secondary School Learners', she highlights the relevance of drama as reflected in the practice of Synergy with offenders as discussed above, thus:

> Drama can be used as an effective instructional tool to facilitate a greater degree of cultural competency amongst learners and educators by specifically exploring and sharing awareness and sensitivity of individuals' and their peers' identity. Certain dramatic tools were used, namely: improvisation, role-play, forum theatre, performative enquiry and ethno-drama. All these forms encourage empathy (thinking from the point of view of the 'other'), discovering the emotional reality of situations through experiencing them, and individual and group reflection (34).

It is theatre that brings offenders together in this aspect to commune and share their problems and feelings from the perspectives of the fictional characters and their experiences as individuals which brings about the spirit of cohesion, problem solving and the ability to care for one another. Here, facilitation becomes a good ground for learning, improvement and change in behaviour that would help offenders and participants to be aware of what constitutes criminal behaviour and how to avoid the dangers of breaking the law and facing incarceration. To achieve this, the facilitator in a drama workshop should adopt a relatable approach and create a safe ground for trust and understanding to thrive within the group. Sheila Preston (2016), although not writing specifically for Synergy, but in a more general term about facilitation in theatre workshop, argues that;

> Participants in a drama workshop may experience a range of feelings about 'doing' drama and this will depend on how the facilitator is able to match the level/kind of 'doing' required with the group's need to feel safe enough to step outside their comfort zone a little. If the balance is struck, participants find the experience involving and enjoyable, creative and opening up of new possibilities and ways of thinking, experiencing, and collective learning as a group (39).

Beneficiaries working with Synergy are taught how to deal with their emotions by allowing themselves to go through the emotional journey with the character. This may develop an understanding of their past behaviours that can pave the way positively for the future. I witnessed that the group members were encouraged through rehearsals and improvisation to learn how to absorb or accept other people's behaviour by holding back anger or finding other ways to deal with angry situations such as singing, dancing, reading, discussing with colleagues, watching movies and

participating in theatre activities. They explored the use of harsh words, the impact they may have on others, and how to cope with such behaviour. They were asked to say those words that they may find unpleasant or annoying to themselves. These words were listed on a flip chart, and they were asked to react to those words when they are mentioned. Some of the words listed are: Druggie, riff-raff, thief, burglar, drunk, idiot, you stink, offender, etc. And after that, they were asked to discuss their feelings and thoughts regarding encountering those words in their everyday lives. Everyone gave their opinion and through that they learned some of the coping strategies that will help them in their everyday lives. According to Adam Blatner (2007), "drama offers a more vivid way to work with the unfolding spirit of questioning, challenging, offering alternatives, affirming one's "truth", and witnessing to one's experience…. There is power in wondering "what if…?" and playing it out "as if". This perspective makes drama a vehicle for life rehearsal, and from this, more courage emerges" (217).

Synergy's interactive sessions during rehearsals, play production and post performances create the forum for investigation and exploration of the meaning and message behind criminal justice system and the understanding of the impact of offending, act of healing and transformation as demonstrated in post-production discussion of *Girls Like That*, Synergy's acting class at Morley College, London and their other presentations in public venues such the Victoria & Albert Museum, London. And it is through this understanding that offenders and victims as well as the audience accept their circumstances and may be able to cope with their experiences. Synergy is very focused on practical coping exercises for the individuals which exemplifies their pragmatic approach in contrast to Clean Break, where the emphasis is perhaps more on a politicised critique of the injustice of society, and the

problems of women experiencing the criminal justice system. Baker highlights her experience of working with both men and women in prison as opposed to Clean Break's women-only practice;

> It is different being a female working with women to working with men and you probably do naturally have a different way of dealing with them. In women in prison, there is a lot of self-harm issues, a lot of drug issues. And in men's prisons, they are more aggressive, and that has to be managed. In some ways they are the same. In some prisons they are all mixed. We are quite good with women, so sometimes, they might work with Clean Break where they are very protected, and then they come work with us. It is quite good for them mixing with men. We do kind of collaborate with Clean Break and we do let them know about our courses and projects their women might be interested in. (Interview, December 2014).

Baker's comment that 'It is quite good for them, mixing with men', perhaps highlights that Synergy's main goal is successful reintegration into society – while Clean Break's is also a feminist project, to provide a feminist analysis of the criminal justice system and to provide a system of feminist solidarity between women in its working practices as well as in its political ideals. Synergy's other main objective is empowerment through participation and by encouraging offenders to have a sense of ownership in all the aspects of theatre making as a collaborative effort in developing the company and the offenders. This helps in giving participants the hope that they are not alone, that some people and organisations still have their interests at heart, and that British society more widely has a place for them, and can offer a future.

Synergy's production of Shelagh Stephenson's *The Long Road* (2008) in collaboration with The Forgiveness Project was its first collaborative work with an external organisation to deliver an artistic project. *The Long Road* deals with restorative justice through the narrative of a mother who is determined to understand the tragic death of her son by stabbing, and her desperation to meet face to face with the woman who killed her son. In this play, there is an exploration of the theme of revenge and forgiveness, echoing a connection with the plays we explored earlier in chapter three: David Williamson's *A Conversation* (2001) where the families of the victim and offender meet to tell their stories, explore their own challenges and create room for forgiveness, and Bryony Lavery's *Frozen* (1998), where the mother meets with the killer of her daughter to understand the motivations behind the perpetrator's act of violence.

The Long Road has been staged in most prisons in London with a cast completely made up of professional actors. It was also produced at Soho Theatre in 2008 by Synergy Theatre Project. Suman Bhuchar in *British Theatre Guide* (Nov; 2008), reviews the performance of *The Long Road* in Soho Theatre, and shares the psychological experience of being in a theatre space as she states that, "watching this at the Soho theatre studio, a claustrophobic space, is like being imprisoned – and the characters in the play almost certainly are: the family by the grief, and the prisoner by her crime". This reflects the empathic response from a member of the audience and makes us understand the pains and suffering of others as we are gripped by pity and fear arising from the understanding and imagination of the circumstances surrounding a character. An exploration of the play *The Long Road* reveals the impact of family relationships as well as socio-economic factors on the offender's behaviour as evident in the playwright's depiction of the character Emma, whose perception of life is all

about hatred from family, neighbours and strangers. She has created a narrative in which she is isolated from everyone around her, in which she is 'hated' by everyone from her closest family to wider society and 'people I've never met':

> Emma: Everybody hates me. It doesn't bother me. I'm used to it. My mum my dad my sisters' brothers my nan grandad uncles, aunties neighbours people I've never met. They all hate me. (p:6)

Elizabeth, the psychologist working with Emma, tells Mary the relevance of understanding the impact of early childhood upbringing. She narrates Emma's childhood circumstances and experiences as the contributing factors to her behaviour, the influence of parental upbringing on a child impacts on who the child becomes and what the child does later in life. The playwright implies here that a person's behaviour is an outcome of their narrative. Emma's narrative is one of parental neglect and economic hardship. Emma's childhood narrative is ruptured, fragmented and complicated as summarised here by Elizabeth:

> Elizabeth: (reading)…When Emma was two her mother married someone called Damien Wilkins, had another child, boy named Franklin. Marriage broke up soon afterwards. Two years after that, her mother married again, much older man named Mick Harris. Two children from this marriage, which ended when Mick sent to prison for fourteen years for armed robbery. Mother subsequently had several relationships, twice hospitalised because of domestic

> violence. Emma lived variously with mother, maternal grandmother, next door neighbour, a second cousin, and was briefly, aged seven, taken into care. Mother had drug and alcohol related problems, but otherwise an adequate mother'. (p:21)

John, the father of the victim blames Emma for her crime and shuns her excuses of giving her childhood experiences as a factor that led her to murder his son. We see the character John as having the same mindset as Derek in *A Conversation:*

> John: I don't care if she had a rubbish childhood, I had a rubbish childhood and I don't go around stabbing strangers because they won't give me the money for crack or heroin or whatever it was. Her dad was a sadistic arsehole? That's not a reason, it's not an excuse, fuck the mitigating circumstances, my dad was a sadistic arsehole (p.45).

In prison theatre as practiced by Synergy as well as other theatre companies I investigate, there are some offenders who come in contact with the criminal justice system because of the crime they commit as a response to what they believe that society has done to them as dramatized in this play. Their crimes are shown to include personal feelings of being slighted, ignored and put down. Emma stabs Danny not only because he didn't give her the money she asked for, but because of the way he spoke to her. This connects to the circumstances that led to the death of Donna in David Williamson's *A Conversation*, where Donna snubbed Mick because of class division, who would have helped her to avoid getting close to her murderer.

Stephenson suggests that Emma's actions were prompted by circumstances surrounding her life especially her understanding or belief that everybody is against her. Emma, further in her monologue says,

> Emma: …I only asked him for a quid, because I'd my bag nicked and how was I supposed to get home I didn't have the tube fare and anyway I only needed a quid. That's all. I never asked him for twenty quid or anything. One quid I said can you lend me a quid mate, and he said fuck off, didn't even look at me…. He shouldn't have spoken to me like that. I can't remember anything else. I was out of it. It was only a quid. Something like that. (p.6).

Emma's circumstances generate a feeling of sympathy in the audience as her bag was stolen, she had no money to get herself home, and she was ignored and treated with disdain. Emma's narrative connects with the audience as Gersie and King (1990) suggest that "the relationship between teller and listener is always intimate. The closeness is generated by the interconnection between one who tells and one who listens" (32). However, Emma lacks self-control in dealing with the challenges facing her. Charles Spencer (2008), in his review of the production of *The Long Road* in Soho Theatre (2008) portrays the playwright as a researcher, and states that "Stephenson spent many hours talking to victims and perpetrators of violent crime, visiting prisons and collaborating with the Forgiveness Project, a charity working in the fields of reconciliation and restorative justice". (*The Telegraph* 21 May, 2008). We see this in chapter three in Rebecca Lenkiewicz's *That Almost Unnameable Lust* (2010), when the character, Writer visits the prison as a researcher, which also

reflects the nature of facilitation and collaborative works going on in prison where an artist views prison and offenders from the outside, and thinks he can come into the prison to help the offenders deal with their circumstances by listening and retelling their stories. In the play, Elizabeth represents the workshop facilitators, playwrights and other professionals who talk to and listen to offenders, research their private lives as they gather information that will help them achieve their career aims. Therefore, the playwrights Stephenson just like Lenkiewicz in *That Almost Unnameable Lust* self-satirizes the role of artists in prison theatre or criminal justice system.

Synergy's production of *The Long Road* in the mainstream creates the platform for the audience to explore Emma's character to find out her motivation to commit such a drastic act. In the play, Mary wants to hear Emma's narratives regarding her life and killing of her daughter, but John, Emma' husband wonders how that will help in healing the wounds and pains his family is going through. John reads out a letter which Mary intends to send to Emma,

> John: (reading) Dear Emma Price, my name is Mary Pritchard. Daniel Pritchard, the boy you killed, was my son. This is not a hate letter, so please don't throw it away…. I wondered if you could write back to me and tell me a little about yourself? …I need to understand what happened. I need the whole story so that I can make sense of this senseless thing. Thank you very much, Mary Pritchard (p.34).

Sometimes, telling and listening to stories creates a channel for a sense of remorse, pity and forgiveness which opens a new chapter for understanding, healing and relief.

From the lines above, it is obvious that lack of adequate information will not lead to a closure on the murder of Daniel Pritchard and it creates a feeling of anxiety for Mary to grasp the full story about what led to the death of her son. She needs a narrative to understand Emma's actions and motivations. Also, in a conversation between Mary and Joe, her other son, we see that feelings of anger and revenge radiate in her words;

Mary: That is the person who killed Dan

Joe: How can you tell?

Mary: Something about the tilt of her head, I'd recognise it anywhere.

Joe: They've blurred their faces, so you can't identify them. Pixilated.

Mary: What?

Joe: That's what it's called. Pixilated.

Mary: Well that's her. Sitting there, alive. Doing a workshop, while Danny's dead.

Joe: I dunno, maybe….

Mary: What is she doing laughing, while Danny's dead?

Joe: How d'you know she's laughing? You can't see her face properly.

Mary: How can she be there, functioning as normal, when he's dead?

(pp:9-10)

Mary wants to know the motivation behind Emma's killing of her son Danny and it feels as if she is haunted by not getting a closure as to what led to the death of her son, hence making her to want to see Emma to get the answer that will help alleviate the psychological trauma. In a sense this is a quest for an ending to a narrative – the narrative of her son's life ending - an ending that can't change the facts but can at least offer something comprehensible, and perhaps a way towards understanding and thereby forgiving. Mary's position above reflects the debate about the place of crime and punishment in our society as raised earlier in this thesis – whether prison is actually for punishment or rehabilitation through the arts.

> Mary: But I couldn't stop thinking about her. I put the article in my desk drawer, tucked away like a love letter. And every so often I'd get it out and stare at the photo of Emma Price, as if it might hold answer to something. I was willing her to turn round, to look me in the eye, so I could say to her why did you do it? (p:10)

In the play, Elizabeth advises Mary to regard understanding as a pathway to forgiveness and overcoming her feelings of anger and hatred against Emma:

> Elizabeth: You can't say 'I want to understand' on the one hand and 'I will never change how I feel about this' on the other. Understanding will change how you feel. It always does. That's the point of understanding, isn't it? (p:22)

While Mary is always talking about the murder of her son and mostly wishing to set her eyes on the murderer Emma Price, John, her husband does not want to engage in any discussion about Emma:

> John: … And now Mary wants us to talk about the girl that did it to us. Why? I want to wipe her off the face of the earth, I don't want to spend a single moment of my life thinking about this woman, I want her not to exist, I don't want to hear her name, as far as I'm concerned, she hasn't got a name. what does she mean we have to talk about her? What good will that do? I'm not interested in people in prison, they've nothing to do with me, they're criminals, they've wrecked people's lives and I refuse to think about them. (p25-6).

This may reflect the way victims of crime regards people in prison, and tend to give deaf ears to their plight even when such actions will impact negatively on them. Synergy Theatre Project through productions such as *The Long Road* dramatizes and interrogates people's perceptions about prisoners; and portrays the making of a narrative (why did this person act in this way?) with all its attendant processes of understanding character, situation, action, reaction – an essential component of a road towards understanding, and thereby, forgiveness. Society may see criminal behaviour as inherent, and indicate that there is less or no positive outcome in rehabilitating offenders who have innate tendencies to commit crime; this attitude towards

offenders may make everyone accountable to the problem of injustices in our society. Some people may not seem to get involved because they have not experienced oppression or victimisation, but lack of response to issues facing offenders may create that fertile ground for injustices and oppression to occur, which is why Mark Weinblatt and Cheryl Harrisson (2011) argue that "all of us are culpable and responsible for uprooting social justice, not just the oppressed" (22). Synergy's main aim is to challenge this perception and prove to society that theatre can bring about positive changes and promote offenders' recovery through participation; but also, that theatre can bring about recovery in the victims of crimes, and in society at a wider level. Synergy's interrogation and interpretation of play scripts encourages offenders to own their actions no matter how they feel that society has treated them as they are responsible for whatever crime they have committed – whilst at the same time leading them to see that the 'script' that has governed their roles, their actions and their circumstances, can be changed, re-imagined and written a-fresh.

Interrogating these perceptions through theatre, means that offenders may realise the need to construct their narratives and accept responsibilities for their crime even as society may frown against them and in other words, change their own identities. *The Long Road* also explores the role of theatre workshops in prison and the impact on the prisoners. It suggests that no matter the crime committed by an offender, there is chance and possibility for change in behaviour and they should not be condemned out-rightly because there is still positive behaviour in them. This is explored through the lines of Elizabeth, the psychologist working with the prisoners in her dialogue with Mary:

Elizabeth: The people are great

Mary: The prisoners?

Elizabeth: Lots of them. Yeah. Why shouldn't they be?

Mary: I never thought of it like that

Elizabeth: The weird thing about prisons, is you walk through the door and there are all these people who've done terrible things, but also all these people who do wonderful things. Middle-aged women teaching murderers about gamelan music. Vicars and rabbis and imams and shopkeepers, retired school teachers, minor aristocrats – plus fraudsters, killers, dealers, druggies, and people who won't pay their council tax – they're all there, organising choirs and photography workshops, book clubs, and god knows what else, for no money, no kudos, nobody knows about them. There's a world in there. (p:21)

There are various rehabilitation initiatives going on in prisons, but some people may still believe that being in prison is not doing much to make prisoners change their ways, and so these detractors are hardened by the belief that theatre does not do much in impacting the behaviour of offenders. Talking about the role of prison in reduction of crime rate, Stephen Hartnett (2010) laments that,

> We appear to have reached the point where putting our neighbors in cages is taken for granted, where it is understood that our popular culture is based largely on the endless repetition of narratives of cop-and-robbers, where our tax dollars are poured

> into facilities that have shown no ability to lower crime rates…. (6).

This suggests that prison plays little or no role in reducing the rate of crime and change in criminal behaviours. But in *The Long Road*, Elizabeth is positive about prisoners learning different skills, and when she tells Mary that not all the prisoners are doing more creative things, rather some of them are thoroughly miserable, Mary feels happy that not all the prisoners are learning rewarding skills:

> Mary: Good. I'm glad. Why should she be singing her head off in a choir when Dan's dead?
>
> Elizabeth: I don't think she is in a choir somehow
>
> Mary: D'you know, I've imagined beating her to death with a baseball bat. I've imagined setting her on fire, shooting her, running her over in a tank. Things that scare me, things I've never felt before, never imagined before. There's this kaleidoscopic rage inside me, and I realise could kill someone. She kills my son, so I kill her off the face of the earth. I could do it. Truly. (p:16).

As pointed earlier, *The Long Road* also questions the arts in prison and voices some of the debates: Should prisoners be in choirs and making plays? Does it sound too much like fun than punishment for a crime? Highlighting the relevance of the arts in the rehabilitation of offenders, Matt Hancock (2016), asserts that, "whether it's a prisoner taking part in a music workshop or theatre production, singing in choir or

attending a visual art class – the arts have the power to improve self-esteem, social skills, empathy, health and wellbeing, and personal development…" (3).

In the play, despite the rage and anger that envelope Mary, she comes to a point of recognition of the fact that the deed has been done, and no matter what she does to Emma, nothing is going to bring her son Danny back. This is a turning point in the play as the audience realise the need to accept one's circumstances are fundamental to being able to forgive rather than seek revenge.

Mary: It won't bring him back, will it?

I can say even though I'm expecting him to walk through the door at any time.

The college rang up a couple of months ago to ask if he was still taking up his place next year, d'you know what I said? I said 'yes'. Because it seemed too premature to say he was dead.

And too cruel. I realise this is completely mad.

Dead people are dead. They don't go to college.

But I can't help it. I still think he might. (p:18)

Even at this point of recognition, Mary is still not believing in forgiveness. She feels so hurt that the only thing that could satisfy her is revenge. She says she will never forgive Emma, but what lies beneath her mind is not the determination to pay an eye for an eye, but it is the inability to cope with the feelings of tragedy on her family as a result of the death of her son. She feels there is a part left for her to play which is a total revenge for the death of her son. Understanding the reason for a character's

actions helps the victim and audience to come to terms with challenges and cope with the traumatic experience through catharsis:

> In the furnace of theatrical involvement, we are re-forged, reformed. Our guilt, anger, resentment, jealousy, and pride, as well as pity and fear, are exorcised by the willingness to internalise the image of such things on behalf of others, who confront us in the play. The unique contribution of theatre to the exploration of human experience consists in the way in which it presents images of truth (Duggan and Roger, 2007:90).

Theatre prepares offenders and victims through the path of healing and in the process of engaging in recovery journey, they attain that level of maturity to be able to cope and view life from different perspective as it affects both the victim and perpetrator. It is believed that through the exploration of theatre processes in various forms, offenders working with Synergy Theatre Project understand issues that may have been confusing or unknown to them or be able to make positive decisions for a healthy growth and development. Participation in theatre enables offenders to explore issues and situations that will help them to understand and reflect on their own life circumstances. One of the ways to let offenders know and understand the implication of hurting others is by working with them through theatre that explores human lives. It is by knowing that they can understand and apologise for their actions towards others. In the *The Long Road,* Elizabeth tells Mary that Emma cannot apologise until she understands her offence,

> Elizabeth: I actually think Emma and I are getting somewhere. But she can't apologise until she completely understands with what she's done, d'you see? (p:46)

Although, John and Mary find it hard to forgive Emma for the murder of their son, when Emma realises and understands the gravity of her crime, she apologises in her own way, as Mary, John and Joe (Danny's brother) stand face to face with her,

> Emma: I'm sorry… (p.57)

She goes further to say,

> Emma: If I had my time over again I wouldn't have done it. (p:57)

Mary challenges this but Emma still asserts a re-thinking of her past behaviour:

> Mary: You're not going to have your time over again though, are you?
>
> Emma: No. but I wouldn't have done it. (p:57).

Offenders learn that no matter what motivation that may spur them to take unacceptable behaviour, they should always think about the consequences. By developing the abilities to cope with angry situations and manage their circumstances, they may be able to desist from any emotional outburst that can lead them to committing crime against others, and the victims should also learn how humane it is to forgive. In a conversation between Emma and Mary, we see how the perpetrator and victim meet, and how the light of forgiveness absorbs the dark side of punishment and retaliation.

However, it is not every offender that is naturally disposed to participate in theatre activities. Some of these offenders do not have a choice than to accept what is

presented to them within or outside the prison. In this case, some of them may not pay attention in the whole process of rehabilitation through theatre while some may participate with minimal interest in theatre. According to McKean (2019), "there have been several years when groups of prisoners or individuals have been unable to commit fully to the processes they volunteered to engage in. Some prisoners have not been able to commit to their work, or to take it seriously, and they have actively prevented others from doing so" (29) while Louise Nicklin (2017) confirms that "many participants share a sense of disregard for commitment, rules and responsibility" (12). I have witnessed first-hand how some offenders do not abide by the rehearsal ethics, they make noises, go into arguments, refuse to take instructions. For example, in one of the acting classes that I attended at Morley College as discussed earlier, during rehearsal, two participants were involved in a serious argument because both wanted to play a particular role, as one said that he could play the role better, and the one rehearsing the role refused to give up. In the process, the one who thought he could play better took offence and refused to be involved in the rehearsal.

Nonetheless, most of the ex-offenders take engagement in theatre seriously as one of the participants in Synergy's acting class at Morley College, said that participating in theatre has really changed his life and that he has no time to think of going back to crime. He stated that he is always busy writing scripts, attending rehearsals, reading his scripts and trying to understand his character more and interpret his roles properly. He confirmed that theatre has brought about whole lot of positive changes in his life as he learns new words, meets new people, learns how to cope with others, controls his temperament, and enjoys being in the imaginary realm. However, in as much as theatre helps offenders in their journey to recovery from

offending behaviour, offenders need additional facilitation from support workers to help smoothen the work of theatre engagements. I mentioned earlier in this research that society needs to play a role in ensuring that offenders do not relapse to their offending behaviour by providing support mechanisms such as funding, education, housing and employment to help them to reintegrate into society. There are other charities working in those areas, but what could be theatre's unique role? Anne Bogart (2007) asserts, "art can expand the definition of what it means to be human…. Art demands action from the midst of living and makes a space where growth can happen…. I watch war declared, social injustices that inhabit the street of my home town… I have to do something. My chosen field of action is the theatre" (4-5). While Peter Renshaw (2013), a British researcher and learning consultant cites Esther Baker, the artistic director of Synergy in an interview with her as saying that,

> The thing about working in the arts is that it is not superficial. The work goes through you at a deeper level. I think that can have quite a profound impact. Having said that I don't think the arts can save the world. If other things aren't in place for people when they come out of prison…. They need lots of support in different ways. You are combating so many negative experience – a lot of people in prison have been in care or kicked out of school or have had emotional trauma. Combating all these things obviously takes a long time. But what the arts can do is build people up (30).

Theatre needs collaboration and social support to make things work in the offenders' recovery journey. Theatre companies and social institutions should work hand in hand towards capacity building to ensure a reduction in crime rate and rise in breaking the cycle of offending. Synergy engages in theatre practice and collaborates with other

companies in arts projects to expose their beneficiaries to all kinds of artistic and creative experiences as already discussed.

We have seen the central idea behind Synergy's formation, and how they engage with their beneficiaries through rehearsal as a creative process, and collaboration with professionals, playwrights and other companies in pushing their ideology. We also explored how Synergy uses theatre to give a voice to their beneficiaries, and also as reflective tools, using forum theatre as well as pragmatic approaches to create individual success stories, rather than taking as a primary purpose the criticism of the socio-political system which companies like Clean Break privilege. It is pertinent to reiterate at this point that while Clean Break pursues their left-wing political ideology in favour of women as a marginalised group and as, collectively, victims of societal injustices, Synergy Theatre Project appears to be less overtly political in its approach, and instead focuses on the impact of theatre on individuals, with the aim of giving offenders and participants opportunities to construct their own narratives, reflect on their behaviour, reimagine themselves and make positive changes in their lives. And for theatre audiences, the opportunity to open their minds and become more understanding and accepting of offenders, and make their rehabilitation into society more possible and successful. Synergy Theatre Project does not tend to pinpoint and tackle wider political issues of economics or social injustice, but channels its energy into equipping, empowering and reintegrating offenders and ex-offenders into society by instigating a change in behaviour and attitudes. Its projects as reflected in the mission statement are based on how to work with offenders to help them adjust and adapt to the norms and values of society through the transforming power of theatre. In as much as theatre offers opportunities for offenders to interact with creative or dramatic pieces, Synergy Theatre Project

designs programmes and embarks on projects targeted towards making positive impact in the lives of the offenders. What Synergy Theatre Project does is to work on the offenders' experiences and emotions, prepare them to have a new perception about life which helps them in shunning offending behaviours. Offenders' participation or engagement in these projects in prison, outside prison and in the communities, can impact their lives in various ways such as helping them to tell their own stories, reflect on their behaviour, break the cycle of offending, be free from addiction or substance misuse, be able to deal with their emotional problems as well as helping them rebuild their confidence, gaining employment, and believing in themselves to make positive impact in society.

In conclusion, we have seen the uses of narrative in various contexts: in Synergy's workshops; in offering offenders the chance to act in public spaces such as the Victoria and Albert Museum; to speak in post-show discussions; but also, in other ways too, for example, the sharing of life-stories, dramaturgical/playwriting skills imparted to offenders so that stories can be crafted successfully on stage; the use of narrative in *The Long Road* – the fractured narrative of a neglected childhood; the need for narrative closure for the mother of a murder victim as explored in the plays *A Conversation,* where the family of the murdered Donna seek answers as to why their daughter was murdered, and in *Frozen*, where we see Nancy the mother of the murdered innocent girl Rhona confronts Ralph the serial killer to find an answer to his motivations behind the murder of her daughter. All this culminates to a quest to end a narrative, to understand motivations, and experiences and to find room for forgiveness and reconciliation. Synergy's work is suffused with narrative, both in private and enclosed workshop contexts right out into public spaces, the West End and professional theatres. The final company I will discuss, Geese, eschews this

public performance of narrative and offers no public or professional theatre performances: instead it sees narrative purely as process: something to be privately explored in workshop settings, without a paying or public audience. Instead the 'audience' or the 'listener' becomes the workshop members themselves. This is narrative as process, not as performance.

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CHAPTER SIX

Devising Narratives for Offenders' Rehabilitation: The Work of Geese Theatre Company

> Society has to review people who come out of prisons. We have to give them opportunities for employment, they have to be given opportunities to live somewhere, housing has to be prioritised, otherwise they will fall straight back, no matter how good a process they might have been through. If society doesn't give a second opportunity, then naturally, a lot of people will revert to their default, which is, 'well, this is how I know to survive'. So, the big issue we have to face is society. Do we want people to have the chance of being constructive members of our society? If we do want that, what then do we need?
>
> -Andy Watson, Personal Interview [8] (17th October 2016)

Most of this thesis has emphasised plays, playwrights and dramaturgy. While Clean Break and Synergy Theatre Project engage with plays and playwrights, Geese Theatre Company do not deal with plays and playwrights, rather they devise their bespoke performances and creative drama activities to suit the group according to specific individual needs. Clean Break may create awareness of the plight of women in prison, and adopt a classroom approach or environment for learning through their theatre in education programme; Synergy Theatre Project employs a pragmatic approach in working with offenders focusing on training their beneficiaries to become actors by getting actively involved in theatre productions while helping them to overcome prison experiences, and by providing learning opportunities through their education programme; Geese does something different again. The three theatre

[8] I conducted an interview with Andy Watson on the 17th October, 2016 at the Young Vic Theatre London. Andy is the Artistic Director of Geese Theatre Company, and Vice Chair of the National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance.

companies discussed in this thesis have their different beliefs and methods of engaging with offenders and ex-offenders, and the motivations behind their formation. Although all three theatre companies analysed in this study may have different views or perceptions about the social and individual responsibilities in criminal justice system, their approaches and projects overlap as they provide platforms to construct narratives about criminal justice system: offering opportunities for offenders to tell their stories focusing on their transformation or desistance journey, employing theatre in steering offenders away from negative behaviour to embrace positive attitudes towards making changes in their lives.

This chapter and this company (Geese) is totally different as there is no writer at the centre of Geese's process; which means that this is a new approach from what has gone before. Language, style, conventional dramatic structure, and the audience have been replaced by drama as a process solely for the benefit of the participants, rather than theatre as a product for an audience. While Clean Break and Synergy perform for an audience in most cases, Geese' focus is on healing through telling of personal stories designed not to entertain the audience, but within a workshop setting, behind closed doors, and without a public or paying audience. This might be seen as a logical conclusion to the 'journey' of prison theatre since 1979 – that it has travelled a long distance from being "alternative theatre" performed in unconventional spaces for a target group, to increasingly conventional mainstream theatre for audiences, and now, with Geese, the emphasis is more on drama as a beneficial process for dealing with individuals and their specific problems, rather than theatre for public audience.

Geese Theatre Company uses its practice to question how society has responded to the stories and experiences of the offenders and how we have dealt with issues affecting these individuals, such as unemployment, poor housing, mental

health problems, poverty etc. What connects this chapter with the rest of the thesis is that it focuses on exploring offenders' narratives of what might have led them into prison in the first place. It also deals with the transformation of offenders through narrative, and through character creation; and examines how professional theatre practice may use narrative construction to instigate a behavioural change. This chapter also interrogates other methods applied by Geese in their practical theatre engagements with offenders, such as devising techniques, workshop approaches and the use of masks as a metaphor. Also, my experience as a researcher/participant, observing and taking part in a Geese Theatre workshop forms part of this chapter's research methodology, alongside extracts from an interview I conducted with Andy Watson, the Geese artistic director, on the 17th October 2016 at the Young Vic Theatre in London. This chapter will also point out the connections with the other companies discussed in this thesis, so I touch upon the theatre techniques and strategies Geese Theatre Company employs such as Boal's Forum Theatre, which as we have seen is a technique and practice for exploring behaviour and change, that is shared with Synergy.

Geese Theatre Company originated in the USA as a touring company that visited prisons and delivered art-based activities to improve the life and understanding of the offenders. It was created in the United States of America by John Bergan but was established in the United Kingdom by Clark Baim in 1987. The company, based in Birmingham, United Kingdom, comprises a team of practitioners in the field of theatre who offer interactive programmes, deliver training to prison staff, provide consultations to offenders-based institutions and organise or facilitate drama-based workshops amongst offenders within and outside the UK. Clark Baim was an active member of the original Geese in the USA, having toured widely with

the company before returning to the United Kingdom to establish Geese Theatre Company, UK. The two companies existed as a twin company until their separation in 1997. Geese Theatre Company is presently under the management of Andy Watson, who is the company's artistic director. Since its inception, the company has engaged with various custodial institutions, helping offenders and people at risk of offending by delivering issue-based performances and devising theatre approaches or techniques towards rehabilitation (Baim et al, 2002). Baim (2007) summarises the work of Geese Theatre (GT) thus,

> GT's drama-based work includes live performances, creative residencies, drama-based workshops, offence-focused workshops and groupwork. GT uses drama and theatre to encourage self-awareness and to assist individuals in exploring the idea of and the impact that change may have in their lives. While focusing on each person's responsibility for their own offending, GT also takes into account the connections between personal behaviour, choice and responsibility and broader social, economic and political factors (205).

This strategically aligns Geese with Clean Break and Synergy in balancing the individual's responsibility alongside societal and political factors. Geese' position is holding individuals accountable for the choices they made but also pointing to other contributing factors in individuals' narratives such as poverty, negligence, social injustices and trauma, and even what might be described as 'tragic' childhood experiences according to Andy Watson in my interview with him (17th October, 2016).

However, Geese Theatre Company may not focus on society as an agent of crime or criminal behaviour nor the individuals as criminals, but goes beyond the

public perception of the offenders as criminals; to interrogate the internal struggles, challenges and other circumstances capable of leading individuals to offending behaviours. Although, Geese adopts issue-based approaches in dealing with offenders according to their needs, no matter how individual-focused their practice is, the aim of the company is essentially always to reduce the cycle of offending (Chui, 2003). Geese's focus is on devising issue-based programmes, performing plays and engaging in group workshops and rehearsals as well as employing an individualised focused approach towards instigating a behavioural change.

I saw this in action in a workshop titled 'Staging Rehabilitation' facilitated by with Andy Watson, the Geese Artistic Director, attended mainly by students from the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, but which was also open to the public. This workshop was not designed for offenders, but for students with an interest in theatre and the criminal justice system, and who want to explore workshop approaches to working with offenders. The session, led by Andy Watson, began with questions and answers about Geese Theatre Company and the work they do. Participants threw open questions to Watson who explained Geese's approach in working with offenders. He pointed out that their work is more focused on individuals who are troubled with some issues and being encouraged to take back control of their lives through the creative drama process. He also explained that they do not have a prescriptive format of working with offenders, rather their works are based on the exploration of an individual's behaviour, to help in making them better through theatre techniques such as improvisation, exercises, storytelling, and the use of masks.

The facilitator demonstrated how experience or an incident in offender's life could be a trigger to offending behaviour. He went further to say that some offenders

they work with have low self-esteem, been abused at some point in their lives, some are struggling with relationships, families, while some are jobless and without homes.. Watson created a scenario with the participants as audience, and at the end of the scene asked the participants to respond to the act based on their observations, understanding and interpretations.

In the scene, the character performed without words. The setting is in a restaurant's bar section. As the character comes on stage, he looks worried and unhappy, sits on the chair, with a facial expression depicting a troubled mind. As he sits and rubs his hands across his wrists looking up the ceiling and sometimes mutters some words inaudibly. He gets off the chair, paces around and sits back, dips his hand inside his pocket, moves towards the imaginary counter, takes two steps and comes back to sit on the chair and stands up immediately. He goes to the bar attendant and asks for a drink and returns to his chair waiting to be served. He waits for five minutes but is still not served. He looks towards the till where the two bar attendants are busy chatting. (Now anger is building up, frustration has become noticeable and he appears agitated, shaking his legs and looking at his wrist watch consistently). He forms a clenched fist and moves quickly to the shelf, grabs two bottles of wine and smashes them on the floor, kicks chairs and pushes down the tables, slaps the wall, punches the door and leaves. The facilitator came out of character and asked the participants about their understanding of the scene and interpretation of the character's actions. These are some of the responses or feedback that came from the participants:

1. An angry man

2. A troubled man

3. Frustration
4. Past ugly experiences
5. Disappointment
6. Heartbroken
7. Transfer of aggression
8. Broken relationship
9. Drug influence
10. Poverty.

The facilitator asked the participants what are other ways the character could have reacted differently? He asked the participants to watch again as he steps back into the same character to explore his behaviour in a different approach. The character at this point displays the same countenance: body language and gestures, but he neither breaks bottles, punches the walls nor turns the tables upside down. Now the facilitator gets out of character and asks the participants to give their feedback. These are their responses:

1. Struggling to take control of his emotions
2. Staying out of troubles
3. Trying to show maturity
4. Conflict with self and the law
5. Being considerate

Then the facilitator gets back on stage to explore the behaviour of the same character from a different perspective. The character comes into the restaurant smiling. He waves his hand and greets the bar tenders, sits down and brings out his mobile phone, types and sends out a message still beaming with smiles. Gets up and orders a drink, comes back to his chair and waits to be served.

The facilitator asks the participants to respond to the scenario from their individual perspectives and observations. And their responses are:

1. Well behaved
2. Peaceful
3. A happy man
4. Tolerant
5. Accommodating
6. Friendly
7. Comfortable
8. Satisfied
9. Cool

The facilitator explained that he employs this technique when working with offenders. He said that he believes in exploration of behaviour through rehearsal and re-enactment of scenarios. Trying out different behaviours tells the offenders that there are so many alternative ways to lead a good and positive life. Through creative drama exploration, they may find better ways of doing things differently. He explained that there is always something that leads an individual to offend, and when

left unchecked and unexplored, it can escalate to creating more problems unless the narrative is changed or broken. A character is created by presenting them with events, needs, obstacles and desires. This presents the character with dilemmas, choices, actions and consequences. What theatre does with offenders is to help them to analyse behaviour through role creation and character development focusing on situations or events, motivations and desire, choices and consequences. It creates a platform for offenders to distance themselves from the familiar stories that define who they are and be able to see themselves in another light, to change their stories, to regain their credibility, to function within the frame of acceptable conduct in society. The facilitator explained that while working with offenders, Geese tends to create an imaginary character and explore the character's behaviour in different ways, asking for the opinions and suggestions from the offenders. Adopting that approach helps the offenders to understand the circumstances surrounding the character's life and identifying with the character as a mirror of their own lives, as sometimes in that process an offender reacts by saying – 'oh! that's me exactly. That's exactly me'. Offenders identifying with the character during the process of exploration of behaviour enhances the possibilities of embracing change as they work through the character in his journey to transformation.

The Geese Theatre Company's creative or devised activities are also strongly focused on the use of masks as major instruments of exploring behaviours and finding strategies for coping with situations. As Jerzy Grotowski's poor theatre (1968) strives to strip the theatre of its irrelevant flamboyance and artificiality, and advocates for theatre where the actor is the centre of attention, Geese Theatre Company similarly does not lay emphasis on the richness of costumes and scenery, rather attention is focused on how to use theatre as a process of exploring techniques to deal with issues

and challenges facing offenders. Hence, attention is on exploring various techniques using masks, gestures, and feedback, towards finding solutions to problems facing the offenders. According to the Geese Theatre Handbook: Drama with Offenders and People at Risk (Clark Baim, Sally Brookes & Alun Mountford: 2002:185), one of the Geese Theatre Company's improvisational techniques is the use of masks to represent characters and situations, such as fear, anxiety; and as a cover up of who the character is. Geese mainly applies eight different masks as improvisational tool to delineate characters – showing varying characteristics these characters represent. These are called 'Fragment Masks' which are designed to represent techniques on how characters can protect themselves, for example, attacking others or laying blame, finding excuses for wrong-doing, and denying responsibilities, and as a method of coping with challenges or situations. The eight main fragment masks employ by Geese in their improvisational and issue-based practice are: The Fist, The Mouth, Mr Cool, The Brick Wall, Rescuer, The Joker, Good Guy and Poor Me. Geese believes that people wear masks in various forms and for different reasons, and they tend to explore that technique in their performances and workshops for the actor to interrogate the masked characters and for the observers to understand their real circumstances by asking them to lift their masks. Through this approach, the audience within the workshop can delve deeper into the interiority of the character's behaviour to understand their feelings and externalise their internal thoughts.

The facilitator, Andy Watson, demonstrated how Geese Theatre Company uses masks in working with offenders. He stated that mask is used in theatre to delineate characters, to represent and understand different situations or scenarios that an individual may encounter, and to explore the character's behaviours. He said that mask is a representation of a character but not a true depiction of the character's

personality because personality changes like masks. Through the use of mask, an individual has different personalities and, to demonstrate a personality or the type of mask to wear depends on the situation of event and the circumstances of the character. Playing a character is akin to wearing a mask. When a character wears a mask, he is removed from his circumstances – his hopes, desires, aspiration, and actions are hidden beneath the mask as he steps out from himself to become a new personality, and bears a different identity. Masks help individuals to change their narratives. For example, the convicts characters in *Our Country's Good* taking up different roles and stepping out from their authentic selves and imposed identities to be able to retell their stories and adorn new identities is a reflection of the role of masks in character development. Masks distance us – both as audience and actors as we are removed from our real situation to hide under the masks to be able to deal with issues facing us, to view ourselves from a different angle in order to analyse our behaviour, to tell our stories, to understand who we really are and our circumstances – needs, desires, choices, actions and the consequences of our actions. Through playing a character, offenders change their stories as we are shown in the play *Our Country's Good* where convict-characters distance themselves from who they are and take up the identities of fictional characters. We see Liz Morden say that she will speak Mr. Farquhar's lines with elegance and clarity their worth command. Also, Ralph advises Liz that when playing a character, she should imagine being someone different, and we see Ascott as he says that "when I speak Kite's lines, I don't hate anymore. I'm Kite, I'm in Shrewsbury" (Act 2, Sc. iii). Mary likes to play Silvia because she is bold and not ashamed. By stepping outside their personalities to embody the characters in a play is a typical example of wearing a mask – a way of distancing themselves in order to analyse their criminal behaviour and to reflect on the need for a change.

Mask is a metaphor, a representation of absence, which implies something that does not exist in a stable or consistent way – the masks we wear can change. As human beings, we wear different masks everyday as we go about our day to day activities. The mask we put on depends on who we are, where we are, who we are with, the circumstances surrounding us, what we are doing and who we are doing what we are doing with. Beneath the mask lies a character (offender) whose behaviour often swings to adjust to the mood and circumstances surrounding his life. Theatre strips off this mask to discover the interiority of the offender's mind, revealing his fear, hope, disappointment, frustration, drivers, motivations, challenges, thoughts and feelings. The facilitator explained that Geese explores behaviours using masks so that offenders can detach from the masked character to challenge their own actions hidden behind the mask, revealing their innermost circumstances. He said that while working with offenders, the offenders can use masks to demonstrate or interpret a situation or behaviour and there are different masks suitable to play different roles and instead of everybody appearing on stage, one person can use different masks to play or demonstrate different behaviour, and the group explores the behaviour through games, improvisation, mirroring, and feedbacks. Wearing masks helps offenders to tell different stories about themselves and enables them to imagine being a part of this new narrative by exploring the characters behind the masks.

Geese believes that offenders need further support from society after participating in theatre for rehabilitation programmes, to reduce the chances of re-offending. Geese Theatre Company's philosophy is enshrined within the principle that theatre is a strong instrument for instigating a change in behaviour and through that medium, individuals are called upon to look deeper into their lives and examine their behaviour towards encouraging and promoting personal development. The

vision is "to create safe, crime-free communities and for the arts to be recognised as a powerful vehicle for individual and social change", while their mission is "to use theatre and drama to enable choice, personal responsibility and change, amongst individuals who have offended, other vulnerable or marginalised groups, and those who work with them". (www.geese.co.uk. Accessed 14th October 2016). Based on its vision and mission statement, Geese believes that an individual has the capacity to change and they create supportive platforms through drama processes to encourage and motivate individuals for self-actualisation and for a better society.

> Drama is also primarily about change; the involvement of the individual from one state of being to another. Through drama, we are able to give form to our experience of change; to have a good look at it and thereby confront our human fear of it. Change necessarily involves challenging our deepest existential fear; loss of personal identity and integrity – the annihilation of the self. Change is therefore at the very root of the dramatic arts; theatre shows how people are changed by events… or not. (Duggan and Roger 2007:138).

Although Geese believes that it is the individual's responsibility to embrace change, offenders may still feel trapped in circumstances that have shaped their choices and hence identities. But through involvement in drama-based activities, offenders may develop self-confidence, self-esteem, the ability to solve problems and to be motivated towards acquiring additional learning skills (Hughes, 2005), and we have seen how Wertenbaker and Out of Joint explored this idea in *Our Country's Good* where the convicts build their confidence, gain eloquence and establish relationship with the officers and cohesion amongst themselves. Geese Theatre company creates experimental and experiential learning environments, enabling individuals to take an active part in exploring issues and situations that are related to them, thereby

prompting the participants to probe their own thinking and understanding by drawing on other individuals' perspectives. Carol Fordham (2002), in her article published in Probation Journal, titled 'Drama-Based Group Work with Young People', is of the view that active participation in drama-based group work, and the method of engagement used within these groups, have a direct and immediate outcome on the participants as they create characters and scenarios based on their experiences. This learning is the priority, rather than acquiring drama skills, knowledge and techniques. Fordham argues that there should be alternative projects or programmes designed to help young people who are not in school and who are at risk of offending, to build their confidence. She argues that lack of confidence is linked to poor performance and basic skills, and often leads young people to develop negative attitudes towards learning.

The main theoretical model which underpins Geese Theatre Company's practice is Cognitive Behavioural theory which tends to be the most effectively used in offenders' rehabilitation or intervention programmes. (McGuire, 2000; Vennard et al, 1997) cited in (Baim, Clark et al, 2002:19). Geese Theatre Company applies cognitive behavioural therapy in their drama-based activities to explore participants' feelings, thoughts and behaviour. Louise Heywood, a Director of Programme at Geese Theatre Company was involved in delivering the 'Journeyman', a five-day Geese Theatre Company project with adult viewed to be at risk of self-harm or suicide, delivered in partnership with Safer Custody teams in prisons. She discusses how they managed the anxiety that arose among the offenders at the early stage of the project and how they employed cognitive behavioural techniques in dealing with the fears and worries relating to engagement in theatre, especially offenders sharing personal stories and experiences with participants not previously known to them in an

unfamiliar environment. Through role-play, issues are explored among offenders, analysing characters' feelings and thoughts, and linking them to their own experiences, giving them the opportunity to investigate the characters' strengths and weaknesses, and to reflect on their behaviour in an environment they considered safe. These workshops create an atmosphere where participants narrate a story or act out a scenario and step aside to watch others relive their experiences This helps them to step back from who they are, to be able to look deeper into the actions or circumstances of the characters and to deal with their own issues or problems. Heywood is of the view that Geese employs Cognitive Behavioural approach as a positive way of exploring behaviour with the offenders, pointing at the 'Journeyman' project as a success, as the participants prepared different pieces of work to showcase their skill and prove how the project has impacted them positively. Some of the participants did some role-playing scenes, while others created an image to depict past behaviour and present personality as well as an imagination of who they want to be. These exercises at the end of the project show that most individual have taken a positive attitude to life and challenged themselves to be that positive personality they have created. Participants are focused on engaging with issues and discovering new ways of coping with situations as they affect them and others. For example, if a participant within the group is given the character of a victim, through exploring that character and playing the role, the participant will understand the impact of his offending behaviour as a perpetrator of crime on his victims, and this will help him develop a deeper understanding of himself and how he feels about other people's behaviour. According to Heywood, in her evaluation of 'Journeyman',

> The introduction of a cognitive behavioural approach is easily digestible because the example is immediate and accessible. The group take ownership of the character by providing detail that

> mirrors their own experiences without, at this stage, having to own them. Working at 'one step removed' provides an emotional safety net and creates a bridge into personal-level work for those who are ready for it, and a vehicle for exploring behaviour with those who are not (Heywood, 2017).

This suggests that at first, they don't explore their own stories, but examine issues through the creation of a fictional character and a fictional story that gives them distance from their own circumstances etc. The idea about Cognitive Behavioural Theory is that our attitudes and beliefs affect our thoughts and reasoning as well as the way we behave. Cognitive behavioural therapy is focused on the application of methods or techniques to modify the way individuals think and feel about themselves which affect their self-esteem and can trigger offending behaviours. It teaches coping skills and ways of dealing with individuals' problems.

Throughout this study, I have argued that narrative-construction and character creation as part of a programme of work involving imagination and story-telling can help individuals step outside the script which they think they are in – a healing process which in my earlier chapter I discussed in relation to Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good* where the convict characters step outside their personal circumstances and imagine themselves to be different individuals with different personalities and identities. Through Geese Theatre workshops and the use of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, participants begin to understand that they can change their stories and identities. Geese Theatre Company employs this Cognitive Behavioural theory as a guide towards intervention and rehabilitation practice with offenders. This theory is mostly referred to among researchers and has gained popularity among interventionists due to the research and findings which suggest that

the application of cognitive behavioural methods in working with offenders is linked to a high rate of desistance in offending behaviour when compared to other theoretical intervention approaches (Burnett and Robert, 2004; McGuire, 2000). The way people think and feel about themselves (Cognitive Behavioural Theory) relates to the stories that form or shape individuals' identities (Narrative Theory). Our lives are made up of stories and episodes of incidents or events that affect our beliefs, thoughts, attitudes and feelings we hold about ourselves. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy explores how these cognitive processes relate or affect our behaviours – actions, reactions and consequences. Theatre or drama is all about exploring human actions, motivations, challenges, experiences, cause and effects as well as the consequences of actions. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy draws a link between Psychotherapy and Behavioural Therapy to point to how individual's patterns of thought and the meaning they attach to things begin in their childhood and explores the relationship between human understanding, issues, problems, thoughts and behaviour. The stories behind what leads offenders to prison in the first place are generally negative ones – poverty, abuse, neglect, etc; and consequently, their narratives are often crafted around some negative thoughts about these experiences, in the case of Ralph in *Frozen*, Scott in *A Conversation*, Emma in *The Long Road,* Liz Morden in *Our Country's Good.* Through Geese' Cognitive Behavioural Therapy as a rehabilitation model, offenders are made to understand that it is not the events or stories of their lives that affect or define them, but the meanings they attach to these narratives, and the ways they think about and interpret them. Most of these offenders view their lives as scripted narratives and are locked up in their negative thoughts that form the overall perception about who they are, what motivates them and the circumstances they are in, pushing the narratives about them in negative thought

patterns, such as: I was born this way, society made me the way I am, I was abused in my childhood, I was abandoned or neglected, I was traumatised etc. Galen Strawson's (2004) 'Against Narrativity' counters this perception and argues that human stories can be episodic in the way in which the person recalls and perceives them – events happening in different time and space and that human identity is fluid, alterable and non-coherent. Strawson views individuals as having the capacity to change their personalities, to (re) tell their stories and (re) construct their identities as individual's circumstances and stories are not fixed. He argues that "telling and retelling one's past leads to changes, smoothings, enhancements, shift away from the facts… (2004:447). As offenders explore their stories, new meanings and interpretation of their circumstances emerge. Cognitive behavioural therapy points to the fact that offenders holding unto these negative thoughts about themselves will prevent them from learning or seeing positive things in their lives. Cognitive behavioural therapy helps offenders to step outside their dysfunctional and automatic thought patterns to explore or examine authentic life experiences in order to understand what happens to them or others who may be in the same situation. Individuals may find themselves, their understanding and interpretation of their narratives may be affected by their thought patterns which follow the script life has written about them, but cognitive behavioural therapy helps these individuals to step outside their thoughts and behaviour to amend their misinterpretations and (re) construct their identities. Thus, CBT as used by Geese can be seen as an analogous, but different, kind of 're-writing' and 're-telling' of hidden stories, to that conducted by the other theatre companies explored in this study. This narrative-building is within the mind of the individual and the intended 'audience' for this newly created narrative, is the individual themselves.

Furthermore, the way narrative is constructed can have consequences on people's behaviour and establish new relationships between fiction and reality. Geese cognitive behavioural therapy gives offenders the platform to share their experiences with the members of the group who may be experiencing similar challenges and issues under the guidance of a facilitator who helps characters in their healing and recovery process - just as we have seen in the works of some playwrights and theatre companies discussed earlier in this thesis. In *A Conversation*, we see competing narratives from the characters under the facilitation of Jack Manning, a conference convenor who helps the characters come to terms with their circumstances and find a channel for forgiveness and mercy knowing that they are all fallible; we see also how the characters in *Our Country's Good* explore their circumstances, using drama as a platform to step outside their own circumstances and life-histories to explore what it feels like to have new identities under the support of Captain Philip whom I see as a facilitator for encouraging and supporting the play production by the convicts and describing participation in theatre as a process of healing and transformation. Also, the character Writer plays a role as a facilitator in the play *That Almost Unnameable Lust* who goes into the prison to appropriate the narrative voices of the offenders whom she nonetheless represents. And as a participant-observer, my role as the author of this thesis has been that of listening to offenders' stories, interacting in their experiences, both within workshops and as mediated by playwrights and theatre productions, and playing my part in the retelling of their stories through the writing of this thesis. All this engagement with fictitious characters through the works of the playwrights and offenders encountered in the practice of the theatre companies is about behaviour analysis – understanding the motivations and consequences of people's actions, helping build people up through narrative, helping offenders to (re)

construct what and why they are in prison in the first place. Looking at society, individuals, circumstances, agency, choices people make – across all these areas, we can see that narrative can help people to think about and analyse the difficult topic of crime, justice, punishment and rehabilitation.

Geese Theatre Company focuses on getting offenders into active employment and motivating them to learn through active participation in theatre-based and individual tailored activities. In the words of Andy Watson, the artistic director of Geese Theatre Company, in an interview with me on the 17th October 2016 at the Young Vic Theatre in London, 'our work is not about trying to train people to be actors. Our work is about trying to train people to be people". This statement underlies the politics and ideology of Geese Theatre Company which focuses on offender's healing process through creative drama, games, workshop and cognitive behavioural therapy – a position clearly very different from Clean Break's gendered arguments about criminal justice. Clean Break's politics and practice speak loud as a women only company and the use of women playwrights in their play productions. Synergy's politics and practice are different again, and pragmatically focus not on blaming offenders or society but helping to change offenders narratives by engaging them in play productions and helping them to gain employment. Watson goes further to state that,

> …theatre is about doing, … because all the guys I work with are doers, they are active people, they are up on their feet a lot and they want to be moving around and that is what theatre does. As soon as you put them on a chair with a desk, and get them to do stuffs in their manuals, it reminds them of education…' (Interview,17th October 2016).

Watson stresses the point that most of the people he works with did not have great time in school, due to bullying, lack of self-confidence, poor support, and lack of social skills. In this case, putting them through education-like programmes will remind them of their experiences, and that may interfere with the intervention process as such experiences might be linked to lack of support from teachers, bullying by classmates or abuse and neglect from families. Geese is not looking at triggering these experiences, rather they are focusing on the individuals who need support with issues affecting them, using drama-based activities or programmes as means of intervention. However, Watson's statement contradicts the whole essence of theatre and psychoanalysis the main purpose of which is to explore the causes and effects, relive the experiences and find healing. Watson emphasises action rather than reflection, but reflection is the essence of theatre and psychoanalysis – creating the platform for the offenders to connect with their past experiences through personal and group narratives for recovery and healing. This contradiction is based on the fact that an individual can gain healing through reflection on his past experiences or circumstances that are locked or trapped within his subconscious mind, but Watson suggests that classroom approach of exploring behaviour will trigger participants' unpleasant experiences during their time in formal education. In this case, it appears that participants are locked in their narratives of their past experiences. It is worth noting that artistic projects can go a long way as an alternative to punishment, as it offers offenders the creative platform to explore, develop, reflect on behaviour and forge a new positive way of living. According to Wilson et al.,

> There is a growing awareness among policy makers and those working in the Criminal Justice System of the contributions that can be made by the arts in prison, in particular by more innovative projects than are often provided by charities and voluntary organisations. numerous research studies

> have suggested that projects – such as music and art programmes – that offer participants a creative outlet, have positive impacts on offenders… (2008:4).

Although, Andy Watson is part of this alternative programme offer as set out above, he argues that 'there are programmes in prisons and they may work for some people, but they certainly do not work for everybody' (Interview, 17th October 2016). Geese Theatre Company's view is that offenders should take responsibility for their crime, and to help facilitate this ideology, they devise projects and programmes that may help the offenders get back on the right track of acceptable behaviour through participation in theatre activities designed to instigate transformation of individuals' behaviour. Balfour (2009:349) describes Geese as "a company specialising in the use of theatre to focus on an individual's responsibility for their offending behaviour". Geese tends to work with a focused group whose behaviours or circumstances are reflected in a particular programme designed for this group. Offenders whose experiences or offences are related to substance misuse, violence, rape, robbery are channelled into different programmes that will enable them to explore their stories and experiences in a more in-depth way according to their various needs. Andy Watson explains why they design bespoke programmes to suit individual's needs;

> Usually we are working with discreet groups. So, if I am running a project for men who are into violence, that means they are the target group for that, if I am running a group for young men between the ages of 18 and 21 all of whom have substance misuse issues, then that is a discreet project. We tend not to work in a sort of a situation where we bring young people into work with some adults. We don't work like that. So, most of our projects are designed around exactly who is going to be involved, so we focus on who it is and then we decide the theatre it will be in terms of what we

> deliver, because if I am working with men who use violence, they have got different sort of issues and needs to a group of men who are drug users. There might be some similarities for them, there might be a lot of differences. So, you create a project according to the particular group you are working with. (Interview, 17th October 2016).

Geese Theatre Company's projects target individuals' behaviours by exploring narratives around themes of identity, violence, peer pressure and mental wellbeing etc. During the interview, Watson states that social factors and uncontrollable circumstances could lead an individual to commit a crime, but the onus lies mainly on the individual to take responsibility for his actions. He affirms that the work of Geese is about holding offenders accountable for the choices they made, and he argues that there is vast amount of social or economic reasons that may make people to offend, but, nonetheless, his view and the approach of his company is based on the belief that responsibility for an individual's choice of actions rests finally upon the individual.

> I think when I am working with the group, I am working with them about what they are responsible for, the choices they have made, the responsibilities they have in the choices that they made… Our work is about holding people accountable for the choices they have made because ultimately, they are the only people who can make different choices. I think we would be naive to suggest that there is no amount of economic and social reasons why people might end up offending. (interview, 17th October 2016).

Here, Watson's position is that although individuals are held accountable for the choices they make, nonetheless very often, those choices are influenced by the social and economic circumstances that society presents them. He is of the view that to make society better, efforts should be focused on the individual's behaviour through

theatre programmes that will enable offenders to look deeper into their own lives and reflect on their behaviours through engagement in theatrical activities. He points out that society plays a part in contributing to the rate of offending behaviour, and therefore, society should be held responsible as well, but the main responsibility is upon the individual for his offending behaviour. Watson further argues,

> However, that doesn't mean that I also don't understand that a lot of choices that people made were made in pretty tricky certain circumstances, society probably has to accept the responsibility for them. Again, it really depends who I am working with. So, if I am working with a group of men who regularly, physically and psychologically abuse their intimate partners, then I can't see any societal rationale for that. I can't say, oh well, society was oppressing him and therefore he took it out on his partner. That doesn't work for me. If I am working with the group of men for whom they are engaged in substance misuse and I hear their stories about neglect and abuse growing up, then that makes sense to me because they potentially started using heroin as a way of numbing history or forgetting the past or coping with their circumstances. (interview, 17th October 2016).

Watson's acknowledges the fact that there are certain socially motivated circumstances that may affect individual's behaviour. Geese theatre projects centre around developing intervention strategies to deal with the exploration of offending behaviour, offering chances for people to develop a renewed sense of agency or rehabilitation. Watson comments,

> But some people believe that because of the circumstances of their life means that that they don't have huge amount of autonomy, they try to find it in other ways, violence is a typical example, violence is a classic example of how I get some control in my life. That makes me feel powerful, if I can hurt someone else, it gives a little bit of power. I think that could be seen as inappropriate

> way of trying to gain autonomy and efficacy of life. (Interview, October 2016).

Autonomy does not imply that individuals can take laws into their hands, but rather that they develop a sense of agency and responsibility that will make them feel less trapped within a pre-written script. Geese's goal is to create a platform for offenders to tell their stories, and a mirror through which they review their actions and reflect on their behaviour by participating in rehearsals and other theatre engagements. CBT is part of the process, but drama processes can be a physicalized 'acting out' that supports these new ways of thinking about behavioural choices. According to Laura Nicklin (2017),

> … Geese work to create drama that accurately mirrors the victims' world, creating opportunities for self-recognition and reconnection to society at large. The intention is to offer a rehabilitative approach to criminal rehabilitation with active intention to identify, understand and transform negative behaviour (5).

It is through this medium that offenders look deeper into their lives to reflect on their past experiences, and practise other positive ways to make a change and view life from different perspectives. Narrative becomes a mirror within which offenders can recognise themselves. In the words of Watson on the aim of Geese Theatre Company using drama and theatre as intervention strategies with the offenders;

> Our overarching aim is to create safer communities. And we do that by working with people who I guess are considered to be the people that make communities unsafe, people that commit offences, people that cause harm. We use theatre to explore behaviour, to explore the possibilities of change, to help people think about identity, think about their roles, think about the impact of their

> behaviour on other people (Interview, 17th October 2016).

Geese Theatre Company devises programmes and projects that challenge offenders to look into their lives and explore the possibilities of (re) constructing their narratives and changing their identities, and also reflect on their behaviours and how such behaviours affect others. According to Watson in the interview, Geese's projects are geared towards the understanding that, "when people commit crimes, they are found guilty in court of law and sentenced to prison, and when they are out of prison, they are coming out to reintegrate into society, they return to their family, community, friends and so on" (2016). At this point, both in prison and out of prison, Geese tends to use theatre as a rehabilitative tool to enable offenders to discover the chances and opportunities in front of them by helping them to find who they are, and what they could turn out to be, as well as the positive impact they can make in their lives.. Harkins et al., (2009:3) cite (Baim, et al., 2002) to argue that "drama-based approaches offer advantages over other approaches in that they are more personally-focused and practical, rely less on literacy and expression of skills and allow for self-reflection and practice of newly learned skills". What these offenders need among social services is rehabilitation through participation in theatre programmes to be able to attain maturity by gaining the ability to reflect on the impact of their behaviours on others, and be determined to accept their responsibilities to make changes in their lives and become individuals with positive behaviours. That is the reason why Geese Theatre Company engages with offenders in theatre with a focus on issue-based activities and programmes that enable them to reflect on their behaviours and experiences, to develop a sense of maturity in making right choices or decisions, and the ability to be self-reflective.

Esther Baker of Synergy Theatre Project in her interview with me (18th December 2014) argues, that sometimes the only way to overcome offending behaviour is simply by maturing, and growing older. In the same vein, Andy Watson (interview, October 2016) re-echoes that point by saying that incarceration and participation in theatre programmes cannot solely stop offenders from offending, rather he argues, that the best way for an offender to stop offending is by maturing. In this case, the role of theatre in changing offenders' behaviour is by engaging them in theatre programmes or projects, where they will learn life skills such as communication, anger management, coping mechanisms, endurance, perseverance, building relationships that will enable them to reflect meaningfully into their behaviours and learn to lead a good and positive life which encapsulates maturity. In the words of Andy Watson,

> The biggest single factor why somebody might move from offending to non-offending is age. As you get older - That's the biggest single factor why somebody stops offending. It is not because of a particular programme, it is because they got older and became more mature and I think part of what we can do with our work is that we can't make people older, but we can enhance their maturity because being mature suggests reflection, looking at yourself, looking at how you are behaving and responding to situations as opposed to just doing. And I think that's what you can do with theatre, you can invite people, that's what theatre rehearsal process is, you rehearse something, you stop it, then you rewind it and you get what was working and what wasn't working, that's exactly what we do with our work with people. (Interview,17th October 2016).

However, I will re-echo Watson's view, that maturity in this sense is not just about ageing, but by gaining the ability to reflect into one's life, accept responsibility and be

ready and eager to make a positive change in one's behaviour and attitudes. Andy Watson suggests above that maturity triggers new perspectives and fresh understanding of the need for acceptable behaviour and in this case, may reduce re-offending and increase 'desistance', which Bilby C. et al (2013:2) define as "the process of personal growth through which offenders become non-offenders. Most of the offenders working with Geese Theatre Company may have in one way or the other caused harm, inflicted pains or broken rules that affected other people's lives through violence, rape, alcohol and substance misuse, but certain situations or experiences might have led them to committing crime. I asked Watson whether the idea of 'tragedy' was relevant to his view of the people Geese works with. Andy Watson explored this idea in the following way:

> There are some individuals I work with that their history is tragic. If I am working with a guy who might describe growing up in a household where there was extreme neglect, poverty, and abuse from the age of three, and his way of dealing with that was to start getting involved in gang activity because they provided a better family, and from that progressed into heavy drug use, because that is how he managed to cope with the realities of life which he was living, with period of homelessness, then you know it is tragic. (Interview, 17th October, 2016).

This connects to the exploration of the tragic experiences of the characters in Byrony Lavery's *Frozen* and David Williamson's *A Conversation* which suggests that there are certain factors which may lead individuals to engage in criminal offence as discussed in chapter three. However, Watson also forcefully denies the sense of 'inevitability' that might accompany this tragic paradigm; Geese strongly asserts an

individual's agency and ownership of their choices – and through that, the potential of growth and change.

Exploration of issues based on the challenges and experiences through participation in theatre activities and learning can offer the opportunity to acquire some transferable skills that will enable offenders to cope and become a positive force in the community by understanding the impact of negative behaviour on themselves and the wider community, thereby having the capacity to desist from re-offending. Harkins et al., point out that,

> The rehabilitation and subsequent resettlement of individuals serving time in prison should be one of the primary goals of incarceration. Ideally, it provides an opportunity to instil the skills necessary for a successful move back into the community providing these individuals with options for living a life that doesn't rely on, or continually resort to crime for lack of other options. Without assistance in developing such skills, it is unreasonable for people to presume that incarceration will deter re-offense (2008:3).

The main goal of theatre in prison is to create the opportunity for offenders to construct their narratives and change their identities towards reintegration into the community. But what is the role of the community in supporting and ensuring that offenders become part of the larger community? Society has a role to play in helping them to develop and improve on their skills and creating enabling environment for them to thrive. The way society responds to the offenders in the community determines the level in which offenders desist from re-offending. Geese Theatre Company has embarked on numerous programmes designed to deal with offenders rediscovering themselves by looking inward to reflect on their behaviours. According to Andy Watson,

> We all need opportunity to work and earn money, and to have somewhere safe and secure to live, and to have opportunity of building new relationships. And if we are not willing to give people that, then we are certainly going to fail. We are saying, come out of prison and fail again. That's not necessarily their faults. (Interview, 17th October 2016).

This points to the issue raised earlier that society has a role to play in reducing the rate of offending behaviour, and should to some extent be held accountable for individuals coming in contact with the criminal justice. Theatre has a role to play by creating an imaginary and reflective platform through drama processes, but offenders should be given adequate support and encouragement through their recovery journey to integration into society when they have left prisons. Geese Theatre Company employs an improvisational approach in working with offenders, creating or devising instant scenes in which vital issues are raised as they concern the participants as observers in exploring issue-based activities with the offenders. And they encourage "offenders to consider and explore issues connected with their release and reconnecting with a life outside prison using theatre performance, experiential exercises, skill practice role-plays, and metaphor such as the masks" (Harkim et al 2010:1). Observers become part of the whole creative and interactive process as they can come up on stage to share their experiences and devise means or strategies to deal with the character's issues and proffer solutions affecting the community of offenders and victims of crime.

While Clean Break and Synergy Theatre Project apart from organising workshops with offenders, also create theatre productions in which their main focus is on the general public as the audience, Geese Theatre Company does not perform for external audiences from the wider view of the public, rather, their main focus is to

engage participants as audience. Like much applied theatre, the emphasis is less on a division between performers and spectators but is about participants as co-creators. According to James Thompson (2009),

> Applied theatre is less about beholders and more about participants co-creating work, from their own desires, delight and inspiration. In certain circumstances, this might be from a sense of pain or anger, but here an alternative has been suggested that starts from an invitation to create something that is understood by the makers to be beautiful… (159).

Something 'beautiful' in this sense suggests participants being elevated to a place beyond the ordinary performance space to the realm of transformation – where they begin to understand and retell their stories from positive perspectives. Like much theatre that could be described as taking place within an 'applied' context, Geese makes use of Boal's Forum theatre techniques. Boal's improvisational process is constructed so that the observers can make interventions in those areas that are important to them, such as perhaps work, relationships, family, self-esteem, as well as discovering ways to desist from offending behaviours, interacting in the process of finding the truth and liberation from the circumstances that oppress them. Geese employs Augusto Boal's idea of Forum theatre (1979) which gives the audience the opportunity to participate, interrogate, make suggestions towards finding better ways to enhance behaviour and bring change in individuals and society. The forum theatre approach generally tends to investigate or explore the stories about the oppression and tragic experiences of individuals and how such individuals respond to societal, political, economic or systemic oppression. However, Watson does not see a firm

boundary between the essence of the work of Geese and that of any other form of theatre,

> Theatre is about exploration of behaviour. Any type of theatre; when you go to a performance at the Young Vic, or you go to the performance at the National Theatre, you are watching behaviour, and you are watching characters interact with other characters and you are seeing the impact of one character's behaviour on another. And you are also sort of invited into the inner world of those characters to understand what their motivations are, what their thoughts, feelings and beliefs are, and I think all that are very useful for anybody to start thinking about in terms of their own lives. (Interview, 17th October 2016).

In working with offenders, Geese devises or dramatizes scenes in which actions revolve around the characters within the context of the workshop, and more importantly the actions extend to the observers as they interact with the characters. Most times, the characters are found in difficult and desperate circumstances that they have to ask the onlookers for a solution regarding their situation. Then, they intervene by acting out what might be a suggestion or solution to the issue raised. In some scenarios, the onlookers need not to come to the performance space, but can indicate intention to participate by raising hands or touching the head. This kind of improvisation builds a bridge that connects the actors, facilitators and the onlookers, as they narrate their stories, share their thoughts, beliefs, fears, frustrations, anxieties; geared towards finding solutions to desist from offending behaviours. As the audiences make suggestions or proffer solutions to the issues raised by the character, the character then tries to engage with the scenario and re-enacts the scene under the full observation of the onlookers. The observer witnesses what the character is doing and observes what is working and not working. The more the character tries out the

suggestions without succeeding, the more the audiences get actively involved and if it becomes harder for the character to deal with the situation despite audiences' suggestions, then the individual in the audience may get on stage to show the character in practical terms how to do it.

It is partly through theatre and other creative means, in my view that these individuals are assisted through the help of the facilitator and contributions of the audience to learn and develop new skills by engaging in rehearsals and other theatrical activities. The relationship between the workshop or work-group facilitator and the participants cannot be overemphasised as it is crucial to the success and positive outcome of the rehabilitation process. Research suggests that the facilitator who possesses good relationship skills with the group can help in reducing reoffending (Andrews and Bonta, 2006), while Watson (2016) points that it is through rehearsals that offenders develop new skills and reflect on their behaviours as they try out actions, behaviours, ideas, over again through experimentation and practice for understanding, reflections towards finding a better interpretation and new meaning about their lives and the choices they made. Through this process, offenders can reflect on their past behaviour and look deeper into their own lives in a more mature manner. That is the role of theatre in rehabilitation of offenders – it is practical, it is engaging, you learn through the process of rehearsal and overall participation. Blacker, Watson and Reech (2008) cite (Baim et al., 2002) as saying that,

> Drama has a number of significant advantages over the discussion-based or instructional approaches used by most anger-management programmes, as the drama-based methods are more personal and practical, less reliant on literacy and verbal expression, and help address thoughts, feelings and behaviour (131).

Watson concurs that one of the benefits of theatre in rehabilitating offenders is that theatre is full of actions: drama is about doing, it urges offenders to get up and take actions, to take charge of their own stories and reflect on their behaviours as a healing process. The Geese' approach is geared towards the understanding that theatre allows the opportunity to explore various versions of oneself as shown in doubling of roles in *Our Country's Good* where some convicts try out and play different character in order to experience different version of themselves and understand what and how it feels to be in another person's shoes.

Theatre in prison is about exploration, understanding and appreciation of roles and identities of offender – the idea of people opening up, the benefit of exploring potential; working with the group and listening to their stories, stepping out of character to analyse and reflect on behaviour. Watson highlights that Geese does not provide theatre of solutions or answers, rather they provide theatre of debate – about what constitutes criminal behaviours, the choices people make and their consequences, the economy of punishment versus rehabilitation through the arts. Geese creates a platform for offenders to explore their potential, to facilitate a process of change, but does not make the change because change is dependent on the willingness and acceptance of the individual going through the rehabilitation process through theatre.

In conclusion, we have seen Geese Theatre Company's methods of exploring behaviour which leads to a reduction in cycle of offending through creative drama process, participant observations, cognitive behavioural approach, as well as the use of masks as a major technique in dealing with characters and analysing behaviour. Through the use of masks, offenders participating in Geese Theatre workshop step

aside from who they are, employing distancing technique in order to explore and evaluate the character and be able to change their narratives and identities. Through this experimental and experiential drama activities, it becomes a healing process for both the participants and the onlookers as they detach from their circumstances to explore issues, desires, hopes, aspiration, motivations, frustration, choices and consequences. We also see that in as much as Geese helps offenders in their healing process, they hold offenders accountable for the choices and actions that led them into prison in the first place, but they are also clear about the role of society in criminal justice. Geese is of the view that offenders need support from society to help them steer away from criminal behaviour, pointing to numerous factors which could lead individuals to offend such as poverty, neglect, homelessness and some other tragic and traumatic childhood experiences. Through cognitive behavioural therapy, Geese encourages offenders not to dwell on their negative experiences and assumptions to evaluate their present circumstances but to change their narratives positively by breaking away from their scripted negative imaginations and assumptions about who they are. The essence of Geese dramatic intervention strategies is to analyse behaviour and to help participants go through the healing process focused more on participation rather than observation. However, there may be problems along the line in evaluating the success of their practice due to the fluidity and unpredictability of individual behaviour and sometimes, resistance on the part of the participants and lack of indication of a follow-up plans after the participants have left the work-group. Geese's clients arrive to the theatre company through a process of referrals; while some do voluntarily sign up for the programme, but not everyone wants to participate. For Geese, any resistance is welcomed in the sense that it becomes part of the workshop process. Hence, Geese applies artistic techniques and methods to explore

psychological issues among offenders and able to engage the participants through the process of rehabilitation in such ways that they are transformed: not into professional actors, as is sometimes the case with Synergy or Clean break – that is very far from Geese's central purpose. Their desire, based on their core politics and practice as Watson puts it so simply, is to 'train people to be people' - to reach greater levels of self-understanding and self-awareness for their own benefit, and for the benefit of those around them.

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CONCLUSION

Human development is enshrouded in narratives, and naturally humans are storytellers and story-listeners as meanings and messages are passed through one channel to the other and from sender to the receiver. Through narratives, we express ourselves, understand or make sense of our lives. The stories we tell about ourselves reflect who we are – our identities, and the way others construct narratives about us may affect our perceptions about who we are. Using narrative research approach, I have explored and interrogated offenders' narratives through varying lenses – playwrights, playtexts and textual analyses as well as theatre companies, participants and the audience. I have also used my position as a researcher to re-tell and report narratives about criminal justice through this thesis.

In the decades since 1979, there have been theatre or performance projects in and outside prisons; researchers and practitioners have debated the purpose and impact of theatre in prisons and with offenders, and there has been an increase in awareness of the efficacy of theatre in instigating a behavioural change. Also, there have been key evaluation reports on the projects of theatre companies, such as Clean Break, Synergy Theatre Project and Geese Theatre Company, to assess the relevance and values of their projects in offenders' desistance journey as reported in Arts Alliance Evidence Library – Clean Break's 'Miss Spent' evaluation report 2010 identified the project's effectiveness in the application of role play, creative drama exercises, etc, as techniques for building confidence and developing personal skills amongst participants and creating a platform to enable women to reflect on their offending behaviour to change their narratives. Also, an evaluation report of Synergy's *Elmina's Kitchen* conducted in 2006 shown that participation in the project created positive impact on the participants as it helped them to develop team building

skills, increased confidence, reflection and behavioural changes. (www.artsevidence.org.uk. Accessed 16 October, 2016).

This thesis has explored a spectrum of playwriting techniques and different British theatre companies' practices, using theatre as a tool to explore the narratives around criminal justice system in Britain, focusing on its transformative impact not only on the offenders, but to change the perceptions of society in treatment of offenders. The playwrights whose works were explored in this thesis have developed, fictionalised and dramatized narratives about crime, punishment and justice through a combination of imagination, observation and experiences of the socio-political issues around the criminal justice system as well as carrying out research, and working in prison theatre projects. These playwrights' plays are culturally informed or influenced as they tapped from the experiences or observations of the socio-cultural and political occurrences and interactions; mapping out what it means to be in prison and the circumstances that may lead individuals to offend, and how society has responded to these issues.

This thesis moved from the exploration of the political and economic policy of the Conservative Party and its impact on the arts from 1979 onwards, to a later period up to 2017 when the arts in criminal justice has attracted funding based on its perceived impact in reducing offending behaviour. In June 2017, the National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance announced its receipt of funding offer to become part of Arts Council England's National Portfolio and in response to that, Alison Frater, the Chair of the National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance was cited as saying "this bid is in recognition of the value of many specialist organisations and individuals working with people in the criminal justice system; with individuals, families, and with staff across all art forms with impressive results – inspiring participation,

changing lives, reducing reoffending, and producing high quality art for all to enjoy" (artsincriminaljustice.org.uk. Accessed 28 July, 2017). The 1980s saw the emergence of alternative and politically motivated theatre, that rose up to counter Thatcherism, and this 'alternative' movement was further fuelled by a rise in the number of women engaged in theatre, such as Caryl Churchill, Winsome Pinnock, Timberlake Wertenbaker whose contributions helped in projecting women's voice through the arts. Also, in 1979, Clean Break, - a women-only theatre company was founded, alongside other feminist companies of the 1970s such as Women's Theatre Group, and Monstrous Regiment. Commercialisation of the mainstream theatre productions affected theatre consumption and paved the way for alternative or applied theatre.

The policies of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government, and the simultaneous rise of feminism generated reaction in the theatre, and we have seen how playwrights and practitioners have responded to changing political and cultural circumstances from 1979 to 2017. The introduction of the policy of 'short, sharp shock' in the 1980s by the Conservative government to address the issues of crime and reducing reoffending offered a punitive approach to combating offending behaviours. This policy featured in the 1979 Conservative policy manifesto, which later led to the enactment of the Criminal Justice Acts 1982. According to Lizzie Dearden, the Home Affairs Correspondent with the *Independent*, in her review of the experiences of some of the people who suffered the brutal effect of the Thatcher's Conservative policy,

> Margaret Thatcher's government rode into the office on the back of a manifesto that promised to fight crime by giving young offenders a "sharp, short shock" at the detention centres. Ministers claimed army-style discipline would deter youngsters from a life of crime, but the boys who lived through the brutal regime the policy inspired

> through the 1970s and 1980s tell a very different story (*Independent*, 22 January, 2018).

This approach was deemed dehumanising by playwrights and arts practitioners such as Timberlake Wertenbaker, who through her play *Our Country's Good* suggests that theatre can be humanising, and she emphasised transformation through theatre rather than punishment. The play promotes and encourages rehabilitation and redemption as opposed to the use of punishment which is deemed ineffective in transforming offenders. Timberlake Wertenbaker challenges the notion that individuals have innate criminal tendencies and focuses on using theatre to examine the wider society. Simon Stephens suggests,

> …it is important that those engaged with the arts in criminal justice, whatever their role, are encouraged to examine the important contextual issues that inevitably impact upon the work and its potential to contribute towards rehabilitation. Rather than focusing almost exclusively on what the theatre project is doing to change the imprisoned person, practitioners and researchers might also seek to address ways in which the projects might help transform the institution (393).

Timberlake Wertenbaker's play *Our Country's Good* and its examination of the treatment of crime and criminality in the 1780s, is used in this study to portray history as a metaphor through which we can reflect on how criminal justice system in Britain has evolved. There have been numerous studies by researchers and debates by theatre scholars and practitioners about the efficacy of prison theatre in rehabilitating offenders, which has been criticised as creating a platform for offenders to be entertained rather than punished (Thompson, 1998; Balfour, 2004; McAvinchey, 2011). But the issue remains that, there is no generally accepted one-size-fits-all

approach that proves how theatre can change behaviour, rather there have been continuous questions and experiments as to how theatre can be used to facilitate or "contemplate the possibility of change" (Watson, 2013), amongst offenders. This thesis interrogated these critical views in applied theatre, and specifically prison theatre, and developed a conversation that highlights issues around community and what it means in a prison context. James Thompson (1998) in his article in *Research and Drama Education*, "Theatre and Offenders Rehabilitation: Observation from the USA", states, "intervention, I believe, should develop an ability to be spontaneous and imagine a multitude of alternatives. We should not be there to teach the right way, but to develop a dialogue about alternatives". This suggests that there is no theatre of solutions, but instead we need a theatre of process which works towards finding creative alternatives to healing and changing behaviours. According to Bridget Keehan (2015), "theatre and drama projects have been a positive effect on those incarcerated and may contribute towards rehabilitation" (391). Keehan appears not to be specific about how theatre contributes to rehabilitation of offenders, but Simon Ruding (2012), in his review of the *Performing new lives: Prison theatre,* highlights Brent Buell's observation, "that theatre in prisons is transformative and humanising, but [that] it is a process, not something that happens overnight" (142). But Thompson is of the view that "while more research is needed, I believe there is a strong case for claiming that many theatre and arts programmes can be central to prevention approach – for engaging individuals in a process of personal, group and community change" (208). Everyone involved in prison theatre should be engaged in examining their own practices; the researchers, prison workshop facilitators, theatre practitioners, arts organisations, should all collaborate more in finding means to intervene in both issues affecting offenders and institutions because theatre should be

a bridge connecting the offenders to all the stakeholders in the field of theatre and criminal justice system. Prevention of criminal behaviour should be focused more on community or societal change because prison intervention programmes that are focused on changing individuals will not be adequate and effective without a change in community or society's perceptions about crime and social injustices.

Prison theatre creates a platform for offenders to find their voice through narrative construction and (re) discover who they are as they embark on a journey towards rehabilitation. This research looked at how a theatre process which at its heart is founded on constructing narratives about crime and justice, can instigate a behavioural change amongst offenders, and empower them to take back control of their lives within the prison and when they return to the community. Thompson (1998) in his book *Prison Theatre: Perspectives and Practices* argues that offenders participating in theatre processes have the opportunity to rehearse the roles which they will embrace when they return to the community. Theatre, I suggest, gives the offenders a safe and non-judgemental space to explore their creativity, interact with others and reflect on their own behaviour. Theatre offers the opportunity for liberation and freedom from psychological, physical and social oppression, and encourages audiences to be active participants rather than passive observers, and in this way much prison theatre is aligned with the approaches of Bertolt Brecht, Jerzy Grotowski and Augusto Boal as theatre theorists and practitioners who believed in active participation of the audience in theatre performances, and in the power of the theatre to persuade, inform and transform the minds of onlookers.

How we treat criminals – and the stories we tell about crime and punishment - reflects powerfully on ourselves as individuals, but also on society, and 'national identity' – what kind of nation do we see ourselves as? What theatre says about crime

and justice, and how and where it tells this story, is very revealing of our priorities and values as a 'nation'. Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good*, and Chloe Moss' *Sweat Box* have been respectively staged in the mainstream theatre such as the National Theatre, and in an unconventional immersive theatre space in a van outside the National Theatre. These plays explore compassion and the limits of compassion in the way we (mis) treat criminals. This thesis has shown that these playwrights through their plays are not only looking at the offenders, but also at the community or society; raising awareness, debates around punishment, justice, and audience transformation. This thesis moved from the issue of national identity and societal response to crime and justice, to individuals' narratives of forgiveness and reconciliation between victims and perpetrators of crime.

Through this research, we have seen the evidence of how individuals confront themselves in an intimate moment of forgiving and taking responsibility for their crime. In David Williamson's *A Conversation* and Bryony Lavery's *Frozen,* we see the staging or dramatization of forgiveness, reconciliation and recovery in aftermath of tragedy. Both plays have been staged in the mainstream theatre - the National Theatre, London and Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester respectively. While their narratives both examine the themes of families struggling to understand and forgive the most violent and horrific of crimes against loved ones, the techniques of these two plays are very different: *A Conversation* makes use of a kind of 'hyper-realism' depicting characters in a real time space, having a conversation, while *Frozen* is based on poetic tones, dramatic monologues, and it is non-realistic. It may arguably be unfashionable to talk about tragedy, and dramaturgical tragic structures and concepts such as hamartia and catharsis etc, but these dramaturgical structures are deeply ingrained in our theatre culture and narrative paradigms. The purpose of

tragedy is to examine the narrative of transgression and the consequences of a character's actions. In other words, tragedy just like psychoanalysis explores the motivations behind characters' actions leading to evocation of pity and fear in the audience. Both psychoanalysis and tragedy work through narrative and story-telling, exploring the relationship between action and motivation, cause and effect, unconscious and conscious mind upon which human behaviour is based; tragic dramaturgical structures and effects are evident in the work of many of the playwrights examined in this thesis, and tragedy can be seen to have a particular relationship with themes of crime, transgression, and justice. Tragic concepts, whether consciously or unconsciously, underpin all theatrical explorations of issues such as the search for causes; the legacy of the past; and the quest to understand individual agency versus the pressure of uncontrollable external forces. Tragedy is therefore a very appropriate vessel to explore question of being 'born bad'' versus the social causes of crime and criminal behaviour; and to explore the recovery of family/community after a terrible crime has occurred. Tragedy invariably asks who is to blame? And in answering this question, we see that there is a cathartic, healing process of purging guilt by facing up and acknowledging fault and error (hamartia). This idea about cathartic or healing process has generated different reactions amongst the audience and participants in various narratives or theatre genres I explored.

The notion of catharsis has been used as a concept for analysing the issues raised in this thesis – in particular the heightening and purgation of emotions leading to recovery and healing. Some of the plays, and theatre events, that I have described and analysed in this thesis, aspire to a cathartic effect. Their goal is to send us out of the theatre feeling that something has been – or at least could be - put right; that recovery, in full or in part – if not fully realised at that moment – might at last be

achievable at some point in the not too distant future. However, other playwrights and playtexts disturb and deny catharsis – they leave us unsettled, with underlying problems unresolved. Sometimes, these playwrights tend to withhold or reject the idea of catharsis – their goal is not to create a consoling sense of closure and resolution. Some of the plays I have discussed offer catharsis in a more traditional, more straightforward sense. In *Our Country's Good*, we see the convicts come out of the tragic narrative which society has written for them regarding the circumstances of their lives and the experiences of being convicts, and in a metatheatrical dimension (in a play within a play), begin to re-narrate their stories, to release all the negative feelings they have about themselves, and replace them with positive emotions, of being good citizens, imagining and assuming different roles while identifying with the dramatic characters. Audiences watching the play *Our Country's Good* are engaged with the dramatic techniques of storytelling, and in some ways may relate the experiences of the convicts characters to their own circumstances, and begin to imagine or position themselves in the shoes of the characters regarding their actions, as well as the uncontrollable circumstances that mitigated against them, such as poverty, abusive childhood experience, and some biological traits that have influenced their behaviours. As the characters recreate their identities in positive ways, the audience feels a sense of fulfilment and relief as the plights of the characters remind them that they have the capabilities and choices to re-write their own stories and change their own identities. *Our Country's Good* reminds the audience that arts can transform, enlighten, and push us beyond unimaginable circumstances. It also reminds us of the redeeming power of theatre as we face suffering and challenges. The audience are put through these painful feelings of exile and suffering, the vulnerability of both the officers and convicts, the desire for change

and ultimately the need to pursue a common goal towards redemption or transformation. The audience are called upon to enter into the world of the play as witnesses, to understand that both the officers, convicts and the audience all share a common humanity. As the audience are exposed to theatre's ability to tell the truth, they perceive the convicts as complex characters entangled in their circumstances as opposed to being born evil, they feel a sense of relief and closure that they can be transformed. This brings a kind of redemptive purging of emotion.

In *A Conversation*, we see the staging of the play as a therapeutic session where characters are presented with a difficult situation of coming to terms with the circumstances that led to the death of Donna. There is a kind of emotional and psychological exploration of the innermost feelings of the characters through a conversation to bring ashore their failures, complicity and responsibility in relation to the tragic death of Donna, which leads to an understanding and a new insight into the circumstances that influenced their individual actions and collective responsibilities. The audience are pushed to experience heightened emotions as they watch the characters struggle with suppressed emotions which are released through a difficult and challenging conversation and subsequent confessions; we witness the characters become purified and refined of their emotions, and move towards a realm of understanding and realisation, leading to forgiveness and reconciliation between the families of the victim and the perpetrator (in which case it brought about healing between the two families). As both families feel that a heavy burden has been lifted off, the audience is empowered to reflect on their own behaviour and how their actions may affect others. Such communal understanding brings a kind of healing to both the characters and the audience.

In *The Long Road*, Mary's quest to confront Emma, the murderer of her son, and the haunted feelings of not getting a closure reach a point of release as Emma apologises for her atrocious deeds. This point of closure offers a relief and healing to Mary as she lets go of her suppressed emotions. The audience may also enjoy the feeling of recovery and healing from the heightened emotional suspense that awaits them as Mary searched for an answer to the motivation behind the murder of her son. In *This Wide Night* by Chloe Moss, the character Marie holding on to the narrative that the wind of life was against her right from her mother's womb leaves the audience with a sense of understanding of the impact of fate in crafting the stories of our lives.

However, the cathartic closure of narrative is not unproblematically present in all the narratives I have discussed – *Sweatbox, Dream Pill* – where the ending leaves us frozen in a paralysis of empathetic suffering, without closure or release. Chloe Moss' *Sweatbox* does not offer the audience a feeling of healing, rather it leaves the audience feeling more disturbed about the experiences of offenders in criminal justice system. Although the audiences are empathetically engaged in the immersive experience of witnessing the dehumanising effects of the control of the prisoners' bodies, it transports them to another realm of understanding but does not lift them to a cathartic realm where they experience healing or recovery, rather it awakens their sensibilities to understand the prisoners' circumstances. The experience makes them more empathetically aware of the plight of the offenders in prison, but it offers no cathartic feeling of closure. Rebecca Prichard's *Dream Pill* similarly does not offer a kind of conventional catharsis, rather it leaves the audience with a disturbing sense of complicity and horror at the violations of human rights taking place in our midst, affecting the youngest and most vulnerable members of society. This play triggers

audience sensibilities and calls them to take social action. It does not lead to a point of purging the emotion in a cathartic way but calls the audience to have a deeper sense of reflection on their own actions and omission of action.

At times in other plays I have discussed, we are offered a catharsis that is at best uneasy – for example, the flowers and window boxes of *London Road* can't utterly banish the ghosts of the dead women who have been brutally murdered, but whose status as drug addicts and sex workers seems to make them marginal, even in death: a social blight to be expunged in life; a painful memory to be buried in death. Social recovery after crime can't help but beg questions about how quickly we could and should recover: which deaths matter most to us – whose deaths we recover most easily from. Communal understanding is very much the subject of *London Road*, in which we see a community coming together to find a way to transform tragic circumstances into a positive light by finding a way to generate feeling of recovery and healing. Audiences who engage in the tragic incidents of the play as they develop may be gripped with empathy, but at the other end, seeing the community change the tide of the ugly incident to aura of beauty, may feel fulfilled by engaging in the aesthetic experience. Also, the use of music in *London Road* can stir a moment of new feeling that leaves the audience feeling renewed and purified as they watch the community move towards recovery. The ghosts of the dead women make a brief appearance, reminding us of the women/mothers/daughters who lost their lives. Some critics thought the play did not engage enough in the sorrow of these murdered women which in my view makes the cathartic recovery of the community a little troubling.

The play *Frozen,* similarly, does not offer an unproblematic catharsis. The deaths in *Frozen* – the implied suicide of Ralph – leaves us painfully aware that his

life is unredeemed; his damage is beyond healing. Catharsis is not without its problematic aspect. Ralph's recognition of the fact that he committed a crime of murder against an innocent young girl and to come to the point of saying 'I am sorry' is a way of emotional release, which offers an aura of healing to Nancy as she reaches a point of closure. But that does not lead Ralph to healing, rather it stirs a traumatic moment of suicidal thought upon realisation of his atrocity. Ralph's implied suicide suggests that he cannot be healed, and this makes the audience feel troubled or disturbed as Ralph's life is destroyed by the trauma and emotional havoc he went through as a child – trauma which has then in turn been passed on to others: the innocent child he killed, and the family whose lives are irrevocably changed. Trauma is not healed or resolved for Ralph; it burns out in his own self-destruction.

Sometimes, the works carried out by the theatre companies I investigated do not work for everybody. The hope and intention is for everybody to benefit in the healing and recovery process, but it works differently for individuals and does not work at all for others. Ester Baker and Andy Watson confirmed this in my respective interviews with them, and they went on to say that sometimes the only way for people's behaviour to change is by maturing and growing up. Age can lead to more reflection and to less impulsive behaviour. In this sense, as an individual gets older, he begin to reflect on his behaviour and become able to make positive choices and decision that can help in transforming his life. The arts in prison is invariably intended to aid or instigate a behavioural change but it does not always work for everyone. Watson in an interview confirms that sometimes putting their clients in a position that will make them reflect or remember their past experiences can be traumatic for the individuals, which means that some arts practices designed to produce the recovery and healing of individuals can in fact put them in a stressful or

uncomfortable situation. Therefore, the nature of catharsis can be unpredictable and problematic; and while catharsis and tragic frameworks offer a useful theatrical vocabulary for exploring ideas of closure, redemption, justice and healing, the plays, and practices I have discussed in this thesis, could sometimes be described as cathartic in intention or effect, but equally they could sometimes be described as strongly anti-cathartic. Catharsis does not generally, automatically or necessarily lead to healing in personal or social context, rather in some cases, it can lead to aggressive behaviour, emotional or psychological turbulence, and it can create traumatic experiences for or within an individual.

Alongside the detailed examination of narratives found in 'prison theatre' plays, this thesis asks, how do the very different manifestos of the theatre companies at the forefront of 'prison theatre' work in the UK embody the tensions and conflicts in the debate about applied theatre in prisons? We see that Clean Break is politically motivated in advocating for the equal treatment for women, and frequently in its work implicitly argues that society and its inequalities are responsible for creating crime; and its social institutions for turning away from the plights of women. Clean Break educates the public about women and crime, and through plays constructs narratives about criminal justice which engage with the audience to wake them up to realities of the evil in our society, such as child trafficking in Rebecca Prichard's *Dream Pill* (2010). Clean Break's work analyses the role played by society in crime and injustices against women. The audience in *Dream Pill* see themselves to be aiding and abetting crime by not taking adequate actions or measures to challenge crime and injustice in our society. Also, the audience questions who makes criminals and how does society respond to social injustices in Vivienne Franzmann's *Pests* (2014). We have also seen how Clean Break turns the spotlight on its own practice to question its

own processes – (the whole endeavour of prison theatre), and to reflect on the potentially invasive nature of a writer who goes into prison as a researcher and appropriates the voices or stories of the prisoners as witnessed in Rebecca Lenkwiczki's *That Almost Unnameable Lust* (2010).

We have seen how these theatre companies through their varying ideologies and practices have engaged with playwrights, who work with offenders and write plays about prison, and through practical and creative processes encourage participation and transformation of not only the offenders, but also a change in public perceptions about crime, punishment and justice. While Clean Break points to the social causes of crime, and in particular the complex root causes for female offending behaviour, which may be located as far back as the person's childhood environment, we have seen that the work of Synergy Theatre Project emphasises practicality, asking, what can we do to rehabilitate and resettle or reintegrate offenders back into society. Synergy is more interested in high production values and artistic quality, professionalism, employability of their beneficiaries, and they are more practical rather than idealistic. This thesis demonstrated that Synergy uses theatre practice and play productions to give voice to their beneficiaries as they adopt pragmatic approaches through creative processes: rehearsals, improvisation, playwriting, participation in play productions in different venues to create and listen to individual's success story. Synergy designs programmes and engages in projects that create a platform for their beneficiaries to be fully involved in their rehabilitation process, focused on giving power back to the people to reflect on their past behaviour and to take back control of their lives by encouraging and giving them opportunity to explore different drama techniques, work with professionals, create their own stories and carve new image for themselves.

We have also seen that Geese Theatre Company does not make use of playwrights, play scripts, nor professional actor training; in the words of Andy Watson, "we train people to be people" (personal interview, 2016). We looked at how they focus their effort on the creative process as a way of rehabilitation; engaging with specific issues affecting individuals, and through exploration of behaviour, encourages offenders to reflect on their past experiences in order to create a renewed sense of agency and the potential to choose new paths. Through creative drama processes and a forum theatre approach, participants explore the behaviour of others and are able to intervene in order to proffer solutions for a way forward. It is evident that Geese Theatre Company lays no emphasis on the use of poetic language, dramatic structure, nor the presence of an audience; rather, emphasis is more on the process rather than theatre as a product for an audience.

Prison theatre in the UK since 1979, therefore, has developed in many creative directions despite the initial hostile political terrain of Thatcher's government, with its emphasis on a 'short sharp shock' approach to offending behaviour, coupled with a 'free market' approach to the arts that cut arts funding and government subsidy for the arts and encouraged commercialism in theatre production. This led to the evolution of alternative theatre practices which now have become mainstream. Audiences in today's theatre are not just looking for performances on West End and nationally subsidized stages that entertain, rather, alternative theatre practitioners are reaching out to wider audiences with performances that have high artistic values, and that have the flexibility to be presented in various venues from the prison to local community and to the National. Attitudes to crime, justice and punishment are of course historically contingent – as Wertenbaker's play foregrounds. Of course, the attitudes of the 1780s seem extraordinary to us today but equally, British society has

moved on from the 'short, sharp, shock' approach of the late 70s and early 80s. Prison theatre has opened doors so that convicts and ex-convicts work with theatre professionals in acting, directing, scene design and in different areas of theatre productions. We see ex-convicts perform in mainstream stage, while some work either as actors or behind the scene as theatre personnel. There are more opportunities now for ex-convicts to engage in employment as evident in the support given to the beneficiaries working with Synergy Theatre Project. Many ex-convicts have gone on to start their own arts projects, some are actors, and some have gained places in other areas of endeavour, while some have gone on to pursue careers in education. Clean Break itself was of course founded by two women who had spent time in prison.

This thesis has demonstrated that, there has been a circle of change in the ways alternative theatre has evolved from 1979 to 2017. Theatre in 1979 and the 1980s focused on finding alternative means to address issues affecting the individual and society, and in later decades, prison theatre moved from alternative venues to mainstream stages, where audiences are invited to be entertained and to re-examine their responsibilities in relation to crime and social justice. Prison theatre asks more questions than offers fixed answers, but its story, if we look at its history from 1979, is one that surely must be regarded as a resounding success: these companies continue to flourish both in the most marginal and unseen of spaces (in rooms within prisons) and also in the most visible and prestigious of spaces: the West End, the Royal Court, the National Theatre. To be inside a prison van experiencing an immersive Clean Break piece such as *Sweatbox*, yet at the same time for that van to be parked on London's South Bank, outside the National Theatre, just metres from the site of a new lavish production of *Our Country's Good* and also the site of a conference on the

purpose and future of prison theatre, visibly illustrates this success perhaps more clearly than any Arts Council report.

In conclusion, this thesis has explored the use of narrative in diverse contexts – British playwrights and theatre companies have created not only narrative spaces, but also a space to interrogate the process and outcome of using theatre for rehabilitation. All the companies and playwrights whose work I have explored in this thesis are narrative experts, who have used narrative to probe into criminal justice. Through exploration and understanding of the implicitly narrative strategies employed in the playtexts – *Our Country's Good* argues against the narrative that offenders are naturally born criminals and we see how participating in a play production helps the convict characters to change their narratives and adorn new identities, we have also seen in *Frozen* a quest for narrative closure as Nancy confronts Ralph the killer of her daughter to seek answers to the motivations behind his actions, and in *A Conversation* where the family of the murdered Donna pushes to find answers to why their daughter was murdered – all to close the narrative. In *London Road,* we see the narrative of community redemption in the aftermath of a crime and in *The Long Road,* the fragmented narrative of a vulnerable and unprotected childhood experience. *Sounds Like an Insult* tells the story of women with mental health issues and how their childhood experiences influenced their contact with the criminal justice system, and in *That Almost Unnameable Lust,* the playwright criticizes the role of theatre practitioners who re (construct) the narratives and appropriate the voices of the offenders who they appear to represent. We have seen that *This Wide Night* dramatizes stories, challenges and experiences of women who struggle to cope with life outside prison, and *Pests* explores the narrative of a neglected childhood and points to the failure of the social support system as a

contributory factor to criminal behaviour. *Dream Pill* points to the audience' complicity and society's indifferent attitude that allows crime to occur, while *Sweatbox* shares the narrative of the power relation between prisoners and the prison officers as well as the de-humanising impact of the control of prisoners' bodies. etc; and as a researcher-observer in the post-production discussion of the play *Girls Like That* at the Unicorn Theatre London, I witnessed as the performers shared the narratives of their traumatic childhood experiences and the effects on their behaviour. Offenders are offered public spaces to tell their stories and get their voice heard as seen in Synergy's performance in Victoria and Albert Museum, and through acting and playwriting workshops, offenders are equipped with the skills to (re) create fictional stories and share life experiences on stage. Crafting a narrative is a reflective process that puts the author in control – the author becomes aware of choices that can be made and how the story turns out in the end. This feeling of control and of actively making choices is something offenders could transfer beneficially as they perceive 'narrative' or 'narrative-making' as a healing, sense-making process. However, the idea about transformation, healing or recovery offers different experiences for the offenders, participants and audience, which sometimes may not produce the intended result. Having examined these playwrights/dramaturgies and the ideologies and practices of the three British theatre companies – Clean Break, Synergy Theatre Project and Geese Theatre Company, it is clear that from its difficult origins in the 1970s, prison theatre seems to have succeeded in straddling the alternative and the mainstream; in finding ways to speak both to, and for, the most silenced and underprivileged members of our society, as well as to the wider public. For its mission and message to remain effective, we must continue to explore and create a

sustainable environment where narratives in prison theatre and arts in general can thrive.

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