

YOUNG VIC

A CO-PRODUCTION

OUR COUNTRY'S GOOD

BY **TIMBERLAKE WERTENBAKER**

based on *The Playmaker* by Thomas Keneally

WORKPACK

by **Gilllan King**

produced in association with the

**THEATRE
MUSEUM**

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF
THE PERFORMING ARTS

edited by Sophie Ward

produced by Madeline Joinson

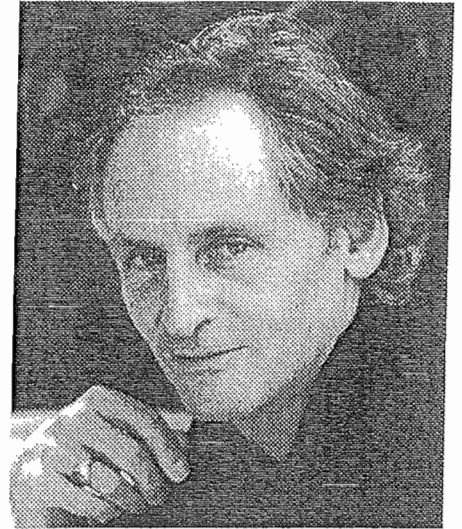
with thanks to Diana Hillier



INTRODUCTION

September 1998

Dear Colleague



Here is Out of Joint's workpack for the 1998 production of *Our Country's Good*. I hope you find it useful.

"The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there." [L P Hartley]

Any production set in the past has to discover what these differences are, and a lot of the exercises I do with actors in the early weeks of rehearsal try to focus on that. There are some simple questions to answer: What did they eat? How much did they drink? Impossible questions like: How much did it hurt to receive one hundred lashes? And intriguing questions like: What did Mary Brenham think of calling her daughter after Ralph Clark's wife? Why did people become criminals? (We played the Transportation Game in rehearsals to explore this particular question).

In the scene called 'The Meaning of Plays', Arscott says *"can we get on with rehearsal and stop talking"*. It's a common belief that doing things is fun but talking about them is less interesting. It's not as simple as that: no exercises or improvisations can be very detailed unless you have absorbed the information first. Read the first few chapters of *The Fatal Shore* by Robert Hughes. Remember that most of the characters in *Our Country's Good* were real people whose lives began before and ended after the play itself. Some of the most unlikely events in the play are true. Robert Sideway did start Sydney's first professional theatre company when he had served his "seven years servitude" and Dabby Bryant, her husband, and her two young children made the longest voyage then recorded in an open boat when they escaped. If you look at a map of Sydney Harbour you will see Clarke Island where Ralph had his vegetable garden, several other places are named after characters in the play.

Throughout the rehearsal process I used 'actioning' which I learnt when working with Bill Gaskill when we ran *Joint Stock* in the 70s. I also used playing cards to clarify characters' status and acting choices. These techniques are explained in the workpack.

I look forward to meeting some of you in the workshops or at the theatre.

Best wishes,

Max Stafford-Clark

LAW AND ORDER

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

THE GEORGIAN JUDICIAL SYSTEM

The Georgians had the harshest judicial system in Europe. Britain's prisons were overflowing due to extremely harsh sentences for criminals. The Government inflicted these harsh laws in direct response to public opinion. The "public" wanted severe punishment for those crimes committed against property (ie theft). This "public" was less concerned with crimes against the self (ie murder).

THE PHILOSOPHY OF PUNISHMENT

WATKIN TENCH (John Locke)

In *Our Country's Good* [Act Two, Scene One] Tench argues that the criminal tendency is innate and definitive - "If you commit a crime, you are a criminal". Tench is a Lockean. John Locke believed that criminals should enjoy no more rights than a slave, there is no room for redemption.

▼

GOVERNOR PHILLIP (John Howard)

Governor Phillip believes that the convicts are not inherently evil, and with compassion are capable of reform. He represents John Howard whose belief in universal sin was the basis for this argument.

▼

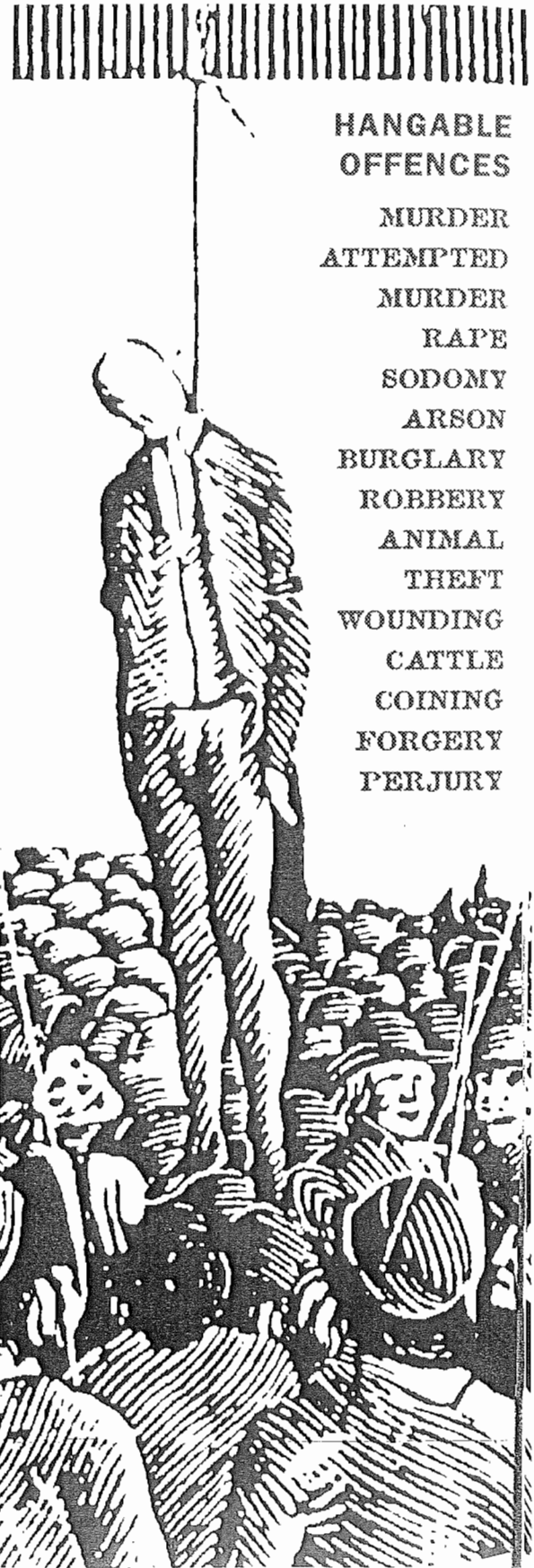
DAVID COLLINS (William Godwin)

The most dominant argument of the late 18th Century was led by William Godwin and is represented by Collins in the play. Godwin believed in reform through exemplary justice; for Collins public hanging could "serve as a sharp example whereas death from flogging was slow and unobserved".



EXERCISE: DEBATE

In your class split up into 3 groups. Each group must take a "philosophy" [even if you disagree personally]. Each member of the group chooses a card from a set of playing cards. If you have a high number or picture card (ace is low) you passionately believe in your chosen philosophy. A lower card means you may be swayed by other arguments. At the end of the session take a vote on which philosophy was argued most convincingly.

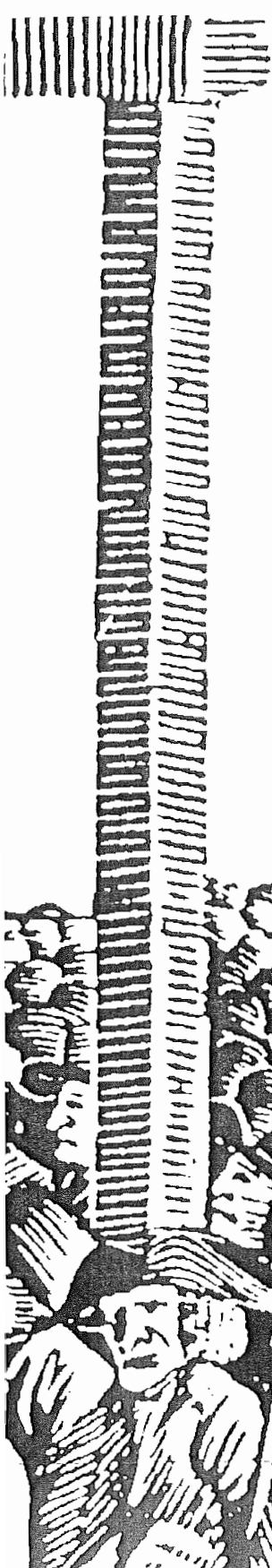


HANGABLE OFFENCES

MURDER
ATTEMPTED
MURDER
RAPE
SODOMY
ARSON
BURGLARY
ROBBERY
ANIMAL
THEFT
WOUNDING
CATTLE
COINING
FORGERY
PERJURY

A good day out...

...for all the family!



Between 1751 and 1800 there were over 1400 people hanged publicly in London. Watkin Tench argues that public hanging was the working people's "favourite form of entertainment", and Tyburn gallows were the central attraction. Eight times a year unfortunate felons were hanged before hungry crowds of between 3,000 and 7,000 people. Often the numbers soared to mobs of 40,000 people and there are records of a crowd of 100,000 for notorious criminals.


It was a gory and fascinating spectacle, many took several minutes to die. In 1802 Governor Wall dangled for 15 minutes before he died. The noose had slipped behind his neck and in the end the hangman had to pull his legs. This was not unusual, a fact borne out by Thomas Barrett's death in *Our Country's Good* [Act Two, Scene Six]

Ketch: **Remember how he danced and everyone laughed**

What do the convicts in *Our Country's Good* think of hanging and the law?

Sideway: **This I am sure of, I shall meet with less
cruelty among the most barbarous nations
than I have found at home**
[Act 2, Scene 5]

Duckling: **No way I'm doing a play with a hangman. The
words would stick in my throat**



EXERCISE : FAMOUS LAST WORDS!

Read Act Two, Scene Six and/or
the chapter "Wryneck Day" in
The Playmaker
(especially page 123).

What were Thomas Barrett's last
words?

Was he sincere? What would
you say in the same situation?

Would you 'perform and
entertain' the crowd?

HOW YOU DIED - THE GORY FACTS!

The eyes red, projecting
forwards and sometimes
partially forced out of their
cavities...

a bloody froth or frothy mucus
sometimes escaping from the
lips and nostrils... the urine and
faeces are sometimes
involuntarily expelled at the
moment of death.

Henry Fielding

(an Eighteenth century playwright and novelist)

EXERCISE: ACTIONING

Look at Act Two, Scene Six, "The Science of Hanging". Read it through in groups. Why doesn't Liz speak initially? After each sentence or thought choose a transitive ('doing') verb that describes what the character is feeling or trying to do. e.g.

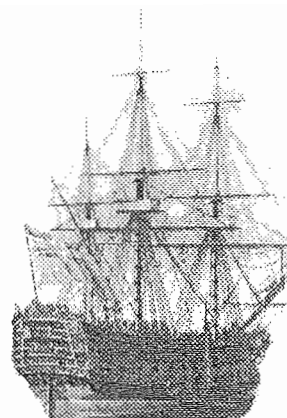
	(confronts)
Ketch:	I don't want to do this
	(bullies)
Harry:	Get on with it, Freeman.
	(prepares)
Ketch:	(to Liz) I have to measure you.

REPRIEVED OR DAMNED FURTHER?

Many characters in *Our Country's Good* were given a "conditional pardon". This meant that their death sentences were commuted to transportation. Why, Governor Phillip asks, was it necessary to erect another Tyburn in Australia? Because public physical punishment was a display of the power of the State over the individual and there was nowhere that the State needed to assert its authority more strongly than in a penal colony. The "authorities" in Australia believed that they had to achieve order before they could offer justice, and it is not surprising that Collins warns Phillip that the "edifice will collapse without the mortar of fear"

(Act One, Scene Three)

EXERCISE: THE TRANSPORTATION GAME



Get into small groups.

Each group creates a communal character and their biography. Your character legitimately earns £20 a year. To survive you need £40 a year. You are therefore likely to be forced to commit crimes to cover this shortfall. One person (possibly the teacher) is the dealer and deals each group three cards. Look at your cards. These cards will indicate the criminal activity you undertake for survival. A low card could be stealing a loaf of bread, a high card could be grand theft and arson. Choose your crimes to fit your cards and characters. Kings and Queens are 'trump cards'. A King symbolises a 'King's Pardon' - if caught you can use this to be reprieved. (A local vicar or a person of high standing has given you a character reference). A Queen means you are pregnant (male characters can swap or give this card away). If caught you can use this card to change your sentence from transportation to imprisonment.

Decide which crime you are going to commit and place the corresponding card in the centre. Each group takes it in turn to relate the story of their crime.

After each story has been told, the Dealer turns over a card from the remaining pack. If it is the same suit or the same number you have been caught and will be hanged or transported for your crime (the Dealer acts as judge and decides the sentence). If it is not the same you have got away with it and have earned the sum of the card. Obviously the higher the card you choose to gamble, the sooner you will reach your £40 a year.

SEE WHO SURVIVES AND GOOD LUCK!

DATES AND EVENTS OF THE 18TH CENTURY

EXERCISE

In groups fit the following dates and events together. Add any other dates/events that you can.

1701

1702

1706

1707

1710

1713

1714

1702

1727

1740

1741

1749

1760

1770

1776

1783

1787

1788

1770

1789

1710

1760

1713

1741

A: George I becomes King

B: Anne becomes Queen

C: *Tom Jones* by Henry Fielding is published

D: Captain Cook "discovers" Australia

E: The first fleet arrives in Australia

F: The King recovers from illness

G: The beginning of the French Revolution

H: The end of Tyburn gallows

I: Wren finishes St Paul's Cathedral

J: Death of George Farquhar

K: First performance of *The Recruiting Officer*

L: George II becomes King

M: David Garrick's theatrical debut

N: Peg Woffington's theatrical debut

O: First fleet sets sail for Australia

P: The King's first episode of madness

Q: Treaty of Utrecht ends war of Spanish succession

R: Convict production of *The Recruiting Officer*

S: Adam Smith writes *The Wealth of Nations*

T: Jethro Tull's seed drill improves farming

U: Watt and Boulton produce the first commercial steam engine.

V: George III becomes King

ANSWERS

1710

- 1701** T: Jethro Tull's seed drill improves farming
- 1702** B: Anne becomes Queen
- 1706** K: First performance of *The Recruiting Officer*
- 1707** J: Death of George Farquhar
- 1710** I: Wren finishes St Paul's Cathedral
- 1713** Q: Treaty of Utrecht ends war of Spanish succession
- 1714** A: George I becomes King
- 1727** L: George II becomes King
- 1740** N: Peg Woffington's theatrical debut
- 1741** M: David Garrick's theatrical debut
- 1749** C: *Tom Jones* by Henry Fielding is published
- 1760** V: George III becomes King
- 1770** D: Captain Cook 'discovers' Australia
- 1776** S: Adam Smith writes *The Wealth of Nations*
- U: Watt and Boulton produce the first commercial steam engines
- 1783** H: The end of Tyburn gallows
- 1787** O: First fleet sets sail for Australia
- P: The King's first episode of madness
- 1788** E: The first fleet arrives in Australia
- 1789** F: The King recovers from illness
- R: Convict production of *The Recruiting Officer*
- G: The beginning of the French Revolution

1770

1789

HISTORY

The play is set in the late 1780s. George III is on the throne but is suffering from bouts of Polyphoria, a disease that scuttles the mind and makes him periodically unfit to govern (a hereditary disease!). To celebrate the King's birthday on June 4 1789 Governor Phillip has asked Ralph Clark to "put on a play". Ralph chooses *The Recruiting Officer* by George Farquhar which was as popular a production when it was first performed in Drury Lane Theatre in 1706 as *Phantom of the Opera* or *The Mousetrap* are today.



What world changing events happened in France in 1789 and in America from the 1770s through to the 1780s ?
How would these events have affected Great Britain and the colonies?

EXERCISE

Create your own contrasting boxes for food, fashion, entertainment etc for one of the convicts and one of the officers while they were still living in England. Write a diary page entry for your two chosen characters taking inspiration from your boxed lists.

SHOPPING LIST FOR THE LOWER ORDERS

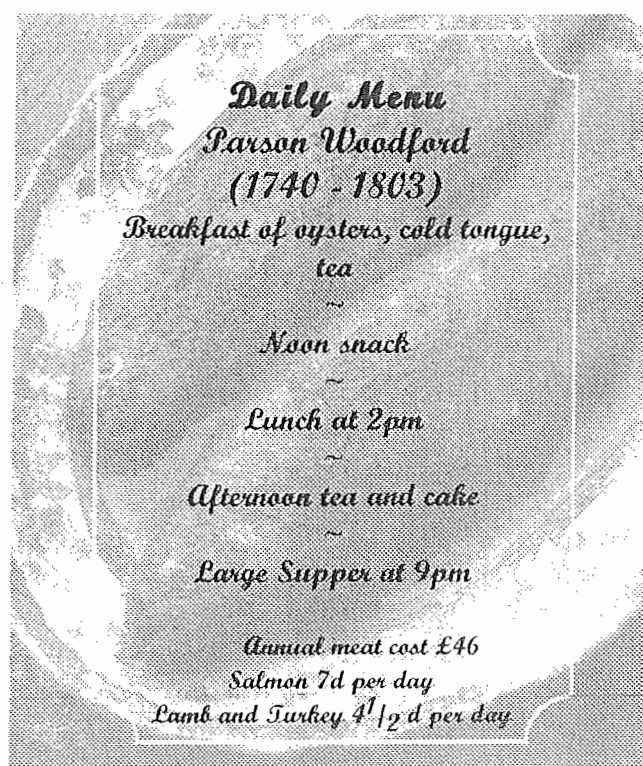
Potatoes, Flour, Yeast, Salt
Tea, Soap, Candles, Blueing,
Sugar and Butter (only occasionally)

MUSIC

- 1719** George Frederick Handel becomes director of The Royal Academy of Music
- 1721** Bach's Brandenburg Concertos
- 1741** Handel's *Messiah*
- 1786** Mozart's opera *The Marriage of Figaro*

LITERATURE

- 1700** Congreve wrote *Way of the World* (play)
- 1719** Daniel Defoe wrote *Robinson Crusoe* (novel)
- 1749** Henry Fielding wrote *Tom Jones* (novel)
- 1755** Samuel Johnson compiled *Dictionary of the English Language*
- 1788** Fanny Burney wrote *Evelina* (novel)
- 1789** Blake wrote *Songs of Innocence* (poetry)



RELATIONSHIPS AND SEX

SHITTY MEG



Costume
design by
Julian
McGowan

Ralph: Dreamt, my beloved Alicia, that I was walking with you and that you was in your riding habit - oh my dear woman when shall I be able to hear from you?

On Sunday as usual, kissed your dear beloved image a thousand times - was very much frightened by lightning as it broke near my tent...

Harry: We used to hear you on the ship, Ralph calling for your Betsey Alicia.

Ralph: Don't speak her name on this iniquitous shore.



What makes Ralph change his mind about taking a 'lag woman' for a mistress?

How does he justify his change of opinion?



Was Governor Phillips' desire that the convicts marry and create a new society ever really possible?

What social conditions impeded his wish?

EXERCISE

Read Act One, Scene Eight of *Our Country's Good*. What chance do the women have of "reforming" or "improving"? Is there a case for the argument that prison/transportation feeds criminality? Do you have to learn the "ways" to survive?

Was there any way to escape this enforced prostitution?

ACTIONING

"An action has to be expressed by a transitive verb and gives the character's intention or tactic for that particular thought. For example, if I was speaking to you at this moment, George, my overall intention for the scene might be to 'teach George'. Along the way the actions I would employ could be 'to interest', 'to grip', 'to instruct', 'to fascinate' or even, and here I would be a bit ambitious, 'to enthrall'. The fact that I could fail with these glorious intentions, and in fact end up puzzling or confusing or even, heavens forbid, boring you, is not my problem as an actor. That's not my intention. One definition of bad-acting would be when an actor plays the result of his action (e.g. 'bores') and not the intention itself (e.g. 'educates' or 'interests'). It's up to the other actors in the scene to play the response, not for the protagonist to act a judgement on himself."

From *Letters to George* by Max Stafford-Clark

EXERCISE

Ralph: I've never looked at the
body of a woman before.

Mary: Your wife?

Ralph: It wasn't right to look at her.
Let me see you.

Mary: Yes.

Ralph: Let me see you.

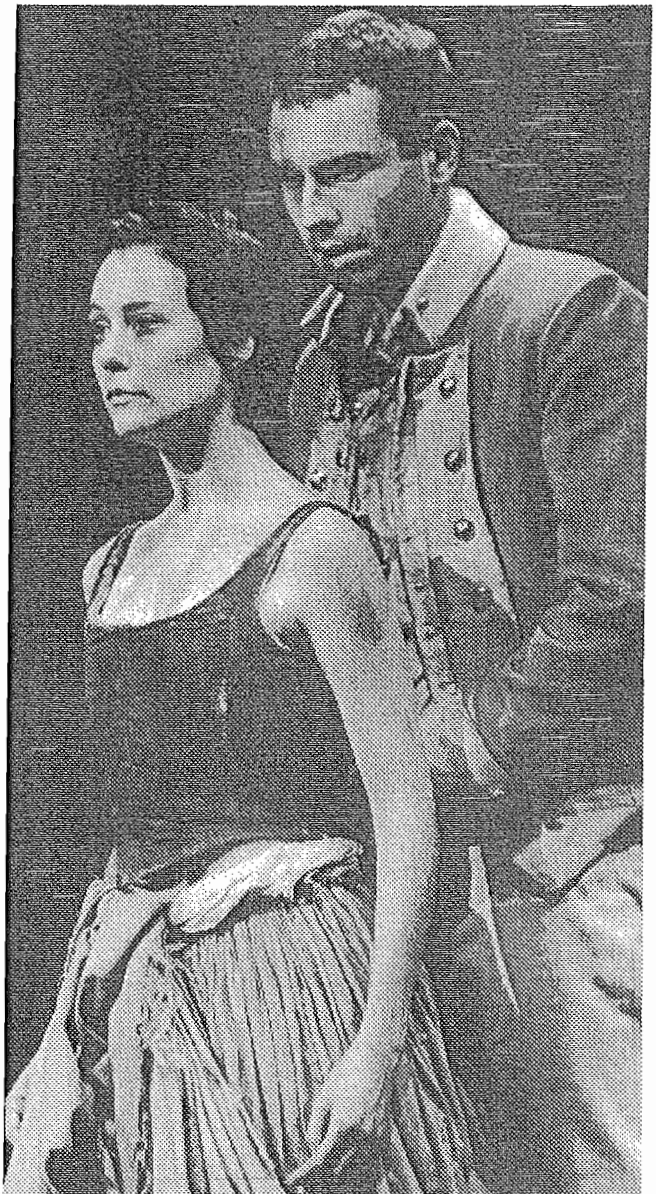
Mary: Yes.

[He begins to undress himself]

At the beginning of each line choose a verb that describes the intention of the characters. e.g. entrusts, guides, humours.

This is an acting exercise that the director of *Our Country's Good*, Max Stafford-Clark works through with the actors. What is the value of this

- a) for an actor? _____
- b) for a student? _____



Sarah Walton (Mary Brenham) and Stephen Beresford (Ralph Clark). Photo: John Haynes

TRANSPORTATION

Is Australia the New America?

Transportation began in 1650 when felons were sent to America to work on plantations. Over the next 125 years, 50,000 men, women and children were shipped off to the 13 colonies. This ended with the American War of Independence. No longer would the new United States put up with our unwanted criminals. It was not the 'material' they needed to build a 'new land'.

A New Dumping Ground?

America had been a convenient, successful and prosperous dumping ground, but Australia was to prove inconvenient and costly. Now in Australia, prisoners' upkeep was a financial burden on the government until they died, returned, or chose at the end of their sentence to become free settlers.

The Financial Decider

In *The Fatal Shore*, Robert Hughes points to the pine and flax of Botany Bay as being the deciding factor. These raw materials, essential for ship making, were the Georgian equivalent of today's oil and uranium. Transportation began on a massive scale and between 1786 and 1865 160,000 were sent to Australia.

As Keneally points out in *The Playmaker*, for the convicts themselves Australia seemed further away than the moon, for at least they could see the moon from London!

EXERCISE

In groups discuss where you would have sent the huge number of prisoners.

If our prisons today continue to become overcrowded, what could we do?

Could transportation work today?

If so, where?

No craft, then or later, was ever designed specifically to carry convicts; that would have cost the owner too much for too specialised a vessel... the 'tween-deck plans for the first fleet transports are lost, but the quarters were certainly very cramped for the marines and crew, let alone for the convicts: four transportees lying in a space seven feet by six feet, the dimensions of a modern king size bed were the norm. There was little headroom; Scarborough, the second largest transport, had only four feet five inches so that even a small woman had to stoop and a full grown man had to bend double.

From *The Fatal Shore* by Robert Hughes

EXERCISE

Mark out an area 2 metres by 1.5 on the floor. Fill with eight people. Have "guards" or marines patrolling the space. Anyone standing upright, speaking to the wrong person, being generally disobedient or annoying can be extracted by the marines to await a sentence of flogging (possible death). How would this feel for nearly eight months? Imagine the smell, disease, lack of privacy etc.

2 metres

1.5 metres

THE FIRST FLEET

On the morning of Sunday May 17th, 1787, a fleet of ships left Portsmouth Harbour with 16,000 miles and eight months of open sea ahead of them. In the first fleet there were 1,500 people on board. 736 were convicts, of these only 48 died on the voyage - a testament to Governor Phillip's care and navigational skills.

CONDITIONS ON BOARD SHIP

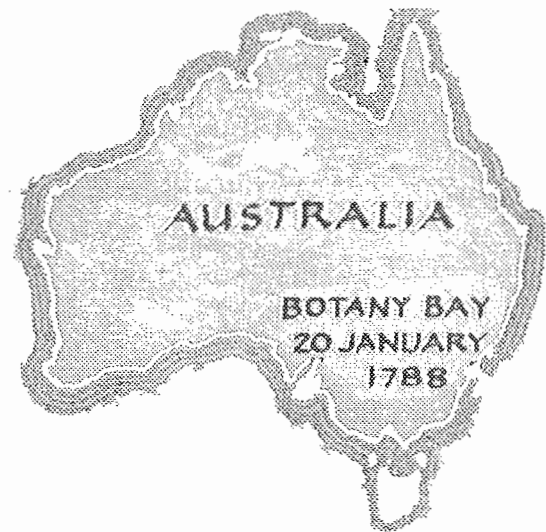
Life at sea was tough whether you were a prisoner or a sailor. The ship was infested with rats, lice, cockroaches and fleas; food and water were scarce, the weather bad and the sea rough.

"The waves advanced in rank after relentless rank, fifteen feet high from trough to crest... Each had knife edged ridges that rose, disintegrated and reformed. Each had slopes that heaved and transformed themselves into tottering cliffs which collapsed and tumbled in ruin onto the streets below."

From *And Not a Drop to Drink*, 1988

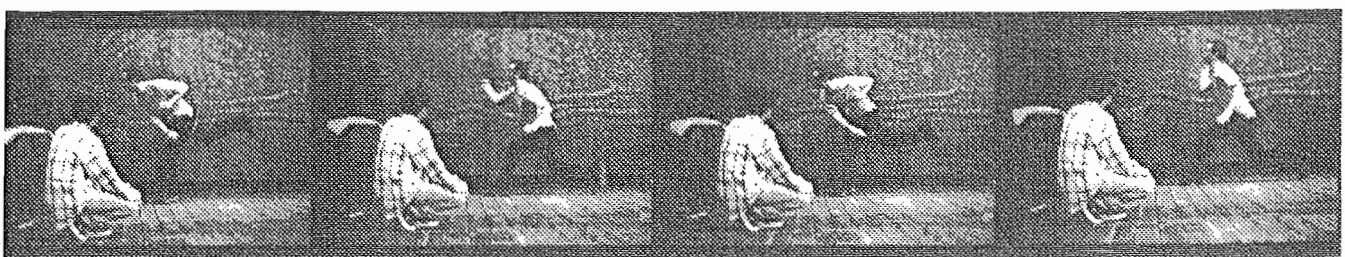
EXERCISE

Read *Our Country's Good* Act One, Scene One and relevant sections from *The Fatal Shore* and *The Playmaker*. Create a scene that illustrates what it was like to be on the ship, involving convicts and at least one officer.



Ross: Sideway.... Take your shirt off... One hundred lashes on Sirius for answering an officer. Remember Sideway? Three hundred lashes for trying to strike the same officer. I have seen the white of this animal's bones, his wreckled blood and reeky convict urine have spilled on my boots and he's feeling modest?

Our Country's Good, Act 2, Scene 5



Declan Conlon (Captain Ross) practises his flogging technique, watched by Company and Stage Manager Phil Cameron.

AUSTRALIA

"Everything they had been told about it, even the testimony of Cook's log, was wrong. They had expected grassland with deep black soil and well spaced trees, where crops could be planted without clearing; an ample source of building stone; a protected anchorage.

But what Captain Phillip saw from the deck as his ship rounded point Solander and hailed into Botany Bay on January 18th 1788 was a flat heath of paperbark scrub and grey-green eucalyptus, stretching featurelessly away under the grinding white light of that Australian summer. The dry buzzing monotony of the landscape did not match Cook's account. The bay was open and unprotected, and the Pacific rollers gave it a violent, persistent swell; the water was shallow, and the holding ground poor."

From *The Fatal Shore* by Robert Hughes

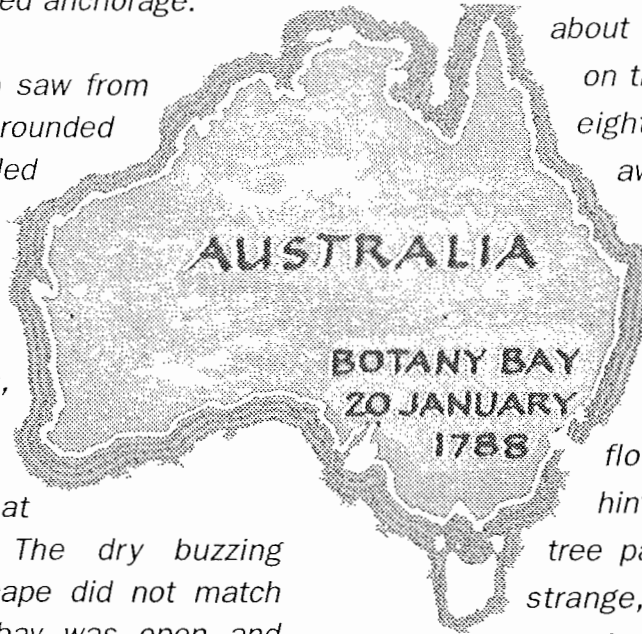
"The place which had been chosen for this far-off commonwealth and prison, and named Sydney Cove in the spirit of events, faced the sun, which here was always in the North.

This reminded you, if you thought about it, that home was always on the other side of the sun - eight moons of navigation away if you were lucky, a year or more if not. The

land on either side of the cove was divided down the middle by a fresh water stream flowing out of a low hinterland among cabbage tree palms, native cedars, the strange, obdurate eucalyptus

trees of a type which (as Ralph was assured by scholars like Davy), occurred nowhere else in all creation."

From *The Playmaker* by Thomas Keneally

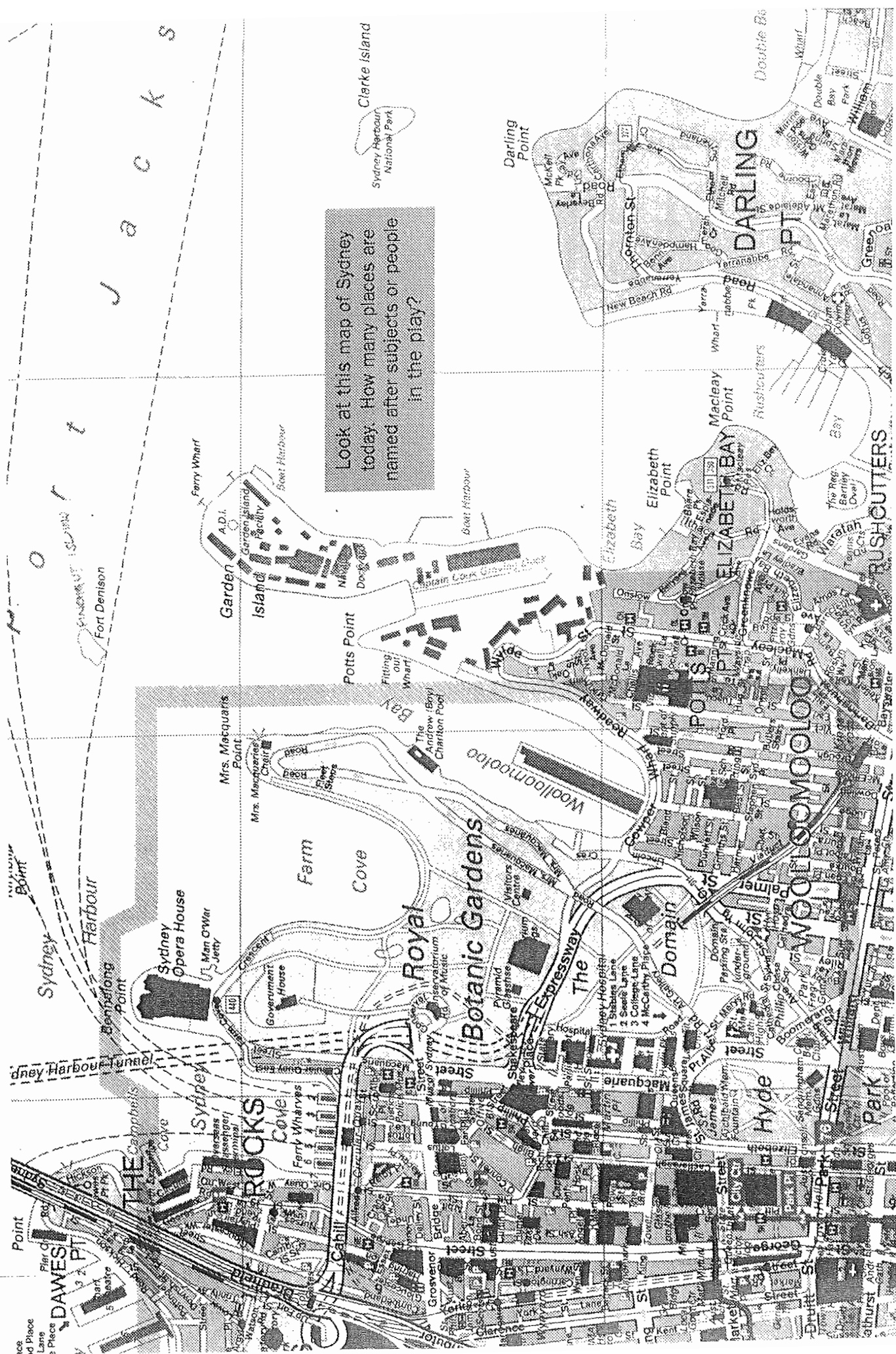


EXERCISE

Read the above two passages about the arrival in Australia.

In groups, discuss and explore practically how you could adapt these two descriptive passages into a short scene.

Write the scene



Look at this map of Sydney today. How many places are named after subjects or people in the play?

Clarke Island
Sydney Harbour National Park

nd Place
Lane
e Piece

DAWES PT

THE ROCKS

Government House

Royal Botanic Gardens

The Domain

Macquarie Street

Hyde Park

Rushcutters Bay

Darling Point

ABORIGINES

AUSTRALIA DISCOVERED?

Contrary to Western belief, Australia was not discovered in 1770. Aborigines had been living there for 30,000 years. In 1788 there were about 300,000 Aborigines in Australia divided between 500 tribes. Originally from Asia these people were regarded as the most primitive of "natives". The tribes did not share a common language; the people did not read or write; they had no concept of private property or money; and no discernable kings or gods. Their weapons and tools were basic, they did not even use a bow and arrow when hunting.

Fundamentally territorial, the Aborigines were a nomadic people who lived in harmony with their land and for whom tribal land signified more than the European concept of ownership could ever embrace.



How do you imagine the Aborigines would have felt when they first landed in Australia?

How would their feelings have compared with those of the first fleet when they landed?



The Governor of the new colony found himself occupied with the constant menace of starvation and the issue of how to deal with the 'natives'. He had had official instructions to be as friendly as possible and gather as much scientific knowledge about the Aborigines as he could muster. While he was prepared for a hostile reception, he did not intend to let violence reign:

"With respect to the natives, it was my determination from my first landing that nothing less than the most absolute necessity should ever make me fire upon them, and the persevering in this resolution has at times been rather difficult. I have hitherto been so fortunate that it has never been necessary"

THREAT OF STARVATION:

Half rations

Convicts primarily from London

No real farming experience

Dense woodland

Hard ground

RATIONS HALVED AGAIN

Ill equipped stores
more convicts arriving...

MORE MOUTHS TO FEED!

Phillip would be "happy to change the convict status into 50 good farmers"

Ralph:

When acting you have to imagine things
...now think of a rich lady and imagine you
are her (Lizzy begins to masticate) What are
you doing?

Liz:

If I was rich I'd eat myself sick.

Dabby:

Me too...potatoes

Sideway:

Roast beef and Yorkshire pudding

Caesar:

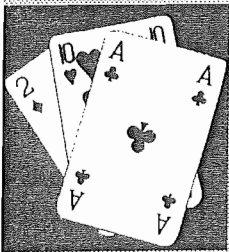
Hearts of Palm

Wisehammer:

Four fried eggs, six fried eggs, eight fried eggs

Act 1, Scene 11

EXERCISE: DEBATE



Form two
groups.
Each
group
chooses
a red or
black

card. If you choose red,
you are of Aboriginal
descent; black is a
British Colonialist. Each
person in each group
chooses a card - the
higher the number the
more passionate you are
about your subject, the
lower the less so.

Debate on who has the
right to the land? Should
travel, discovery, science
and Western civilisation
triumph over tribal and
native beliefs?

Not only did convicts venture into the bush to steal Aboriginal weapons and to try to look for food, but officers and Governor Phillip made "expeditions" a minor theme of life in the colonies. In 1791 one man describes the arduous trek through the "jungle".

"The march begins at sunrise, and with occasional halts continues until about an hour and half before sunset. It is necessary to stop thus early to prepare for passing the night for toil here ends not with the march. Instead of the cheering blaze, the welcoming landlord and the long bill of fare, the traveller has now to collect his fuel, to erect his wigwam to fetch water and to broil his morsel of salt pork. Let him then lie down and if it be summer, try whether the effect of fatigue is sufficiently powerful to overcome the bites and stings of the myriads of flies and mosquitos, which buzz around him".

What effect does the appearance of the Aborigine have on the play as a whole?

"The Aborigine in the play acts like a touchstone, he reflects not just the Aborigines and their culture but the Australian land mass as a whole - "How can we befriend this crowded, hungry and disturbed dream?" [Act 2, Scene 5]. My performance as the Aborigine is not based on research of Aborigines today, but is more an interpretation of the lines and the feeling embodied in the character."

Howard Saddler -

actor playing the Aborigine in this production

HOW DID YOU APPROACH PLAYING HARRY BREWER AND HIS DREAMS?

"In *The Playmaker*, Ralph wonders if maybe Harry has picked up something of the Aborigine philosophy - that is, that our ancestors and friends hang around after they have died until they have resolved their differences with the living. This could certainly apply to Harry.

Harry is in the last stages of alcoholism and is suffering from the DT's. This is coupled with his obsession with hanging and the horror and fascination with this way of dying. In *The Playmaker* Harry often visits Newgate gaol to see people the night before they die and even once he has been transported to the new colony of Australia he cannot escape his morbid fascination with hanging.

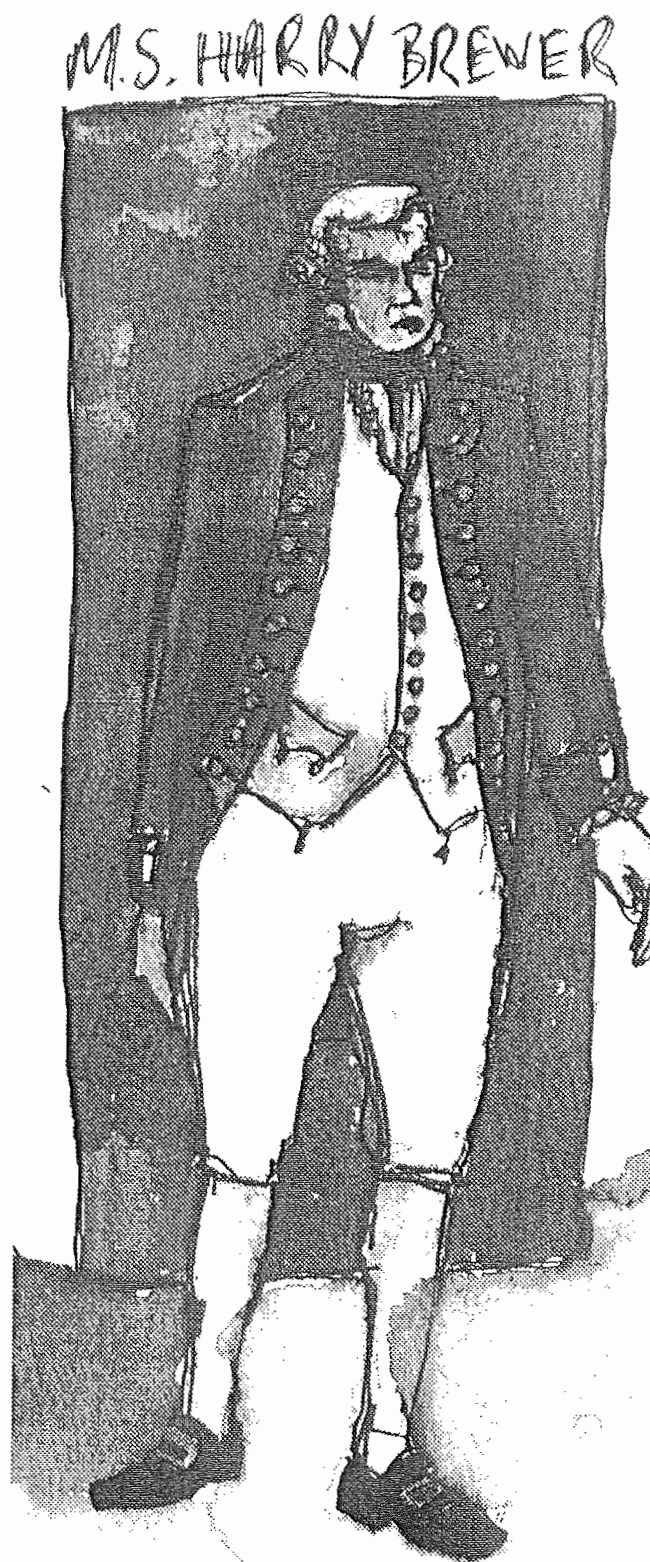
Instead of dreaming the liberating dreams of an Aborigine, he is cluttered with the repressive, restrictive visions of 18th century England and all that is cruel and inhumane.

In the first half of the scene, Max and I decided to play Harry as a drunk that you might see on an underground platform - talking to himself, muttering, having conversations with people in his head - in the second half the 'people' become clearer and actually exist in his physical surroundings, they are in his tent and Harry can now no longer block them or escape from them."

**Ian Redford -
actor playing Harry Brewer in this
production**

WHICH PART WOULD YOU PLAY IN OUR COUNTRY'S GOOD, AND WHY?

"Ralph Clark, because he's a good director!"
Max Stafford-Clark - director



Costume design by Julian McGowan

THE THEATRE IS OF CIVILISATION

Our Country's Good is a play which explores the very nature of theatre

"I'm trying to write about how people are treated, what it means to be brutalised, what it means to live without hope, and how theatre can be a humanising force.

Timberlake Wertenbaker,
New York Times, 1990

During rehearsals for *The Recruiting Officer*, convicts and gaolers alike begin to see the effects of theatre on their society. Phillip persuades Ralph that the rehearsal of the play is important because, like slaves, the convicts need to be able to see themselves as human beings again (Act Two, Scene Two). Ralph notes that by speaking the

"well-balanced lines of Mr Farquhar"
the women convicts

"seemed to acquire a dignity, they seemed...to lose some of their corruption"

(Act I, Scene 6).

This is borne out in Act Two, Scene Five when Ross and Campbell invade the rehearsal and the notion of savage convict and human gaoler is severely tested. After this incident, Ascott argues,

"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".

(Act 2, Scene 6)

Our Country's Good is a modern play and these arguments have contemporary resonance. During rehearsals for the original production in 1988, Timberlake, Max and some of the actors from *The Recruiting Officer* went to a performance of *The Love of a Good Man* at HMP Wormwood Scrubs, given by long-term prisoners.

Timberlake writes that this night "confirmed all our feelings about the power and value of theatre". One of the actors/prisoners, Joe White, subsequently directed a production of *Our Country's Good* when he was transferred to Blundeston Prison. Timberlake went to see the production, and the correspondence between Joe and herself is printed in the Methuen student edition of the play.

Joe White is now working as Assistant Director on this production

"As I approach the latter stage of my sentence, and begin to make my first tentative steps back into the free world, I feel compelled to express my gratitude for the existence of theatre in prisons. Re-emerging into the world, after more than a decade of institutional life, I am more conscious than ever of the scale of my indebtedness. Rather than face a daunting transition steeped in uncertainty and an overwhelming sense of dislocation, I feel able to walk forward with a certain degree of confidence and genuine optimism. There is no doubt that without the bridges that

DREAMTIME

In *Our Country's Good*, the Aborigine speaks only four times, but his haunting words give a native Australian reaction to the bewildering events of 1788. 'Dreaming', central to the Aborigine's assessment of the action, is the basis of Aboriginal spirituality. Each tribe had their own version of the myth of Dreamtime.

In the Dreamtime, in the long distant past, giant semi-human beings, behaving like men and women rose out of the featureless plains, where they had been slumbering for countless ages, and started to wander aimlessly over the countryside. As they wandered these dreamtime heroes carried out the same tasks as do the Aborigines of today. Then mysteriously, this dreamtime came to an end, and wherever these creatures had been active, mountain range, isolated hills, valley, watercourse or other natural features now marks the place"

From The Dreamtime: Australian Aboriginal Myths in Paintings by Ainslie Roberts, 1964



"The Australian Aboriginal Code of Behaviour is based on the saying 'As it was done in Dreamtime, so it must be done today' and the landscape itself is their 'embodied history', the trees, mountains and animals of Australia are all sacred, all part of the Aboriginal 'Dreaming'. To deprive the Aborigines of their territory was to condemn them to spiritual death - a destruction of their past. Their future and their opportunities of transcendence."

From The Fatal Shore by Robert Hughes

EXERCISE

Read Harry's speech at the opening of Act Two, Scene Three. What does this tormented dream communicate to the audience about Harry's character?

How might an actor approach rehearsing this scene?

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ACTING STYLES

A load of stupid actors strutting around, shouting with their chests thrust out so far you'd think their nipples were attached to a pair of charging elephants.

Blackadder (III)

Acting in the eighteenth century was taken very seriously, there were two schools: Garrick was renowned for his 'naturalness'; and John Kemble and Sarah Siddons for their 'classicism'. The physicality of the actors was of the utmost importance to both 'styles'. Each gesture had a universally understood meaning and was seen as the visual expression or spirit of an actor's passion. Garrick's face was said to look twice as old as his body because he 'used it so much'. Great importance was attached to clarity, nobility and ceremony and the techniques were designed so that an actor always looked 'interesting' and 'beautiful' even in death. Many actors would practice their facial expressions and gestures in a mirror to ensure perfection!

EXERCISE

Consider how you would perform the following extract from *The Recruiting Officer*, using eighteenth century acting styles.

Worthy: What pleasures I may receive abroad are indeed uncertain; but this I am sure of, I shall meet with less cruelty among the most barbarous nations than I have found at home.

Melinda: Come, sir, you and I have been jangling a great while I fancy if we made up our accounts, we should sooner come to an agreement.

Worthy: Sure, madam, you won't dispute your being in my debt - my fears, sighs, vows, promises, assiduities, anxieties, jealousies, have all run on for a whole year, without any payment

Melinda: A year! Oh Mr Worthy, what you owe me is not to be paid under a seven years' servitude



Mrs Siddons as Constance

AN EXPRESSION

GOVERNOR PHILLIP ACT 1, SCENE 6

theatre has provided - both in terms of opportunity and, perhaps more importantly, with regard to maintaining and consolidating a more personal sense of worth and purpose - my reintroduction into society would be considerably less hopeful."

Joe White, The Prisoner's Voice in Prison Theatre, ed James Thompson (1998).



Is it the responsibility of prison governors to teach, educate and hopefully reform prisoners?

Or should prison simply represent a loss of freedom with no opportunities for rehabilitation?

Having played Ralph and directed *Our Country's Good* in prison, what differences do you notice working with a professional theatre company as Assistant Director on this production ?

"There are strengths and weaknesses with both: prisoners have a wealth of experience which directly relates to this play, they also have a raw emotional state so if tackled responsibly it can be used as a great asset. What prisoners don't have is any technique - for most of them it is their first experience of acting. Professional actors have the acting tools which makes directing much quicker, there's a shorthand. The difficulty for professional actors is in finding the truth within the play and the characters, therefore a lot of time is spent researching. The resources of a professional production enable you to take the play further, and with this production as we're touring for several months the play has time to progress. In a prison, we could only perform for

HOW DOES ACTING IN THE PLAY CHANGE YOUR CHARACTER?

"Unexpected situations are often matched by unexpected virtues, are they not?"

(Governor Phillip - Act 2, Scene 2)

"The play gives Duckling a sense of self-worth and something to hold onto after Harry's death"

Ashley Miller [Duckling]

"Being in the play seems somehow to humanise Liz, she begins to see that being part of a society may be an attractive proposition, for the first time in her life she considers that she may have a future"

Sally Rogers [Liz Morden]

"Ketch is allowed to join the society and his acting helps him to gain the respect that he lost as a hangman"

Declan Conlon [Ketch Freeman]

three or four nights so it was very sad when it finished!"

Joe White - Assistant Director



MR GARRICK in Four of his Principal Tragic Characters.



Mrs Siddons as Isabella

EXERCISE

Examine the gestures on these pages. Can you identify the 'passion' that each gesture is intended to represent? (ie grief, despair, anger, surprise). In pairs, act out a selection of the gestures. Add a line of dialogue for each gesture which is indicative of the passion you are expressing. You may want to experiment and add some gestures of your own invention.



Mrs Siddons as Andromache



Mrs Siddons as Constance in King John, Theatre Museum

Sideway: A greeting. Yes. A greeting looks like this
[He extends his arms high and wide]
Plume! Now I'll change to say the next words. 'My
Dear Captain', that's affection isn't it? If I put my
hands on my heart like this. Now 'Welcome'. I'm not
quite sure how to do 'Welcome'.

Ralph: I think if you just say the line.

(Act 1, Scene 11)



David Beames (Sideway) & Stephen Beresford
(Ralph Clark) Photo: John Haynes

? How good a
director is
Ralph?

What sort
of advice
does he
give?

**What research did you
do into 18th century
acting? Could it ever
be a style that comes
into fashion?**

*Timberlake has grafted our
knowledge of 20th century
acting onto the way Ralph
directs in 1788. Ralph uses
Stanislavskian methods, for
example he tries to
encourage Liz to feel and
respond like an 18th century
lady. I don't think the style
will come back into fashion.
If I watched a play with all the
gestures and feelings
physically presented I would
probably find it amusing but
frustrating - perhaps it would
be like watching Kabuki
theatre [Japanese theatre]*

**Stephen Beresford - actor
playing Ralph Clark**



costume design by Julian McGowan

EXERCISE

Find a quote for at least three characters in the play that illustrates their belief in the play and subsequently their belief in themselves.

Ralph Clark is referred to as the director in *Our Country's Good*, but this is a plausible artistic liberty on the part of Timberlake Wertenbaker. In the late eighteenth century the director's duties were shared between the leading actor, playwright, prompter and the theatre managers.

EXERCISE

Read and discuss this scene in small groups.

- Mary:** How can I play Sylvia?
She's brave and strong.
She couldn't have done what I've done.
- Dabby:** She didn't spend eight months and one week on a convict ship. Anyway, you can pretend you're her.
- Mary:** No, I have to be her.
- Dabby:** Why?
- Mary:** Because that's acting.
- Dabby:** No way I'm being Rose, she's an idiot.

Ralph Clark and his actors organise the set and arrange the costumes for the 1788 production. In 1998 a Deputy Stage Manager (DSM) is present throughout rehearsals to assist the director and actors.

"I'm responsible for producing 'the book'. This is a script in which all the changes to the dialogue and all the moves the actors make are recorded. I also note down any decisions or ideas that are made in rehearsals and I relay the information at the end of each day to all the other departments. When Our Country's Good opens I will run the show technically, calling the actors to the stage in time to make their entrances and giving 'cues' to the sound, lighting and 'flying' operators to produce the effect at the right time.

Clare Norwood - DSM

THE MAJOR PLAYERS AS REFERRED TO IN

DAVID GARRICK (1717 - 1779)

Sideway: I saw Mr Garrick being melancholy
once...Hamlet it was

David Garrick is probably the most notorious and influential of all the eighteenth century actors. The Manager of Drury Lane Theatre from 1747 to 1776, he established a 'natural' style of acting. This was not what we would understand as naturalistic, but his portrayal of emotions was less formal than before, and he was able to bring out comedy in tragedy and vice versa.



David Garrick as Benedick in
Much Ado About Nothing.
Theatre Museum

CHARLES MACKLIN (1699 - 1797)

Phillip: I never liked Garrick,
I always preferred Macklin.

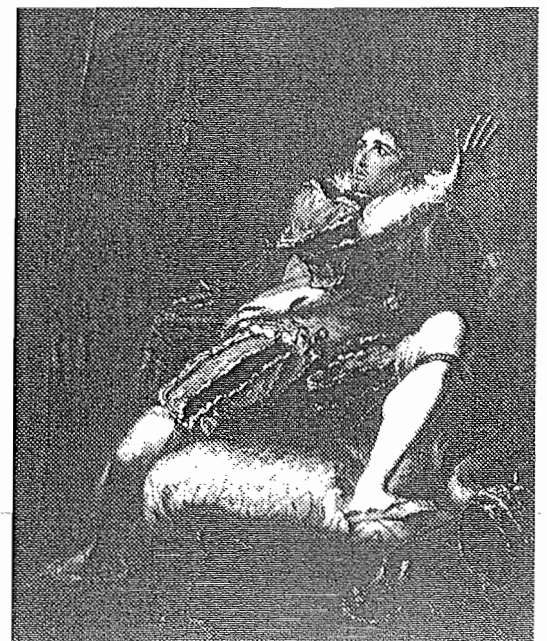


Charles Macklin as Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*. Theatre Museum

Macklin was the first actor to perform Shylock as a tragic, rather than a comic character. He founded a 'school' of realism, and encouraged actors first to speak the lines as they would in everyday life and then exaggerate and project them for the stage.

**JOHN PHILIP
KEMBLE
(1757 - 1823)**

In 1788 Kemble became the Manager of Drury Lane. His style was *essentially* classical, distinguished by... the severe grandeur, and the majestic simplicity which characterised the fine art of the classical ages.



J P Kemble as Richard III,
oil on canvas, *Dyce Collection*,
Theatre Museum

OUR COUNTRY'S GOOD

Mrs Siddons. Theatre Museum

PEG WOFFINGTON (1714 - 1760)

**Sideway: lovely Peg Woffington...
She was so pale -**

The Marilyn Monroe of the eighteenth century stage. She became famous for her portrayal of Sir Harry Wildair in *The Constant Couple*. It was a 'breeches' role of her own making.

Margaret (Peg) Woffington, oil on canvas, artist unknown. Jones Bequest, Theatre Museum



SARAH SIDDONS (1755 - 1831)

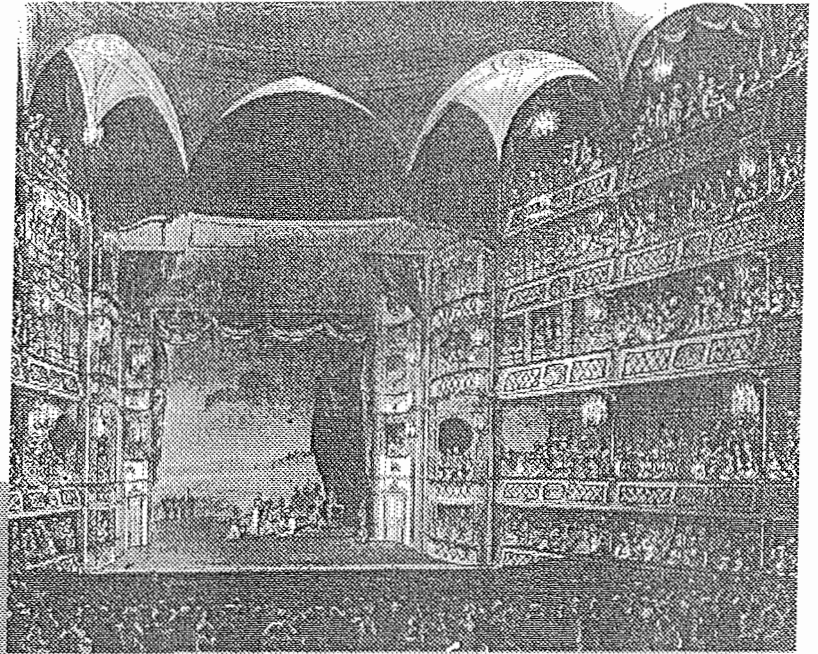
**Sideway: I see ladies
approaching: our
future... Siddons**

Sarah Siddons overcame the presumption that every actress was a whore; in 1789, she became the female symbol of the nation - Britannia - at a service in St Pauls to celebrate the recovery of George III from his first bout of madness.

Collins: I'm a Kemble man myself

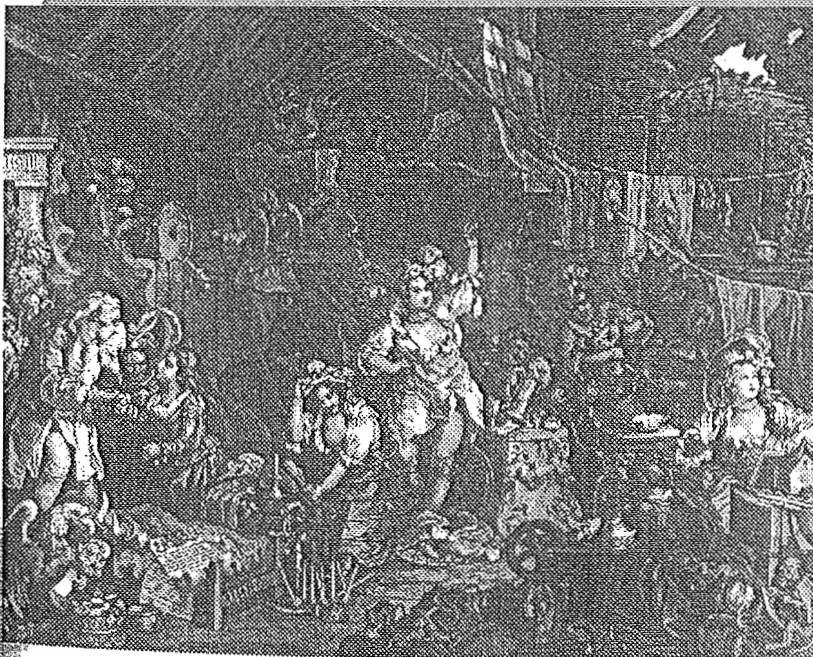
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY THEATRE

The Recruiting Officer was first performed in 1706 at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane and ran for eight nights. Farquhar died the following year. However, over the next 20 years the play enjoyed 124 performances which is testimony to its incredible success.



The Drury Lane Theatre which Sideway visited was the second Drury Lane, designed by Christopher Wren and seating 2,000 people.

How would the acting styles have differed between performances given in a 'site specific' location, such as a barn, and a theatre such as Drury Lane?



Actresses dressing in a barn, engraving by William Hogarth, Enthoven Collection, Theatre Museum

How would you envisage the performance space for the convicts' production of *The Recruiting Officer*?

How do you imagine their production might have been staged in terms of set, lighting, costume and make-up?

Describe your ideas.

During the eighteenth century, there was a strong tradition of "strolling players" who would give "site specific" performances in locations such as barns.