Our Country's Good

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF TIMBERLAKE WERTENBAKER

Timberlake Wertenbaker was born in New York City but grew up primarily in Basque country in the town of Ciboure, France. Her father, Charles Wertenbaker, was a journalist, as was her mother, who's best known for the book she wrote about his death. After graduating in 1966 from St. John's College, Wertenbaker began to write, though she soon started teaching full-time. It wasn't until the 1980s that she moved to London and started writing plays. In 1983, she became a writer for the theater company Shared Experience before moving on in 1984 to write for the Royal Court Theatre. While writing for the Royal Court, she put out *The Grace of Mary Traverse*, for which she won her first award. In 1988 she debuted her most famous play, *Our Country's Good*, which she adapted from Thomas Keneally's novel *The Playmaker*. All in all, she has written 29 original plays, in addition to a number of translations and radio programs. She now lives with her husband (the writer John Man) in Norwich, England, where she is the Chair of Playwriting at the University of East Anglia.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Our Country's Good takes place in the late eighteenth century, when the British government began exiling convicts to its colonies in Australia. Although Britain had previously transported its criminals to the United States, this ended with the onset of the American Revolution. To remedy England's already overcrowded prisons, the government established its first Australian penal colony in 1788 in Sydney, which was the continent's first British—and, for that matter, European—colony. For roughly the next eighty years, England transported male and female convicts to these Australian settlements, most often exiling people for relatively insignificant crimes, since more serious criminals were usually executed rather than embarking upon the long voyage to the colonies. The vast majority of the prisoners who were eventually set free in Australia ended up staying on the continent and making lives for themselves, which is why approximately one in five Australian citizens can trace their lineage back to former convicts. Furthermore, it's worth noting that many of the characters in *Our Country's Good* were real people, including Captain Arthur Phillip (who was the first Governor of New South Wales) and Robert Sideway (who founded Australia's first theater company), among others.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Wertenbaker wrote *Our Country's Good* as a stage adaptation of the novel *The Playmaker* by Thomas Kenneally. Like Wertenbaker's play, *The Playmaker* is about a penal colony in Sydney Cove, Australia, where a Lieutenant works closely with a number of convicts to stage a play. In both the novel and Wertenbaker's work, the play that the convicts produce is *The Recruiting Officer*, a piece of theater written by the Irish author George Farquhar in 1706. Farquhar's play is about two military officers and chronicles their various romantic and mishaps.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Our Country's Good
- **When Published:** *Our Country's Good* premiered on September 10, 1988
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Realism, Historical Theater
- **Setting:** The British penal colonies in Sydney, Australia in 1788
- **Climax:** Unable to overcome his guilt about having executed two men, Harry Brewer falls ill and dies.
- **Antagonist:** Captain Watkin Tench and Major Robbie Ross

EXTRA CREDIT

Inspiration. Searching for inspiration while working on *Our Country's Good*, Wertenbaker visited a theater production put on by the inmates of a prison in West London.

Research. As part of her research, Wertenbaker read a number of journals written by convicts who came to Australia with the First Fleet (the 11 convict ships that were the first to arrive in the penal colonies).

PLOT SUMMARY

It is 1787, and a fleet of British convict ships is bound for Australia, where Captain Arthur Phillip will become Governor of one of the region's first penal colonies. Not long after the military officers and their prisoners arrive, Phillip discusses the merits of punishment with Judge Collins, Captain Tench, and Midshipman Harry Brewer. Phillip is averse to cruel displays of discipline, but Tench believes in the value of capital punishment. As this discussion continues, the men turn their attention to the **hanging** of several convicts, which is set to take place soon. Phillip expresses his reservations regarding the spectacle, but Judge Collins suggests that public hangings instill a "mortar of fear" in the convicts that is necessary for a well-functioning

"civilisation." Agreeing with this, Tench explains that the hangings are the convicts' "favourite form of entertainment." This appalls Phillip, who suggests that the convicts should be exposed to other forms of entertainment, and when Tench makes fun of him for this, Phillip upholds that "no one is born naturally cultured," saying that even he had to learn to appreciate things like theater. All the same, he instructs Harry to move forward with the hanging.

In his tent one night, Lieutenant Ralph Clark writes in his diary, addressing Alicia, his wife who stayed behind in England. Eventually, Harry visits and starts to talk about his loneliness. It has been a month since the convict ship first landed, which is when Harry hanged the convicts Phillip was discussing in the opening scene. One of those convicts was Handy Baker, who was the second lover of Duckling, a female convict with whom Harry is also involved. "Ralph, I saw Handy Baker last night," Harry admits, insisting that "he's come back." He explains that Duckling has stopped talking to him, suggesting that it's because he was involved in Handy's execution. "I didn't want to hang him," he says. He also says that Duckling claims "she never feels anything" with him, worrying aloud that perhaps she *did* "feel something" when she was with Handy. Harry then explains that he saved Duckling's life by getting her transported to Australia instead of executed, though she isn't grateful to him for this favor.

Ralph then complains that Governor Phillip doesn't make time for him. He brainstorms how he might catch the Governor's attention, and Harry informs him that Phillip wants someone to produce a play with the convicts. This surprises Ralph, who finds it ridiculous to think the prisoners might actually act in a play, but Harry insists that some of them are "good women," though he immediately complains about Duckling again. Ralph says he has a theater background and asks Harry to mention this to Phillip.

At the behest of Phillip, Ralph holds auditions for *The Recruiting Officer*, which is the comedy they have decided to stage. Among the first people Ralph casts are Mary Brenham in the lead role and her friend Dabby Bryant in a small supporting role. Ralph is quite taken by Mary, whose reading skills and articulate nature impress him. He also casts Liz Morden, an unpopular convict who's often violent and rude. Not long after this initial casting session, Phillip discusses "the merits of the theatre" with a number of his associates, all of whom have differing opinions regarding whether or not the play is a good idea. On one side, Major Ross and Captain Tench remain critical, thinking that criminals are incapable of change and thus should simply be forced to serve their time. Phillip and Ralph, on the other hand, believe the play will have transformative effects. Reverend Johnson and Judge Collins waver between both sides. Ralph insists that the auditions he's had have already made an impact on the convicts. "They seemed to acquire a dignity," he says, "[…] they seemed to lose some of their corruption." He also points out that the play will not only give the convicts a distraction, but will allow the guards to come together and pretend they're back in England.

As preparations continue, Harry tries to convince Duckling to start talking to him again, pleading with her to acknowledge him. They live in the same tent, but she's clearly resentful of him. When she suggests that Harry should let her fraternize with the rest of the convicts, he becomes suspicious. The two fight, and finally Duckling says, "I wish I was dead. At least when you're dead, you're free." Taken aback, Harry suggests that Duckling should act in Ralph's play, though he warns her against sleeping with Ralph.

During this period, Dabby and Mary rehearse their lines. When Liz tries to join them, Dabby insults her. Nonetheless, Mary helps them both practice, since she's the only one who can read. Before long, Dabby and Liz end up fighting, at which point Ketch Freeman—the colony's hangman—appears and asks why they're "at each other's throats." "I wouldn't talk of throats if I was you, Mr Hangman Ketch Freeman," Liz says, and the three women berate him. That night, Freeman visits Ralph's tent and tells him his life story, explaining that he always gets in trouble simply for being part of a group that collectively breaks the law. In fact, he was with Handy Baker when he and several others stole food, but Ketch avoided execution by agreeing to become the colony's hangman. However, he can't stand that everyone hates him, so he pleads with Ralph to be included in the play, hoping this will help him redeem himself.

At the first official rehearsal, Ralph gathers the actors, a group that includes Mary, Liz, Dabby, Ketch, Duckling, a sophisticated literary man named John Wisehammer, and a posh man named Robert Sideway. For the majority of the rehearsal, the convicts quarrel, as nobody wants to work with Liz and everybody resents Ketch. As Sideway presents himself in an absurdly dramatic manner to the imaginary audience, a convict known as Black Caesar rushes in and insists upon joining the play, saying he'll play a servant even though the part doesn't exist. This annoys Ralph, but he agrees.

As the rehearsal continues, Major Ross and Captain Campbell appear and inform Ralph that John Arscott and Henry Kable—two men he originally cast and who failed to turn up at rehearsal—have escaped with "three others" into the woods. He then blames the play for this turn of events. Seeing Caesar among the actors, Ross tells Ralph that the convict was with the group of escapees before turning back. Ross also sees Wisehammer and accuses him simply because he's Jewish. Lastly, he says that Liz was last seen with Kable near the colony's food rations. "Liz Morden, you will be tried for stealing from the stores," he says. "You know the punishment? Death by hanging."

In jail, Liz, Caesar, and Wisehammer talk with Arscott, who has been recaptured. Eventually, Mary, Sideway, and Duckling enter and resume rehearsal with their fellow actors, assuring

them that they can still imagine they're in the play even if they're bound in chains. Around this time, Ralph visits Phillip and tells him he wants to stop the play, since the other officers are against it. However, Phillip encourages him to persevere, pointing out that it's natural to make "enemies" when breaking "conventions." He then references the Socratic dialogue *Meno*, in which Socrates teaches an uneducated slave geometry. "When he treats the slave boy as a rational human being, the boy becomes one, he loses his fear, and he becomes a competent mathematician," he says, suggesting that Ralph should do the same with his actors. He also says that he wanted Ralph to cast Liz so that they can make an "example" of her by spotlighting her "redemption." Ralph agrees to forge onward with the play.

One night, Harry sits in his tent drinking rum and hearing the voices of people like Handy and Thomas Barrett, both of whom he helped execute. As he works himself into a tormented rage, Duckling runs to him and he accuses her of cheating on him with Handy on the beach, though she has just offered to let him have sex with her to calm his nerves. Not long after this scene, Harry falls ill and dies, and Duckling mourns his death, having finally confessed her love for him.

One night, Ralph finds Mary rehearsing alone on the beach. When he joins her and recites the lines of her character's lover, they begin to feel a connection, and their fake embrace turns into something real. As they take off their clothes, Ralph admits he's never seen a naked woman before—not even his wife.

Liz and the others are let out of jail and allowed to rehearse. However, Liz has been sentenced to death, having refused to plead her innocence during her trial. To rectify this, Phillip meets with her, Judge Collins, Ralph, and Ross. Eventually, Liz admits she didn't defend herself because she didn't think anyone would listen to her—an idea that deeply troubles Phillip and Collins, who want to create a just judicial system. Finally, Liz insists that she steal food, and Collins grants her a retrial.

On the night of the play, Dabby tells her fellow actors that she plans to slip away during the bows, but Mary pleads with her not do this, saying Ralph will be "blamed." The rest of the players agree, and Mary points out that they'll never be allowed to act again if Dabby runs away. As such, Dabby tacitly agrees not to go through with her plan. Shortly after this conversation, Ralph enters and prepares the cast to go out on stage. Wisehammer reads a prologue he wrote, and though Ralph admits it's good, he insists that it's too "political." Sideway assures Wisehammer that he can read it in the "Sideway Theatre," which he intends to establish when he's eventually set free. With this, Arscott steps out onto stage and delivers the play's opening monologue, which draws thunderous applause from the audience.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Captain Arthur Phillip (Governor Phillip) – A captain of the Royal Navy who has been brought out of retirement to serve as governor of the penal colony in Australia. Phillip is a kind and empathetic man who is against overt displays of violent punishment. He also believes that anyone can change for the better. Because of these views, he's often at odds with Captain Tench and Major Ross, both of whom are strong advocates for capital punishment and think that criminals can't be reformed. Despite this disagreement, Phillip decides to put on a play in the colony, enlisting Lieutenant Ralph Clark to cast and direct the piece. When his colleagues challenge the value of this activity, Phillip asserts that the play will be good for the convicts because it will encourage them to embody a more "refined" way of life. Eventually, Ralph loses heart during the rehearsals, but Phillip inspires him again by helping him see that it's important to give people opportunities to improve themselves. In addition, the Governor also advocates for Liz Morden when she gets in trouble for supposedly stealing food. Along with Judge Collins and Ralph, he urges her to tell the truth about what happened, suspecting that the only reason she refuses to testify on her own behalf is because she doesn't think anyone will listen to her. In doing so, he demonstrates his benevolent style of leadership.

Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark – A man who, unlike his fellow guards, is focused on remaining loyal to his wife, Betsey Alicia. This, however, is quite difficult, since Alicia stayed behind in England when Ralph came to Australia to work in the penal colony. A pious man, Ralph says his prayers and writes in his journal, addressing his entries to Alicia and telling her about his life, including his frustration that he hasn't been promoted to First Lieutenant yet. Just before he's about to kiss Alicia's picture a thousand times one night (something he does once a week), Harry Brewer visits him in his tent and mentions that Captain Phillip is looking for someone to direct a play in the colony. Because Ralph thinks Phillip never pays attention to him, he tells Harry to let the Governor know that he has some experience in the theater. As such, he becomes the director of the play, choosing *The Recruiting Officer* by the Irish playwright George Farquhar and beginning the casting. In particular, he's impressed by Mary Brenham, whom he casts in the lead role. Throughout the course of rehearsals, Ralph develops a certain fondness for certain convicts and becomes convinced that the play has a positive effect on them. He even convinces Liz Morden to fight harder to prove her innocence when she's sentenced to death for stealing. In one of the play's final scenes, Ralph finds Mary rehearsing on the beach and joins her by reciting the lines of her character's lover. When they eventually embrace, they find that they're drawn to one another in real life. As such, they suddenly begin taking off their clothes,

realizing they're in love.

Mary Brenham – A convict in the penal colony. Unlike many of her fellow convicts, Mary went to school until she was ten. Because of this, she's able to read, which sets her apart from many of the other people in the colony. As a result, Lieutenant Ralph Clark specifically seeks her out when he's casting *The Recruiting Officer*, knowing she'll be the best person to play the lead role. When he sees her at the audition, he isn't disappointed, and immediately casts her. Shortly thereafter, Mary's friend Dabby makes fun of her, saying she should sleep with Ralph because he's clearly interested in her. However, Mary doesn't like this joke, since Dabby encouraged her to sleep with a sailor on the convict ship on their way to the penal colony. Although this affair earned her more food, she still feels as if she can't "wash the sin away." Throughout the rehearsals, Mary helps her fellow convicts learn their lines and even lends Liz Morden a helping hand despite the fact that she—like everyone else—doesn't like associating with her. What's more, Mary ends up falling in love with Ralph, and they make love on the beach not long before the play's opening night. It is partially because of her feelings for him that she discourages Dabby when she (Dabby) reveals that she's going to run away in the commotion of the play's final scene. Telling Dabby that Ralph will be held accountable for her disappearance, she and her fellow players convince her to stay.

Captain Watkin Tench – An officer in the penal colony, and one of the primary antagonists of the play. Unlike Governor Phillip, Tench believes that criminals can't be reformed. In keeping with this, he thinks it's a waste of time to let the convicts participate in a play, upholding that they should only be exposed to punishment and labor. He also believes that all of the prisoners in the colony deserve to be treated harshly. A strong advocate of capital punishment, he has a hard time understanding why Phillip opposes the spectacle of public executions.

Captain David Collins (Judge Collins) – Another captain overseeing the penal colony in Australia. Collins has been chosen to fulfill the position of the colony's judge. As such, he helps Phillip create a moral and just society, eventually stressing the importance of a healthy judicial system. At first, he appears to endorse the practice of public execution, suggesting that the convicts won't behave unless they're stricken by the "mortar of fear." However, he later helps Phillip and Ralph convince Liz Morden to advocate for herself in order to avoid the death sentence, saying that it would be very unfortunate if convicts like her came to see the justice system in Australia as incapable of recognizing the truth. In this way, then, he helps her avoid the death sentence while also contributing to Governor Phillips's efforts to create a well-functioning society.

Midshipman Harry Brewer – A low-ranking officer in the Royal Navy. Harry has worked for Governor Phillip for a long time, though he himself isn't involved in much of the penal colony's decision-making. Instead, he focuses primarily on his relationship with a convict named Duckie, of whom he's quite possessive. Because Duckie has had other lovers, Harry is extremely jealous. This is exacerbated by the fact that he played a part in her late lover's execution, helping hang a marine named Handy Baker who was caught stealing from the colony's food rations. Ever since this happened, Duckling has been quiet and cold to Harry, though she lives in his tent. Harry complains about this one night to Ralph, lamenting that having sex with Duckling is like "fucking a corpse." At the same time, he's clearly quite guilty about the role he played in Handy Baker's execution. He's even haunted by Handy's ghost, which visits him more and more throughout the play. In an attempt to get Duckling to forgive him, Harry encourages her to join Ralph's play, since she doesn't like that he doesn't let her do anything with other people. As the play nears its premiere, though, Harry is increasingly tormented by the ghosts of Handy and the other men he helped hang. While lying on his deathbed, Duckling confesses her love to him, pleading with him to stay alive, but this does nothing to keep him from dying.

Duckling Smith – A convict in the penal colony. Duckling is romantically involved with Harry Brewer and even lives with him in his tent, though she resents him because of how controlling he is. Indeed, he doesn't even let her fraternize with the other convicts or guards, thinking she'll have sex with them. What's more, Duckling resents Harry because he played a part in the **hanging** of Handy Baker, her other lover. Throughout the play, she is terse and cold to Harry, though she often becomes momentarily affectionate toward him and reminds him how much he likes having sex with her. In an attempt to make her happy, Harry encourages her to join Ralph's play—something that pleases her. Not long thereafter, though, Harry falls ill, and though she pleads with him to stay alive by telling him that she loves him, he dies. Nevertheless, Duckling goes through with her role in the play, refusing to step down because of her grief.

Liz Morden – One of the convicts in the penal colony. Liz is the most insubordinate prisoner of the entire group, often tempting the guards to punish her by misbehaving or speaking out of turn. It is for this reason that Governor Phillip wants Ralph to cast her in the play, eventually explaining to him that he wants to make an "example" out of her—not by executing her, but by spotlighting her "redemption." However, he encounters some difficulty with this plan when Henry Kable, John Arscott, and several other prisoners try to escape. This affects Liz because a soldier claims to have seen her when he was drunk the night before the group ran away. Indeed, this soldier upholds that Liz helped Kable steel food for the journey. Because of this, Major Ross insists that she should be hanged. During her trial, Liz doesn't advocate for herself, thinking that it won't matter what she says. Luckily for her, though, Judge Collins and Governor Phillip suspect that this is why she doesn't try to defend herself, so they give her another chance, ultimately convincing her to explain her innocence and thus

avoid the death penalty.

Handy Baker – A marine who thinks it's unfair that the officers and the convicts get the same amount of food. Because of this, he steals from the food supply with Ketch and several others. Handy Baker is one of Duckling's lovers, a fact that gives Harry Brewer extra motivation to hang him. In the aftermath of this execution, Harry is haunted by Handy's ghost, who visits him periodically and torments him by saying sexually explicit things about Duckling and guilt-tripping him about his involvement with the **hanging**.

Ketch Freeman (James Freeman) – Another convict in the penal colony. Along with Handy Baker, Ketch is part of the group that steals from the colony's food supply at the beginning of the play. Unlike the others, though, he avoids the death penalty by accepting a job as the colony's hangman. This upsets him deeply, but since he was only going along with the plan to steal food, he thinks he doesn't deserve to die. Still, though, he admits to Ralph that he's worried God won't forgive him for **hanging** his co-conspirators. Furthermore, his role as the hangman has made him wildly unpopular in the camp. Because of this, he pleads with Ralph to be cast in the play, hoping he'll be able to redeem himself by joining the production. At first, the other actors only continue to resent him, refusing to act alongside him. By the end, though, they stop giving him a hard time.

Dabby Bryant – A convict in the penal colony. A loud and crass individual, Dabby is Mary's closest friend in the settlement, which is why she decides that—since Mary's going to be in the play—she wants to act in *The Recruiting Officer*, too. This is much to Ralph's chagrin, since Dabby isn't as talented as Mary. Nevertheless, he gives her a small role, and Mary helps her learn her lines, since she can't read. Just before the first performance, Dabby tells her fellow players that she intends to sneak away while everyone is taking a bow, but Mary and the others convince her to stay, pointing out that running away will only make life worse for everyone else.

John Arscott – One of the convicts in the penal colony. Ralph casts Arscott in *The Recruiting Officer*, but the prisoner runs away with Henry Kable, Black Caesar, and several others before the first rehearsal. However, he's caught, brought back to the colony, and placed in jail, where he complains to Liz and Wisehammer that the "compass" he bought from a sailor failed him (the compass, it turns out, is just a piece of paper with the word "North" written on it). Because of this failed attempt, Arscott becomes rather hopeless, insisting that there's no "escape" from the colony. Later, though, he becomes immersed in *The Recruiting Officer*, feeling as if the theatrical experience gives him an opportunity to forget about his own life.

Robert Sideway – Another convict in the penal colony, and an actor in Ralph's play. Sideway is a smooth-talking and well-mannered man who presents himself as a sophisticated gentleman. A pick-pocket by profession, he has a great appreciation for the theater, since he used to go to plays quite often in England. Because of this, he convinces Ralph to cast him, and when he begins rehearsals, it becomes clear that his grandiose style will get in the way of his ability to act, as he presents himself as a lauded thespian and overacts every piece of dialogue. At the end of *Our Country's Good*, he tells the other convicts that he plans to start his own theater company when he's no longer a convict, assuring them all that they can all join him as actors.

John Wisehammer – A convict in the penal colony, and another actor in Ralph's play. Wisehammer isn't initially cast in *The Recruiting Officer*, but Mary encourages him to join when he talks to her about his literary knowledge. Having stumbled into her while she's practicing her lines, he tells her that he has read every word in the dictionary up to the letter L. Later, Major Ross accuses him of being involved with Arscott's escape simply because he's Jewish, though he—like the others—is still allowed to act in the play. On opening night, he asks Ralph if he can read a prologue he wrote before the production begins, but Ralph says what he's composed is too political. Because of this, Sideway promises him that they can use it in the company he's going to start when they're all free.

Black Caesar – A convict in the penal colony who hails from Madagascar. Caesar is never officially cast in *The Recruiting Officer*, but he decides that he simply must be involved. After initially running away with Arscott and Kable, he decides to turn back, at which point he goes to Ralph's first rehearsal and declares that he'll play a servant. And though Ralph doesn't like this idea, Caesar refuses to leave, ultimately making his way into the final performance.

Major Robbie Ross – A major in the Royal Marines, and one of the guards in the penal colony. Along with Tench, Ross is one of *Our Country's Good*'s primary antagonists, since he doesn't believe it's a good idea to let convicts rehabilitate themselves by acting in a play. In keeping with this belief, he does whatever he can to interfere with Ralph's rehearsals. When he catches John Arscott and brings him back, Ross accuses Liz Morden of helping Kable—one of the other escapees—steal food for the journey. He also implicates Wisehammer in the escape simply because he's Jewish. Despite Ross's best efforts, though, Ralph manages to put on a successful play, and none of the actors are executed.

Henry Kable – A convict in the penal colony. Although Ralph casts him in *The Recruiting Officer*, Kable runs away on the same day as the first rehearsal. Taking Black Caesar, John Arscott, and three other prisoners with him, he sets off into the woods, but he and the unnamed other three convicts are the only ones to successfully escape. In the aftermath of this event, Liz is accused of having helped Kable steal food before the journey, though this didn't really happen.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Reverend Johnson – The penal colony's sole reverend. Reverend Johnson's primary concern has to do with whether or not *The Recruiting Officer* espouses appropriate morals. As long as the play sets forth positive religious values, he agrees with Governor Phillip and Ralph that it could only benefit the convicts.

Thomas Barrett – A seventeen-year-old convict who is hanged along with Handy Baker for stealing food from the colony's rations. Along with Handy, Thomas's ghost comes back to haunt Harry Brewer.

Captain Jemmy Campbell – One of the guards in the penal colony. One of Major Ross's cronies, Campbell is constantly drunk, and though he always aligns with Ross, he can't quite hide how amused he is by *The Recruiting Officer*.

Meg Long – A convict in the penal colony known for sleeping with the guards. "Shitty Meg"—as everyone calls her—tries to audition for *The Recruiting Officer*, but Ralph refuses to cast her.

Betsey Alicia – Ralph's wife, who has remained in England while he goes to the Australian penal colony.

The Aboriginal Australian – An aboriginal man who at various moments throughout the play delivers brief monologues about the arrival of the British in Australia, outlining how the area's indigenous population perceives the newcomers. By the end of the play, the Aboriginal man and his people are dying of small pox.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

PUNISHMENT AND REHABILITATION

In *Our Country's Good*, a play about convicts and their military guards, Timberlake Wertenbaker challenges the value of straightforward criminal punishment. As Arthur Phillip attempts to govern the first Australian penal colony in 1787, he finds himself at odds with people like Captain Tench, who believe the convicts should be exposed to nothing but punishment and hard labor. Phillip, on the other hand, stresses the importance of exposing the prisoners to culture, asserting that criminals can be "reformed" if only they're given the chance to grow. By outlining Phillip and Tench's disagreement regarding the efficacy of conventional punishment, Wertenbaker raises questions about the human capacity to change, ultimately suggesting that rehabilitation is possible when criminals are treated not as lost causes, but as regular humans who are capable of improvement.

Arthur Phillip—who has been chosen to govern Australia's first British penal colony—is an empathetic man who wants to give exiled convicts the opportunity to change, but some of his military associates strongly disagree with his viewpoint. In particular, Captain Tench promotes the theory that criminals are incapable of rehabilitation, suggesting that wrongdoing is an "innate tendency," something that the convicts of the penal colony can't resist because such debauchery is "in their nature." He uses this notion to advocate for the merciless punishment of criminals, justifying the practice of **publicly hanging** convicts for rather petty infractions. Phillip questions this merciless method, saying, "It is the spectacle of hanging I object to. The convicts will feel nothing has changed and will go back to their old ways." When he says this, he draws attention to the fact that he and his colleagues are supposed to be encouraging the convicts to reform themselves, but Tench has lost sight of this goal, saying, "The convicts never left their old ways, Governor, nor do they intend to." Tench has rejected the idea that criminals can change, which effectively makes it easier for him to treat them without even the slightest sense of empathy. After all, if he tells himself that the convicts are only capable of immorality, then he has no reason to help them reach a point of rehabilitation.

Despite the resistance he encounters from his associates, Phillip decides to help the convicts change by encouraging them to stage a play. Part of his decision to use theater as a means of influencing these people has to do with Tench's insistence that the colony's public hangings are the most captivating thing the prisoners witness. "It's their favourite form of entertainment, I should say," he notes after Harry—another military officer—points out that "the convicts laugh at the hangings." In response, Phillip suggests that the convicts find entertainment in such a gruesome act simply because they haven't been exposed to more wholesome forms of amusement. "We learned to love such things because they were offered to us when we were children or young men," he says. "Surely no one is born naturally cultured?" This is an important moment, since this idea challenges Tench's belief that criminals can't change their ways. Interestingly enough, Phillip doesn't refute the idea that the convicts are naturally prone to "vice," but rather that respected individuals like himself are innately cultured and refined. In turn, he suggests that even he and Tench had to *learn* to be respectable people. It therefore follows that the convicts merely need to learn to improve themselves in the same regard, and the only way to make this happen is to teach them to value what society values instead of debauched spectacles like public hangings.

Phillip instructs Lieutenant Ralph Clark to direct the play despite Tench's reservations. Shortly after rehearsals begin, Tench remains unconvinced that this is a good idea, but Ralph maintains that even the initial phases of rehearsal have already

had a profound effect on the prisoners. "In my own small way, in just a few hours, I have seen something change," he says. "I asked some of the convict women to read me some lines, these women who behave often no better than animals. And it seemed to me […] they seemed to acquire a dignity, they seemed—they seemed to lose some of their corruption." Already, the play has begun to have a lasting effect on the convicts, as it provides them with a release, something to distract them from their otherwise bleak existences. More importantly, though, the convicts respond favorably to the play because it shows them that the guards actually respect them as humans.

This sentiment is made clear later in the play, when Ralph becomes discouraged because of Tench's continued skepticism. In response, Phillip emboldens Ralph by referencing the Socratic dialogue *Meno*, in which Socrates proves the intelligence of an uneducated slave by kindly walking him through several geometrical problems. "When he treats the slave boy as a rational human being, the boy becomes one, he loses his fear, and he becomes a competent mathematician," Phillip says, urging Ralph to "see [his] actors in that light." As such, Phillip advocates for kindness, insisting that empathetic instruction can lead to legitimate rehabilitation in ways that brute punishment simply cannot. Furthermore, Phillip's successful attempt to change the convicts ultimately sets a positive "example" for the rest of the colony, showing the prisoners that self-improvement is possible. In this sense, then, Wertenbaker illustrates why it's important for people like Tench to reevaluate standard forms of punishment, which often fail to do anything but subject prisoners to pointless agony.

THEATER, LIBERATION, AND UNITY

Above all, *Our Country's Good* is a play about the power of art to unite and liberate people. Although the convicts in the penal colony often behave like "animals" who are at odds with one another, the artistic process eventually brings them together, as their commitment to rehearsing *The Recruiting Officer* overshadows their tendencies to quarrel. What's more, the play gives the prisoners an escape from their everyday lives, which are unrewarding and bleak. Because of this, the characters come to cherish their involvement in the theater, enjoying the emotional freedom that comes along with artistic expression. In turn, this makes their lives more bearable, meaning that they're less likely to misbehave and thus *more* likely to peacefully finish their prison sentences and become productive members of society. Putting the positive effects of theater on display, Wertenbaker highlights the therapeutic and restorative nature of the artistic process, suggesting that this kind of endeavor is more valuable than many people think, since art is not only a source of personal expression, but also of unity.

When Phillip debates Tench about the merits of staging a play with the convicts, he suggests that theater is a way of coaxing the prisoners into inhabiting a new way of life. This idea implies that Phillip understands the transformative effects of the artistic process, which gives people the opportunity to step outside themselves and gain new perspectives. "The theatre is an expression of civilisation," he says. "[…] The convicts will be speaking a refined, literate language and expressing sentiments of a delicacy they are not used to." Saying this, Phillip underscores the benefits of leaving behind one's own outlook via artistic expression. Rather than continuing to speak crudely about sex and thieving—common topics in the penal colony—the prisoners will experience a new and more wholesome way of behaving, one the Governor believes will help them transition into a more "civilis[ed]" lifestyle. In turn, Wertenbaker accentuates the ways in which art can have a profound effect on the way a person moves through the world.

Encouraging the convicts to achieve personal growth isn't the only reason Phillip wants to stage a play. He also believes that doing so will promote a certain kind of harmony in the penal colony, which is otherwise a divided place. "And we, this colony of a few hundred will be watching this together, for a few hours we will no longer be despised prisoners and hated gaolers," he tells Tench. "We will laugh, we may be moved, we may even think a little." It's important to note Phillip's use of the first-person plural pronoun "we," since it draws attention to the idea that the theater is capable of unifying the guards and the prisoners. In this moment, Phillip urges his colleagues to see this artistic experience as a chance to do some substantial community building.

However, Captain Tench and Major Ross aren't easily convinced that staging a play is worthwhile. This is because they clearly don't believe in the transformative powers of art, instead thinking of creative endeavors as nothing more than silly distractions from more practical activities. "I would simply say that if you want to build a civilisation there are more important things than a play," Tench upholds, suggesting that teaching the convicts to "farm" or "build houses" would be a better use of time. At the heart of this sentiment is the belief that art isn't capable of affecting the prisoners as profoundly as Phillip claims. However, Wertenbaker later suggests that Phillip is right to invest himself in the positive qualities of theatrical expression, as Arscott—a prisoner who recently tried to run away—waxes poetic about how much he likes acting. "When I say Kite's lines I forget everything else," he says, referring to the character he's playing. "I forget the judge said I'm going to have to spend the rest of my natural life in this place getting beaten and working like a slave. […] I don't have to remember the things I've done, when I speak Kite's lines I don't hate anymore." The artistic process has thoroughly influenced Arscott, an otherwise hardened criminal, to the point that acting gives him an escape from his own life, enabling him to leave behind "hate" and hopelessness. As a result, it's less likely that he'll try to run

away again, since acting has given him a way to cope with his otherwise dismal existence in the penal colony.

Similarly, the other actors dissuade Dabby from running away during the commotion of the play's final scene, since this would surely make the guards forbid them from staging another production in the future. The fact that Dabby listens to them underlines the extent to which the theatrical process of collaboration has brought the prisoners together. Furthermore, their collective decision not to use this opportunity to escape suggests that they're happier with their current existences than they were before, since they have at least gained an outlet to express themselves—in a way, the theater has liberated them to a degree that they're no longer so desperate to physically free themselves from their situation. This benefits the guards, too, since it means they don't have to track down more escaped convicts. As a result, the audience sees that art provides the prisoners with a valuable outlet for self-expression while also aligning their interests with those of the guards, therefore emerging as a unifying force.

LOVE, SEX, AND POWER

In *Our Country's Good*, Wertenbaker suggests that successful romantic relationships rely upon equal power dynamics. Many of the characters in the play engage in sexual affairs, but very few actually achieve true love. This is because most of the convicts use their sexuality as leverage, having sex with guards in exchange for special treatment. Despite the unemotional nature of these liaisons, though, Wertenbaker intimates that this behavior can lead to complex feelings, as is the case when Duckling eventually admits that she loves Harry Brewer despite the way he has lorded his authority over her. Nonetheless, their relationship is doomed because of the irreconcilable imbalance of power that exists between them. In keeping with this, the only relationship in *Our Country's Good* that is actually successful is the one that blossoms between Mary and Lieutenant Ralph Clark. Because neither of them wants anything tangible from the other, their feelings grow organically, and when they finally consummate their love, it isn't because Mary wants special treatment or because Ralph is only interested in sex, but because they've cultivated a mutual affection. By comparing their successful relationship to the colony's more complicated liaisons, Wertenbaker suggests that healthy romances occur when neither partner is trying to get something from the other, but simply following their romantic impulses.

For the female convicts, the benefit of sleeping with authority figures is clear. It is, after all, a way to survive through difficult times, since having sex with an officer enables them to ask for favors. Because of this, Mary lets her friend Dabby convince her to have sex with one of the sailors on the ship that takes them to exile. This earns her more food, but she hates the fact that she has to sleep with this man in order to make her life easier. "What would you have done without that lanky sailor drooling over you?" Dabby asks, pointing out how helpful it was for Mary to have this affair. "I would have been less of a whore," Mary says, ashamed of having given up her body. "I'll never wash the sin away," she adds, but Dabby responds by outlining the unromantic approach that seemingly everyone around Mary takes when it comes to sex—namely, that God "shouldn't have created men who pay for" sex if He "didn't want women to be whores." By saying this, Dabby not only embraces the idea of selling oneself, but suggests that this transactional spirit is part of the very nature of human sexuality. As such, she destigmatizes the practice of trading sex for various perks, ultimately encouraging Mary to consider the fact that her own sexuality is a way of seizing a modicum of power in a situation in which she's otherwise powerless. Nevertheless, this doesn't change Mary's feeling that she'll "never wash the sin away"—an indication that engaging in transactional sexual affairs is more emotionally complex than Dabby suggests.

While the guards who have sex with female convicts are able to do so because they're in a position of power, they can find themselves at a certain disadvantage in these relationships. This is because some become actually interested in the prisoners, whereas the prisoners only have sex with them to get something. This dynamic especially bothers Harry Brewer, who is tormented by the idea that Duckling might not love him exclusively. Working himself into fits of jealousy, he worries constantly that Duckling—who lives with him in his tent—likes other men better than him. In a conversation with Ralph, he complains that she has "gone silent" on him because he facilitated the execution of her other lover, Handy Baker. This enrages Harry, as he feels frustrated that his willingness to help her in exchange for sex hasn't led to a stable romantic relationship. "Do you know I saved her life?" he asks Ralph. "She was sentenced to be hanged at Newgate for stealing two candlesticks but I got her name put on the transport lists. But when I remind her of that she says she wouldn't have cared." What upsets Harry the most, it seems, is that nothing he can do will solidify Duckling's love for him. Of course, this is because he and she both treat their relationship like a transaction, each one wanting something different from the other. As such, it's unlikely that their feelings will ever perfectly align.

Though it's true that Duckling has her own reasons for getting involved with Harry, it's worth mentioning that she *does* seem to harbor affection for him. Just before he dies, she pleads with him to stay alive, saying, "If you live, I will love you." At the same time, though, there's no changing the fact that she sees him as an oppressive force, since she makes it clear earlier in the play that she's fed up with his possessiveness, saying, "I wish I were dead. At least when you're dead, you're free." With the contrast between her resentment of Harry and her eventual declaration of love, Wertenbaker conveys just how emotionally fraught relationships can become when both parties must overcome a

significant power imbalance.

Unlike the other guards, Ralph makes a point of not having a "she-lag," or a female prisoner with whom he has sex. This, at least, is the case until he falls in love with Mary while rehearsing *The Recruiting Officer*. However, the nature of their relationship is much different than that of Duckling and Harry's, since Ralph and Mary develop a shared affinity for one another—an affinity that grows naturally as they rehearse the play. Over the course of the rehearsals, Ralph admires Mary's talent and her hardworking nature, and she comes to appreciate his encouragement. Then, when he himself portrays her character's lover during a one-on-one rehearsal on the beach, it becomes clear that there's an emotional connection between them, and their fake embrace turns into a real-life expression of their feelings. The play allows them to gradually cultivate a genuine relationship, and since neither of them wants anything from the other, their attraction is organic and uncomplicated by the messy interpersonal dynamics that come along with transactional or power-oriented sexual affairs. As a result, Ralph and Mary exemplify the play's belief that the most successful and healthy relationships are those that are free of ulterior motives and based solely on sincere romantic sentiments.

GOVERNANCE AND JUSTICE

Our Country's Good showcases Governor Phillip's quest to create a fair mode of governance in Australia. To do this, he touts the benefits of a healthy judicial system and a just ruling class, upholding that everyone—including criminals—must be treated with respect, since this is the only way to encourage people to actively work toward the establishment of a well-functioning society. This outlook especially applies to the manner in which Phillip and Judge Collins run their court, as they go out of their way to show the convicts that their testimonies will be treated seriously and fairly. This is because they know nobody will respect or advocate for the prevailing system of government if they think it's rigged against them. It is this kind of respect and thoughtful consideration that Wertenbaker implies is integral to the foundation of any successful society. Without this willingness to listen to even the most disenfranchised community members, the play intimates, a society will never manage to establish a legitimate justice system or an overall sense of order.

Governor Phillip has been given the difficult job of creating a just society comprised of criminals. Knowing that the convicts will be citizens of this new colony once they're released, he wants to instill in them an appreciation of the law. To do this, he doesn't want to scare them into simply obeying commands, but rather help them develop genuine respect for the kind of order it takes to create a successful society. "What is a statesman's responsibility?" he says to Ralph. "To ensure the rule of law. But the citizens must be taught to obey that law of their own will. I want to rule over responsible human beings, not tyrannise over a group of animals. I want there to be a contract between us, not a whip on my side, terror and hatred on theirs." In so many words, what Phillip wants is to work alongside the prisoners instead of against them. Rather than "rul[ing]" with an iron fist, he wants to teach the convicts to follow the law because of their own desire to do so. As such, he tries to be a benevolent guiding force who levelheadedly works with his community members toward the collective goal of building a fair society. Hoping to establish a "contract" between the ruling class and the people who will soon become everyday citizens, he seeks to use a sense of mutual respect to help his people become productive society members.

When Liz Morden refuses to defend herself after being accused of stealing food, Wertenbaker shows the audience why it's so important for community members to feel as if their voices will be heard. Although Liz faces a death sentence, she doesn't testify on her own behalf, declining to plead her innocence even though she isn't guilty. After her trial, Governor Phillip and Judge Collins call a meeting with her, Lieutenant Ralph Clark, and Major Ross, hoping to get more out of her because they want to avoid **hanging** her. "My only fear, Your Excellency, is that she may have refused to speak because she no longer believes in the process of justice," Collins says. "If that is so, the courts here will become travesties." This sentiment outlines why it's so critical for a society to treat its members fairly, since it's impossible to achieve justice when people like Liz don't believe in the judicial process. Major Ross, for his part, has little patience for these considerations, suggesting that they all have bigger things to worry about than whether or not Liz stole food. In response, Phillip says, "Truth is indeed a luxury, but its absence brings about the most abject poverty in a civilisation." By saying this, he suggests that although debating over the truth might seem like a superfluous and unimportant endeavor, civilization actually relies on the ruling class to value due process. After all, if people like Liz don't think their superiors care about the truth, they'll have no reason to participate in or cooperate with the judicial system, which is an integral part of any society. As such, Phillip, Collins, and Ralph convince Liz that her voice will be heard, and because they've demonstrated their desire to truly listen to her, she eventually tells them the truth, thereby avoiding the death sentence.

Any examination of governance and the ruling class in Australia would be incomplete without recognizing the fact that British colonists like Phillip have also intruded upon groups of Aboriginal Australians. Although Wertenbaker doesn't spend much of the play focusing on this dynamic, she does spotlight the injustice of colonialism in several moments throughout the piece, as an unnamed Aboriginal man periodically narrates what it's like to be overtaken by the British. First, he compares the arrival of the British to a "dream" that is best left ignored,

but he later realizes that it's impossible to turn away from this "dream," since the settlers have taken over the land and infected the Aboriginal population with small pox. For all of Governor Phillip's talk about respect and justice, then, it becomes clear that he's only thinking about his own society, ultimately failing to extend his thoughtfulness to the people whose land he has intruded upon. As such, the audience sees that his desire to establish a just and egalitarian civilization is somewhat insincere, since he fails to recognize the ways in which he is disrespecting Aboriginal Australians and depriving them of the same rights he so adamantly insists his own people should have. To that end, he believes that the most disenfranchised members of his own society (like Liz) deserve to be treated in a "humane" manner, but he neglects to reflect upon how poorly he and his people have treated Aboriginal Australians. In this way, Wertenbaker outlines the tragically hypocritical dynamic of colonialism, which enables settlers like Phillip to thoughtlessly oppress entire groups of people even while supposedly advocating for justice, equality, and respect.

GUILT, REGRET, AND FORGIVENESS

Although *Our Country's Good* largely deals with the topic of guilt in the context of criminal punishment, Wertenbaker also scrutinizes the kind of guilt that arises from personal regret. In keeping with this, certain characters struggle with their own consciences, finding themselves distraught by the idea that they're unable to right their past wrongs. In particular, Harry Brewer is haunted by his involvement with the **hanging** of Handy Baker, who was Duckling's other lover. Unable to forgive himself for participating in this execution, Harry feels as if he killed Baker for personal reasons, which is why he can't quiet his conscience. As a result, he is haunted by Baker's ghost, a fact that illustrates how difficult it is for a person to escape a guilty conscience. Furthermore, Wertenbaker compares and contrasts Harry's guilt with the remorse Ketch Freeman feels after he's forced to become the colony's hangman. Whereas Harry is unable to forgive himself for what he's done, Ketch eventually manages to move on with his life after hanging his fellow prisoners. This is likely because he was forced into his role as a hangman, whereas Harry can't ignore the personal stake he had in killing Henry Baker. By charting Harry Brewer's decline and contrasting it with Ketch's ability to move on, Wertenbaker portrays the destructive effects of guilt on people who can't find ways to forgive themselves.

Although he clearly feels remorseful for having participated in the hanging of Henry Baker, Harry Brewer tries to avoid moral responsibility. To do this, he insists that he didn't "want" to go through with the execution, refuting the idea that he wanted Baker to die because he was Duckling's other lover. In fact, Harry goes out of his way to express this sentiment whenever possible, even visiting Lieutenant Ralph Clark late at night and insisting not once but *twice* that he wasn't motivated to hang Baker for personal reasons. "I didn't want to hang him, Ralph, I didn't," he asserts, and then he reiterates this point only moments later, saying, "[Duckling] thinks I hanged him to get rid of him, but I didn't, Ralph." The fact that Harry is so desperate to prove that he didn't hang Baker to "get rid of him" suggests that this is exactly what he did. After all, Ralph isn't accusing him of any such thing, yet Harry continues to belabor the point, making it rather obvious that he's trying to convince *himself* that his intentions weren't malicious.

Unfortunately for Harry, his attempt to forgive himself for playing a part in Baker's death is rather unsuccessful. This is made evident by the fact that he is literally haunted by Baker's ghost, who refuses to leave him alone. When Harry tells him to "go away," Baker's ghost suggests that this will never happen, saying, "The dead never go away." He also accuses Harry of wanting him to be hanged, and Harry finally breaks, saying, "All right, I wanted you hanged, Go away!" It is precisely because Harry wanted Baker to be hanged that the ghost will never leave him alone, since it is his own guilt that is really haunting him. Unable to justify his actions, Harry is forced to grapple with the fact that he facilitated Baker's execution for personal reasons, and the ghost is a manifestation of this internal struggle. When it becomes clear that Baker's ghost will never leave him alone, the audience understands that Harry is dealing with a toxic kind of guilt, one that will last for the rest of his life because he's unable to forgive himself for what he's done.

Ketch Freeman experiences a similar kind of guilt as Harry Brewer, since he too has hanged people in the penal colony. This has turned him into an outcast amongst his fellow prisoners, which is why he wants to join the play, hoping this will show everyone that he isn't so bad. The difference between Ketch and Harry, though, is that Ketch was *forced* to become the colony's hangman after having been caught stealing. He feels bad for accepting this role, but the alternative was death. "When they say to you, hang or be hanged, what do you do?" he asks Ralph. "Someone has to do it. I try to do it well." Despite this acceptance of his role as the hangman, Ketch is plagued by guilt, afraid that he'll never find true forgiveness. "When I say my prayers I have a terrible doubt," he says. "How can I be sure God is forgiving me?" This regret and obsession with forgiveness resembles Harry's embattled remorse, but it has less to do with self-forgiveness. Rather than struggling—like Harry—to find a way to excuse himself for his past misdeeds, Ketch is primarily worried about broader forms of forgiveness, wanting first and foremost to be absolved by his peers and his God. This, it seems, takes a less significant emotional toll, since he isn't constantly at odds with himself. Harry, on the other hand, tries desperately to forgive himself, and because he can't, his mental health deteriorates rapidly. He even falls ill and dies, and since there's no mention of him having contracted a specific disease, it's possible to assume that his decline is the direct

result of his internal turmoil. As such, Wertenbaker shows the audience just how difficult it is for people to cope with guilt when they're incapable of forgiving themselves, ultimately illustrating how desperately human beings yearn to be at peace with themselves.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

PUBLIC HANGINGS

In *Our Country's Good*, the very idea of public hangings represents the different ways in which people rule and govern. Captain Tench, for one, has no problem hanging convicts in the penal colony, since he believes that this is one of the only ways to convince criminals to follow rules. However, Governor Phillip is uncomfortable with turning violent punishment into a "spectacle," preferring to use positivity—not fear—to encourage the convicts to change. Throughout the play, Phillip has to defend this viewpoint time and again. The fact that he constantly has to convince his colleagues that it's best to avoid execution is an indication that people in positions of power are quick to assume that scaring subordinates is the only way to keep them in line. In this way, the practice of public execution—and all the consideration that goes into hanging someone—comes to symbolize the great burden of responsibility that leaders like Governor Phillip must learn how to navigate.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the The Dramatic Publishing Company edition of *Our Country's Good* published in 1990.

Act One, Scene One Quotes

At night? The sea cracks against the ship. Fear whispers, screams, falls silent, hushed. Spewed from our country, forgotten, bound to the dark edge of the earth, at night what is there to do but seek English cunt, warm, moist, soft, oh the comfort, the comfort of the lick, the thrust into the nooks, the crannies of the crooks of England. Alone, frightened, nameless in this stinking hole of hell, take me, take me inside you, whoever you are. Take me, my comfort and we'll remember England together.

Related Characters: John Wisehammer (speaker), Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark , Robert Sideway

Related Themes:

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

Wisehammer speaks these words in the first scene of *Our Country's Good*, while Lieutenant Ralph Clark whips Robert Sideway. By talking about the fact that he and his fellow convicts have been "spewed" from England, Wisehammer prepares readers for a play that examines isolation as a form of punishment. When he says that he and the others are "bound to the dark edge of the earth," he anticipates Governor Phillip's eventual assertion that being sent to the penal colony is a fairly severe punishment in and of itself—an argument he uses to push back against his colleagues' desire to publicly discipline the convicts. Furthermore, Wisehammer suggests that the convicts often find comfort in sex, upholding that there's nothing else "to do" but "seek" out sexual liaisons. This, he maintains, helps the convicts feel a little less "alone" as they leave their homes in England to start new and rather hopeless lives as castaways in Australia.

Act One, Scene Three Quotes

COLLINS. […] You have been made Governor-in-Chief of a paradise of birds, Arthur.

PHILLIP. And I hope not of a human hell, Davey. Don't shoot yet, Watkin, let's observe them. Could we not be more humane?

TENCH. Justice and humaneness have never gone hand in hand. The law is not a sentimental comedy.

PHILLIP. I am not suggesting they go without punishment. It is the spectacle of hanging I object to. The convicts will feel nothing has changed and will go back to their old ways.

TENCH. The convicts never left their old ways, Governor, nor do they intend to.

Related Characters: Captain Watkin Tench, Captain Arthur Phillip (Governor Phillip), Captain David Collins (Judge Collins) (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

This conversation takes place between Governor Phillip and his colleagues shortly after they arrive in Australia for the first time. As they go on a bird-hunting expedition, they discuss how to punish the three convicts who were caught stealing food from the colony's rations, and Phillip expresses his discomfort regarding the idea of public execution. Because he doesn't want to preside over a "human hell," he wonders if there's a way that he and the other guards could be more "humane." When he says this, Tench emerges as his philosophical opposite, upholding that "justice and humaneness have never gone hand in hand." In this way, Wertenbaker presents the audience with two men at odds with one another over the best way to govern. Despite Tench's encouragement to ignore whether or not the convicts are treated humanely, Phillip stays true to his values, insisting that the "spectacle" of a public hanging is an especially perverse display of power and mercilessness. Furthermore, he suggests that a public hanging in the penal colony would only inspire the convicts to continue behaving like they did in England, where harsh punishment was a standard practice. By saying this, he reveals his desire to foster change amongst the convicts—a goal Tench thinks is pointless because he believes the criminals haven't and will never leave behind "their old ways."

❝ I commend your endeavour to oppose the baneful influence of vice with the harmonising acts of civilisation, Governor, but I suspect your edifice will collapse without the mortar of fear.

Related Characters: Captain David Collins (Judge Collins) (speaker), Captain Watkin Tench, Captain Arthur Phillip (Governor Phillip)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Judge Collins says this to Governor Phillip as they discuss whether or not to publicly execute three convicts who were caught stealing food from the colony's rations. Phillip, for his part, thinks that hanging the criminals in public will only discourage the other convicts from even trying to improve their ways. He also wants to find a way to rule over the colony in a "humane" fashion. Captain Tench, on the other hand, believes that the convicts are incapable of change. In this moment, Wertenbaker presents the audience with Judge Collins's somewhat impartial opinion, as he focuses not on whether or not it's possible to reform criminals, but on the nature of justice. As the colony's judge, he's concerned first and foremost with implementing a justice system that is effective. As a result, he worries that the criminals will come to see the judicial process in Australia as weak if they're not made to fear it. He sees fear as the "mortar" necessary to hold together the "edifice" (a large building or structure) of a justice system.

❝ TENCH. It's their favourite form of entertainment, I should say.

PHILLIP. Perhaps because they've never been offered anything else.

TENCH. Perhaps we should build an opera house for the convicts.

PHILLIP. We learned to love such things because they were offered to us when we were children or young men. Surely no one is born naturally cultured?

Related Characters: Captain Arthur Phillip (Governor Phillip), Captain Watkin Tench (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

In this exchange, Captain Tench and Governor Phillip debate the merits and downfalls of public execution. A proponent of harsh punishment, Tench points out that the convicts in the penal colony think of hangings as a "form of entertainment." This isn't the smartest way to convince Phillip to move forward with the hanging, since the Governor has already stated that he objects to the "spectacle" of such merciless displays. Nevertheless, Tench doesn't hesitate to suggest that the other convicts will find the hanging amusing, and Phillip points out that this is because they've "never been offered" any other kind of entertainment. When Tench makes fun of this idea by jokingly saying that the guards should "build an opera house for the convicts," Phillip pushes on, trying to help his colleague see that refined taste isn't an inherent trait. "We learned to love such things because they were offered to us when we were children or young men," he says, disputing Tench's overall view that criminals are born the way they are

and have no hope of changing. To convince him of this, Phillip invites Tench to consider his own predilections, saying, "Surely no one is born naturally cultured?" He asks this because he wants to help Tench recognize that humans have to develop their habits and preferences. If Phillip can get Tench to see that even his own interests and proclivities have been cultivated, then he might be able to prove that the convicts are equally capable of becoming refined and cultured.

Act One, Scene Four Quotes

Duckling's gone silent on me again. I know it's because of Handy Baker. I saw him as well as I see you. Duckling wants me, he said, even if you've hanged me. At least your poker's danced its last shindy, I said. At least it's young and straight, he said, she likes that. I went for him but he was gone. But he's going to come back, I know it. I didn't want to hang him, Ralph, I didn't.

Related Characters: Midshipman Harry Brewer (speaker), Handy Baker, Duckling Smith, Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark

Related Themes:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Harry Brewer tells Lieutenant Ralph Clark that he has seen Handy Baker's ghost. Even though Harry helped execute Handy a month ago (after Handy stole food from the colony's rations), he hasn't been able to get over what happened. This is partially because his lover Duckling—who was also Handy's lover—refuses to speak to him, despite the fact that they live together in Harry's tent. What's most interesting about this passage is that Harry focuses primarily on his own jealousy. Instead of fixating on having seen a ghost, he thinks mainly about Duckling's love of Handy Baker. As such, the audience sees that he's a possessive man, one who is still tormented by his lover's past infidelities. And yet, there's something else at play in this moment, as Harry abruptly tries to get Ralph to acknowledge that he "didn't want to hang" Handy Baker. When he says this, it becomes clear that he's grappling with guilt, having a hard time forgiving himself for the role he played in Handy's death. Of course, the mere fact that he goes out of his way to say that he "didn't want" to hang Handy suggests that he most likely *did* want to hang him, especially considering that he was so jealous of the man's relationship with Duckling. In this way, Wertenbaker presents the audience with a man who's at odds with himself as he struggles with guilt and retrospective jealousy.

Do you know I saved her life? She was sentenced to be hanged at Newgate for stealing two candlesticks but I got her name put on the transport lists. But when I remind her of that she says she wouldn't have cared.

Related Characters: Midshipman Harry Brewer (speaker), Duckling Smith, Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

Harry Brewer says this to Ralph while complaining about Duckling's refusal to speak to him. Even though Duckling lives with him in his tent and has sex with him, Harry finds himself deeply bothered that she doesn't want to meaningfully engage with him. When he mentions that he "saved her life," it's evident that he expects a certain amount of gratitude from her, clearly feeling that she owes him. This highlights the transactional nature of their relationship, in which Harry does favors for Duckling in exchange for romantic attention. However, Duckling makes a point of defying Harry's expectations by refusing to be thankful for what he's done. Indeed, she tells him that "she wouldn't have cared" if he let her die, thereby making it difficult for him to hold his favor over her. In this way, Duckling manages to hold the power in their relationship. Though Harry is in a position of authority because he's a guard and Duckling is a convict, she is the one who controls the emotional nuances of their relational dynamic.

Act One, Scene Six Quotes

PHILLIP. We are indeed here to supervise the convicts who are already being punished by their long exile. Surely they can also be reformed?

TENCH. We are talking about criminals, often hardened criminals. They have a habit of vice and crime. Habits are 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.

Related Characters: Captain Watkin Tench, Captain Arthur Phillip (Governor Phillip) (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

This exchange takes place when Governor Phillip speaks to his colleagues about the idea of producing a play in the penal colony. Phillip suggests that the convicts would benefit from the artistic process, but Tench thinks putting on a play is a waste of time, since the guards have come to Australia specifically to punish the convicts. Phillip acknowledges that this is the case, but he points out that the convicts "are already being punished by their long exile." While this punishment is taking place, then, the Governor wants to try to "reform" the criminals by exposing them to art. But Tench still disagrees, since he thinks that "hardened criminals" are incapable of changing their unsavory ways. In fact, he believes criminality is an "innate tendency." By framing misbehavior in this way, he implies that there's nothing a convict could do to change for the better. This is why he thinks they only deserve punishment—after all, if they can't change, there's no reason to try to "reform" them in the first place.

❝ 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's 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.

Related Characters: Captain Watkin Tench (speaker), Captain Arthur Phillip (Governor Phillip)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

Captain Tench says this during his and Governor Phillip's disagreement regarding whether or not criminals can be reformed. Having suggested that the convicts might undergo a positive transformation after acting in a play, Phillip listens as Tench sets forth his rather black-and-white opinion that criminals have broken the law and thus deserve nothing but punishment. To illustrate this point, Tench compares the convicts to the indigenous people of Australia, mercilessly referring to the Aboriginal population as "savages." This moment is worth noting because it underlines Tench's lack of compassion. Although Phillip never stops to consider the ways in which he and his people are harming and intruding upon Aboriginal Australians, he at least never speaks so scornfully or condescendingly about them. Tench, on the other hand, doesn't hesitate to disparage not only their way of life, but their intelligence. In this moment, then, the audience sees that Tench is an unempathetic man who only respects people who match his very specific idea of what it means to be a dignified human being—an idea based on his very limited worldview.

❝ PHILLIP. Some of these men will have finished their sentence in a few years. They will become members of society again, and help create a new society in this colony. Should we not encourage them now to think in a free and responsible manner?

TENCH. I don't see how a comedy about two lovers will do that, Arthur.

PHILLIP. The theatre is an expression of civilisation. [...] The convicts will be speaking a refined, literate language and expressing sentiments of a delicacy they are not used to. It will remind them that there is more to life than crime, punishment. And we, this colony of a few hundred will be watching this together, for a few hours we will no longer be despised prisoners and hated gaolers. We will laugh, we may be moved, we may even think a little.

Related Characters: Captain Watkin Tench, Captain Arthur Phillip (Governor Phillip) (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Governor Phillip once again tries to convince Captain Tench that producing a play with the convicts in the penal colony is a worthwhile endeavor. To do this, he reminds Tench that some of the prisoners are going to be set free soon, meaning they'll become "members of society again." Further, they're not only going to *rejoin* society, they're going to *recreate* it, since the majority of them will stay in Australia to live in the country's new British colonies. As such, they will play important roles in the formation of this young settlement, which is why Phillip wants to give them a chance to learn how to "think in a free

and responsible manner." When Tench expresses his doubt that acting in a play will teach the prisoners anything about responsibility, Phillip insists that "the theatre is an expression of civilisation," adding that it will give the convicts a chance to step outside themselves. He believes that speaking a "refined, literate language" will inspire them to see that there's "more to life than crime" and "punishment." By saying this, he reveals his conviction that the artistic process can lead to genuine transformation and emotional liberation. He also suggests that putting on the play will be a good way to bring the community together, since it'll give everyone a chance to unite and share a certain experience, even if only for an evening. As he waxes poetic in this fashion, then, the audience comes to understand how invested he is in the idea that artistic expression is capable of bringing about positive cultural change.

❝ In my own small way, in just a few hours, I have seen something change. I asked some of the convict women to read me some lines, these women who behave often no better than animals. And it seemed to me, as one or two—I'm not saying all of them, not at all—but one or two, saying those well-balanced lines [...], they seemed to acquire a dignity, they seemed—they seemed to lose some of their corruption. There was one, Mary Brenham, she read so well, perhaps this play will keep her from selling herself to the first marine who offers her bread—

Related Characters: Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark (speaker), Mary Brenham, Captain Watkin Tench, Captain Arthur Phillip (Governor Phillip)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark says this to his colleagues while he and Governor Phillip try to convince them that it's a good idea to let the convicts act in a play. Captain Tench firmly believes that criminals are incapable of reforming themselves, so Ralph points to the auditions he's held as evidence that the theater has indeed had a transformative effect on some of the convicts. When he says that speaking the "well-balanced lines" of *The Recruiting Officer* has already made a positive impact on some of the prisoners, he aligns himself with Phillip's previous assertion that "speaking a refined, literate language" will help the criminals embody a new way of moving through the world, one that leads to things other than "crime" and "punishment." To that end, Ralph upholds that people like Mary Brenham have already adopted a sense of "dignity" simply by taking part in the play. This is because the auditions are perhaps the first time Mary has ever been given the chance to put her literacy to good use. As a result, Wertenbaker intimates that Governor Phillip was right when he said that the convicts simply need to be exposed to arts and culture in order to learn to appreciate them.

Act One, Scene Seven Quotes

❝ HARRY. [...] I'm sorry, Duckling, please. Why can't you? —can't you just be with me? Don't be angry. I'll do anything for you, you know that. What do you want, Duckling?

DUCKLING. I don't want to be watched all the time. I wake up in the middle of the night and you're watching me. What do you think I'm going to do in my sleep, Harry? Watching, watching, watching. JUST STOP WATCHING ME.

HARRY. You want to leave me. All right, go and live in the women's camp, sell yourself to a convict for a biscuit. Leave if you want to. You're filthy, filthy, opening your legs to the first marine —

DUCKLING. Why are you so angry with your Duckling, Harry? Don't you like it when I open my legs wide to you?

Related Characters: Duckling Smith, Midshipman Harry Brewer (speaker), Handy Baker

Related Themes:

Page Number: 36

Explanation and Analysis

This exchange takes place between Harry Brewer and Duckling while they're rowing in Sydney Cove. Harry tries desperately to get Duckling to speak to him, but she refuses to engage in a meaningful way. Although this might be because he helped execute her other lover, Handy Baker, her main point of contention with him seems to be that he won't leave her alone. As she treats him with silence, he pleads with her to talk to him, but as soon as she tells him that she simply needs her space, he becomes angry. Rather than acknowledging what she wants, he insults her and jealously assumes that she wants to have sex with another man. What's most strange about their interaction, though, is that Duckling also changes her attitude. When Harry calls her "filthy," she suddenly becomes attentive, endearing herself to him by reminding him that he likes it when she "open[s]" her "legs wide" to him. In this moment, it becomes

overwhelmingly apparent that Harry doesn't have the power he thinks he has when it comes to his and Duckling's relationship. Rather, Duckling knows how to appeal to his sexual desires in order to calm him down, ultimately manipulating his yearnings and using them to her own benefit. As such, she manages to use her sexuality against him, though their relationship is still quite complicated, since he remains an authority figure in her life.

DUCKLING. I need freedom sometimes, Harry.

HARRY. You have to earn your freedom with good behaviour.

DUCKLING. Why didn't you let them hang me and take my corpse with you, Harry? You could have kept that in chains. I wish I was dead. At least when you're dead, you're free.

Related Characters: Midshipman Harry Brewer, Duckling Smith (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

This conversation takes place between Duckling and Harry Brewer while they're rowing in Sydney Cove. Harry has spent the last few minutes trying to get Duckling to talk, but when she finally tells him why she's upset—saying that she wants him to give her space—he becomes angry, at which point she placates him by appealing to his sexual desires. Now, though, she returns to her original frustration, insisting that she needs "freedom sometimes." Her relationship with Harry is transactional, however, meaning that he only gives her what she wants if she gives him what *he* wants. "You have to earn your freedom with good behaviour," he says, and this fills her with a sense of defeat, as she sees that it's pointless to try to convince him to let her be more independent. To express her exasperation, she tells Harry that he should never have saved her from being hanged. By saying this, she addresses the fact that Harry thinks she owes him for everything he's ever done for her. No longer happy with this transactional dynamic, she fantasizes aloud about being dead, since this would at least save her from having to constantly please Harry.

Act One, Scene Eight Quotes

DABBY. You're wasting time, girl, he's ripe for the plucking. You can always tell with men, they begin to walk sideways. And if you don't—

MARY. Don't start. I listened to you once before.

DABBY. What would you have done without that lanky sailor drooling over you?

MARY. I would have been less of a whore.

DABBY. Listen, my darling, you're only a virgin once. You can't go to a man and say, I'm a virgin except for this one lover I had. After that, it doesn't matter how many men go through you.

MARY. I'll never wash the sin away.

DABBY. If God didn't want women to be whores he shouldn't have created men who pay for their bodies.

Related Characters: Mary Brenham, Dabby Bryant (speaker), Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark

Related Themes:

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Dabby and Mary discuss the sexual affair Mary had with a sailor on the convict ship. Although this relationship earned Mary extra portions of food, she clearly regrets having given up her body to a stranger. The fact that Dabby tries to soothe her worries by saying that God doesn't mind if women are "whores" suggests that she sees no problem with using sex to get something from another person. In fact, she views such relationships as natural and nearly impossible to avoid, since God "created men who pay" for sex. It's worth noting that this entire topic has arisen because Dabby insists that Mary is "wasting time" by not pursuing a relationship with Ralph, who she thinks is "ripe for the plucking." However, since Mary doesn't have the same casual beliefs about transactional sex (which makes her feel ashamed, not empowered), she resists her friend's encouragements.

Act One, Scene Nine Quotes

When I say my prayers I have a terrible doubt. How can I be sure God is forgiving me? What if he will forgive me, but hasn't forgiven me yet? That's why I don't want to die, Sir. That's why I can't die. Not until I am sure. Are you sure?

Related Characters: Ketch Freeman (James Freeman) (speaker), Midshipman Harry Brewer, Second Lieutenant

Ralph Clark

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

Ketch says this to Ralph one night while telling him his life story. As the penal colony's resident hangman, he worries about his standing with God, wondering if he'll be forgiven when he dies. Saying that he suffers from "terrible doubt" when he prays, he admits that he doesn't want to die before he's certain that God will forgive him for hanging his fellow convicts. Although this is undoubtedly a difficult position to be in, it's worth noting that Ketch's struggle to find forgiveness is more manageable than Harry Brewer's. This is because he isn't trying to forgive *himself*, which is what Harry is so desperately trying to do. Rather, Ketch is focused on earning an external kind of acceptance. This is easier for him to deal with on an emotional level because there are tangible things he can do to work toward forgiveness (like praying and, later, joining the play to endear himself to his community). Harry, on the other hand, is constantly at odds with himself, and this is why he succumbs to his guilt while Ketch manages to live with what he's done.

Act Two, Scene One Quotes

WISEHAMMER. I am innocent. I didn't do it and I'll keep saying I didn't.

LIZ. It doesn't matter what you say. If they say you're a thief, you're a thief.

WISEHAMMER. I am not a thief. I'll go back to England to the snuff shop of Rickett and Loads and say, see, I'm back, I'm innocent.

LIZ. They won't listen.

WISEHAMMER. You can't live if you think that way.

Related Characters: Liz Morden, John Wisehammer (speaker), Henry Kable, Captain David Collins (Judge Collins) , Captain Arthur Phillip (Governor Phillip), Major Robbie Ross

Related Themes:

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

During this conversation, Wisehammer and Liz are in chains because Major Ross has accused them of taking part in Henry Kable's escape. As they pass the time, Liz asks Wisehammer why he was sent to the penal colony in Australia. When he insists that he's an innocent man, she disregards this, trying to make the point that "it doesn't matter" what a person says after they have been accused of a crime. "If they say you're a thief, you're a thief," she says. This viewpoint suggests that Liz doesn't trust the judicial system, automatically assuming that it's rigged against people like her and Wisehammer. Given that Governor Phillip and Judge Collins want so badly to create a well-functioning society in Australia, this kind of mentality doesn't bode well, as Liz's distrust indicates that the convicts don't think the government respects them. As such, it's unlikely that they'll advocate for themselves when necessary, and this means the judicial system will have a hard time getting at the truth during criminal trials.

MARY. Liz, we've come to rehearse the play.

WISEHAMMER. Rehearse the play?

DUCKLING. The Lieutenant has gone to talk to the Governor. Harry said we could come see you.

MARY. The Lieutenant has asked me to stand in his place so we don't lose time. We'll start with the first scene between Melinda and Brazen.

WISEHAMMER. How can I play Captain Brazen in chains?

MARY. This is the theatre. We will believe you.

Related Characters: John Wisehammer, Duckling Smith, Mary Brenham (speaker), Henry Kable, Midshipman Harry Brewer, Captain Arthur Phillip (Governor Phillip), Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark , Liz Morden

Related Themes:

Page Number: 69

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Mary, Duckling, and the other convicts in the play come to visit Liz, Arscott, and Wisehammer after they've been put in chains for allegedly helping Henry Kable escape. The fact that they want to continue rehearsing with their fellow cast members is a testament to how much the play has brought them together as a group. At first, everyone was hesitant to associate with Liz Morden, who has a bad reputation in the penal colony. Now, though, Mary

and Duckling eagerly seek her out, hoping to keep working on the play with her even while she's in chains. In addition, when Wisehammer asks how he'll play his character while he's bound up, Mary suggests that acting is a liberating experience, one that can help a person transcend their current circumstances. As such, Wertenbaker illustrates the ways in which theater has not only brought these convicts together, but given them a way to cope with their otherwise bleak lives.

Act Two, Scene Two Quotes

❝ When he treats 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.

Related Characters: Captain Arthur Phillip (Governor Phillip) (speaker), Major Robbie Ross, Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark

Related Themes:

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

Governor Phillip says this to Lieutenant Ralph Clark as a way of motivating him to keep working with the convicts on *The Recruiting Officer*. Because Ralph has received so much push-back from people like Major Ross, he finds himself discouraged and pessimistic, wanting to stop rehearsals because everything is going so badly. However, Phillip comforts him by referencing *Meno*, one of Plato's dialogues. In this text, Socrates helps a young "slave boy" answer geometry questions even though the boy has never had formal mathematical training. "When he treats the slave boy as a rational human being, the boy becomes one, he loses his fear, and he becomes a competent mathematician," Phillip points out, drawing a parallel between Socrates's "encouragement" and Ralph's work with the convicts. Rather than treating the prisoners like no-good criminals who are incapable of anything but immorality, Phillip believes Ralph should treat them like "rational human being[s]." This, in turn, will inspire them to be strive to be better people. In other words, as long as Ralph continues to believe in their ability to change for the better, Phillip thinks they will undergo a positive transformation.

❝ PHILLIP. Liz Morden—*(He pauses.)* I had a reason for asking you to cast her as Melinda. Morden is one of the most difficult women in the colony.

RALPH. She is indeed, Sir.

PHILLIP. Lower than a slave, full of loathing, foul mouthed, desperate.

RALPH. Exactly, Sir. And violent.

PHILLIP. Quite. To be made an example of.

RALPH. By hanging?

PHILLIP. No, Lieutenant, by redemption.

Related Characters: Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark , Captain Arthur Phillip (Governor Phillip) (speaker), Captain Watkin Tench, Liz Morden

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Governor Phillip tells Ralph why he wanted Liz Morden to be cast as one of the leading roles in *The Recruiting Officer*. Whereas someone like Captain Tench would most likely want to make an "example" of a misbehaved criminal by publicly hanging her, Phillip wants to shine a light on her ability to change. Even though she is "full of loathing, foul mouthed, desperate," and "violent," Phillip believes that she's capable of "redemption." This suggests that he believes it's possible for *anyone* to change, since Liz is apparently so far from perfect. Once again, then, the audience sees that Phillip's method of ruling over the penal colony depends upon acts of compassion and encouragement, as he commits himself to spreading the narrative that positive change is attainable for even the most immoral and supposedly wretched people.

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

Related Characters: Captain Arthur Phillip (Governor Phillip) (speaker), Captain Watkin Tench, Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark

Related Themes:

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

Governor Phillip says this to Lieutenant Ralph Clark while trying to encourage him to continue directing *The Recruiting Officer*. Deeply concerned with the nature of his "responsibility" as governor of the penal colony, he reflects upon the importance of creating a society in which citizens actively care about "obey[ing]" the law. Unlike Captain Tench—who would be perfectly happy ruling "over a group of animals"—Phillip hopes to forge a social "contract" between the convicts and himself, one that will align their interests instead of pitting them against each other. Without this kind of mutual agreement about the importance of "the rule of law," Phillip knows that he will only ever be able to "rule" by inspiring "terror and hatred." And because he knows that this "tyrann[ical]" mode of governance only creates animosity, he strives to instill in the convicts a respect for the rules that come along with a successful society.

Act Two, Scene Five Quotes

I have seen the white of this animal's bones, his wretched blood and reeky convict urine have spilled on my boots and he's feeling modest? Are you feeling modest, Sideway?

(*He shoves SIDEWAY aside.*)

Modesty.

Bryant. Here.

(*DABBY comes forward.*)

On all fours.

(*DABBY goes down on all fours.*)

Now wag your tail and bark, and I'll throw you a biscuit. What? You've forgotten? Isn't that how you begged for your food on the ship? Wag your tail, Bryant, bark! We'll wait.

Related Characters: Major Robbie Ross (speaker), Captain Jemmy Campbell, Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark , Dabby Bryant, Robert Sideway

Related Themes:

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

Major Ross says this during one of the rehearsals of *The Recruiting Officer*. After Lieutenant Ralph Clark asks him and Captain Campbell to leave so that the cast can continue to rehearse without having to be self-conscious, Ross claims that the convicts couldn't possibly feel any sense of "modesty" in front of him, since he's seen them in various states of exposure and humiliation. Calling Sideway over, he points out that he's whipped him so much that he's seen his bones, suggesting that the unfortunate prisoner has nothing to hide from him. Similarly, he forces Dabby to act like a dog, making a passing insinuation that she used to "beg for food" on the convict ship by submitting to the officers in this manner. Ross clearly loves displaying his power and authority, especially when he has a chance to punish a prisoner in public. This provides a stark contrast to Phillip's (and now Ralph's) empathetic nature, ultimately reminding the audience that the compassion Phillip and Ralph have showed the convicts is quite rare in the harsh and merciless context of the penal colony.

Act Two, Scene Seven Quotes

DABBY. When dealing with men, always have a contract.

MARY. Love is a contract.

DABBY. Love is the barter of perishable goods. A man's word for a woman's body.

Related Characters: Mary Brenham, Dabby Bryant (speaker), Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark , John Wisehammer

Related Themes:

Page Number: 85

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Dabby, Mary, Ralph, and Wisehammer discuss *The Recruiting Officer*. More specifically, they talk about a moment in the play in which Mary's character wants assurance that her love interest is willing to wed her. When they stop to talk about this moment, Mary says that if she were in her character's position, she would trust her lover to marry her, but Dabby says it's vital to "always have a contract" when "dealing with men." As such, she once again frames romantic relationships as transactional affairs, an idea that she reinforces when she says that "love is the barter of perishable goods. A man's word for a woman's body." This perspective aligns with Dabby's previous assertion that Mary shouldn't be ashamed of having traded her body for food on the convict ship, since this is precisely

what "love" is supposed to be: an exchange of "goods." Given that Mary is currently in the process of falling in love with Ralph—a man who, because he's married, can't promise to wed her—Dabby's comment about needing a "contract" when "dealing with men" is most likely quite distressing, so she argues that love is in and of itself a contract between two people.

❝ When I say Kite's lines I forget everything else. I forget the judge said I'm going to have to spend the rest of my natural life in this place getting beaten and working like a slave. I can forget that out there it's trees and burnt grass, spiders that kill you in four hours and snakes. I don't have to think about what happened to Kable, I don't have to remember the things I've done, when I speak Kite's lines I don't hate anymore.

Related Characters: John Arscott (speaker), Henry Kable, Dabby Bryant

Related Themes:

Page Number: 85

Explanation and Analysis

Arscott says this after Dabby complains that her character in *The Recruiting Officer* isn't similar enough to her. Unlike Dabby, Arscott enjoys the fact that Kite—the man he portrays in the play—isn't anything like him. This is because he sees acting as a chance to transcend his current circumstances, losing himself in the words when he speaks. Indeed, when he says Kite's lines, he feels as if he can "forget everything else." This is quite meaningful for him, since he otherwise has a lot on his mind, including the fact that he's been sentenced to spend his entire life in exile in the penal colony. He also sees acting as an opportunity to leave behind troublesome emotions. "When I speak Kite's lines I don't hate anymore," he says. In turn, the audience comes to understand that Kite's ability to transport himself from his own life via the artistic process ultimately helps him become a better person.

Act Two, Scene Eight Quotes

❝ If you live, I will never again punish you with my silence. If you live, I will never again turn away from you. If you live, I will never again imagine another man when you make love to me. If you live, I will never tell you I want to leave you. If you live, I will speak to you. If you live, I will be tender with you. If you live, I will look after you. If you live, I will stay with you. If you live, I will be wet and open to your touch. If you live, I will answer all your questions. If you live, I will look at you. If you live, I will love you.

Related Characters: Duckling Smith (speaker), Midshipman Harry Brewer

Related Themes:

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

Duckling speaks these words to Harry when he's on his deathbed. In keeping with their relational history, she tries to get what she wants by offering herself to him. Once again, then, the audience witnesses the transactional nature of their relationship, as Duckling vows to reward Harry with various emotional and sexual pleasures. This time, however, Harry has no control over how he responds to her, since he can't keep himself from dying just to enjoy her "tender" treatment or her promises to be "wet and open to [his] touch." What makes this scene especially tragic is that it's the first time Duckling actually tells Harry that she loves him, though even this declaration is couched inside of a conditional, as she says, "If you live, I will love you." This recalls Dabby's previous assertion that love is a "barter" of "a man's word for a woman's body." This time, though, Harry is unable to make any kind of promise to Duckling, and he dies after she declares her love.

Act Two, Scene Ten Quotes

❝ COLLINS. My only fear, Your Excellency, is that she may have refused to speak because she no longer believes in the process of justice. If that is so, the courts here will become travesties. I do not want that.

PHILLIP. But if she won't speak, there is nothing more we can do. You cannot get at the truth through silence.

Related Characters: Captain Arthur Phillip (Governor Phillip), Captain David Collins (Judge Collins) (speaker), Liz Morden

Related Themes:

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Judge Collins and Governor Phillip discuss the fact that Liz Morden refused to speak during her trial. Rather than making a case for her innocence, she remained silent, leading the court to find her guilty of stealing food with Henry Kable. However, Judge Collins now voices his worry that Liz only "refused to speak because she no longer believes in the process of justice." This is true, since Liz has already made it clear that she thinks it "doesn't matter" what she says on her own behalf. "If they think you're a thief, you're a thief," she told Wisehammer in the first scene of the play's second act. However, the fact that Collins and Phillip are even talking about this instead of simply moving forward with Liz's execution is a testament to the unexpected amount of compassion they've introduced into the penal colony's judicial system. While Phillip is correct when he says that they "cannot get at the truth through silence," his and Collins's willingness to go out of their way to more carefully consider Liz's case demonstrates that she's actually wrong to think that no one will listen to her if she advocates for herself.

Act Two, Scene Eleven Quotes

From distant climes o'er wide-spread seas we come,
Though not with much éclat or beat of drum,
True patriots all; for be it understood,
We left our country for our country's good;
No private views disgraced our generous zeal,
What urg'd our travels was our country's weal,
And none will doubt but that our emigration
Has prov'd most useful to the British nation.

Related Characters: John Wisehammer (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 107

Explanation and Analysis

These lines of iambic pentameter belong to the prologue that Wisehammer composes for *The Recruiting Officer*. (This is also an example of Wertenbaker drawing on real history, as this "Prologue" is often attributed to George Barrington, himself a famous pickpocket exiled to Australia.) When Wisehammer says that he and his fellow convicts are "true patriots" because they left their country for their country's "good," he suggests that England is better off without them. In a tongue-in-cheek manner, he frames the convicts' departure from England not as a forced exile, but as a gesture of goodwill, as if they recognized the negative effects they have on the country and decided to make a sacrifice by removing themselves from the nation. This is what Wisehammer means when he says, "No private views disgraced our generous zeal, / What urg'd our travels was our country's weal," lines that facetiously uphold that there were no other circumstances ("private views") that led him and his fellow convicts to leave England—nothing, Wisehammer claims in this moment, motivated them to go into exile other than an interest in benefiting England by leaving it. Of course, Wisehammer doesn't really mean this, and these eight lines are dripping with sarcasm and false self-deprecation, suggesting that Wisehammer finds it ridiculous that his government has displaced him halfway across the world. By subtly mocking the utility of exiling criminals, then, he delivers a scathing critique of his home country, which banished him from everything he ever knew.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

On a convict ship bound for Australia in 1787, Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark counts softly and dispiritedly as a prisoner named Robert Sideway receives fifty lashes. When Sideway is let go, he falls into a heap on the deck, and a fellow convict named John Wisehammer delivers a brief monologue about the loneliness and fright of the grueling passage, talking about how he and the other criminals have been "spewed" from England and "bound to the dark edge of the earth." As he speaks in this poetic manner, he points out that the only way to comfort oneself is by taking pleasure in sex. "Take me," he says, addressing an imagined woman and telling her that they can "remember England together."

Timberlake Wertenbaker establishes several of Our Country's Good*'s main interests in this scene. As convicts like Sideway and Wisehammer are transported from England to a penal colony in Australia, they find themselves suffering from brutal physical punishments and a sense of hopelessness, since they're leaving behind everything they know. Because the prisons in England became overcrowded after the American Revolution and during the Industrial Revolution, criminals were transported to British colonies in Australia, where they were forced to serve time with little hope of ever returning. Faced with this bleak future, then, the convicts had limited sources of joy or pleasure, which is why Wisehammer speaks in this scene about sex, framing it as one of the only things the criminals can use to distract themselves from harsh punishment and isolation.*

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

Alone on stage, an Aboriginal Australian man narrates what it's like to encounter the first fleet of convict ships in Botany Bay in 1788. As he watches a boat appear on the horizon with "clouds billowing" up from what he mistakenly believes are its oars, he says, "This is a dream which has lost its way. Best to leave it alone."

In this moment, the Aboriginal man optimistically thinks that he and his people will be able to ignore the British, who have just arrived. This is an example of dramatic irony, given that the audience most likely knows at least a little about Australia's history—namely, that Australia was taken over and colonized by the British.

ACT ONE, SCENE THREE

On a recreational hunting expedition in Sydney Cove, Governor Arthur Phillip speaks with Judge David Collins, Captain Watkin Tench, and Midshipman Harry Brewer about the nature of punishment. As he wonders aloud why the British government thought it was a good idea to "cross fifteen thousand miles of ocean" just to build a penal colony, Judge Collins points out that the convicts are guilty and thus deserve to be here. "But **hanging**?" Phillip asks, and Collins assures him that only three of the convicts will be hanged, since they were caught stealing food from the colony's supply. As he says this, he draws Phillip's attention to a beautiful bird, adding that he has been given control over a beautiful "paradise of birds." "And I hope not of a human hell," Phillip replies.

Governor Arthur Phillip emerges right away as an empathetic character, someone who wants to rule the Australian penal colony in a just and levelheaded way. Because of this, he isn't automatically in favor of public executions, especially when this method is used to punish something as petty as theft. When Phillip expresses his hesitations, the audience sees that he is a compassionate man who doesn't want to preside over a "human hell" replete with terror and authoritarian violence.

Phillip expresses his desire to rule the colony with a "more humane" attitude, but Captain Tench asserts that "justice and humaneness have never gone hand in hand." In response, Phillip clarifies that he doesn't think the convicts shouldn't be punished, but simply that **public hangings** are rather perverse, since they become "spectacle[s]." To that end, he fears the criminals will see the hanging and think that everything in the colony is exactly the same as it was in England, which will encourage them to revert to their "old ways." This logic doesn't convince Tench, though, since he thinks the convicts haven't changed in the first place, adding that they also don't "intend" to reform themselves. Chiming in, Judge Collins says he respects Phillip's desire to treat the criminals in a humane manner, but he says that this "edifice will collapse without the mortar of fear."

During this discussion about the positive and negative effects of public execution, Phillip reveals his belief that criminals are capable of rehabilitation. This is why he doesn't want to make public hangings into a "spectacle," since he believes that this kind of punishment will discourage the convicts from ever trying to improve themselves. When he says that he doesn't want the prisoners to think the justice system is exactly the same as in England, he implies that he wants to create an environment in which personal growth and even forgiveness are possible. However, Tench demonstrates his strong disagreement by upholding that the convicts have no desire to change, and even Judge Collins criticizes Phillip's empathetic outlook by suggesting that fear is an integral part of any well-functioning society. As such, the audience sees how uncommon Phillip's compassion is when it comes to justice and governance in the Australian penal colonies.

Phillip suggests that lashings should be enough to keep the convicts in line, but Tench and Collins point out that many of them have already experienced heavy whippings and that—at a certain point—this punishment leads to death anyway, though in a slower way that can't be made into an "example" because it isn't public. When Phillip asks Harry what he thinks, the midshipman tells him that the criminals "laugh at the **hangings**," since they're so used to seeing them. Agreeing, Tench says that public executions are the convicts' "favourite form of entertainment," and Phillip finds this troubling, ultimately suggesting that perhaps they enjoy the hangings because nobody has exposed them to more wholesome forms of entertainment.

Once again, Phillip gives the convicts the benefit of the doubt, this time suggesting that they only need a bit of guidance in order to become respectable individuals. When he says that the criminals only see public executions as "entertainment" because they haven't been exposed to anything better, he implies that everyone is capable of recognizing and benefiting from good art—even people who are seen as uncultured and crass. In turn, he again expresses his desire to reform the convicts, seeing them as human beings capable of change.

Captain Tench makes fun of Phillip for wanting to treat the convicts as civilized humans, but Phillip insists that people have to "learn to love" things like opera and the theater. "Surely no one is born naturally cultured?" he says. However, Collins reminds him that they hardly have any books or plays in the colony, so they might as well focus on punishing the convicts instead of educating them.

Phillip's assertion that "no one is born naturally cultured" emphasizes his belief that personalities are formed, not innately inherited. This is an important idea, since it suggests that everyone is capable of changing themselves. Still, this mentality doesn't quite align with the conditions of the penal colony, which has seemingly been created to punish criminals, not to reform them. This, it seems, is what Judge Collins points out by saying that—since they hardly have any resources to help the convicts change—they might as well concentrate on carrying out standard forms of punishment.

Turning his attention to the upcoming **hanging**, Phillip asks Harry to tell him the names of the convicts sentenced to death. First, Harry tells him, there's Thomas Barrett, a seventeen-year-old brought to the colony because he stole a single sheep. Phillip is troubled that Thomas is so young, and when Tench suggests that this proves "the criminal tendency is innate," he disagrees, insisting that the convict's age indicates no such thing. Next, Harry tells Phillip that a convict named James Freeman has also been sentenced to death. The final criminal, Harry says, is Handy Baker, a marine who was the "ringleader" of the theft. Collins adds that Handy tried to argue that it was unfair that the marines receive the same amount of food as the convicts. Hearing this, Tench agrees that it *is* too bad that this is the case, since his men "are in a ferment of discontent."

The fact that someone like Thomas Barrett—a mere seventeen-year-old—has been sentenced to death simply for stealing food illustrates just how harsh the rules are in the penal colony. Handy Baker is also a marine, but is set to receive the same punishment as the two convicts, meaning that the courts have no sympathy even for members of the military. As such, the audience sees how strict and unbending this society is when it comes to doling out penalties—something that clearly bothers Phillip, since he wants to rule the colony in a more "humane" manner.

Wrapping up their discussion, Tench says that the **hanging** should take place as quickly as possible. "It's their theatre, Governor, you cannot change that," he says. In response, Phillip says he'd rather the convicts watch *actual* theater. Nonetheless, he tells Harry to prepare the hanging, adding that he'll need to find someone to be the hangman. Before they finish the discussion, Harry mentions that there was also an eighty-two-year-old woman who stole food from Robert Sideway, and when Phillip suggests that it's unnecessary to hang such an old woman, Collins says, "That will be unnecessary. She hanged herself this morning."

By this point, Tench has already proved his overall lack of sympathy for the convicts. The reason he is so merciless, it seems, is that he truly believes criminals are inherently inferior and morally corrupt, which is why he tells Phillip that it's impossible to change the fact that the convicts see public hangings as "theatre." When Collins tells Phillip that the old woman who stole food from Sideway hanged herself, though, the audience sees just how hopeless these convicts really are, and how little faith they have in an overly harsh justice system.

ACT ONE, SCENE FOUR

Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark is up late one night writing in his diary. He addresses his entry to Betsey Alicia, his wife who stayed behind in England. In his writing, he tells her about life in the colony, saying that a prisoner named Liz Morden was whipped for being "impertinent." This, Ralph thinks, was much deserved, since Liz has had such punishment coming for a long time. Moving on, he tells Alicia that he kisses her picture a thousand times every Sunday. He also mentions his frustration regarding the fact that he hasn't been promoted to First Lieutenant. As he writes, Harry Brewer enters and starts talking to him, clearly wanting to soothe his loneliness. At one point, he mentions that he could easily have ended up like the convicts if it weren't for Governor Phillip, with whom he's worked for a long time.

The first real glimpse Wertenbaker gives the audience of Ralph is telling, as he spends his time diligently writing to his wife. As he tells Betsey Alicia that he kisses her picture a thousand times each Sunday, it becomes clear that he's a disciplined and loving man, someone who misses his former life and is unsatisfied with his new existence in the penal colony. Harry Brewer's assertion that he himself could have ended up like one of the camp's criminals if it weren't for Phillip again illustrates the Governor's compassion, since it's clear that he has been kind to Harry, showing him the kind of support he apparently needed in order to avoid a life of crime.

Changing the subject, Harry says that he saw Handy Baker the night before. "You hanged him a month ago, Harry," Ralph replies, but Harry insists that Baker has "come back," explaining that he saw him holding a rope. He then starts talking about Duckling, the female convict with whom he lives. He tells Ralph that she has stopped talking to him because of his involvement in Handy Baker's **hanging**, since Handy was Duckling's other lover. When Harry saw Baker's ghost the night before, Baker taunted him by talking about Duckling, bragging about how she likes having sex with him better than having sex with Harry. "I didn't want to hang him, Ralph, I didn't," Harry says. In response, Ralph points out that Baker stole food, adding that he himself voted to hang him because he didn't know Phillip would oppose the punishment.

When Ralph reminds Harry that he hanged Handy Baker a month ago, Wertenbaker makes it clear that Phillip eventually allowed his colleagues to go through with the public execution that he was so uncomfortable with. The fact that Harry has started seeing Handy's ghost suggests that he can't forgive himself for playing a part in the man's death, especially since he obviously had a personal investment in Handy's execution. Harry feels guilty, which is why he insists that he "didn't want to hang" Handy, though Ralph never suggested this in the first place.

Still talking about Duckling, Harry tells Ralph that she claims to not "feel anything" when she's with him. He then worries that she *did* "feel something" when she was with Handy Baker. "She thinks I hanged him to get rid of him, but I didn't, Ralph," he reiterates. After a brief pause, he explains that he saved Duckling's life by getting her exiled to Australia when she was about to be executed. "But when I remind her of that she says she wouldn't have cared," he says. He then points out that Governor Phillip thinks the guards should treat the female prisoners with "kindness," and Ralph wonders how he could possibly show convicts respect. "Not all the officers find them disgusting," Harry says, asking if Ralph has ever been "tempted" by them—a question that appalls Ralph.

Not only is Harry guilty about having played a part in Handy Baker's execution, he also feels insecure about his relationship with Duckling. This is a reasonable way to feel, since their relationship is founded upon a vast imbalance of power: Harry is one of the guards, whereas Duckling is a prisoner. Ralph, for his part, is seemingly aware of the volatile dynamics that arise when a person in power has a relationship with a prisoner, though his harsh reaction seems to have less to do with his morals and more to do with the fact that he finds it hard to respect the convicts.

Ralph complains that Phillip never notices him, and Harry tells him the Governor wants to stage a play with the convicts as actors. Ralph finds this idea ridiculous, but he soon sees that this might be a way to get Phillip's attention. He mentions that he has experience in the theater. Still, he finds it hard to believe that the convicts could possibly be good actors, but Harry tells him that some of the female prisoners are "good women. "I believe my Duckling is good," he says. "It's not her fault—if only she would look at me, once, react. Who wants to fuck a corpse!" Trying to ignore this, Ralph asks Harry to tell the Governor that he would be capable of directing the play. Harry agrees, and before he leaves, he asks Ralph if he thinks he killed Handy Baker. "No, Harry," Ralph answers.

Throughout this exchange, Ralph's primary focus is on how he can catch Phillip's attention. As such, he decides to involve himself in the play not because he believes in the transformative effects of the theater, but because he wants to gain the Governor's approval. As he makes these calculations, Harry continues to struggle with the idea that Duckling hates him for executing Handy Baker. When he tries to get Ralph to make him feel better about having helped execute Handy, the audience sees how heavily his guilt weighs on him.

ACT ONE, SCENE FIVE

One day after Ralph decides to direct the play, a prisoner named Meg Long approaches him and says she heard he's "looking for some women." Meg's implications are clearly sexual, but Ralph tries to ignore this. Still, she insists that "there ain't nothing [that] puts Meg off," which is how she got the nickname "Shitty Meg." Trying to explain what he's doing, Ralph tells Meg that he's casting prisoners to participate in a production of *The Recruiting Officer*. Nevertheless, Meg still thinks he's interested in having sex with the women he casts—an idea that pleasantly surprises her, as she admits that everyone thinks Ralph is "prissy" since he doesn't have a "she-lag." Having said this, she takes her exit.

Meg's treatment of Ralph is worth noting, since her relaxed manner and sexually explicit way of talking suggests that Ralph isn't necessarily respected or feared by the prisoners. Furthermore, she outlines the fact that the entire penal colony looks down on him for not engaging in an extramarital affair with one of the prisoners. This underlines just how common it is in the colony for an officer to abuse his power and to use his position of authority to have sex with female convicts, many of whom (it seems, judging by Meg's insinuations) invite these interactions. Given that Duckling lives in Harry's tent, the audience can conclude that the prisoners stand to gain certain favors by sleeping with the guards, though Ralph remains loyal to his wife.


As Meg leaves, Robert Sideway appears, greeting Ralph in a polite manner and telling him that he was "once a gentleman." When Ralph asks what he means, Sideway explains that he was a professional pickpocket in London but that he enjoyed a high-society lifestyle, going to plays in the evening and admiring the beautiful clothing everyone wore in the audience. "The coaches, the actors scuttling, the gentlemen watching, the ladies tittering, the perfumes, the clothes, the handkerchiefs," he says, elegantly handing Ralph a handkerchief that, Ralph realizes, is his own. "Here, Mr Clark, you see the skill," Sideway says conspiratorially. At this point, two convicts named Dabby Bryant and Mary Brenham approach. Ralph has specifically requested to see Mary because he heard she can read. When she reads aloud from the script, Ralph is pleased with her performance, though annoyed because Dabby insists upon participating too.

At this point, it's clear that Ralph has succeeded at getting Phillip's attention and has been made the director of the play. The group of people he has available to him, though, is a very eccentric collection, ranging from crass people like Meg Long to well-spoken, literate people like Mary and Sideway. As he begins to choose convicts for the play, the audience sees that he might have a hard time assembling a group of like-minded individuals capable of forging a unified, cohesive cast.

"Where do I come in, Lieutenant?" Dabby interrupts, and when Ralph asks if she can read, she admits she can't, though she assures him that Mary will teach her what to say. Ralph begrudgingly casts her as Rose, the cousin of Mary's character, Silvia (who is the play's lead). As Ralph tries to lead this audition, Liz Morden arrives, much to the chagrin of Dabby, who looks at her confrontationally while Mary "shrinks away." Turning to Ralph, Dabby tells him he can't cast Liz because it's obvious she's going to be executed sooner rather than later. Ignoring this, Liz grabs the script from Ralph, saying, "I understand you want me in your play, Lieutenant. Is that it? I'll look at it and let you know."

There have already been several instances in which Liz's name has come up in the play. The most recent was when Ralph wrote to his wife and mentioned that Liz had recently received a whipping, which he thought she deserved. Bearing this in mind, it seems strange that Ralph would cast her in the play, since she's likely to make trouble. At the same time, Governor Phillip wants to stage this play as a way of helping the convicts become better people, so it makes sense that the production should include someone like Liz, who needs reformation so badly.


ACT ONE, SCENE SIX

While drinking one night, Governor Phillip and a number of his fellow guards debate the pros and cons of staging a play. Major Ross is strongly against the idea, thinking that everyone has better things to focus on, though Judge Collins points out that the play won't keep the much-anticipated supply ship from finally arriving to restock the colony's food stores (though nor will it speed the ship along). Still, Ross doesn't like the idea that the play will include female convicts, who he thinks are "filthy, thieving, lying whores." Phillip assures him that he won't be forced to attend the play if he feels so strongly about it, but this does little to calm Ross, who thinks the guards have a duty to "make sure [the convicts] get punished." Although Phillip agrees with this, he adds that it's already punishment enough that the prisoners have been exiled.

Again, Phillip finds himself at odds with his colleagues. When Ross suggests that the play is a waste of time, he devalues the artistic process, seeing it as nothing more than a trifling and potentially problematic source of distraction from punishing the prisoners. This perspective clashes with Phillip's outlook, since Phillip is a compassionate man who isn't solely focused on punishing the convicts. Rather than spending all his energy making sure the prisoners are miserable, Phillip is interested in providing them with opportunities to change.

Phillip also suggests that the prisoners can "be reformed" while enduring their punishment in the penal colony. "We are talking about criminals, often hardened criminals," Tench responds. "They have a habit of vice and crime. Habits are difficult to break. And it can be more than habit, an innate tendency." Going on, he says that vice is "in their nature," but Phillip disagrees. Turning to Reverend Johnson, the Governor asks if he believes the convicts can be "redeemed," and Johnson says that he does, though he'll only support the play if it touts positive religious morals. Tench states that "a crime is a crime" and that if someone commits a crime, he or she is a criminal. "It's like the savages here," he says. "A savage is a savage because he behaves in a savage manner."

Unlike Phillip, Tench is a very judgmental man who is hesitant to extend empathy to people who aren't like him. Instead of seeing the convicts as capable of change, he writes them off as inherently flawed, thereby allowing himself to go on punishing them without having to consider their humanity. Similarly, he disparages the Aboriginal Australians upon whom he and his fellow Brits have intruded. Rather than thinking about the fact that the British have treated the indigenous people of Australia unfairly, Tench sees them as "innate[ly]" inferior, yet again giving himself permission to do whatever he wants without having to reflect upon his actions.

Ralph argues that the play could alter the way the colony functions (even in just a small way), but Tench makes fun of him for thinking that letting the convicts make "fools of themselves" will have a positive impact. As the group continues to argue, Phillip points out that many of the convicts will soon be finished with their sentences and that it would be worthwhile to expose them to culture before they "help create a new society" in Australia. "The theatre is an expression of civilisation," he says. He also notes that the actors would be using "refined" language and engaging with ideas they're not accustomed to expressing. "It will remind them that there is more to life than crime [and] punishment," he says. He says the play will also bring everyone—guards and prisoners included—together, even if only for a few hours.

Again, Phillip makes a case for the artistic process, maintaining that it's capable of teaching people how to lead better lives. By saying this, he reveals his desire to reform the prisoners, seeing the penal colony not as a place to simply dole out punishments, but an environment that can inspire change. Because Tench refuses to accept this, though, Phillip points out that the convicts aren't the only ones who will benefit from the play, since it will create a sense of unity throughout the entire community.

Agreeing with Phillip and trying to convince his peers, Ralph says he has already noted a "change" in some of the female prisoners during the auditions. Although many of these women often act like "animals," he says that several of them have "seemed to acquire a dignity" and lost "some of their corruption." In particular, he sings Mary's praises, saying that she was a fantastic reader and hoping aloud that the play will "keep her from selling herself to the first marine who offers her bread."

Having watched Mary read from the script of The Recruiting Officer *during auditions, Ralph tries to provide concrete evidence that the artistic process actually affects the prisoners. By speaking of "dignity" and the loss of "corruption," he urges people like Tench and Ross to consider the benefits of going through with the play, framing it as a means by which the guards might make the prisoners easier to deal with.*

One of the other officers mumbles that Mary will probably "sell herself" to Ralph instead of the "first marine who offers her bread," since he's taken such an interest in her. Brushing this off, Ralph says he thinks the other convicts will also benefit from the play, adding that it will give the officers a chance to pretend they're at the theater back in London. Eventually, Judge Collins polls the group, taking a vote regarding who wants to do the play and who's against the idea. Tench and Ross are the most outspoken critics of the idea, but they're outnumbered. Furious, Ross erupts, saying that "theatre leads to threatening theory" and that he plans to tell Phillip's boss about what's going on. When he storms away, Phillip turns to the rest of the men and says, "The last word will be the play, gentlemen."

It's obvious that the officers themselves are quite divided. This is why Ralph says that the play might bring them together by inviting them into a collective experience—an experience that will also let them escape the stressors of their little world, at least for a little while. In this manner, Wertenbaker intimates that art—and specifically theater—has the ability to soothe burdens while simultaneously unifying otherwise disparate groups of people.

ACT ONE, SCENE SEVEN

While rowing in the cove with Duckling, Harry tries to get her to talk by mentioning how much Sydney is beginning to turn into a real town. However, she remains silent, despite his many attempts to engage her. When he says that he thought she'd like going for a row, she says she wishes she were on the Thames. "This isn't Newgate, Duckling," Harry reminds her, and she says she wishes it were. "At least the gaoler of Newgate left you alone and you could talk to people," she bitterly remarks. In his defense, Harry reminds her that he allows her to speak to other female convicts, but she complains that he doesn't let her actually go into the "women's camp." "It's not the women you're after in the women's camp, it's the marines who come looking for buttock," Harry says.

Once more, Harry's jealousy gets in the way of his relationship with Duckling. Using his authority to assume a domineering position in her life, he forbids her from seeing other men. Their relational dynamic suffers as a result of this attitude, since Harry's overbearing ways are constant reminders that he has more power than she does in this context. At the same time, she exercises a certain kind of power by refusing to talk to him—something that clearly torments him. Again, relationships with uneven power dynamics are presented as emotionally fraught.

Harry accuses Duckling of having another lover, like she did when she was involved with Handy Baker. He calls her a "filthy whore," but then immediately apologizes and asks her not to be angry. In response, she tells him that she hates how often he watches her. This makes Harry angry, but Duckling quickly endears herself to him by reminding him that he loves it when she touches him where he "like[s] it." She tells him that she simply needs some freedom, to which he responds, "You have to earn your freedom with good behavior." She says he should have just let her die, saying he could have taken her dead body and kept it under his watch at all times. "I wish I was dead," she says. "At least when you're dead, you're free."

When Duckling sweet-talks Harry, she uses his own desires against him, ultimately finding a way to use her sexual appeal to her benefit. Although he's technically in a position of authority because he's a guard and she's a prisoner, it becomes clear in this moment that Duckling is the one who truly holds the power. In fact, she doesn't only use sex to her own benefit, but also weaponizes Harry's tendency to feel guilty, saying that she wishes she were dead as a way of further disarming him (though she might also actually feel this way).

Harry is taken aback by Duckling's comment about wishing she were dead. To cheer her up, he suggests that she join Ralph's play. He then explains that Dabby Bryant and Liz Morden are also in the cast, and Duckling agrees to participate. "How is Lieutenant Clark going to manage Liz Morden?" she asks, and Harry says that Governor Phillip specifically asked for her to be cast. Moving on, Duckling remembers how she and the other women used to try to get Ralph to blush when they were on the convict ship. Unsettled by this comment, Harry makes her promise that she won't "try anything" with Ralph.

The fact that Governor Phillip wanted Liz Morden to be in the play is worth noting, as it once more demonstrates his belief that people can change, since Liz is the most misbehaved of the convict characters. Harry's suggestion that Duckling join the play is yet another sign that she is the one who holds the power in their relationship, since her sudden display of sadness—when she said she wished she were dead—is what prompted him to give her more "freedom" than he would have otherwise been comfortable with.

ACT ONE, SCENE EIGHT

Dabby and Mary sit together trying to learn their lines. Despite Mary's effort to get Dabby to concentrate, though, she can't convince her friend to stop fantasizing about someday returning to England. As Dabby waxes poetic about the rain in England, she compares its softness to Ralph's "dimpled cheeks," using this as a way to transition into talking about how Mary should seduce Ralph. "He's ripe for the plucking," she says, but Mary says she won't listen to her anymore. After all, she listened to Dabby's advice on the convict ship, when Dabby told her to have sex with a sailor in exchange for larger portions of food. Although this technically benefited her, Mary regrets it, saying that she'll "never wash the sin away." However, Dabby tells her that "if God didn't want women to be whores he shouldn't have created men who pay for their bodies."

When Dabby and Mary talk about Mary's sexual relationship with a sailor on the convict ship, the audience sees how common it is in the world of the penal colony to treat sex as nothing more than a transaction. This, Dabby implies, is a natural way of approaching sexuality, since she believes that even God would approve of a woman who uses sex to get something she needs. However, Mary clearly dislikes the nature of such relationships, which leave her feeling nothing but regret.

Mary accuses Dabby of exploiting her on the convict ship, since she encouraged her to sleep with the sailor so that she (Dabby) and her husband could share the extra portions of food. But Dabby points out that Mary wasn't a virgin anyway, reaching out and lifting up Mary's skirt. "A. H. I love thee to the heart," Dabby reads, making fun. "That was different. That was love," Mary replies. The two convicts decide to focus on their lines again, and before long, Liz Morden joins them. Though Dabby bristles at her presence, Mary eventually helps her with her lines, too. When Liz asks Mary to tell her each line so that she can repeat it, Dabby realizes she can't read. As soon as she asks if this is true, though, Liz jumps at her, and they begin to fight.

Again, Wertenbaker makes it clear that Mary regrets having slept with the sailor. In contrast to her relationship with "A. H.," this affair had nothing to do with love; she was only engaging in sex as a practical transaction, one that helped her and Dabby survive the long voyage. Such relationships are apparently tacitly accepted by the guards, judging by the fact that Harry Brewer openly lives with Duckling. This means that sleeping with a guard for food is considered fine, but stealing from the food stores is an act punishable by death, so the prisoners have an incentive to have sex with the guards.

As Liz and Dabby fight, Ketch Freeman enters and asks why they're "at each other's throats." The two women stop fighting immediately and glare at him. "I wouldn't talk of throats if I was you, Mr Hangman Ketch Freeman," Liz spits, and Dabby and Mary join her in calling him names. Defending himself, Ketch says he was only curious about what they were doing, but Liz tells him not to "bother the actresses." This catches his attention, since he hasn't heard about the play. However, the women continue to berate him, as Liz suggests that she'd kill herself before ever **hanging** one of her fellow convicts.

Liz, Dabby, and Mary resent Ketch because he is the penal colony's hangman. Audience members may recall from the play's third scene that Ketch (also known as James) was one of the three people—along with Handy Baker and Thomas Barrett—to be caught stealing from the stores. However, it seems that Harry Brewer must have asked him to be the hangman for the other two convicts, since he is still alive while his fellow thieves are dead. As such, the other convicts see him as disloyal, ostracizing him for aligning with the guards.

ACT ONE, SCENE NINE

Ralph writes in his journal and at midnight takes out his wife's picture to kiss it, but he's interrupted by Ketch, who apologizes for intruding. "When I say my prayers I have a terrible doubt," Ketch says. "How can I be sure God is forgiving me?" He then wishes aloud that he stayed in Ireland, where he believes his "guardian angel" used to be. When he moved to England, his guardian angel didn't follow him, which he thinks is the reason he ended up getting arrested in the first place. After all, if he hadn't come to England, he wouldn't have been part of a workers' strike, and if he hadn't been part of the strike, he wouldn't have helped a group of strikers beat a fellow employee to death for going against them.

Ketch's comment about forgiveness suggests that he's struggling with guilt; he is the colony's hangman, which means he has to find a way to cope with his role as a killer. The mere fact that he's talking about such things in the middle of the night suggests that his conscience is bothering him, but he also seems to sidestep any kind of moral culpability when he suggests that the only reason he was arrested in the first place is because his guardian angel failed to guide him. Still, it's evident that he's thinking hard about his actions, and is hungry for acceptance and moral absolution.

Ketch upholds that—although he was involved in the murder of a worker who went against the strike—he shouldn't have been held accountable, since he was only going along with the rest of the group. This, he claims, is also what happened when he was caught stealing food with Handy Baker and Thomas Barrett; he was simply going along with the plan. He tells Ralph that he was given a chance after getting caught to "**hang** or be hanged." "What would you do? Someone has to do it," he says, attempting to justify the fact that he hangs his fellow convicts. Getting to his point, he tells Ralph that he's tired of everybody hating him in the colony. "It's the women," he says, "they're without mercy." Because of this, he wants to join the play, hoping that doing so will help him regain the convicts' acceptance.

Ketch has trouble accepting responsibility for his actions. Until now, it has apparently been rather easy for him to blame his moral failures on someone or something else, but now—as the hangman—it's a bit more difficult for him to sidestep moral culpability. Still, though, he tries to rid himself of guilt by pointing out that "someone has to" do the hanging, so it might as well be him. And yet, this logic fails to make him feel better, because what he truly seeks is his peers' approval. As such, he wants to redeem himself by joining the play, which he hopes will endear him to his fellow convicts.

ACT ONE, SCENE TEN

While Mary copies lines from the play onto paper (since there aren't enough scripts to go around), Wisehammer stops to listen as she speaks the words aloud. Every so often, he seizes upon a word and analyzes it. He explains to her that his father gave him a dictionary when he was young and that he read the entire thing up until the letter L. Because of this, Mary asks him the meaning of a number of words in the play, and he eloquently defines them. After a while, she tells him she has to stop talking because she needs to finish copying the script, and he mentions that he too knows how to write. Because he's so literate, she suggests that he join the play, and though he insists that he's too shy to do so, he decides to follow her advice.

At this point, the audience begins to see that Phillip was smart to stage a play in the penal colony. Although someone like Tench would assume that all the criminals are unintelligent and incapable of engaging in the artistic process, moments like this one—in which Mary and Wisehammer have an intellectual conversation about language—prove otherwise. By giving someone like Wisehammer an opportunity to put his mind to use, Phillip and Ralph encourage the kind of behavior that society typically respects, thereby transforming the nature of the colony.

ACT ONE, SCENE ELEVEN

During the first rehearsal of *The Recruiting Officer*, Ralph gathers the convicts he's casted, including Sideway, Wisehammer, Mary, Liz, Dabby, Duckling, and Ketch. As Ralph tries to begin, the prisoners insult Ketch because he's the hangman. Duckling protests the fact that her character is Liz's maid, saying that because she lives with Harry she deserves a better part. Hearing this, Dabby scoffs at her relationship with Harry, and the two women begin to verbally spar. Meanwhile, Ralph tries to proceed but notices that Henry Kable and John Arscott (two other convicts he cast) aren't present, though he notes that Arscott said he'd be there in an hour. Dabby laughs at this, saying, "You won't see him in an hour!" Liz mumbles that Dabby isn't the only one who knows something is afoot, though she doesn't clarify what she means.

Although the play has already had a positive effect on some of the convicts, there's no denying that Ralph will have a hard time getting the actors to behave. He's in a position of authority, but in order to properly direct the play, he'll have to find a way to be firm while also managing to encourage his actors—a job that will no doubt be difficult for a man whose primary duty is to watch over a group of unruly prisoners. To that end, Liz and Dabby's insinuative conversation about the whereabouts of Arscott and Kable hint that the two men have perhaps taken this opportunity to run away when no one was watching them.


Ralph begins the rehearsal with a scene that includes Sideway, who overacts his part by accompanying every word with a physical gesture. As Ralph tries to convince him to act a more casually, Sideway realizes that his handkerchief is gone, at which point he flies into a rage, letting his posh diction fall away as he yells, "My wiper! Someone's buzzed my wiper!" Looking about himself, he jumps at Liz and starts to fight her, but Ralph separates them and forces Sideway to continue the scene. Not long after they resume, a convict known as Black Caesar arrives and begs Ralph to include him in the play, saying that he's seen multiple plays in Madagascar. When Ralph says there's no role for Caesar, the convict declares that he'll be Sideway's servant and refuses to leave.

This rehearsal is quite chaotic, and yet another sign that Ralph has his work cut out for him if he's going to pull off a successful production of The Recruiting Officer*—even if there are several convicts in the cast who are genuinely skilled and excited to be in the play. In this moment, then, Wertenbaker challenges the idea that the artistic process might lead to substantial personal transformation for the convicts.*

Deciding to rehearse a scene with the female convicts, Ralph calls Liz and Mary to the front of the group and asks them to read for him. Liz has memorized her lines, but she delivers them quickly and without feeling, so Ralph tries to tell her to act like a rich woman, since her character is wealthy. However, this only distracts the convicts, as they begin to fantasize about what they would eat if they were rich. Soon enough, they get back on track, but Major Ross and Captain Campbell barge in and inform Ralph that five prisoners—including John Arscott and Henry Kable—have run away during the rehearsal. Ralph tries to point out that the play has nothing to do with this, but Ross maintains that the entire production is bringing "calamity" to the penal colony.

The fact that several prisoners have run away during the first rehearsal doesn't bode well for Ralph's production, as it enables detractors like Major Ross to frame the entire endeavor as ill-advised. Once again, Wertenbaker invites readers to reconsider whether or not the artistic process is really something that has a place in the penal colony. By encouraging the audience to truly scrutinize this, the playwright makes sure that any kind of positive outcome that might come of the play is fully appreciated when (or if) it comes to fruition.

"Caesar!" Ross shouts, noticing the convict amongst the actors. "He started going with them and came back." He then looks at Wisehammer and accuses him of being "guilty," and when Wisehammer says he was completely uninvolved in the escape, Ross says, "You're Jewish, aren't you?" Lastly, he turns his attention to Liz and claims that she was seen near the colony's food supply the previous night with Henry Kable. "You will be tried for stealing from the stores," he declares. "You know the punishment? Death by **hanging**." With this, he turns to leave, and Campbell—who is exceedingly drunk—mumbles that *The Recruiting Officer* is a good title, though he adds, "But a play, tss, a play."

It's obvious that Major Ross wants to do anything he can to derail the play, which is why he accuses as many of the actors as he possibly can (and reveals his blatant anti-Semitism in the process). Under these circumstances, it seems unlikely that Ralph will be able to prove that criminals are capable of change, since the small group of escapees has just reinforced the idea that convicts will jump at any opportunity to break the rules.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

Having been placed in chains, Liz, Wisehammer, Arscott, and Caesar sit next to each other as Liz relates her life story. She speaks about her difficult life, in which seemingly no one has respected her. "But here, the Governor says, new life," she says, pondering the idea of a fresh start. However, she notes that Major Ross doesn't like her, so it's unlikely that her life will change. Turning her attention to Wisehammer, she asks why he's in the penal colony, and he insists that he's innocent. "It doesn't matter what you say," she replies. "If they say you're a thief, you're a thief." Still, Wisehammer says he'll return one day to England and prove his innocence, but Liz says nobody will listen to him. "You can't live if you think that way," he says.

In this scene, Liz expresses her pessimistic worldview, which aligns with her personal history, since she's lived a hard and lonely life. Because of this, she thinks that nobody will ever listen to a criminal, which is why she tells Wisehammer that it "doesn't matter" what he says to prove his innocence. Considering Tench's earlier assertion that anyone who commits a crime is forever a criminal, Liz's perspective is rather accurate—as bleak and depressing as this might sound to Wisehammer.

Liz and Wisehammer discuss the idea of returning to England after their sentences are over. Liz doesn't think returning is worth it, but Wisehammer wants desperately to go back. Similarly, Caesar wants to return to Madagascar to "join [his] ancestors." Interrupting, Arscott says, "There's no escape!" As Caesar refutes this, Arscott tries to convince him to give up hope, saying that it's impossible to find one's way through Australia. He explains that he went in circles after getting away from the colony, and even though he had a compass, it didn't work. "Why didn't it work?" he asks, handing it to Wisehammer. "What does it say." After examining it for a moment, Wisehammer informs him that the object isn't a compass at all, but a piece of paper with the word "NORTH" written on it. "I gave my only shilling to a sailor for it," Arscott laments.

Similar to Liz's belief that it's not even worth trying to prove their innocence once people think they're criminals, Arscott gives up all hope of ever returning to England. When he produces the piece of paper he thought was a compass, Wertenbaker underlines the extent to which Arscott and the other prisoners have been deprived of rudimentary educational instruction. As such, the audience sees why giving them the opportunity to be in a play is unique and significant, since no one has ever helped them pursue an intellectual or artistic goal before.

As Wisehammer informs Arscott that the sailor who sold him the fake compass "betrayed" him, Sideway, Mary, and Duckling appear and tell the chained convicts that they've come to continue the rehearsal. "The Lieutenant has gone to talk to the Governor," Duckling says. "Harry said we could come see you." When Wisehammer asks how they'll be able to act in chains, Mary says, "This is the theatre. We will believe you." The group begins to act.

Although rehearsals have just begun, the play has already started to bring the convicts together. What's more, Mary hints at the imaginative liberation that the artistic process inspires, assuring Wisehammer that he can pretend he's not in chains and that everyone else will pretend along with him. In this sense, the convicts gain a sense of freedom.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

Ralph goes to Governor Phillip and tells him he wants to stop the play because his peers are against it. After considering this, Phillip tells him that making "enemies" is unavoidable when "break[ing]" from "convention." He reminds Ralph that Socrates was executed because he annoyed his fellow statesmen by questioning their ways. "Would you have a world without Socrates?" he asks. Before Ralph can answer, Phillip continues, referencing Plato's *Meno*, in which Socrates guides an uneducated slave through a handful of geometry questions. "When he treats the slave boy as a rational human being, the boy becomes one, he loses his fear, and he becomes a competent mathematician," Phillip explains. This, he suggests, is what Ralph should do with the convicts in the play.

Yet again, Governor Phillip invests himself in the idea that everyone can change for the better, this time framing it as a matter of education. In the same way that Socrates helps Meno's uneducated slave answer geometry questions simply by treating him as a "rational human being," Phillip believes that the convicts will rise to the occasion if Ralph treats them like respectable and distinguished actors instead of lowly convicts.

Governor Phillip tells Ralph that he wanted Liz to do the play because he wanted to make an "example" of her. Although she's "violent" and "full of loathing," Phillip thinks she can be reformed. As such, he doesn't want to make an example out of her by **hanging** her, but by allowing others to witness her "redemption." Considering this idea, Ralph suggests that Liz doesn't have very much "humanity," but Phillip challenges this idea, pointing out that there's no way to know what Liz is capable of until she's treated with "kindness."

Unlike Tench and Ross, who believe in using harsh and public displays of punishment to make "examples" of misbehaved convicts, Phillip wants to call attention to the positive ways in which Liz has changed. This, he knows, will spread a productive message throughout the camp, one that encourages other convicts to reform themselves and become better people.

Phillip talks to Ralph about how he was called out of retirement to become Governor of the penal colony. "What is a statesman's responsibility?" he muses. "To ensure the rule of law. But the citizens must be taught to obey that law of their own will." Expounding upon this idea, he tells Ralph that he doesn't want to "tyrannise over a group of animals." Instead, he wants to develop a social "contract" between the guards and the prisoners, not wanting to frighten them with punishment, which he believes only creates resentment and "terror." He recognizes that the play itself won't necessarily change the entire penal colony, but he hopes it will show the convicts that they're capable of presenting themselves as respectable humans, not as reviled criminals. Ralph agrees to forge onward with the rehearsals.

Part of why Phillip wants to treat the convicts so well has to do with his desire to form a just and well-functioning society in Australia. Since he has been chosen to lead this community and thus establish the beginnings of a new culture, he's interested in creating a system of government in which the people in the ruling class aren't simply dominating everyone else, but working with them to foster a positive and well-functioning society. This means finding a way to help citizens become responsible individuals who know that they're respected by the government. The way to do this, he suggests, is by helping people like Liz Morden invest themselves in the importance of the law and of the community she's about to join.

ACT TWO, SCENE THREE

Inside his tent at night, Harry drinks large quantities of rum and has a conversation with Handy Baker's ghost, speaking out both as himself and as Handy. When he calls for Duckling, Handy says, "She's on the beach, Harry, waiting for her young Handy Baker." Tormented, Harry orders Handy to leave him alone, but Handy tells him that "the dead never go away." Handy then taunts him by saying that he doesn't have possession over Duckling. "I didn't hang you," Harry declares at one point, but Handy challenges this, knowing that Harry wanted him to die. "All right," Harry admits, "I wanted you hanged, Go away!" Just when Handy finally leaves him, though, Thomas Barrett appears (again narrated by Harry himself) and talks about how "horrible" it is to be dead.

In this scene, Harry finds himself unable to keep his guilty feelings at bay. Indeed, he is literally haunted by the convicts whose deaths he helped bring about. He knows that he had an extra incentive to arrange Handy Baker's execution, since Handy was Duckling's other lover. Unable to forgive himself, then, he is tormented by the memory of what he's done.

As he talks to the ghost of Thomas Barrett, Harry periodically calls out for Duckling, who eventually comes rushing to him. She tells him that she heard him all the way from the beach, and when he insists that he's seeing ghosts, she tells him he's just having a nightmare. "No. I see them," he says. "Let me come inside you." She asks him if this will calm him down, and he says that it will, so she agrees. However, he pauses for a moment and asks what she was doing on the beach. "You were with him, he told me, you were with Handy Baker," he says.

When Harry asks to "come inside" Duckling, the audience sees that he tries to use sex to calm himself down. However, his guilt is too strong in this moment, and he finds himself unable to keep himself from accusing Duckling of cheating on him with a ghost, despite the fact that Duckling has agreed to do whatever she can to help him. As he melts down and grows angry with her, it becomes clear that he has lost himself to his stress and guilt.

ACT TWO, SCENE FOUR

The Aboriginal Australian once again appears alone on stage, this time saying that the arrival of the British is "a dream no one wants." "How can we befriend this crowded, hungry and disturbed dream?" he wonders.

Although Our Country's Good *doesn't focus much on the ways that the British have intruded upon Australia's indigenous population, Wertenbaker makes sure to periodically remind readers that regardless of what's going on with the primary characters, the entire play is set against a backdrop of violence and exploitation.*

ACT TWO, SCENE FIVE

Major Ross and Captain Campbell escort Caesar, Wisehammer, and Liz to the second rehearsal of *The Recruiting Officer*. All of them except Liz are allowed to be unchained, since Liz is going to be tried the following day. Despite this hindrance, Ralph tries to begin the rehearsal as Ross and Campbell look on and mock the entire process. When Ralph asks them to leave, Ross insists that these prisoners have nothing to hide from the guards, forcing Sideway to reveal his back, which is scarred by the 100 lashes he received on the convict ship on the way to the colony. Ross then orders Dabby to get on her hands and knees and pretend to be a dog. "Isn't that how you begged for food on the ship?" he taunts.

Major Ross's cruelty provides a sharp contrast to Governor Phillip's kindness. Once again, he tries to derail Ralph's rehearsals, this time trying to make the prisoners feel sheepish and ashamed to be involved with the play. As such, he turns what's supposed to be a liberating experience into yet another form of punishment.

Turning to Mary, Ross orders her to lift her skirt to show her tattoo. Just as she's about to obey him, though, Sideway faces Liz and delivers his line, stopping Ross from continuing to exert his power over the convicts. As they continue, Ross angrily orders Campbell to go punish Arscott for having tried to run away. Shortly thereafter, the air is filled with the sounds of Arscott's screams, and Liz and Sideway find it impossible to continue. In the middle of a line, Liz abruptly stops and sinks to the ground, listening as Arscott yells in agony.

When Ross orders Campbell to punish Arscott, he successfully disrupts the rehearsal by making it impossible for the actors to focus on their lines. Despite Sideway's admirable attempt to drown out Ross's taunts, the criminals can't quite ignore Arscott's screams, which only remind them that they're not just actors pursuing an artistic hobby, but prisoners in a penal colony.

ACT TWO, SCENE SIX

Later, Harry summons Ketch to take Liz's measurements in preparation for her **hanging** the next day. Apologetically, Ketch tries to measure Liz, saying all the while how much he doesn't want to hang her. He also promises to make sure the rope is the perfect length so that she won't dangle in the air and suffer as she dies a slow death. This, apparently, is what happened to Thomas Barrett. Turning to Harry, Ketch says that he can't measure Liz unless she stands up, adding that it's difficult to hang a woman, since women are lighter and—because of this—their necks might not break when the rope catches them. "You've hung a boy," Harry says in Thomas Barrett's voice. Finally, Harry grabs Liz and forces her to her feet. As Ketch determines her height, Harry sporadically makes accusatory pronouncements in Thomas's voice.

It's not hard to see why Ketch would have such a hard time measuring Liz for her hanging; she's not only a fellow convict, but a fellow actor, too. However, it's worth noting that Harry seems to be the one who feels the most guilt, as evidenced by his inability to block out Thomas Barrett's voice. The difference between Ketch and Harry's reactions has to do with the kind of forgiveness they each need. Ketch wants his peers to forgive him for taking the role as the hangman. Since he knows that someone else would do the job if he didn't, though, he doesn't necessarily feel the need to forgive himself for what he's done. Harry, on the other hand, is involved in an internal struggle to forgive himself for playing a part in Handy and Thomas's deaths—an internal struggle he just can't seem to overcome.

After measuring Liz, Ketch apologizes again, telling her that if he doesn't hang her, someone else will. At least, he says, he can make sure that she feels as little pain as possible. As he and Harry are about to leave, Liz finally speaks, asking Harry to tell Ralph that she didn't steal any food. "Why didn't you say that before?" Harry asks, but she doesn't answer. At this point, Thomas Barrett's voice completely takes control of Harry and describes the sensation of **hanging**, saying, "First fear, then a pain at the back of the neck. Then nothing." Suddenly, in his own voice, Harry says, "I can't see. It's dark. It's dark," and collapses.

When Liz says she didn't help steal any food and Harry asks why she didn't "say that before," audience members can reasonably assume that she has already had her trial and that she declined to argue for her own innocence. This is in keeping with her previous assertion that "if they say you're a thief, you're a thief." Unfortunately for her, though, Harry is too overwhelmed by his own personal demons to be a good advocate for her.

ACT TWO, SCENE SEVEN

Once more, the Aboriginal Australian man talks about the British colonizers. Wondering who they are, he suggests that they are "ghosts" who have "spilled from [a] dream." He doesn't know why they've come, nor what they need, but he wants to "satisfy" them so that they'll return to their own land. "How can we satisfy them?" he asks.

In this brief monologue, the Aboriginal man tries desperately to discern what, exactly, he and his people could possibly do to "satisfy" the colonizers and thus convince them to leave. The audience knows, however, that there's nothing this man can do to ward off these newcomers.

After the Aboriginal Australian man leaves, Mary and Ralph rehearse in front of Dabby, Wisehammer, and Arscott. After a moment, they pause to discuss the script, wondering why Mary's character wants Ralph's character to make a will for her. Wisehammer chimes in, explaining that Mary's character just wants proof of Ralph's "willingness to marry her." Now that she understands, Mary says that she would "trust" Ralph's character if she were in the same circumstances. "When dealing with men, always have a contract," Dabby says. "Love is a contract," Mary replies, to which Dabby says, "Love is the barter of perishable goods. A man's word for a woman's body."

When Mary says that she would "trust" Ralph's character based simply on love, Wertenbaker hints at a possible sense of affection growing between Mary and Ralph in real life, though it's difficult at this point to say whether or not she's flirting with him by saying this. Dabby then distracts Mary by suggesting that men are untrustworthy. By saying that love is "the barter of perishable goods," she again reveals her view of romance as a transaction of sorts—one in which a man promises to do something for a woman in exchange for her "body."

Wisehammer tells Ralph that he has written a new prologue for the play, since the current one "won't make any sense to the convicts." As Ralph reads it over, Wisehammer tells Mary that he would marry her, suggesting that they should live together when they're free. "Think about it, you would live with me, in a house," he says. Referring to Ralph, he says, "he'll have to put you in a hut at the bottom of his garden and call you his servant in public, that is, his whore. Don't do it, Mary." After a moment, Ralph dismissively says that Wisehammer's prologue is "interesting" and promises to read the rest later. "Do you like the last two lines. Mary helped me with them," Wisehammer says, to which Ralph only says, "Ah."

This scene seemingly confirms that Mary and Ralph are beginning to develop feelings for one another. Wisehammer picks up on this when he advises her not to live with Ralph, pointing out that he'd have to treat her like a "servant" or "whore" in front of his colleagues. Ralph sees that Wisehammer is also becoming friendly with Mary, which is most likely why he largely disregards Wisehammer's prologue. In an environment in which romantic relationships are chiefly sexual and transactional, it's worth paying attention to this dynamic, as two men compete for Mary's affections not because they simply want to have sex with her (or so it seems) but because they genuinely like her.

When the rehearsal resumes, Wisehammer approaches and kisses Mary. Seeing this, Ralph "angrily" interrupts, saying the script doesn't indicate that they should kiss. He forbids it, saying that he is the director and therefore gets the final say, even as Wisehammer argues that "it's right for the character." Soon after this exchange, the cast discusses *The Recruiting Officer*, and Dabby complains about how little she identifies with her character. Arscott, on the other hand, is pleased with his role as a man named Kite. "When I say Kite's lines I forget everything else," he says. "I forget the judge said I'm going to have to spend the rest of my natural life in this place getting beaten and working like a slave." He says that playing Kite helps him forget about his mistakes. "When I speak Kite's lines I don't hate anymore."

The play solidifies Wisehammer and Ralph's competition for Mary in this moment, as Ralph becomes unnecessarily angry when Wisehammer kisses her. Arscott's positive remarks about what it's like to perform underline the ways in which acting gives people a chance to escape their own lives. Unhappy with his existence in the penal colony, Arscott relishes the time he gets to spend pretending to be someone else, giving him a rather cathartic experience that is emotionally liberating.

Despite Arscott's good attitude, Dabby is still upset, saying that she wants to do a play that more closely resembles her own life. However, Wisehammer points out that this is the beauty of the theater, which can help a person "understand something new." Still, Dabby doesn't hide that she's unhappy with her role, eventually storming away as Ketch enters and begins to rehearse. However, Mary has a hard time doing a scene with him because she can't stop thinking about the fact that he's going to hang Liz the following day. "One has to transcend personal feelings in the theatre," Ralph insists, but she runs away. Wisehammer follows her, at which point Ralph looks at Ketch and decides to end the rehearsal, admitting that they aren't making good "progress." When everyone is gone, Ketch stands on his own in a "bewildered" state.

Again, the audience sees the emotionally liberating effects of performance, at least insofar as Wisehammer discusses the power of theater to help people inhabit new worldviews and "understand something new." However, the "transcend[ent]" mindset that Ralph encourages Mary to embody isn't quite strong enough to help her forget that one of her fellow convicts is going to be executed. As for Ketch, he once more finds himself ostracized by his peers, unable to gain their acceptance or forgiveness despite his attempt to join them in the otherwise unifying context of the theater.

ACT TWO, SCENE EIGHT

Harry is gravely ill in his tent. It is night, and Duckling is by his side, trying desperately to rouse him. She tells him that she'll stop being silent around him if he lives and that she won't ignore him or think about someone else when they have sex. "If you live, I will stay with you," she says. "If you live, I will be wet and open to your touch. If you live, I will answer all your questions. If you live, I will look at you. If you live, I will love you." After a moment, she says, "If you die, I will never forgive you." Once she's said this, she leans close and realizes that he's dead. "I hate you. No. I love you," she laments, curling up and crying, "How could you do this?"

In her short but impassioned monologue, Duckling tries to bribe Harry into staying alive. Although he obviously doesn't have much control over whether or not he dies of an illness, this rhetorical approach aligns with their overall relational dynamic, since they're both used to treating their romantic connection as a transaction. What Duckling wants in this moment is to be reassured that Harry will remain alive, so she offers her body. The fact that she actually says she loves him is worth noting too, since it suggests that their relationship is perhaps more complicated than it seems, again showing that relationships founded upon power imbalances are emotionally fraught and difficult to navigate.

ACT TWO, SCENE NINE

On the beach that night, Mary practices her lines by herself, rehearsing a love scene between her character and the play's primary love interest. Before long, Ralph approaches and starts doing the scene with her. When the two characters kiss, Mary and Ralph embrace and then repeat the intimacy before stopping and deciding to try it again. This soon turns into a real kiss, and Mary begins to take off her clothes. "I've never looked at the body of a woman before," Ralph admits, and when Mary asks if he's ever seen his wife without clothes, he says, "It wasn't right to look at her. Let me see you." She says, "Yes. Let me see you," and he too starts taking off his clothes.

Unlike the other relationships in Our Country's Good, *Ralph and Mary fall in love in an organic, natural way. Neither of them wants to get anything from the other, and the fact that Ralph has until this point been so against the idea of having an affair with one of the convicts confirms that he's acting on legitimately strong romantic feelings, not a fleeting attraction. In fact, it seems that his feelings for Mary are the first truly romantic feelings he's ever had, considering that he never felt comfortable seeing his wife naked. As such, Wertenbaker presents the audience with one of the play's healthiest relationships, though even this romantic connection is complicated by the power imbalance between Mary and Ralph.*

ACT TWO, SCENE TEN

In a meeting about Liz Morden, Judge Collins tells Ralph, Major Ross, Captain Campbell, and Governor Phillip that the convict declined to speak on her own behalf at her trial. This, he explains, was interpreted as "an admission of guilt," and so she was sentenced to death. "The evidence against her, however, is flimsy," Collins admits, and though Ross points out that she was seen with Kable near the food supply, Collins says that the soldier who supposedly saw this was intoxicated and far away. "My only fear, Your Excellency, is that she may have refused to speak because she no longer believes in the process of justice," Collins says to Phillip. "If that is so, the courts here will become travesties."

Judge Collins demonstrates his desire for a just society by pointing out that any successful community has to have a well-functioning judicial system. This, he says, depends not only on the people who run that system, but on the citizens, too, since they have to "believe in the process of justice" in order for that process to work. This sentiment recalls Phillip's previous assertion that he wants to forge a social "contract" with the convicts so that they can work together to build a productive society. In this case, however, Liz hasn't even tried to prove her own innocence because she thinks the guards won't listen to her.

Ralph says that Liz *did* tell Harry Brewer she was innocent, but Harry is dead and was never able to relay her message in court. Although Ketch gave an account of what Liz said to Harry when she was getting measured for her **hanging**, Collins notes that his testimony didn't do much in the trial because Liz "wouldn't confirm what he said." As this conversation continues, Ralph, Phillip, and Collins insist upon finding out the truth, but Ross disparages them for being too kind to a convict like Liz. "Truth is indeed a luxury, but its absence brings about the most abject poverty in a civilisation," Phillip tells him. Ross upholds that the colony isn't a "civilisation" but a "hateful" "outpost."

Yet again, Phillip finds himself arguing for the fair and humane treatment of the convicts, this time insisting that it's worth it to diligently investigate whether or not Liz is guilty of having stolen food. By saying that the "absence" of truth "brings about the most abject poverty in a civilisation," he encourages his colleagues to consider the fact that no well-functioning society—or judicial system—can operate without a genuine respect for and interest in finding the truth.

Judge Collins sends Campbell to fetch Liz, whom he gives one last chance to defend herself. Explaining that they'll be forced to hang her if she doesn't say anything, he tells her that Governor Phillip can "overrule the court" if he thinks she's innocent. "Did you steal that food with the escaped prisoner Kable?" he asks, but she doesn't respond. To encourage her, Ralph tells her that nobody will be angry if she speaks the truth, but Phillip contradicts this, saying, "Tell the truth and accept the contempt. That is the history of great men, Liz, you may be despised, but you will have shown courage." Collins, Ralph, and Phillip try to encourage her to speak by telling her that it's for "the good of the colony" and for the good of the play. Finally, after a long pause, Liz says, "I didn't steal the food."

When Phillip disagrees with Ralph and says that telling the truth often means upsetting other people, he shows his willingness to treat Liz as an equal. Rather than talking down to her and assuming that she can't handle the stress of deciding whether or not to tell the truth, he levels with her, acknowledging that Kable might get mad at her if she tells them that he stole the food on his own (though this is a moot point, since Kable is already gone). By treating Liz as a "rational human being"—in the same way that Socrates treats Meno's slave—Phillip encourages her to be levelheaded about her situation, which is likely why she finally decides to speak up for herself.

Having gotten the truth out of Liz, Governor Phillip asks why she didn't advocate for her innocence earlier. "Because it wouldn't have mattered," she says. "Speaking the truth?" Phillip asks. "Speaking," she replies. Cutting in, Ross says that Judge Collins should listen to the soldier who claimed to have seen Liz by the food stores, but Collins points out that this soldier was drunk and "uncertain of what he saw." Ross ignores this, saying that the soldier is still a soldier and thus deserves to be listened to. "You will have a revolt on your hands, Governor," he says, to which Phillip replies, "I'm sure I will, but let us see the play first. Liz, I hope you are good in your part." Liz tells him that she'll do her very best to deliver her lines with "elegance and clarity."

Liz's initial decision not to speak up for herself proves that Collins was right when he said that she didn't believe in the efficacy of the judicial system. Thankfully for her, though, Phillip's kindness helped her see that her voice would be heard. When she tells him that she'll speak her lines with "elegance and clarity," the audience sees that the play has also transformed her, since she was originally so brusque and short-tempered but now is interested in presenting herself as a cultured actor.

ACT TWO, SCENE ELEVEN

The Aboriginal Australian stands backstage that night. "Look," he says, "oozing pustules on my skin, heat on my forehead. Perhaps we have been wrong all this time and this is not a dream at all." When he leaves, the convicts pass him and Mary asks, "Are the savages coming to see the play as well?" Ketch explains that the Aboriginal Australians are dying of small pox. "I hope they won't upset the audience," Sideway says, and Mary starts talking about how many people have come to see the play. Noticing Duckling—who is mourning the loss of Harry—Liz tells her that Dabby could fill in for her, but Duckling insists upon doing it herself. Apparently, Ross kicked her out of Harry's tent, saying that "a whore [is] a whore." As she explains this to the group, she begins to cry, and Mary promises to talk to Ralph about the matter.

Although the convicts themselves have benefited from kindness—since Phillip was empathetic enough to treat them as "rational" humans—they fail to extend this goodwill to the Aboriginal Australians. Instead of stopping to consider the fact that the Aboriginal population only has small pox because they—the British settlers—brought it to Australia, the convicts selfishly hope that the dying indigenous people won't "upset the audience." As such, the audience sees that they have failed to perpetuate the kind of compassion from which they themselves have benefited. While Mary's relationship with Ralph has developed naturally, in this scene it becomes clear that their bond will indeed come along with certain privileges, as Mary hints at the fact that she might be able to convince Ralph to advocate for Duckling.

Sideway insists that everyone practice their bow. Dabby, however, says she won't be taking a bow and that she doesn't want to be "noticed." She then explains that she plans to run away in the commotion following the play's final scene. "You can't," Mary says. "The Lieutenant will be blamed, I won't let you." However, Dabby tells her that if she mentions these plans to Ralph, she won't act. Mary isn't the only one upset by this development, though. "When I say my lines, I think of nothing else. Why can't you do the same?" Arscott says. In response, Dabby says that the play is temporary, pointing out that what she wants is to return to England. Still upset, Mary says the guards won't let them do another play if Dabby runs away.

Dabby's plan to run away seemingly challenges the notion that the play has transformed the convicts. At the same time, the reaction of the other actors suggests that the artistic process truly has *made a difference to their community. After all, they all come together to try to dissuade Dabby from running away, revealing how important the play is to them (while also demonstrating that the play has united them). The fact that the convicts are distressed by the idea of not being able to put on another play also indicates just how much they have enjoyed this experience. In and of itself, this is a significant development, since before the play they didn't have anything to devote themselves to.*

Wisehammer doesn't understand why Dabby wants to go back to England. "It's too small and they don't like Jews," he says. "Here, no one has more of a right than anyone else to call you a foreigner. I want to become the first famous writer." Sideway declares that he's going to found a theater company in Australia once he's free, assuring everyone that they can join. Everyone loves this idea, including Liz, who says she'd happily be part of Sideway's company. "And so will I," Ketch chimes in, and Sideway says, "I'll hold auditions tomorrow." In response, Dabby says, "Tomorrow," and everyone echoes her.

Wisehammer and Sideway's grandiose plans for the future suggest that the play has helped them visualize better lives, ones in which they are more than criminals. This, it seems, is exactly the kind of character rehabilitation that Phillip hoped to see from the convicts. It even appears as if Dabby has decided not to run away. Indeed, the play has unified this group of convicts so much that they want to convince her to follow the rules. In this way, Wertenbaker shows the audience that Phillip was right to invest himself in the idea that criminals are capable of positive change.

Ralph comes backstage and gives last-minute directorial advice to the actors before realizing that Caesar is missing. As Arscott goes looking for him, Ralph gives Duckling his condolences and tells her she doesn't need to act in the play, but Duckling insists, saying, "[Harry] liked to hear me say my lines." Walking over to Mary, Ralph compliments her beauty, and she tells him she had a dream in which she had three children. "If we have a boy we will call him Harry," Ralph says. "And if we have a girl?" Mary asks. "She will be called Betsey Alicia," Ralph answers. Just as he says this, Arscott returns with Caesar, whom he found lying drunkenly on the beach.

At the beginning of Our Country's Good, *Ralph was primarily interested in directing the play because he wanted to impress Governor Phillip. Now, though, the experience has made him into a more compassionate person, as he goes out of his way to empathize with a convict, telling Duckling that he's sorry about Harry's death. This isn't the only way he has changed, as evidenced by the fact that he's finally in a loving relationship, one in which he actually feels comfortable seeing his partner naked (which apparently wasn't the case in his actual marriage). He still feels a bit guilty about having cheated on his wife, though, which is perhaps why he makes the rather confusing decision to name his and Mary's daughter after Betsey Alicia—a gesture that calms his conscience more than it actually honors his wife.*

Caesar tells Ralph that he can't act because his ancestors will be "angry" with him for being "laughed at" by the audience. Nonetheless, Ralph forces him to participate, reminding him that he's the one who wanted to be in it in the first place. "I'm nervous too, but I have overcome it," Ketch says. "You have to be brave to be an actor." Ralph then tells the drunken convict that his own ancestors wouldn't be happy to see him in this play, either. "But our ancestors are thousands of miles away," he says. He then threatens Caesar by saying that he'll hang him if he doesn't act, and Caesar finally "pulls himself together." Having heard this reference to **hanging**, Ketch turns to Liz and tells her that he wouldn't have been able to hang her.

The fact that Ralph forces Caesar to go through with the performance is worth noting, since he originally didn't want Caesar to be in the play. This demonstrates the extent to which Ralph has come to see the actors as a cohesive group. Although Caesar doesn't have any lines and wasn't supposed to be part of the cast, he has been with the group throughout rehearsals and thus bonded with them. Similarly, Ketch seems to have finally endeared himself to the other convicts, who at the very least have stopped making hateful comments about him. In turn, Wertenbaker once again emphasizes the unifying effects of the artistic process.

Wisehammer reminds Ralph of his prologue. Reading it aloud backstage, he pronounces lines such as: "True patriots all; for be it understood, / We left our country for our country's good." When he finishes, Ralph notes that Major Ross will have a "fit" if he hears this, and though he admits it's quite good, he tells Wisehammer it's too political for the audience. Because of this, Sideway assures Wisehammer that they can use the prologue in the "Sideway Theatre." Wisehammer is disappointed, but Ralph tells him that the theater is like a "small republic," which "requires private sacrifices for the good of the whole." Having said this, he gives the actors one last encouraging speech, telling them that they're "on their own" now. Finally, Arscott goes onstage to deliver his opening monologue, which receives cascades of laughter and applause from the audience.

The title, Our Country's Good, *is drawn from Wisehammer's prologue (itself a quote attributed to the real-life George Barrington, a famous pickpocket sent to Australia), which provides a commentary on the fact that the convicts in the penal colony have been expelled from their home country. This, Wisehammer somewhat ironically asserts, is for their "country's good," since they are supposedly nothing but a band of criminals and lowlifes. However, the eloquent style of this prologue and the apparent success of the play suggest that England was wrong to write them off as incapable of contributing productively to society. Governor Phillip has recognized their potential, however, thereby turning their isolation in Australia into a new beginning rather than a hopeless internment.*

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