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渥騰貝克戲劇中的歷史與性別

History and Gender in Timberlake Wertenbaker's Plays



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博士論文提要

論文名稱：渥騰貝克戲劇中的歷史與性別

指導教授：姜翠芬 教授

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論文提要內容：

本論文由性別的角度切入討論渥騰貝克的歷史劇與口傳歷史劇，強調歷史與性別兩者都應該重新被檢視，以挑戰傳統的封閉線性的歷史觀與刻板印象的男女特質，如此才能對歷史與性別有重新的認識。本論文論證渥騰貝克在戲劇創作上的特點即是指出歷史中兩性的動態權力關係。此研究包含五個章節，第一章介紹論文架構、渥騰貝克的多文化的成長背景、與她的戲劇特色。第二章是本論文的理論基礎，認為唯有將歷史視為敘述的形式，才能開啟重新撰寫歷史的可能，而從性別寫歷史也才可行，進而達到對歷史與性別的同時批判。第三章討論四部歷史劇，《解剖新義》(1981)、《瑪麗·崔維斯的美德》(1985)、《為了國家的利益》(1988)、《達爾文之後》(1998)，並論證歷史不再是建立在男性的高壓統治與女性的絕對服從之上，再者，將性別視為社會建構的產物才能夠打破傳統對兩性限制的男子氣概與女性特質的刻板印象。第四章研究三部歷史劇，《夜鶯之愛》(1988)、《黛安妮拉》(1999)、與《灰姑娘》(2000)，因為都是採用口傳歷史的緣故，本論文命為口傳歷史劇以區別第三章的四部劇作。從性別角度閱讀以男性為中心的口傳歷史如神話與童話，渥騰貝克批判了傳統的性別關係，企圖與傳統男性沙文的口傳歷史做切割，並從中賦予過去與當代女性自我意識，期許未來有一個平等的兩性關係。論文最後一章強調渥騰貝克由性別重建歷史是成功的，尤其是重建歷史的動作本身就是重要並且是刻不容緩的工作。

**關鍵字：**渥騰貝克、歷史、性別、女性特質、男子氣概

## Abstract

As traditional immobilized history and gender are confining, Timberlake Wertenbaker in her (oral) history plays argues that both history and gender should be reread radically to challenge closed linearity of history and stereotypical images of femininity and masculinity so as to reconstruct new visions of history and gender. This book aims at discussing mainly seven of her plays from the perspective of gender, especially how the playwright rewrites gender into history, and it proposes that Wertenbaker's contribution to drama is to expose the unstable power relations between the sexes in history. Chapter One introduces the structure of the book, Wertenbaker's cosmopolitan background, and the characteristics of her plays overall. Chapter two is the theoretical foundation, and it claims that just as Hayden White sees narrative nature of history and just as Joan Scott finds social formation in gender, Wertenbaker also believes that both history and gender are constructed and should be reread to offer new visions. Analyzing four history plays, *New Anatomies* (1981), *The Grace of Mary Traverse* (1985), *Our Country's Good* (1988), and *After Darwin* (1998), Chapter Three asserts that by rewriting gender into history, Wertenbaker asserts that history is no longer based on the model of men's coercive domination over women and only the acknowledgment of gender as a social construction can destroy the stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. Chapter Four, focusing on three oral history plays, *The Love of the Nightingale* (1988), *Dianeira* (1999), and *The Ash Girl* (2000), claims that by rereading against male-centered oral history of myth and fairy tales from a gender-oriented perspective, Wertenbaker criticizes the traditional gender relation and proposes a break from male chauvinism in oral history and to have self-awareness for women in the past and the present so as to have a new mode of gender relations in the future. The final chapter affirms that Wertenbaker's history rewriting from gender is successful and the act of reconstruction of history itself is important and necessary.

**Key Words:** Timberlake Wertenbaker, history, gender, femininity, masculinity



## Chapter One

### Introduction

As traditional immobilized history and gender are confining, British playwright Timberlake Wertenbaker in her (oral) history plays argues that both history and gender should be reread radically to challenge closed linearity of history and stereotypical images of femininity and masculinity so as to reconstruct new visions of history and gender. This book aims at discussing her plays from the perspective of gender, especially how the playwright rewrites gender into history, and it proposes that Wertenbaker's contribution to drama is to expose the unstable power relations between the sexes in history.

Timberlake Wertenbaker is one of the most important female playwrights in the contemporary British theatre. Critically and commercially popular, Wertenbaker's plays have won her several awards and solidify her reputation and status in the history of British theatre.<sup>1</sup> As a prolific playwright, her works include plays, translations, a screenplay and a television play.<sup>2</sup> This book intends to focus on seven of Wertenbaker's plays: *New Anatomies* (1981), *The Grace of Mary Traverse* (1985), *Our Country's Good* (1988), *The Love of Nightingale* (1988), *After Darwin* (1998),

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<sup>1</sup> *The Grace of Mary Traverse* (1985) won her a Plays and Players' Award for most promising playwright. *Our Country's Good* (1988) was the winning play for Laurence Olivier Award and New York Drama Critics Circle Award. *The Love of the Nightingale* (1988) won an Eileen Anderson Central Television Drama Award, and *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* (1991) a Susan Smith Blackburn Prize for playwrighting.

<sup>2</sup> Wertenbaker has published twenty-three plays: *This Is No Place for Tallulah Bankhead* (1978), *The Third* (1980), *Second Sentence* (1980), *Case to Answer* (1980), *Breaking Through* (1980), *New Anatomies* (1981), *Inside Out* (1982), *Home Leave* (1982), *Abel's Sister* (1984), *The Grace of Mary Traverse* (1985), *Our Country's Good* (1988), *The Love of Nightingale* (1988), *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* (1991), *The Break of Day* (1995), *After Darwin* (1998), *Dianeira* (1999), *The Ash Girl* (2000), *Credible Witness* (2001), *Galileo's Daughter* (2004), *Divine Intervention* (2006), *Jenufa* (2007), *Arden City* (2008), and *The Line* (2009). Wertenbaker has translated eleven plays, including: *False Admissions* (1983) by Pierre Marivaux, *Successful Strategies* (1983) by Pierre Marivaux, *Mephisto* (1986) by Ariane Mnouchkine, *Léocadia* (1987) by Jean Anouilh, *La Dispute* (1987) by Pierre Marivaux, *Pelléas and Mélisande* (1989) by Maurice Maeterlinck, *The Thebans* (1992) by Sophocles, *Hecuba* (1994) by Euripides, *Filumena* (1998) by Eduardo de Filippo, *Hippolytus* (2009) by Euripides, and *Phedre* (2009) by Jean Racine. Wertenbaker also wrote a screenplay, *The Children* (1990), and a television play, *Do Not Disturb* (1991).

*Dianeira* (1999), and *The Ash Girl* (2000).<sup>3</sup> I divide them into two categories, history plays and oral history plays, which means plays based on oral history, for two reasons. First, these seven plays directly use historical materials. Second, they present a strong manifestation of the deconstruction of the traditional idea of gender. Because how the playwright rewrites history to review gender and history is the main object in the book, the seven plays are good examples to illustrate Wertebaker's concepts of history and gender. Although *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* (1991), *The Break of Day* (1995), and *Credible Witness* (2001) are not history plays, they serve as supplements due to the relevance of their historical and gender concern.<sup>4</sup>

Wertebaker in an interview claims, "There are four things I do not talk about: my name, where and when I was born, and what I am working on at present" (qtd. Wilson, "Forgiving History" 146-47). Although she refuses to mention her private reference, we still can know some of her background from interviews and papers. Born in 1951 in the United States ("Timberlake Wertebaker"), Wertebaker was then raised in the Basque region of France and educated in France and the United States.

<sup>3</sup> Wertebaker's two collections of plays are the major sources in this book: *Plays One: New Anatomies, The Grace of Mary Traverse, Our Country's Good, The Love of the Nightingale, Three Birds Alighting on a Field* (1996) and *Plays Two: The Break of Day, After Darwin, Credible Witness, The Ash Girl, Dianeira* (2002).

<sup>4</sup> Studies on Wertebaker's plays in Taiwan are just in the beginning stage. So far, by 2009, no thesis or dissertation on Wertebaker has been published, and only two journal papers are printed. Professor Yih-Fan Chang publishes a Chinese paper on Wertebaker's *Our Country's Good*, and she argues that British identity, through "othering" and "worlding," justifies its legitimization of colonization, and language becomes the tool for defining and erasing national identity (109). Professor Chun-Yi Shih, in her Chinese paper on *The Break of Day*, analyzes the play from the perspective of motherhood, and concludes that Wertebaker suggests the 21<sup>st</sup> century is better for women as long as they may have more control over their own bodies (34). Unlike few papers on Wertebaker in Taiwan, there are many papers, theses, and dissertations abroad. Among numerous journal papers, topics about Laurence Olivier-winning play *Our Country's Good*, myth-revising play *The Love of the Nightingale*, and the controversial play *The Break of Day* are the most popular. Furthermore, most journal papers deal with one or two of Wertebaker's plays, but none of them discusses the dramatist's major plays from the perspectives of history and gender together. Maya E. Roth received her Ph. D. degree in 2001 with a dissertation on five of Wertebaker's plays entitled *Open Civic, Feminist and Theatrical Spaces: The Plays of Timberlake Wertebaker*. In Roth's dissertation, she argues that different practices of space constitute different selves and identities, and she analyzes how Wertebaker utilizes space to create a feminist geography. Her dissertation is so far the only one which deals with Wertebaker's plays without comparing her with other playwrights. All these academic researches reveal a lack of research that treats Wertebaker's plays from an overall point of view. Unlike Roth's approach, which reads Wertebaker's plays from space, this study focuses on history and gender.

After Wertebaker graduated from college in the States, she used to work as a journalist in the States and England, and as a French teacher in Greece. It was in Greece where she first found her passion for theatre. When an interviewer asks her what makes her write plays instead of fictions or poetry, she replies, “It happened by change. I was in Greece teaching French and surrounded by people working in the theater, and for fun, we all sat down to start writing a play” (“A Conversation” 55). From then on, Wertebaker first wrote for children and then she became a successful professional playwright.

It is difficult to define Wertebaker’s identity. Her first name, Timberlake, is usually seen as a pseudonym, but she claims that “my great-grandmother was named Timberlake and I was named after her” (“Interview,” *A Search* 265).<sup>5</sup> While she is called “British playwright,” “Canadian playwright,” “Franco-British playwright,” “Anglo-French playwright,” “Basque/Canadian background,” Susan Carlson expresses that she is most identified as “Anglo-French American” (“Issues of Identity” 267). However, Wertebaker declares she is a “European.” An interviewer asks her if she is American by birth, the dramatist responds, “French-American, actually, and I was educated in France. I think of myself as a European now, though I’ve lived here in London for a long time” (“Interview,” *A Search* 265).

Because of Wertebaker’s cosmopolitan background, she in her plays always deals with the issue of identity, which from her point of view is fluid, unstable and cannot be defined by only one factor. In *New Anatomies*, Isabelle Eberhardt’s search for gender identity is highly relative to her cultural, religious and national identities. In *The Grace of Mary Traverse*, Mary has to cross the spatial division back and forth in order to redefine herself. Learning to be a good guest in England, Alexander in

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<sup>5</sup> It is interesting to notice that the storyteller in *Dianeira* is also named Timberlake. The playwright blurs the boundary between reality and fiction while she is Timberlake, while her great-grandmother is Timberlake, or while the storyteller is made up.

*Credible Witness* maintains his ethnic identity and accepts his new cultural identity at the same time. Characters in Wertebaker's plays do not identify their multi-cultural backgrounds easily, such as the English officers and convicts suffer from their double-identity in the British colony in *Our Country's Good*. In fact, they feel painful from the stress and from being "hybrid." Wertebaker expresses, "I don't know why you can't be many things at once;" she further explains, "I am interested in various cultures, and I also think it's wrong to get stuck in only one culture and to identify yourself completely with it" ("Interview," *A Search* 267). Due to the playwright's multiple identities, Carlson argues:

Timberlake Wertebaker's ambiguous personal status is representative. It is representative of critical obsessions with the self, obsessions with questions of stability, multiplicity, fracture. And it is representative of a late twentieth-century theatre increasingly the product of a multi-cultural world. ("Issues of Identity" 268)

Wertebaker was educated in France and the United States. She believes that her education in France is crucial in her life because she learns the pain of being silenced. "I was brought up in the Basque country, in the southwest corner of France—brought up by a mixture of my parents and a Basque family. That upbringing was very influential, because it was at a time when the French authorities weren't allowing Basque to be spoken in the schools" ("A Conversation" 54). Owing to the fact that she has the experience of being silenced for a certain language, Wertebaker is sensitive to language and the relation between language and identity. This is the reason why in her plays she cares much about the women in history who are silenced and forbidden to show their emotion and opinions. In *Our Country's Good*, the powerless convicted men and women learn proper English to reestablish their identities and to react against the British authority. Besides, Wertebaker transforms



the women in myth from stereotypes of voiceless women to the people who are conscious of their language and their anger. Philomele in *The Love of the Nightingale* is good at asking questions to set up her identity from the other; Dianeira in *Dianeira* displays her anger through saying “the things she cannot say.” “Growing up in a generation that could not talk to its parents in their native language,” Wertebaker states, “started an obsession with language” (“A Conversation” 54).

Wertebaker’s eagerness about speaking for the minority, who usually are the silenced and the hybrid people in the multi-cultural society, motivates her to review history from their points of view. Reshaping the stereotypical images of women in history is the dramatist’s purpose, but she also believes that men as well as women are confined to the traditional sexual roles. Rejecting the sexist conventions in society, Wertebaker deems, “I don’t think men have been very happy in their roles, and I think the competition among men is lethal” (“Interview,” *A Search* 270). The playwright cares not only about women’s inferior status in history but also men’s restrictions within gender hierarchies, and that is the reason why she claims her plays are more humanist rather than feminist. She argues, “I see feminism as humanism, and the questioning of authority, and therefore male authority since most authority is male” (270).

Hence, while Wertebaker reviews history in her plays, she does not intend to create a women’s history; rather, she re-examines history from the perspective of the gender relation to see how a society is built up. Many scholars caution that the emphasis on women as victims in the past puts women to the margin in the present because this stress only reinforces that women have no power or rights in history (Hannam 303). Therefore, in order to obtain fair treatment of men and women, women who are excluded from history must be revealed so that the history of women can be uncovered and their existence in history can be affirmed. “Her-story” or

“women’s history,” versus his-story, intends to recreate a history that is different from phallogentric history. However, the possibility of writing her-story without men is questionable because history, after all, describes all human beings, not just one sex. June Hannam thinks that understanding the unequal power relationships between two sexes is more important than the emphasis of the divisions of two sexes for “an understanding of the historical process” (310). Joan Scott also suggests that instead of proving women indeed have history, it is the time to re-evaluate “standards of historical significance” (*Gender* 17). The importance of her-story should turn its focus from searching for the female documents to the discussion of “gender.” In light of such new outlook on gender discussion, Scott suggests “that relations between the sexes are a primary aspect of social organization,” “that the terms of male and female identities are in large part culturally determined,” and “that differences between the sexes constitute and are constituted by hierarchical social structures” (*Gender* 25).

Therefore, this book focuses on how gender is constructed socially and culturally in history through analyzing Wertebaker’s plays. Not only do we understand history from gender, but we also understand that the inclusion of gender in history indeed changes our perception of history. It is definitely not enough to simply emphasize women as victims in history, so the recognition of gender differences and the relations between gender and history help to lead us to rethink and reconstruct history. Also, reading history from the perspective of gender is different from reading history from feminist perspective because some feminists focus on women only and exclude men’s problems (Lieske, “Gender” 179).<sup>6</sup> In Wertebaker’s words, reading

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<sup>6</sup> Many critics have observed a lack of men’s studies in feminism and they suggest that feminists are supposed to turn their focus on women *only* to gender, which means to study men and women together. bell hooks in *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* (1984) states that overlooking men’s studies in feminism is “a declaration of war between the sexes” (33), and she even believes, “If feminist movement ignores his predicament, dismisses his hurt, or writes him off as just another male enemy, then we are passively condoning his actions” (74). bell hooks in *Feminism is for Everybody* (2000) further states that the failure of feminism is the limited studies on men, and she asserts, “If feminist

history from the viewpoint of gender is more like “humanist” since both women and men need to question the authorities and since they both are restricted to the traditional sexual roles. Hence, gender no longer merely refers to “women”<sup>7</sup> but a complicated relationship with historical discourses.

The seven Wertebaker’s plays this book discusses are categorized as “history plays.” The term, history plays, as M. H. Abrams defines, “is often applied more broadly to any drama based mainly on historical materials” (37). In other words, Wertebaker in her plays uses historical materials for not only a review of the accepted history but also a reconstruction of history based on historical materials.<sup>8</sup> Wertebaker’s rewriting history exactly reveals that history is essentially a narrative form, which can be rewritten, retold, and re-arranged, and in this way, different interpretations of history are welcome, so that to reread history from the perspective of gender is possible and necessary.

In order to justify the legitimacy of Wertebaker’s rewriting history from the standpoint of gender, Chapter Two claims that just as Hayden White sees narrative

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theory had offered more liberatory visions of masculinity it would have been impossible for anyone to dismiss the movement as anti-male. To a grave extent feminist movement failed to attract a large body of females and males because our theory did not effectively address the issue of not just what males might do to be anti-sexist but also what an alternative masculinity might look like” (69-70). From hooks’ perspective, we may understand that there is indeed a lack of men’s studies in feminism. Like what Pam Lieske puts it, “both male and female gendered identities come under study” (“Gender” 179). Hence, gender studies of both women and men are now important and necessary.

<sup>7</sup> The original meaning of gender is not like what we think now, but it was “an analytical category to draw a line of demarcation between biological sex differences and the way these are used to inform behaviours and competencies” (Pilcher and Whelehan 56). It was a term to designate the differences between two sexes, seeing the differences are biological, essential and natural. Feminists, before the 1980s, used gender as a synonymy with “women, sexual difference, or sex roles” (Lieske, “Gender” 178). Even so, gender was more like a descriptive term than a complicated concept. It was also used with “women” interchangeably.

<sup>8</sup> This book takes the broad definition of history play in order to observe how Wertebaker uses historical materials to reconstruct gender. However, some similar terms with history play are supposed to be mentioned, they are history in drama, historical drama, and chronicle drama. According to Richard H. Palmer’s survey, historical drama is another name of chronicle drama, which is in contrast with history in drama, and the distinction between chronicle drama (historical drama) and history in drama lies in the different ideas of chronicle and history (6). However, M. H. Abrams designates “chronicle plays” as “dramatic works based on the historical materials in the English *Chronicles* by Raphael Holinshed and others” (36), whereas “history plays” as “any drama based mainly on historical materials” (37).

nature of history and just as Joan Scott finds social formation in gender, Wertebaker also believes that both history and gender are constructed and should be reread to offer new visions. White's and Scott's arguments are the theoretical background in the book. As "the first to construct a detailed theory of history as a tropic exercise" (Munslow 149), White solidifies his reputation by metahistory, and his comment on history as narrative authorizes different versions of rewriting history.<sup>9</sup> Rejecting to see history as linear, objective, and rejecting to see it as the only truth, Wertebaker in *Credible Witness*, like White, asserts that history is not only established by scientific truth or official records on historical events but also personal narrations.

Problematizing the theory of historical narratives, Wertebaker furthermore questions who has the right to narrate history and what happens when one's insistence on his or her history becomes chauvinistic.

Moreover, Wertebaker's concept of history is colored with her concern of the gender issue, and Chapter Two then adopts Scott's gender theory to supplement the limited discussion of the relationship between history and gender. Gender normally was a synonymy with "women." Nevertheless, it is not until Gayle Rubin, who systematically draws a line to distinguish gender as a social construction from sex as a biological designation, that gender is no longer used as a descriptive term to show the biological differences of the two sexes. The discussion of gender instead moves into

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<sup>9</sup> White is not the first person who finds the narrative form of history, but he is the first one to theorize it (Munslow 149). Before White, Foucault has observed the narrative element of history although Alun Munslow in *Deconstructing History* (2006) emphasizes that both Foucault and White follow Giambattista Vico's concept of history (186-88). This book is also aware of many different theories and criticisms of history and the relation between history and narrative. For example, Fredric Jameson also proposes a similar opinion as White's, stating that history "is not a text," but "history is inaccessible to us except in textual form" (82). What Jameson means is that history exists in textual forms, but history is not a text. In his opinion, the meaning of history should be accessed only by interpreting the textual forms. Combining psychoanalysis with Marxism, Jameson's history is "the Lacanian Real" (Roberts 98), which means that the Real as well as history cannot be directly apprehended, but only known by symbolic expressions. Besides, Michel de Certeau in *The Writing of History* (1975) also discusses the relation between history and literature. De Certeau asserts, "History is not an epistemological criticism. It remains always a narrative" (43). History is a narrative, and history and fiction are in fact "quasi-identical" to de Certeau (Tom Conley xi). However, since White is the first person who theorizes history with an essential narrative nature, the book appropriates his theory mainly.



cultural and social areas, studying how women and men are constructed as what they are thought they should be. After Rubin, Scott's explanation of gender based on Foucault's power/knowledge theory is commonly accepted now; that is, the definition of gender is "knowledge about sexual difference" (*Gender 2*). Based on the discussion of *Credible Witness*, *Three Birds Alighting on a Field*, and *The Break of Day*, Chapter Two argues that Wertebaker regards gender as a constitutive element of world relationships and a social construction that can be deconstructed.

Chapter Three discusses four of Wertebaker's history plays, *New Anatomies*, *The Grace of Mary Traverse*, *Our Country's Good*, and *After Darwin*, and it argues by rewriting gender into history, Wertebaker asserts that history is no longer based on the model of men's coercive domination over women and only the acknowledgment of gender as a social construction can deconstruct the stereotypes of femininity and masculinity. Femininity and masculinity are two important terms in this chapter as well as the next, and they are also targets that Wertebaker intends to unsettle. Femininity means "the social and cultural characteristics associated with being female" (Barker 68), whereas masculinity means "the cultural characteristics associated with being a man" (115). They are a set of characteristics defined by society and based on biological determinism; for example, women must behave feminine, which signifies "[p]retty, dainty, fragile, soft, nurturing, caring, healing, passive, narcissistic, duplicitous, irrational, powerless" (Stern 151), while men must identify with masculinity, which refers to "strength, power, stoicism, action, control, independence, self-sufficiency, camaraderie and work amongst others" (Barker 115).

In feminist theories, there is a debate "between essentialists (who argue that femininity resides in the female body), and constructionists (who argue that femininity is socially constructed and hence detachable from the body)" (Stern 151). The book asserts that Wertebaker obviously follows constructionists who believe

femininity and masculinity are both constructions, and she regards the current concepts of femininity and masculinity should be deconstructed to expect a better and fair gender relation in the future. The discussions on both *New Anatomies* and *The Grace of Mary Traverse* center on femininity and claim that women are confined to the arbitrary sex/gender system. Isabelle Eberhardt challenges gender norms by cross-dressing while Mary Traverse does so by crossing the spatial division. The discussion on both *Our Country's Good* and *After Darwin* targets masculinity and reveals that men are also the victims of the concept of ideal masculinity in the society based on biological determinism. The English convicts are feminized while the English officers suffer from the unfulfillable masculinity. Both Robert FitzRoy's and Charles Darwin's masculinity is threatened, and their conflicts in the play are derived from the individual insistence on each manhood. Through deconstructing femininity and masculinity, Wertenbaker in her history plays suggests that history is based on an unstable gender hierarchy and a more open and flexible concept of gender relations will liberate our understanding of history.

Chapter Four focuses on three of Wertenbaker's history plays, *The Love of the Nightingale*, *Dianeira*, and *The Ash Girl*. However, since the three plays are based on oral history materials, myth and fairy tales to be exact, this chapter proposes to categorize them as "oral history plays" in order to distinguish them from the four history plays in Chapter Three.<sup>10</sup> These three plays are revisionary plays, which review oral history with a strong intention of changing it. Adrienne Rich regards the

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<sup>10</sup> To define Wertenbaker's *The Love of the Nightingale*, *Dianeira*, and *The Ash Girl* as "oral history plays" does not mean to historicize Wertenbaker's literary creations or to assert that myth and fairy tales are real historical events. By the same token, to define Wertenbaker's *New Anatomies*, *The Grace of Mary Traverse*, *Our Country's Good* and *After Darwin* as "history plays" does not mean to see every literary creation as history. In fact, I argue that Wertenbaker in her plays intends to offer a historical fact or figure different interpretations and her strategies are to read history and oral history from the perspective of gender and through literary intrigues. Thus, in order to assert the inclusion of gender indeed changes our perception of history, Chapter Four suggests that Wertenbaker's oral history plays provide us an alternative comprehension of oral history through rewriting myth and fairy tales.

importance of re-vision as “an act of survival” (18) because we need to know the past differently in order not to convey wrong and sexist social norms to the next generation (18-19). Also, Alicia Ostriker claims that female writers’ revisionary works are an act of “revisionary mythmaking,” and she explains:

Whenever a poet employs a figure or story previously accepted and defined by a culture, the poet is using myth, and the potential is always present that the use will be revisionist: that is, the figure or tale will be appropriated for altered ends, the old vessel filled with new wine, initially satisfying the thirst of the individual poet but ultimately making cultural change possible. (317)

Revisionary works mean to change and challenge the accepted sexual norms while they review the past at the same time.

In *The Love of the Nightingale*, *Dianeira*, and *The Ash Girl*, by rereading against male-centered oral history of myth and fairy tales from a gender-oriented perspective, Wertebaker criticizes the traditional gender relations and proposes a break from male chauvinism in oral history and to have self-awareness for women in the past and the present so as to have a new mode of gender relations in the future. Wertebaker’s strategy to rewrite oral history is to give voices to the voiceless, so that the tongueless Philomele becomes sensitive to language, the emotionless Dianeira is angry, and passive Ashgirl becomes active to search for her own happiness.

Wertebaker also likes to give the flat characters psychological developments to complicate and deepen them. By doing so, Procne is not a cruel child-killer; Iole is not a senseless object-like gift; the stepsisters in the story of Cinderella are not naturally evil girls. While reversing the stereotypical images of women in myth and fairy tales, the dramatist reviews the traditional gender relations from modern feminist and humanist viewpoints.

Overall, these seven plays by Wertebaker manifest that the playwright is good at using historical materials to reconstruct the past, to criticize the present, and then to look forward to a better future. More crucially, she exposes the unstable gender relations in history, which is to say that she uncovers the power relation between the sexes. By emphasizing the reconstruction of gender, she allows us to see that the powerless in history may re-establish their identities, whereas the powerful may no longer possess superiority forever.

Wertebaker's writing strategies can be discussed from two aspects. As far as the form is concerned, the dramatist prefers to use the device of a play-within-the-play and an episodic narrative line. In *Our Country's Good*, *After Darwin*, *The Love of the Nightingale*, Wertebaker arranges the theatrical device of a play-within-the-play while in *Dianeira*, she sets a storyteller to create a form of a story-within-the-story. This device in both *Our Country's Good* and *The Love of the Nightingale* functions as "an artistic agency of self-reference and self-reflection" (Fischer and Greiner xii). While the English convicts perform and discuss *The Recruiting Officer* in *Our Country's Good*, Wertebaker's play itself becomes the reference that reflects the criticism of the play; in this way, Wertebaker may provide her value of theatre as "the redemptive power" in it (Introduction, *Plays One* viii). Similarly, *Phaedra* in *The Love of the Nightingale* reflects that some audiences in theatre believe every word on the stage, such as Tereus who thinks he is Phaedra, and some judge the play critically, such as Philomele who clearly realizes she is watching a play. The play-within-the-play in *The Love of the Nightingale* is a device of self-reflection on the abuses and functions of theatre.

This theatrical device in *After Darwin* and *Dianeira* works as "a special mode of perception that allows for different ways of presenting perspectives of appropriating and placing itself in relation to the world at large" (Fischer and Greiner



xii). The play-within-the-play in *After Darwin* deals with the perception of history directly. While Tom and Ian are rehearsing their performance about the friendship between FitzRoy and Darwin, the audience sees how history is constructed and deconstructed again and again in front of them. The totality of history is loosening gradually, so different perspectives of history are permissible. In *Dianeira*, Wertebaker also uses a story-within-the-story as a special mode of perception of history. The storyteller Irene links the ancient Greek story with today's Balkan wars to reveal that history will be full of male violence as long as men's coercive dominance remains. In brief, no matter whether the function of the play-within-the-play is self-reflection or a special mode of perception, it aims at creating an alienation effect to force the audience to think critically.

In addition to this theatrical device, Wertebaker's plays are usually characterized as an episodic narrative form without a clear major character, especially in *Our Country's Good*, *After Darwin*, *Three Birds Alighting on a Field*, and *Credible Witness*. Because Wertebaker intends to let characters talk about their own stories and to interpret history in their own words, the multiple interpretations by different characters make a play lack a clear linear narrative line and a center character. Max Stafford-Clark, the director of *Our Country's Good*, expresses his opinion toward this trait of Wertebaker's plays by stating, "Timberlake Wertebaker's plays are also sometimes criticized for lacking a narrative line, for lacking a principal character. And sometimes those criticisms are also a critic's limitations to come to grips with a new form which is a strength as well as a weakness" (qtd. in Buse 161). From the director's point of view, the "weakness" instead is why Wertebaker's plays are so special. In *Our Country's Good*, we hear not only The Aborigine's counter discourse of imperialism, but also different interpretations of the colonial history in Australia from the perspective of the English convicts and the English officers. In *After Darwin*,

we cannot decide which character is the protagonist or which character speaks for the playwright. This special theatrical device, like the device of a play-within-the-play, means to baffle the audience so that watching plays needs an active participation.

As far as the form is concerned, Wertebaker's (oral) history plays are special for the device of a play-within-the-play and episodic narratives without a central character. Moreover, as far as the content is concerned, these plays have the characteristics of feminist history defined by Richard H. Palmer, but this book argues that these plays are more colored with the characteristics of gender history.<sup>11</sup>

Containing eight qualities of feminist history,<sup>12</sup> Wertebaker's plays are distinguished for the power relation between the sexes, so men as well as women are also the dramatist's concern. Although women are still the main objects in gender history, Kathleen Canning pronounces that the study of gender history highlights "relations between the sexes and a new attention to masculinity" (11). While some feminists reject taking men's problems into their concern (Lieske, "Gender" 179), many gender theorists, such as Canning or Scott, call attention to the inclusion of men in women's studies and the power relation between the sexes.

Rather than stable and fixed, gender hierarchy in Wertebaker's plays is

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<sup>11</sup> In Richard H. Palmer's *The Contemporary British History Play* (1998), he gives a short discussion of Wertebaker's *New Anatomies*, *The Grace of Mary Traverse* and *The Love of the Nightingale* under the category of "gender-based feminist history play" (152-55). Moreover, he also suggests that not all Wertebaker's plays belong to this category; for example, "the primary thrust" of *Our Country's Good* "is not feminist" (155). I agree with Palmer's category of "gender-based feminist history play," but I propose to include *Our Country's Good* because Wertebaker's history plays all intend to reread history from the point of view of gender and because feminist purposes are obvious through her recreation of women in history. Besides, Palmer's term of "gender-based feminist history play" is derived from his observation of the development of feminist history plays in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which contains four phases from "compensatory," "contributory," "social," to "gender-focused" feminist history plays (134). Unlike Palmer's historical approach, this study is based on Hayden White's and Joan Scott's theories to discuss Wertebaker's history plays with a special emphasis on the gender issue.

<sup>12</sup> Richard H. Palmer in *The Contemporary British History Play* concludes eight characteristics of feminist history. First, "History is depicted from a woman's point of view" (157). Second, "Incidents depicted are more likely to be personal or domestic than public or political" (157). Third, "A woman's reliance on a man is usually self-destructive" (157). Fourth, "The plays value women's learning to rely upon one another" (158). Fifth, "most feminist histories show women who represent the dominant male society betraying those who rebel against that patriarchy" (158). Sixth, "Gender differentiates character traits" (158). Seventh, "Female protagonists often flout conventional sexual conventions" (158). Eighth, "Women, both characters and performers, often dress in men's clothing" (158).

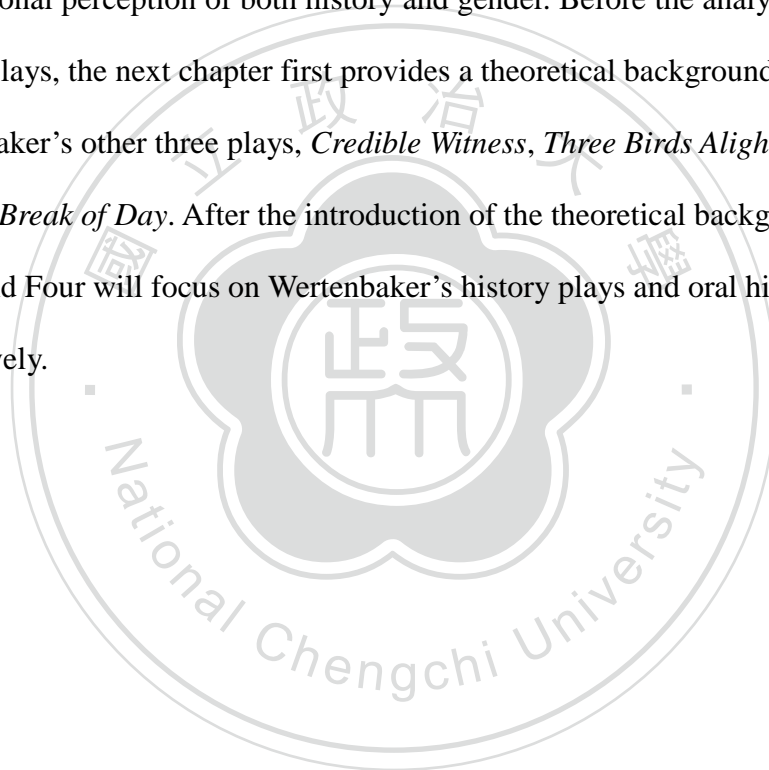
dynamic and fluid. By cross-dressing and crossing the spatial division, Isabelle in *New Anatomies* and Mary in *The Grace of Mary Traverse* transgress the traditional femininity to challenge the arbitrary sex/gender system. By taking gender into consideration in the colonial history, Wertebaker uncovers the double-marginalized positions the male colonized hold in *Our Country's Good*. Also, by revealing multiple masculinities and femininities in *After Darwin*, the playwright suggests that the identity and security that gender hierarchy offers men and women collapse.

Wertebaker in her oral history plays rewrites heroines in myth and fairy tales in order to expose that history is no longer based on women's silence and submission to society. Like the characteristics of feminist history plays, Wertebaker's plays emphasize rereading history from the perspective of women and questioning the patriarchal society; however, they also reveal that men, like women, are the victims who are restricted within the fallacy of biological determinism, and show that history is the production of the tension and power relations between the sexes. Wertebaker's contribution to drama exactly lies in her reconstruction of history from the point of view of gender.

While Wertebaker rereads history from the perspective of gender, she simultaneously criticizes the traditional closed concept of history that silences other voices. The characteristics of feminist history plays, as Palmer suggests, focus on how playwrights use historical materials to assert their feminist purposes, but Wertebaker in her plays directly judges history itself. Confronting with history directly, Wertebaker describes how a woman is officially edited out of history in *New Anatomies*, why a woman is excluded from the history of politics in *The Grace of Mary Traverse*, how the native people's voice is repressed in the colonial history in *Our Country's Good*, how history is constructed and deconstructed in *After Darwin* through the device of a play-within-the-play, who has the right to tell and create

history in *The Love of the Nightingale*, why history is full of anger in *Dianeira*, and what the silence in history is in *The Ash Girl*. The dramatist's critique on history is radical for she rejects viewing history as linear, coherent, self-sufficient, and stable cognition; instead, she "genderizes" history to expose the unstable history built on the dynamic relations of sexual differences.

In a nutshell, the book aims at reading Wertebaker's (oral) history plays and asserts that only when gender is taken into consideration of history does it open our conventional perception of both history and gender. Before the analyses of seven (oral) history plays, the next chapter first provides a theoretical background of the book with Wertebaker's other three plays, *Credible Witness*, *Three Birds Alighting on a Field*, and *The Break of Day*. After the introduction of the theoretical background, Chapters Three and Four will focus on Wertebaker's history plays and oral history plays respectively.





## Chapter Two

### History as Narrative: The Possibility of Writing Gender into History

This chapter argues that just as Hayden White sees narrative nature of history and just as Joan Scott finds social formation in gender, Wertenbaker also believes that both history and gender are constructed and should be reread to offer new visions. Wertenbaker's plays are characterized by rewriting history to highlight gender issues; therefore, this chapter first analyzes White's metahistory to justify Wertenbaker's writing history in her history plays and then Scott's gender theory to re-examine history from the perspective of gender. In this chapter, *Credible Witness* (2001), *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* (1991) and *The Break of Day* (1995) are the illustrations to explain Wertenbaker's concepts of history as narrative and multiplicity and gender as a constitutive element of world relations.

#### A. History as a Literary Artifact

Hayden White's theory of history as a form of literature blurs the relation between history and literature, but their distinction did not appear until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the very beginning, there were only tales of the legendary past. Not until the invention of writing and calendar did history become written stories that dated events (Korhonen 9). In ancient Greece, Aristotle put down a well-known distinction between history and literature in *Poetics*, claiming, "The poet and the historian differ not by writing in verse or in prose. [. . .] The true difference is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen" (55). History and literature were both rhetorical arts, but history described the events that actually happened while literature the imaginative events that might possibly happen. Due to the larger and more complicated dimension that poets deal with, Aristotle asserted, "Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the

universal, history the particular” (55). Nevertheless, even though history and literature dealt with different events, they both belonged to the rhetorical tradition (Korhonen 10; White, “Historical Discourse” 25).

Raymond Williams also explains that history contained both real and imaginary events in the earliest uses of the term. History was “a narrative account of events” (146), and in the early English usage, “history and story (the alternative English form derived ultimately from the same root) were both applied to an account either of imaginary events or of events supposed to be true” (Williams 146). However, from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, history meant “an account of past real event” while story referred to “less formal accounts of past events and accounts of imagined events” (146). Especially, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, historians started to emphasize the scientific accuracy of historical events, so they disregarded the rhetorical elements of historical writing (Korhonen 10); in other words, from then on, history, opposite to rhetoric and fiction, has been regarded as an objective and scientific discourse.

Because of the emphasis of the events that actually happened and the documents that were proved scientifically, historians prefer to describe wars, diplomacy or great men, who are usually kings or warriors. In this way, many human experiences, such as the dreams and life of minority people, are neglected in historical writing (Korhonen 10). Joan Scott points out a contradiction in historiography, asserting,

History is a chronology that makes experience visible, but in which categories appear as nonetheless ahistorical: desire, homosexuality, heterosexuality, femininity, masculinity, sex, and even sexual practices become so many fixed entities being played out over time, but not themselves historicized. (“The Evidence of Experience” 778)

In order to describe and emphasize what actually happened, many other important

issues in history have been overlooked.

Due to the limitation of traditional historiography, people then start to challenge scientific-motivated historians and to break the boundary between history and literature in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, it is not until Hayden White's *Metahistory* was published in 1973 that the relation between the two is shattered again, and his theory causes an overwhelming influence in many academic areas (Korhonen 10-11). He develops a theory called "metahistory" in order to affirm history as literary artifact. In his book, White "treat[s] the historical work as what it most manifestly is: a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse" (*Metahistory* ix). Understanding history is to understand a narrative structure for the reason that we know history through narrative since we cannot encounter the past directly. Therefore, in order to expose the poetic nature of historical works, White highlights principal modes of historical consciousness based on four tropes: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony (x-xi). These dominant tropes control the metahistorical basis of every historical work.<sup>1</sup> In other words, the works of history are rhetorical constructions with forms of literature; hence, the value or the meaning of history depends on narrative, rather than on historical data.

From this standpoint, White proposes that a good historian is a good storyteller, who has an ability of narrating a story with several historical facts (*Tropics* 83). Without historians' storytelling, facts do not have any meaning. Historical facts are always fragmentary and incomplete, but historians have to tell stories to make those senseless facts sensible. "Constructive imagination" facilitates historians to answer what indeed happened and what the facts mean (*Tropics* 83-84). These historians'

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<sup>1</sup> Following these four tropes are three kinds of "explanatory affect": the explanation by formal argument, by emplotment and by ideological implication (x). Each is associated with four possible modes of articulation: for emplotment, there are Romance, Comedy, Tragedy, and Satire; for argument, there are Formism, Organicism, Mechanism, and Contextualism; for ideological implication, there are Anarchism, Conservatism, Radicalism, and Liberalism (x).

special ability is like the keen observation of detectives because historians and detectives both find meanings beyond the surface structure. As long as historians with their constructive imagination successfully tell a reasonable story which is hidden from senseless historical facts, then they can offer plausible explanations for events (84). History, in this way, is able to be understood and facts are comprehensible. In other words, neither objective nor innocent, facts essentially are meaningless.

Historians provide them meanings by storytelling, and any historical event is just a story element. The ways that make those elements become a story are “the techniques that we would normally expect to find in the emplotment of a novel or a play” (84). That is to say, history is a literary artifact that needs historians’ imagination and narrative techniques.

The statement of the fictional element in historical narratives establishes White as an important historian as well as literary critic. Owing to the fact that historical events are “value-neutral” (*Tropic* 84) per se, different historians write different versions of the same historical events. According to historians’ arrangement of historical events and their ability of storytelling, which White calls “emplotment,” meaning “the encodation of the facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific *kinds* of plot structures” (83 emphasis in original), the same set of events can be described both as tragedy and comedy. To put it in another way, no event is inherently comic or tragic, but emplotment makes them comic or tragic. White asserts, “The term ‘tragic’ describes or refers to a structure of meaning, not a factual situation. Lives may be described as tragic, but it is the description that makes or makes them appear to be tragic, but the lives that justify the description” (“Historical Discourse” 31).

However, while White asserts history is a literary artifact, his statement does not mean that history then is not real or history is a lie. Moreover, the distinction

between “rhetoric versus history” or “fiction versus history” is improper. It is often seen that “rhetoric” and “fiction” are the opposite of history for the reason that rhetoric cannot provide evidence and fiction is imaginary and illusory (White, “Historical Discourse” 25). White, nevertheless, points out the rhetorical nature of history by asserting history as a form of literature. Also, fiction does not mean deception; rather, it refers to creative literary works no matter whether they are based on real or imaginary events (Korhonen 16).<sup>2</sup> The opposite pair is neither “history versus rhetoric” nor “history versus fiction”; instead, for White, the contrast is between “the imaginable and the actual” (*Tropics* 98). History is supposed to be understood through the differences and similarities between imagination and reality because history manifests its value by two modes: “one of which is encoded as ‘real,’ the other of which is ‘revealed’ to have been illusory in the course of the narrative” (98).

Besides, there are several approaches, for White, to make the fragmentary historical events reasonable, and historians tend to “familiarize the unfamiliar” (*Tropics* 86). While historians deal with facts that at first are incomplete and illogical, they arrange all facts to tell a sensible story so as to be accepted by the reader. Therefore, facts, through emplotment, are no longer strange but they become familiar to people. White further explains, “They [facts] are familiarized, not only because the reader now has more *information* about the events, but also because he has been shown how the data conform to an *icon* of a comprehensible finished process, a plot structure with which he is familiar as a part of his cultural endowment” (86 emphasis in original).

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<sup>2</sup> The Latin word of fiction is *factio*, which means “molding and shaping pre-existing material” without a meaning of lies (Korhonen 16). By the meaning of molding and shaping, fiction refers to literary techniques that are used in literature and historiography. *Fictio*, during the Roman times, refers to “lies and inventions” (16), standing for the things or events that never exist in the physical world or cannot be proven. In modern time, it refers to novels and short stories (16).



Comparing the therapeutic process in psychotherapy to writing history, White emphasizes the importance of familiarizing the unfamiliar. Patients suffer from their past which is strange, unfamiliar and mysterious for them. Unable to make all their past events sensible-connected, they are threatened and haunted by their past, or they may arrange a certain form of their horrible past by themselves. White believes that helping patients to re-arrange their past events familiarizes the unfamiliar in their memory, and further eases their illness. Says White, “The problem is to get the patient to ‘reemplot’ his whole life history in such a way as to change the *meaning* of those events for him and their *significance* for the economy of the whole set of events that make up his life” (*Tropic 87* emphasis in original). Hence, in this light, White reveals the significance of the narrative structure of history for people for the reason that how to narrate history represents how to create subjectivities and identities, and understanding the narrative element in history comforts and eases the strangeness of personal past events.

This process of familiarizing the unfamiliar, nevertheless, is male-centered for two reasons. First, before the rise of feminism, history writing has been dominated by men; as Deirdre Beddoe observes, “[H]istory has been, and continues to be, as male dominated as our society” (9). White emphasizes that historians arrange facts, which means to edit facts, to leave some and abandon some, and we observe that those facts that are discarded outside history, however, are usually references about women. Consequently, even though phallogocentric historians have the ability of storytelling to familiarize historical events, which White describes as “strange, enigmatic or mysterious” (86), those familiarized events are still male-centered. Historical events about women are not “strange, enigmatic or mysterious,” but what is worse is that they simply disappear in history. Following this, what phallogocentric historians familiarize is not familiar to women, so the familiarized historical events still make

women feel “strange, enigmatic or mysterious.” No matter how good the storytellers are, it is difficult for these male-centered historians to escape the patriarchal ideology to familiarize the unfamiliar for women.

From this point of view, White’s theory of metahistory provides a fundamental ground for scholars, especially feminists, to rewrite history. History, under White’s interpretation, is a literary artifact with a narrative form, and it is no longer a fixed monolith that conveys the only truth without other interpretations. Based on the value-neutral historical events, feminists may rewrite history to provide different versions of the same historical events. In addition, the interpretations of historical events, instead of historical events per se, are the meaning of history, so a feminist perspective of historical events is legitimate and necessary. In this way, the realization of history as literary artifact “liberates” our construction of the past by accepting different interpretations of historical events, rather than limit our perception toward the past (Munslow 163).

White’s insistence on history as a literary artifact opens a possibility of rewriting women into history although his metahistory does not take women into serious consideration. If history is narrated by storytellers as White suggests, then history could be re-narrated by other storytellers. Her-story, consequently, is not impossible to achieve. Some male-centered historians use value-neutral historical events to tell stories to familiarize the unfamiliar facts and to use them to control women by editing some facts. With the same strategy of familiarization, writing women into history may help women to eliminate the strangeness of the historical events for them and to recreate their perception toward history and toward themselves. As White mentions, the narrative form of history does not mean history is a lie; by the same token, her-story, with the same historical facts but without the same narration and interpretation, is not a lie, either.

History, in this way, has several different versions due to different ways of storytelling, but the historical facts are not changed. White explains, “The events themselves are not substantially changed from one account to another. That is to say, the data that are to be analyzed are not significantly different in the different accounts. What is different are the modalities of their relationships” (97). White emphasizes the multiple interpretations to the same historical event, but he, as a historian, does not assert that history is totally equal to literature because history after all needs to take into concern events that actually happen. A classic historical work will not be denied by any new explanation or data discovered by the next generation (97). What White intends to propose is that the overemphasis of scientific dimension of history limits our perception of history and the knowledge of history as a literary artifact liberates us to create and accept different interpretations of history. Hence, White’s theory indeed provides a significant theoretical background for re-writing history for historians, literary authors, and readers.

### **B. Wertenbaker’s Concept of History**

Comparing British theatre with American theatre, Richard Palmer observes that the history play is more popular in British theatre (2), and the tradition of the history play in Britain may even be traced back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century (2). Nevertheless, the tradition of the history play transforms immensely in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially owing to the question of the objectivity of history (Palmer 1-2). Palmer attributes this change to the difference between Old History and New History (12-13). Obviously, Palmer’s distinction between the two concepts of history echoes Hayden White’s assertion of history as a literary artifact different from scientific and objective history. Historical facts may be rearranged and retold for different purposes by different people; in this way, the playwright of the history play has multiple strategies in using

historical materials, and Palmer concludes eight methods.<sup>3</sup> Chapters Three and Four will have a further discussion on how Wertebaker uses historical materials in all her history plays. Before that, the following analyzes Wertebaker's concept of history in general in three plays, *Credible Witness*, *Three Birds Alighting on a Field*, and *The Break of Day*, for three purposes: to illustrate White's statement by Wertebaker's plays, to legitimate Wertebaker's rewriting history, and to describe Wertebaker's concept of history as background to the following two chapters.

### 1. The Narrative Element in History

From Hayden White's point of view, "history as a discipline is in bad shape today because it has lost sight of its origins in the literary imagination. In the interest of *appearing* scientific and objective, it has repressed and denied to itself its own greatest source of strength and renewal" (*Tropics* 99, emphasis in original). In order to pursue the scientific accuracy and objectivity of history, history writing loses the power of literary imagination and the possibilities of different interpretations. Like White's point, Wertebaker in *Credible Witness* (2001) describes an immigration officer and a guard, who are both historian-like and both insist only on a "credible witness" to judge whether asylum seekers may stay in Britain or not. Their emphasis on evidence blinds themselves, showing a wrong judgment in deciding not to permit asylum seekers to stay. Ironically, with the assistance of refugees, they at the end

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<sup>3</sup> Palmer distinguishes strategies of using history into eight types: first, "Characters and situation are largely fictional, but the style of the play mimics that of a play from an earlier period" (9); second, "Plays based on legendary sources, that may or may not have historical foundation, contain characters known to the audience, who possess some degree of historic validity for the audience" (9); third, "Even with fictional characters, some plays have their setting, characterization, and action determined by a historical period" (9); fourth, "Fictional characters react to a background of actual historical events in plays" (9); fifth, "Plays that depict specific historical characters and situations, but in a recognizably exaggerated fashion, include travesties of history" (9); sixth, "In many plays historical figures interact with fictional characters, sometimes in real, sometimes in imaginary circumstances" (9); seventh, "Recognizable figures from the past appear principally in private and therefore largely imaginative circumstances" (9); eighth, "A play may depict, as accurately as possible, the behavior of historical figures in reported events" (9).

realize scientific evidence is neither the only source of making history nor the only way to reveal truth; rather, everyone's narrative and they themselves are "credible witnesses."

*Credible Witness* premiered at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Upstairs in 2001, telling a story about a Macedonian mother, Petra Karagy, who flies to Britain in pursuit of her son, Alexander Karagy.<sup>4</sup> Because of using a false passport, Petra is detained and locked in a detention center, where she meets some asylum seekers, including Aziz, Shivan, and Ameena. Simon Le Britten is the major immigration officer in charge of all asylum seekers. Lacking the historical knowledge of complicated relationship between Greece and Macedonia, Simon does not believe Petra's words that her son is persecuted by Greeks simply because of teaching Macedonia history. Without evidence and official papers, Simon doubts Petra's words and the existence of Alexander. He describes his job, "Now I'll tell you the facts of this case," and states, "The challenge of this job is to find the truth of a story and it's a challenge I relish. I'm like a historian myself, sifting the evidence" (*Credible Witness* 199). Like science-disciplined historians whom White and Wertenbaker criticize, Simon claims for the authority of the only truth and the priority of the credible evidence he sifts from the false. Deciding which evidence is true, he is an authority on explaining facts. Simon intensely depends on official records to judge the legitimacy of asylum seekers. Therefore, without any paper record of Alexander, Simon declares Alexander "vanishes" (199). In other words, Alexander disappears, becoming "no one," in both histories of England and Greece due to a lack of official records.

Simon is like one of those historians who only care about the scientific

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<sup>4</sup> According to *Credible Witness Resource Pace* published by Royal Court Theatre, Wertenbaker and the directors, actors, actresses all went to detention centers to interview asylum seekers. During a period of two weeks, they talked with asylum seekers and then shared their discovery when they went back to the theatre. About two and a half years later, *Credible Witness* was finally completed (Royal Court. n. pag.).



accuracy of history, so he relies on official papers a lot. Official evidence becomes the only way to decide whether asylum seekers may stay or not. Aziz lacks any official evidence so he is restricted within the detention center. He, a refugee from Algeria, comes to England for political asylum in order to escape a civil war in his own country. Horrified by the civil war, he declares that Algerian history makes his head come off, so he sees his head everywhere. However, his fear is not a piece of official evidence. He expresses, “When I came here I told them I was running away because my head was going to be torn off. We don’t accept fear of the future, they tell me, only what happened: were you *officially* threatened? *Officially*? There’s a civil war in Algeria, I say. It’s not *officially* a civil war, they say” (206 emphasis added).

According to the 1951 United Nation Convention on Refugees, which Britain is one of the signatories, refugees are people who are forced to leave their countries for security owing to “a well founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, memberships of a particular social group or political opinion” (Royal Court. n. pag.). Britain has an obligation to obey the convention and to accept refugees. However, refugees are often regarded as criminals and locked in detention centers while waiting for examination (Royal Court. n. pag.). The most effectual way to prove refugees’ claim is official records, so Aziz’s fear of losing his head off and an unofficial civil war in Algeria are not reliable evidence. As a result, Aziz, like other refugees, is detained as a prisoner.<sup>5</sup>

Without any aid from the English government, Petra, providing no official record to prove herself and the existence of her son, decides to go on a hunger strike

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<sup>5</sup> Compared with many other European countries, the UK takes far fewer asylum seekers even though it has the obligation to follow the 1951 United Nations Convention on Refugees (Royal Court. n. pag.). Asylum seekers are not welcome in Britain, and with the increase of the population of refugees and their problems, the asylum issue becomes one of the crucial subjects in contemporary Britain. Theatres also reflect this political and cultural issue and perform several plays on the relevant subject (Aston, “The Bogus Woman” 5).

until the government finds Alexander. Although Simon believes official papers only, he is kind and willing to help Petra. He mentions that he understands every refugee's miserable experience in their country, personally refusing to send them back to be killed or tortured, but he needs evidence to prove their asylum claim even if just some marks of torture on the body. Simon expresses, "I feel sorry for those going back to hunger and disease, believe me, but I have to see the *marks of torture* before I let anyone in. *Genuine. Deep.* Or the *real* fear of death. It's easier than you think. There were *no torture marks* on your son" (215 emphasis added). Consequently, "body" becomes a credible witness as well as official records. The authority represented by Simon, however, only needs marks of physical torture, but what refugees suffer from is mental torture. The invisible marks of torture are still unofficial; thus, when Simon declares that there are no torture marks on Alexander, he denies both Alexander's right of claiming asylum and his existence in England.

Immigration officers need to sift evidence like historians who decide which evidence is true. Nevertheless, the way they sift facts has been controlled by their prejudice. Especially, when immigration officers encounter refugees, who are foreigners and who are different from them, the cultural difference leads the officers to distrust refugees. Alexander reveals that the English government does not believe he was beaten by the police, and the main reason is that the translator misinterprets his words.

I had only the false passport. I'd pretended I didn't know any English because I was nervous and I thought an interpreter would help. That was two lies—you'd told me the English don't forgive lies. The embassy man misinterpreted everything I said to the official. It made me unsure, hearing it in another language, but so different—I become confused. They didn't want to believe I was beaten by the police, they asked how

many, details. I couldn't say for sure. (219)

As a result, “when no one believes you, you begin to doubt yourself” (219), Alexander comments. The interpreter's and the officer's distrust to him eventually makes him conclude, “I was humiliated” (219).

The consequence of humiliation caused from distrust is a revolt, which also explicates why asylum seekers in the detention center rebel against Paul. Paul, a guard in the detection center, does not believe Shivan, a refugee from Sri Lanka, is a doctor; he sees Aziz as a crazy person whose head is everywhere; he doubts Petra's pursuit of Alexander. He presupposes that their claims are false and denies their right to stay in England. Paul says to Petra, “You're not even supposed to be here. You can't refuse to eat perfectly decent food which is costing the taxpayer all this money, especially when you were probably starving in your own country” (207-08). Paul values the tax that English people pay more than the life of refugees, so Paul's comment is exactly like what Michael Billington describes, England “is locked into a notion of itself as an *island fortress* destined to repel unwanted boarders” (“*Credible Witness*” emphasis added).

Paul's island mentality angers refugees in the detention center, so they cause a small revolt. Shivan reads *Paradise Lost* to get through the humiliation in the center, believing the power of language in the book may give him strength. Now he uses English language in *Paradise Lost* to rebel against English people, quoting from Milton's description of hell to express the asylum seekers' condition in the detention center: “No light, but rather darkness visible / Served only to discover sights of woe / Regions of sorrow, doleful shades— / Where peace and rest can never dwell, hope never come” (I. 63-66). Shivan, echoing Satan's anger, continues referring to Satan's speech: “Our prison strong, this huge convex of fire / Outrageous to devour, immures us round” (II. 434-35). Refused to be seen as a doctor in the center, Shivan then

decides to be Lucifer in hell. While he cites *Paradise Lost*, he claps rhythmically and Aziz joins this music-like revolt with dancing. Paul does not believe those refugees' narration, so Shivan retorts, "If we don't share the truth of language, what then? You don't believe I'm a doctor, why should I believe you're a guard? If language disintegrates, there's nothing left. He [any person who needs help] needs help, you deny him, he riots" (*Credible Witness* 209). The distrust among people separates themselves. Furthermore, if people do not believe in each other, a credible witness is still incredible. Simon and Paul are eager to find facts, official records, and the marks of torture, but they ignore those refugees' words and feelings. In this way, Simon and Paul never find the truth of history, except fragmental records.

Ironically, Simon asks for the evidence of the marks of torture on the refugees' body, but he never "sees" them. When Simon decides to send all the refugees back to their countries, Petra helps Ameena to claim her right of political asylum. Ameena takes off her blouse, showing a great many cigarette burns on her body. Shivan expresses, "She's been here eight months. The doctor has given her the strongest tranquillisers he could find, but he hasn't once examined her" (232). Because of rape and torture in Somalia, Ameena comes to England for a new life. The English government, however, sends two male interpreters to interview her, and one of them is even Ameena's tribal enemy in Somalia. As a result, Ameena is said to be a prostitute. Suffering from huge physical and mental tortures, Ameena has a nervous breakdown. The doctor in the detention center only gives her pills, but never examines her. Simon has a record in a file, saying she screams at the doctor, but he never finds out the reason why she screams at him. Therefore, Ameena's "file" means nothing, and Simon's insistence on official papers becomes nonsensical and ridiculous. Moreover, even if Simon insists on the marks of tortures on the body, if he does not look, the marks are useless.

Petra forces Simon not only to “see” Aameena’s body, but also to “listen” to her story. Words for Aameena are like “medicine” (234). They do not taste good, but they cure her. Aameena must narrate her story in order to remedy the traumatic past. Like White’s comparison between a therapeutic process and history writing, Aameena has to “re-plot” her life history so that she can change the meaning of horrible facts to help herself. Her words are medicine for her as well as “credible testimony” for Simon. Petra urges her to tell her story, arguing, “Go on, Aameena. Mr. Le Britten wants credible testimony. Let’s give him testimony” (233). Without scientific objectivity, the personal narration now becomes a credible witness. If Simon represents the science-motivated historian, now he, by believing people’s narration of their history, realizes that history contains the narrative element, which helps him to get rid of his prejudice, or in White’s term, ideology (*Tropics* 99). White asserts that if historians understand the narrative element in their history writing, then “this recognition would serve as a potent antidote to the tendency of historians to become captive of ideological preconceptions which they do not recognize as such but honor as the ‘correct’ perception of ‘the way things really are’” (*Tropics* 99 emphasis in original). Hence, facts and evidence are not the only important elements in history, and the realization of the narrative form of history assists historians in moving to “a higher level of self-consciousness” (*Tropics* 99). In this light, Simon has to open his eyes to see the truth inscribed on the bodies of the refugees and his mind to accept the oral evidence besides documents. Realizing his narrow eyes and mind, Simon finally confesses, “I’m making too many mistakes” (*Credible Witness* 236).

## 2. The Right to Narrate History

Like Hayden White who asserts history is a literary artifact, Wertebaker in *Credible Witness* emphasizes the important role of personal narration in history.



Nevertheless, the playwright further asks a question, who has the right to narrate or write history? Or in the case of *Credible Witness*, who has the right to narrate or write English history? After Simon admits his fault, Petra replies, “Me, too. I’ve been walled, like you. History shifts, we can’t hold it. Simon, when we turn to you, don’t cover your eyes and think of the kings and queens of England. Look at us: we are your history now” (236). Accordingly, every refugee in the detention center has the right to narrate his or her history; by implication, everyone, including English and non-English, can use his or her own way to tell and write English history. In the play, none of the characters is “pure” English. The name of Simon Le Britten indicates his Norman ancestor. Sara Freeman suggests that the last name, Le Britten, “harkens to the Norman conquest in the middle ages,” and it implies “a complex history of conquest, colonialization, and migration” (64). Like Simon who works for the English government, Paul is also an immigrant, who comes from North India. All the refugees are from everywhere in the world: Petra from Macedonia, Ameena Somalia, Shivan Sri Lanka, and Aziz Algeria. Alexander’s students are all exiles: Anna is Balkan, Henry Eritrean, and Ali Algerian. Forced to leave their own countries, they come to Britain, becoming parts of England and parts of English history.

Wertenbaker in her article “Everyone Comes to Café Europa” explains two concepts of Europe: Café Europe and Fortress Europe. Through her emphasis on Café Europe, the dramatist reveals her concept of history as a public café, where everyone can talk about their story freely. Europe for Wertenbaker is supposed to be like a café, instead of a fortress, and she describes, “Cafés are half inside, half outside, they mingle with the street, and in a good café you sit for hours and talk. You don’t even have to sit in a café, you can play music in front of one, you can stand around, looking for a friend” (“Everyone”). Café is a place which is both inside and outside, suggesting the borderline of here and there is blurred. In this in-between and liminal

place, “café Europeans” are free to talk about anything, but “fortress Europe” separates each other, distinguishing friends from enemies while protecting us from invaders, fortresses besiege us, and even isolate us (“Everyone”). Wertebaker thinks that when it comes to asylum seekers, the fortresses immediately build up in the people’s mind. Seeing them as enemies, people refuse to accept them as friends. The playwright, however, points out that many of the asylum seekers are also Europeans, so Britain, as one of European countries, is supposed to open its heart to embrace them (“Everyone”).

Using these two concepts to spatialize history, Wertebaker argues that history welcomes many different voices, especially since English history is involved in European history as well as world history. Everyone can narrate his or her story; everyone is both a storyteller and a historian. The dramatist, nevertheless, does not idealize the concept of Café Europe because she recognizes the disadvantage of Café Europe; for example, our bag might be stolen; we do not understand the other people’s language; we cannot find a table to sit down at. Even so, she still prefers Café Europe, proposing, “But isn’t that better than looking down from the battlements in fear and solitude? I don’t want to be imprisoned in the silence of Fortress Europe” (“Everyone”). In other words, in order to pursue accurate and scientific evidence, historians lose their power of imagination and creativity, so Wertebaker asserts it is worthless to do so.

In *Credible Witness*, Wertebaker emphasizes that everyone can narrate history and they themselves are the credible witnesses. When Petra talks to Simon, “Look at us: we are your history now” (236), she reminds Simon of the idea of Café Europe, instead of Fortress Europe, if we appropriate Wertebaker’s terms. Freeman well explains Petra’s statement by writing, “[S]he is not conquering England and overwriting its history, she is making England more plural, or asking England to

acknowledge the ways it has always been plural” (66). Never being pure and single, England itself is hybrid and “plural,” depending on others to create and write history together. Therefore, English people “must shift their view of an imperialist past and learn to see themselves as inside (not outside) asylum histories” (Aston, “The Bogus Woman” 6).

More importantly, this idea of hybrid and pluralistic history allows multiple stories to coexist together; that is to say, no hegemonic narrative dominates history. The way Wertebaker shows how history is mingled with others is through the layers of a wall. At the very beginning of the play, Alexander is teaching his students Macedonian history, showing them that history never disappears even though political and military forces intend to erase it. Alexander’s lecture merits quoting at length:

How do you find history? Look at these walls: dug up a few years ago. Before then, a field of wheat in Northern Greece. Now: five thousand years of Macedonian history. See here: we have an Iron Age layer, but above, on exactly the same alignment, a street from the Bronze Age. A new history built on top of old histories. Then, a devastating fire. Later, maybe here, a house belonging to a Macedonian general, where Alexander the Great stayed, planning the Persian campaign. That house too was buried and the land criss-crossed by Romans, Byzantines, Turks collecting taxes, Englishmen planting cotton. A school was built here to teach Bulgarian, burnt, then another school to teach Greek. Macedonians killed Germans here, a Communist killed a Royalist cousin. A wedding group sang, a family danced here before fleeing abroad. Our Macedonian history is like this ancient dig: hidden, dangerous and covered up by a Greek field of wheat. (185)

This is quoted at length for two reasons: it shows Wertebaker’s concept of

“palimpsest history,” and it reveals that the future will be hybrid, multiple and pluralistic. First, Alexander uses the layers of a wall to explain his Macedonian history, tracing from the Iron Age, the Bronze Age, Alexander the Great, Romans, Byzantines, Turks, Bulgarians to Greeks. These different layers of history all constitute Macedonian history. Each layer represents a certain political period which conquers the previous and surrenders to the next. Political periods change with time, but they all leave their traces in history. The wall displays “the sedimentation of history” (Aston, “The Bogus Woman” 11), and this layering concept of history is called “palimpsest history.” Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin explain that the trait of the palimpsest is that “there are always traces of previous inscriptions that have been ‘overwritten’” (174). In other words, the past never disappears, and the present always contains the past. These three scholars, illustrating that a palimpsest characterizes the trait of layers of history, further express, “While the ‘layering’ effect of history has been mediated by each successive period, ‘erasing’ what has gone before, all present experience contains ineradicable traces of the past which remain part of the constitution of the present” (174). What we know about the present always includes the trail of the past, and what we know about the past also includes the acknowledgement of the present. In light of such new concept of history, the wall that Alexander refers to indicates that the future must be more pluralistic, more hybrid, or more “layers.” Wertebaker consequently predicts a multicultural, multiracial, and multinational future through the connotation of the wall.

Furthermore, when Wertebaker suggests everyone is a historian and a storyteller and their stories constitute history, she also refers to the idea that we do not depend on official records to understand history because history is around us. That is to say, history is not in books; rather, it is in our daily life. For example, Alexander teaches his students how to discover history by talking with the elder, advising,

“[U]ncover the bands of your history through the witnesses. Go to your grandmothers who have hoarded memories, kept words hidden in the folds of their clothes. Go to the old man muttering in the café” (185). In other words, the practice of palimpsest history is not to read books; rather, it is achieved through talking with the witnesses, who are our grandparents and the elder. History is right in their memory and in our daily life, such as in a café, where everyone is free to talk. Hence, Alexander encourages students to talk with the elder, to find their stories, and to understand their past. Also, Simon must have had some real talks with asylum seekers, rather than look for official records, because everyone is a witness of history.

The way of knowing history through oral conveyance is called “oral history” by historians. The importance of oral history is that it provides the first-hand reference; as suggested by Tosh and Lang, “[P]ersonal reminiscence is viewed as an effective instrument for *re-creating* the past—the authentic testimony of human life as it was actually experienced” (316 emphasis in original). More importantly, unlike the elites’ records of history, oral history is “regarded as evidence of how non-elite communities construct and modify cultural meaning over time” (311). Because after all it is the majority of common people who create history, the perception of history is limited if we only notice the official works written by elites. Thus, Tosh and Lang assert that oral history questions “the monopoly of an academic elite” (317). “Ordinary people are offered not only a place in history but a role in the *production* of historical knowledge with important political implications” (317 emphasis in original), they claim.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Although oral history is important for constructing social history, the danger of it is that the authenticity of people’s words is questionable. The way historians interview needs professional training, and the interviewees’ description of the past is easily effected by their personal prejudice and their present condition (Tosh and Lang 318). Oral history has limitations, but it is still worthy of being believed as “precious evidence of how social memory is constructed” (322), which is what Wertenbaker intends to emphasize in *Credible Witness*. How Wertenbaker retells oral history and the importance of retelling oral history for a new perception of history from a gender perspective are

### 3. Dancing with History

Wertenbaker asserts that everyone has the right to narrate history because history after all is palimpsest-like with pluralistic and hybrid layers. The dramatist further problematizes the right to narrate history. If everyone insists on his or her own historical narrative, rather than communicate with each other, what and how does their perception of history influence their identities? In other words, when one's insistence becomes chauvinistic, rejecting the others' narration, then history turns to be a burden, which limits people's eyes and fixes them on the status quo without moving. In *Credible Witness*, Petra insists on her Macedonian identity while Alexander is willing to give it up to invent himself in England. Although everyone can express his or her own history, the conflict caused from different opinions is inevitable. Petra's transformation at the end reveals that historical identities could be changed and we do not need to stick to one historical narrative.

Because of teaching Macedonian history, Alexander meets with persecution. He exiles himself in England, where he teaches refugee children and realizes that "[e]veryone who comes here has a rich and bloody history on their shoulders" (220). Then he changes from an insistence on Macedonian history to an invention of new history, which combines Macedonian and British history. Alexander learns to be a new guest in England, explaining an exile "is a guest in a new country" (188). He teaches students crying lessons because they must lament their past first in order to love their new country. He asks Henry to find out one thing he likes in England, and encourages Anna to "have the courage to be complicated" (212). All in all, he shows his will to accept a new life in England. Macedonian history is a heavy burden for him, and Macedonian "lullabies of blood and hatred" (221) no longer stands for honor and



heroics. In England, he claims, “Here, I’ve felt light, free” (221). When Henry asks him why he does not fight for his own country, he replies, “It was never a country, Henry, it’s a name, a feeling—I’ve buried it for a while” (204). Alexander’s comment on a country reminds us of Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities.” An imagined community or nation “is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (7), and “it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings” (7). Nation is imagined as a community, where people fight for it owing to comradeship, fraternity, or patriotism, which is also imagined. Alexander used to fight for his country, but now he sees through the imagined element of a country. Unwilling to struggle with Macedonian blood history and to sacrifice himself for an imagined country, he prefers rewriting and restarting his history in England.

However, in contrast to Alexander’s concept of changeability of history, Petra insists on a fixed and heritable history. Her insistence eventually becomes chauvinistic, stubbornly believing the superiority of her own country, and rejecting multiple interpretations of history. Petra names Alexander after the greatest king in Macedonia, Alexander the Great. She is proud of being a descendant of Alexander the Great, and always mentions his name. When Paul is confused with where Macedonia is, Petra proudly announces, “Everyone knows about Macedonia” (187). Her great-grandfather is English, but she sees him as simply “fertilizer” (223). That is to say, Petra, unable to accept a hybrid identity, needs to stick to a certain identity to give herself a sense of security and honor. She chooses Macedonia as her only source of identity even though she has English and Bulgarian ancestors and an American lover. Petra cultivates Alexander with “stories of Macedonia heroism” (221) and “lullabies of blood and hatred” (221), emphasizing her history is Alexander’s history. Her obsession with

Macedonia is completely different from Alexander's attitude; at the end, she refuses to call Alexander her son because she thinks Alexander betrays his own country.

Petra's identity roots in her belief in Macedonian history, as she says, "Our history tells us to make sons that will fight—if that's not right, what have we been doing for hundreds of years?" (226). On the contrary, Alexander's identity shifts when he comes to England and encounters exiled children and with a new culture. He does not negate his past; instead, he knows that before he could be a good guest in a new country, he has to lament his past, his history and his loss first. These two different kinds of identities illustrate Stuart Hall's two types of cultural identity. Petra's identity is set up "in terms of one, shared culture," which "people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common" (Hall 223). As Hall suggests, the first kind of cultural identity provides people "with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning" (223), so it offers Petra a root in a certain position and a sense of security. Hall's opinion is similar with the function of "imagined communities," which is to provide "comradeship" and "fraternity" (Anderson 7) and connects people in a community together. Therefore, this cultural identity reflects history as linearity, heritage with a fixed origin. This is also why Petra tells Alexander, "My history became your history, that's how it goes" (*Credible Witness* 222). Hall, however, points out another kind of cultural identity, which is embodied by Alexander, and declares that the second cultural identity "is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture" (Hall 225). Hall further explains, "Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they [cultural identities] are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (225).

It is only Hall's "second" kind of cultural identity that can well demonstrate the

experience of “exile and diaspora” in the play.<sup>7</sup> *Credible Witness* sits in a contemporary globalized age. With the increase of globalization, voluntary or forcible expatriation becomes common nowadays; consequently, the concept of nation and the boundaries of countries have been blurred by the dissemination of people. Since nation has been challenged, people’s national identity is also shaken, and the loss of a stable national identity becomes a historical trauma, especially for exiles who leave their countries.<sup>8</sup> Most of the exiled children in the play have this historical trauma. Henry does not tell people his real Eritrean name. As an Algerian, “Ali” is not Ali’s real name, but at least it is an Algerian name. Anna, getting angry when she hears someone laughing, comes from “an inflamed part of Europe” (191). They come to

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<sup>7</sup> Hall affirms that only the second cultural identity can “properly understand the traumatic character of ‘the colonial experience’” (225). However, even though Alexander and all the refugees and exiled children in the play are not subjugated people, their traumatic experiences are similar for the reason that they both are “the other,” encountering cultural differences, power relationships, and the sense of displacement and in-betweenness. Therefore, I suggest that it is also the second kind of cultural identity that can explain the diaspora world in *Credible Witness*. In addition, according to *Oxford English Dictionary*, diaspora means “dispersion” while exile “expatriation.” They contain both the voluntary and compulsory movement, but the biggest difference between the two is the original meaning of exile includes an “[e]nforced removal from one’s native land according to an edict or sentence” (“Exile”). Therefore, seriously speaking, diaspora means the voluntary and forcible movement of people, but exile is a forcible movement. Nevertheless, it is difficult to distinguish the two in the play. Asylum seekers in a way are willing to leave their home for a better life; in another way, their movement is also forced by their own country because of war or political persecution.

<sup>8</sup> Wertenbaker highlights the issues of exile and diaspora on purpose; especially the epigraph of the play exposes her intention. The epigraph at the beginning of *Credible Witness* is from Thomas Mowbray in Shakespeare’s *Richard II*, writing, “Then thus I turn me from my country’s light,/ To dwell in solemn shades of endless night” (*Credible Witness* 184). In *Richard II*, accused of treason by Henry Bolingbroke, the later king Henry IV, Thomas Mowbray is sentenced to exile for the rest of his life. The intertext of *Richard II* enriches *Credible Witness*, particularly several similarities between them. Mowbray’s exile parallels with the asylum seekers and exiled children, and they all suffer from the pain of leaving their own countries. As Mowbray describes, “Now no way can I stray—/ Save back to England all the world’s my way” (33). In other words, except their mother land, they can go anywhere. Besides, language for them is useless. Mowbray talks to the king, “The language I have learnt these forty years,/ My native English, now I must forgo” (31). Losing the function of communication, the exiles’ tongues are locked in their mouths (31). For Mowbray, the sentence of exile is a sentence of “speechless death,” and he claims, “What is thy sentence then but speechless death,/ Which robs my tongue from breathing native breath?” (31). Alexander and Shivan in *Credible Witness* also express that language is an obstacle when they exile to England. However, John of Gaunt believes that the valuable thing lies in the future way they are going to, rather than in the way they come from, saying, “Look what thy soul holds dear, imagine it/ To lie that way thou goest, not whence thou com’st” (38). Therefore, instead of motherland, it is the new country that exiles can find a new start, and it is this new thinking of exile that Wertenbaker suggests in *Credible Witness*. More importantly, Wertenbaker seems to use *Richard II*, which describes a downfall of a political period ruled by Richard II, as a caution to Britain at the turn of the millennium, criticizing that the island mentality of England prevents its development. Reading *Credible Witness* from the intertext of *Richard II* uncovers profound levels of Wertenbaker’s text.

England for a safe future; therefore, they need to recreate a new identity, which is no longer fixed in their nation only, but in the hybridity of England, their native culture, and the other cultures they meet. It is no longer suitable for them to assert a particular national identity while they have been through the experience of trans-national exile. In other words, due to globalization, people are not supposed to stubbornly insist on an unchangeable concept of nation when nation has been de-territorialized by exile or travel. Petra learns this lesson when she realizes, “I cursed my only son because he would not stay inside his history, but what is Macedonia to me without my son?” (226). Proud of being a descendant of Alexander the Great, Petra refuses to claim political asylum; however, after she recognizes her insistence as stubbornness, she actively helps Ameena to claim her right in England. Like Simon who acknowledges his mistake, Petra confesses, “Me too. I’ve been walled, like you [Simon]” (236). The wall between her and her son, between Macedonia and other countries, is collapsed at the end.

Stuart Hall reminds us that identity is never “an already accomplished fact;” rather, it is “never complete, always in process” (222). The reason is that identity has to be considered from a “dialogic” relationship between two axes: “The one gives us some grounding in, some continuity with, the past,” and the other “reminds us that what we share is precisely the experience of a profound discontinuity” (227). The intersection of the two axes is the position where identity is produced, and this position is always influenced by the changing of the two axes. Hence, identity is “positioning” (230 emphasis added) all the time. Each position is tentative, or in Hall’s term, “strategic” and “arbitrary” (230), so identity is never ahistorical, fixed and stable. In light of Hall’s explanation of identity, Petra “must move ‘outside’ of her own history” (Aston, “The Bogus Woman” 9), and Britain must accept others “inside” of its history. Both personal and national identities are being produced and reproduced

in the endless process.

Wertenbaker poetically describes the changeability of history, which generates people's cultural and national identities, as "dancing." She proposes,

[Y]ou can keep the history you came from, you can adopt another, you can have none. You can, in other words, choose your dancing partner, you don't have to wait, to be asked for a dance. You can find your partner, you can dance parallel, you can keep changing and dance with several partners. ("Dancing with History" 22)

We need history to provide us an explanation of our origin, just like we need a partner in a dance. Nevertheless, asserting that we may change our partners, Wertenbaker suggests that history is changeable so that we do not need to stick to our heritage history, as Petra does on Macedonia history, or stick to a new history, like Anna does.<sup>9</sup> Like what Alexander encourages Anna, to "have the courage to be complicated" (*Credible Witness* 212), having courage to be complicated in history and in dancing gives us surprises. Hence, Wertenbaker states that "we must join the dance" (22) and "let's not be ahistorical" (22).

#### 4. Multiplicity of History

Wertenbaker reveals her concept of history in *Credible Witness* as the following: history has a narrative element, as Hayden White affirms; everyone has the right to narrate history; the historical identity is changeable, especially with the increase of globalization. Her opinions of history go through all her plays. The narrative element of history legitimates the playwright's rewriting history, and how she rewrites history

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<sup>9</sup> Anna is Alexander's student, who comes from an unnamed country in the Balkan States. She is a clever student; especially she is familiar with every king and dynasty in English history (*Credible Witness* 212). Anna knows every historical event in English history, but she has no idea about her own history. Therefore, like Petra who insists on a fixed and heritable history, Anna sticks to a new history and forgets her own past.

is going to be discussed in the following two chapters. Besides, *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* (1991) and *The Break of Day* (1995) both display Wertebaker's opinions of history in *Credible Witness*. The three of them all discuss what England is and how history influences people's perceptions of nation, culture and themselves. Unlike the perspective from non-English people in *Credible Witness*, *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* and *The Break of Day* both reconsider England and English history from the perspective of English people. Both plays reveal the island mentality of English people, and they assert that the only way to improve Britain is to accept differences and to welcome a multicultural, multinational and globalized world.

Set against the backdrop of London at the end of the 1980s, *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre in 1991. With the coming of a new millennium, characters in *Three Birds* dwell upon the past, losing their identity at the end of the century. As Susan Carlson observes, "investigations of English identity in a global context" are the main theme in the play ("Language and Identity" 144). The play centers on Bidy Andreas. In order to save her second marriage by helping her Greek husband, Yoyo, to climb to an upper social status in England, Bidy, an English woman, becomes an art collector even though she has no idea about art. In the process of learning art, she finds that the art market, which embodies England, has been corrupted: art dealers, like Alex and Jeremy in the gallery, only want to make money through selling works of art; art learners, such as Vincent, now are jobless, becoming a dossier; art buyers, like Mr. and Mrs. Boreman, only care about whether the painting they buy would increase in value or not; art critics, such as Jean, hold the power to judge art works and to determine style based on their prejudice. The whole art market/England is influenced by capitalism, as the name of the painting in the first scene says, "Art is sexy, art is money, art is money-sexy, art is money-sexy-social-climbing fantastic" (*Three Birds* 362). Hence, the play displays



the loss in capitalism in fin de siècle.

Art dealers decide to sell paintings that represent England in order to make money, but ironically they do not know what the characteristics of England are. In other words, English people have lost themselves and forgotten their history. It is the outsider Alex, a 35-year-old American woman, the manager of the gallery, who points out the feature of England is “English gardens” (*Three Birds* 367). Explaining, “I walk around London. People have gardens. Big gardens. We don’t have gardens in America, we have lawns” (367), Alex asks her employees to find some painters who can paint English landscape. With the purpose of making money, Alex intends to invent “the school of new English landscape” (368) or “the English garden school” (368) to create a fashion in the art world. However, English people do not understand their art. For example, Sir Philip states, “English? Do we paint? I know we write. And we garden. I didn’t know we painted” (391). Even the critic, Jean, despises English landscape in the works of art, claiming, “What’s this with the English [. . .]?” (401).

English people’s ignorance of English painting represents the loss of English identity. When Sir Philip asks his club members’ opinion about whether to connect with Europe or not, David, a club member, responds, “Why do we have to worry about Europe, Philip, what’s wrong with England?” (392), continuing, “What do they know? They’re European” (393). If English people are not European, then Sir Philip asks who and what English is (393). Like *Credible Witness*, which suggests multiculturalism and multinationalism instead of nationalism, *Three Birds* also proposes that the island mentality of English people is supposed to be broken down to accept differences and the other. Susan Carlson further expresses that *Three Birds* is “a play about contemporary England, a place in which the concept of nation is problematised and ‘English’ identity is consequently destabilised” (“Language and Identity” 144). As Carlson claims, English identity should be re-examined in the globalized world, and

she observes that parochialism prevents England from improving (144). Therefore, who can be regarded as an authentic English person? What exactly is Englishness? These are the major themes the play investigates.

In order to become an art collector, Bidy knows about Stephen, a landscape painter, through the introduction of Marianne, Stephen's ex-wife. Bidy's ignorance of art represents an open mind accepting any interpretation whereas Stephen's insistence on the painting of the fashion in the 1960s shows his obsession with the past. The artist used to be famous in the 1960s for his landscape paintings, but now he is poor and landscape is out of fashion in the late 1980s. Because Alex decides to make landscape paintings popular in the future, she invites Stephen to have a show in London. Disappointed at art and politics of the eighties,<sup>10</sup> Stephen rejects Alex's invitation. Living in the sixties, escaping from the contemporary England to his memory, Stephen's cynicism of society and insistence on painting landscapes are at the expense of his first marriage. Marianne complains that Stephen's insistence on landscape painting of the sixties is "perverse" (396), confirming, "He hasn't recovered from the sixties. I bet he's still a socialist, secretly" (380). However, for Stephen, it is his contribution to history by painting English landscape and English memory, and he explains, "I paint what is vanishing. As it vanishes. Sometimes I paint the memory of

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<sup>10</sup> Margaret Thatcher is the first female Prime Minister in England, and from 1979 to 1990, the whole decade of the eighties is usually called "Thatcherism" (Peacock, *Thatcher's Theatre* 11). Thatcher's policy for the theatre was not friendly, cutting the subsidization for the theatre, preventing the theatre from political judgment (1). Afraid of the disappearance of the political function of theatre, several conferences centered on the crisis of British theatre were held during the years of Thatcher (1-2). Some major playwrights reflect their anxiety about the development of British theatre in plays, such as Caryl Churchill and Harold Pinter, and Wertebaker is no exception (2). Among Wertebaker's plays, *The Grace of Mary Traverse* (1985), *Our Country's Good* (1988), *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* (1991), and *The Break of Day* (1995) are the plays that convey the dramatist's criticism of the Thatcher government and her politics of theatre directly. In *The Grace of Mary Traverse*, Mary is the only female leader in the Gordon riots, which symbolizes that Thatcher is the only female Prime Minister in England. Wertebaker responds to Thatcher's theatre policy in *Our Country's Good*, in which the dramatist highly values the function of theatre. The corruption of art market in the 1980s in *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* reveals Wertebaker's attitude toward Thatcher's government. Also, *The Break of Day* is a striking warning for successful professional women. Overall, the eighties in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the generation of Thatcher, and the plays performed during this decade more or less criticized and judged Thatcher's government and policy.

something that was there long ago [. . .] Particularly the English. *Islands* are mysterious . . . our land is so watery, that is its beauty [. . .]” (414 emphasis added). Stephen’s obsession with English islands represents his island mentality and the parochial viewpoint.

Stephen’s insistence on the English past reminds us of Petra’s insistence on Macedonian history. Their stubbornness is at the expense of losing a wife and a son respectively. Because of the experience in the detention center, Petra, who encounters the asylum seekers who come from all over the world, realizes the changeability and hybridity of history. As for Stephen, his awareness also derives from encountering the other and differences, which are embodied by Constantin, a Romanian. Stephen, as a socialist, builds his fantasy on the communism in East Europe and lives in his own ideal. When Constantin deceives him into giving his paintings to Romania, he agrees immediately without thinking. Constantin, however, at the end turns out to be a capitalist businessman, who needs art to earn money, instead of an art lover who strives to help his homeland. After his real identity is revealed, rather than feel ashamed of his behavior, he criticizes English people’s fantasy of communism in Romania. He claims,

But you—you never came to Romania when we were communist. You preach communism in your country, but you let us make the experiment for you. So we have the destroyed land in co-operatives, the bread tails, but it doesn’t matter, because we are your ideal. And when it has completely failed, and we have a revolution, you love us because we are having a revolution and that is exciting to you, even if it is a revolution against what you are preaching for in your country. And again we carry your soul for you. And now you’re unhappy because we are not perfect revolutionaries [. . .] You forgive your own evil because you say it’s built

into capitalism, but we are not allowed—We have to be moral, perfect martyrs [. . .] You despise me because I want to live [. . .]. (437)

In his defense, Romania is not England's ideal, soul, and dream, and he despises the hypocrisy of English people, asserting the inevitability of capitalism in Romania. His statement hits Stephen and breaks his belief in the socialism of the sixties.

Like Petra who admits her fault, Stephen confesses, "I may not have been thinking very well in the last ten years" (438). He finally agrees to display his paintings in London. More crucially, he never paints portraits, but he paints Bidy at the end of the play. The name of the play "Three Birds Alighting on a Field" is the title of the painting of Bidy (Feingold 88). In other words, the painter who represents the island mentality of the English people now is willing to cross the boundary and take a step further to accept differences. Although this optimistic ending does "not provide answers or even implied prescriptions" of who and what English is (Sullivan 152), the change of Stephen indicates that the way forward is to "have the courage to be complicated," as Henry tells Anna in *Credible Witness*, to recognize the existence of the other, instead of fantasizing them, and to embrace the future, instead of merely dwelling upon the past.<sup>11</sup> Carlson believes that this open ending asks the audience to reconsider "the multiplicities of English social identities," ("Language and Identity" 144) which are influenced by the other and the experience of crossing boundaries in the globalized world.

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<sup>11</sup> *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* won the 1992 Susan Smith Blackburn Prize for playwriting, but the feedback was not all positive mainly due to the open ending. Michael Feingold's critique is the most negative by writing that the play is "a drama lacking point, laden with glib, half-thought-out social comment and secondhand satire" (88). Stephanie Coen is nicer, but the open ending especially bothers her. "Wertenbaker never answers Sir Philip's query [who and what English is], which hangs in the air and over the play, and *Three Birds* ends with all its characters in as much a state of flux as they began" (10). However, Stephen's change is obvious at the end, and so is Bidy (Bidy's transformation will be discussed later). His insistence on the out-of-fashion landscape painting, his nostalgia of the past and his isolation from the others all represent the island mentality of Britain; therefore, his change implies the dramatist's opinion of England and English people. On the other hand, Esther Beth Sullivan proposes the ending is "an optimistic wrap-up, with the central character(s) clearly transformed" (152), and Susan Carlson suggests the open ending is a challenge for the audience to force themselves to reconsider English identities ("Language and Identity" 144).

Like *Credible Witness* and *Three Birds*, *The Break of Day* (1995) also criticizes the isolation of Britain from Europe and from the world. Many critics, such as Elaine Aston, believe that the play encourages people to think “beyond an English, nationalist, isolationist, ‘island mentality’” (“Geographies of Oppression” 248).<sup>12</sup> In this new revision of Chekhov’s *Three Sisters* (1901),<sup>13</sup> these three sisters, not by biology, like Stephen in *Three Birds*, dwell upon the good old days, nostalgically lamenting their wonderful youth. Tess, Nina and April were influenced by the Women’s Liberation Movement in the 1970s. At that time, Nina formed an all-female band; Tess was the only female reporter in a rock magazine; April successfully got her degree in the university. Now they, childless, all turn into “top girls”<sup>14</sup> in their careers. Nina is a singer-songwriter, Tess an editor of a women’s magazine, and April a professor of Classics. Their success, nevertheless, does not bring them happiness, but rather a sense of void about the future. Tess describes, “I felt I had a right to what I wanted. It goes with the empowerment I felt all my life [. . .] Then the sixties when all

<sup>12</sup> Like Aston, Jozefina Komporály thinks that the play suggests that Britain needs to go beyond “the confines of isolationism,” (134) and Stuart Young believes that the failure of Britain at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is due to “social-historical parochialism” (452). They all regard *The Break of Day* as a criticism of the isolated condition of England, proposing the way to improve is to break and move beyond the status quo.

<sup>13</sup> Wertenbaker accepted a commission from Out of Joint, a company established by Max Stafford-Clark, to rewrite Chekhov’s *Three Sisters*; in 1995, *The Break of Day* fulfilled this commission, performed first by Out of Joint and then the Royal Court in the same year (Rabillard 135). Because the play is based on *Three Sisters*, many papers on *The Break of Day* deal with the comparison between the two, such as Kristin Johnsen-Neshati’s “Chekhovian Transformation: *Three Sisters* and Timberlake Wertenbaker’s *The Break of Day*” and Geraldine Cousin’s “Revisiting the Prozorovs.” Stuart Young observes that recent British theatre tend to rewrite Chekhov’s plays or to find inspiration from Chekhov. Not only Wertenbaker, several well-known playwrights all rewrite Chekhov’s plays, such as Edward Bond, Pam Gems and David Hare (Young 443).

<sup>14</sup> The term “top girls” is enlightened by Caryl Churchill’s well-known play *Top Girls* (1982). *The Break of Day* and *Top Girls* both describe successful professional women and discuss the plight of feminism. Clare Bayley affirms, “*The Break of Day* is more a natural successor to Caryl Churchill’s 1982 *Top Girls*” (33 emphasis added). There are many similarities between the two plays. The success of top girls in both plays is at the price of motherhood, so the issue of motherhood becomes one of the major themes in them. They both provide a warning for feminists to reconsider what a woman is supposed to be. Young especially pays attention to the parallel of feminism and Thatcherism in the two plays (448-49) while Komporály emphasizes backlash feminist opinions in them (135). Although there are many familiar elements of *Top Girls* in *The Break of Day*, what Wertenbaker cares about more is the future of England when she clearly elaborates Tess’s and Nina’s eagerness for having children, who symbolize the future.

you had to do was be very young. Being a woman in the seventies, then being in London and clever in the eighties, making money despite myself, buying this house. And now—” (9). Resembling Tess’s grief, Nina believes that it was “the moment” (11), the past time in other words, which made them feel life with possibilities. In addition to the three, their male lovers share a similar lament over the past. Robert has been unemployed for a year; Jamie’s hospital is going to be closed. To them, the sense of progress of history is lost. All of them live in the past, missing the past, complaining about the present, and are scared of the future.

With *The Break of Day* set in the 1990s at the turn of the millennium, Wertebaker in this play intends to describe “the fatigue at the end of the century, the breakdown of a lot of ideals, particularly for women, and this notion of the future and what the future is, what sort of future we are providing for others” (*Rage and Reason* 144). Obviously, the fatigue comes from the uncertainty of the future with the fin-de-siècle malaise. Characters in the play express their different opinions of the future. Robert, Tess’s husband, has a strong “sense of worthlessness” (22) about the future. Jamie, April’s lover, is pessimistic because of the frustration of his career now. Hugh, Nina’s husband, an American, expresses that Americans are in love with the future. Nina feels a “void” (30) in her body. Marisa, the girlfriend of Hugh’s son, seizes the present, criticizing that people escape into the future.

Children are widely considered as the representative of the future, so Tess and Nina expect the future by having children. The desire of being mothers goes through the whole play, and the theme of infertility not only illustrates women’s biological barrenness but also “the spiritual barrenness of Britain in the mid-nineties” (Komporály 134). These sisters delayed motherhood while they were young in order to fulfill their professional achievement; however, when they want to be mothers now, they find they are unable to have children. April is childless by choice, asserting that



having children is not the only purpose for women. Nina cannot get pregnant owing to a past abortion, and Tess cannot produce viable eggs. The major part of the plot delineates how Tess and Robert accept an infertility treatment in London while Nina and Hugh adopt a baby girl in an unnamed Eastern European country. Their inability to bear children symbolizes their frustration of the present whereas their eagerness to be parents reveals their expectation for the future. Therefore, Young claims, “Motifs of barrenness and frustration not only apply at a personal level in *The Break of Day*, but seem to characterise a whole society” (450). Like Nina and Tess, Britain at the end of the century is barren, infertile, expecting a way that can lead English people to the future.

The different results of Tess’s infertility treatment and Nina’s adoption indicate Wertebaker’s attitudes toward future. Nina and Hugh fly to Eastern Europe to look for a girl whom they expect to adopt. Encountering complicated rules and bureaucracy, they finally find their ill girl, deciding to raise her by love. Nina is nervous at the beginning when searching for the girl, but she at the end turns out to be a confident mother. This transnational and transracial adoption stands for an unselfish love. The couple, through the experience of cultural differences and the assistance from foreigners, such as Mihail, realize their indifference to other countries, so they consider their “cross-border child as an antidote to the rise of ethnic nationalism and, also, the selfishness of capitalism” (Roth 88). On the other hand, Tess, regarding Eastern Europe as inferior to Britain, maintains her island mentality and denies, “I don’t want some stolen Romanian baby with AIDS” (44). She wants an English child, even if it means not using her own eggs and not her husband’s sperms. As a result, Tess loses her job as well as Robert’s love. She was a representative of the Women’s Liberation Movement in the 1970s, but now she finds, “Women used to be my sisters. Now they’re objects: egg vessels” (75). Compared with Nina, Tess’s insistence

signifies the confinement to English isolationism, and the inability of crossing boundaries makes her future unrealized. Through Tess, Wertebaker demonstrates that the only way to break the status quo is moving beyond their position, embracing the possibility of a multicultural, transnationalist, and transracial future.

The reason that stimulates Nina to go beyond her nation to adopt a child in Eastern Europe lies not in no choice but in her idea of history. She describes how she is jealous of her Russian grandmother's experience of history, and her envy wakes her up from the stable, fixed and unchangeable concept of history. Nina expresses that her grandmother grows up in a war time in Russia at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, saying, "A lot of those Russians went around missing their estates, but I think she enjoyed it: migration, husbands, lovers, history. Even when she was old, she kept moving house. I have her restlessness and I envy her experience of history" (29). In other words, Nina envies her grandmother's experience of history full of changes, possibilities, and even adventures, but now she sticks to the present in resignation, seeing no way forward to the future. Therefore, she decides to move, to cross, and to travel to the other countries like her grandmother's movement. Elaine Aston explains the importance of three locations shifting in the play by writing, "To move out of or beyond this millennium moment of despair and hopelessness, requires re-locating from the country house setting in England, to Eastern Europe in Act Two. Act Three re-locates to England, but not back in a 'home', a domestic, conventional, familial space. Characters re-unite backstage in a theatre dressing room for a touring production of the *Three Sisters* [. . .]" (*Feminist Views* 155). From an English country house in Act One, Eastern Europe in Act Two, to a touring theatre in Act Three, the change of locations represents that Nina needs to cross boundaries and to learn a tour-like life that can provide a state of fluidity. By suggestion, Britain also needs to move beyond its boundary so that improving and progress are possible.

In *The Break of Day*, Robert and Mihail are the spokesmen for Wertebaker, particularly because they reflect the playwright's expectation to the future. Unemployed for a year, Robert, an actor, now has to choose one job from two: one is a television series that offers him good pay and the other is to play the role of Vershinin of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* in a small touring theatre troupe. Struggling between the financial temptation and self achievement in theatre, he finally decides to take the role of Vershinin. The more he understands *Three Sisters*, the more he agrees with Chekhov's opinion of history. Robert finds that Chekhov's three sisters' sense of paralysis of history is familiar to him, and he observes, "Those three sisters suspended in an odd paralysis at the end of their century, with a cataclysm already in formation. There's something familiar about that paralysis, feeling outside history, I wanted to explore it" (19). Like three sisters, Robert feels he is "outside" history. He cannot sense the progress that history gives people; instead, "the sense of worthlessness" (22) takes him and makes him feel unable to do anything for the future. Nevertheless, while he plays Vershinin, he realizes that "Vershinin intoxicates himself with a vision of a better future" (28). He admits that performing Vershinin's optimistic belief in the future is the most difficult part; in other words, he has to change his pessimism to believe in the future and to sense history "inside" him so that he can do the job well. At the end, through playing Vershinin, Robert finds confidence in himself and in the future. Wertebaker reveals, "I tried to have a dialogue with Vershinin and that twentieth-century view of history" ("Dancing with History" 19). *The Break of Day* becomes a dialogue between turn-of-the-20<sup>th</sup>-century Vershinin and turn-of-the-21<sup>st</sup>-century Robert.<sup>15</sup> They both encounter "historical paralysis," but they both face the future optimistically.

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<sup>15</sup> In an unpublished interview, Wertebaker expressed her fondness for Chekhov by saying, "I adore Chekhov, and although it is not obvious, he has influenced me very much" (qtd. in Carson, "Language and Identity" 144-45).

This “historical paralysis” repeats in *Credible Witness* and *Three Birds*. Little Bosnian girl Anna in *Credible Witness* discovers that historical paralysis is natural because it protects animals from danger. For the same reason, when people face some serious historical moments, they prefer to maintain the status quo in order to keep away from danger that comes from changes. Anna comments,

You know that animals suffer something called tonic immobility—it is the same as what Freud calls hysterical paralysis—you freeze, can’t move. Now they think it’s evolutionary, because for animals it’s safer not to move from the hunter. But what about humans? When the Serbs came to our village, we all froze. Hysterical paralysis. What makes people freeze at certain moments of history? Hysterical paralysis? Historical paralysis? If we understand it, can we prevent it? (*Credible Witness* 237)

Characters in both *The Break of Day* and *Three Birds* suffer from historical paralysis, especially when they both are in the background of the turn of the millennium. The fin-de-siècle malaise and the unstable identity caused from globalization make people lost in history and the future, and it is natural for people to freeze in a serious historical moment. Nevertheless, how to find a way forward is more important than staying put in the status quo.

Robert/Vershinin’s faith in the future reflects that no matter how difficult life is, we still need to believe in the future with an optimistic attitude. In addition, through Mihail, Wertebaker expects that the future is full of international and multicultural citizens. Living in Eastern Europe, where history, political history in particular, moves quickly, Mihail acknowledges that truth is never fixed due to the reason that truth moves with history. The changeability of history is not supposed to scare people, but he finds that “people suffer the greatest fear of all: fear of the future” (*The Break of Day* 86). Consequently, he strives to help Nina and Hugh to find their baby girl,

putting all the hope on this “cross-border” child. Mihail confirms,

I still believe in history. Now, it will be in the hands of the children, possibly most of all, these cross-border children I have helped to get out. Born in one country, loved and raised in another, I hope they will not descend into narrow ethnic identification, but that they will be willfully international, part of a great European community. I hope they will carry on history with broad minds and warm hearts. (86)

Cross-border children embody the love of multicultural and multination. If children symbolize future, then the future is supposed to be multicultural, transnational and interracial. Britain must move beyond its confinement of isolationism, becoming involved in “a great European community.” This community resonates with Wertebaker’s “Café Europe,” rather than “Fortress Europe,” where people regard history with a wide and open mind. Wertebaker once again spatializes history to problematize the lineal timing of history.

Aston explains, in *The Break of Day*, “Wertebaker shows that the way forward lies not in the past but in making new, cross-border, feminist connections in the interests of securing a less selfish and more democratic future” (*Feminist Views* 153). Aston’s statement can also apply to *Credible Witness* and *Three Birds*. People should not dwell upon or insist on the past, like Petra in *Credible Witness* and Stephen in *Three Birds*; instead, they have to learn to accept a cross-border and multiple future without selfishness. The image of English garden penetrates these three plays. In the 1991 play, *Three Birds* expresses that “garden” is the most famous characteristic in England. It symbolizes England, but it has to welcome non-English people to go in there. In the 1995 play, *The Break of Day* starts in Tess’s house with a garden. However, the lawn in the garden is dying due to a drought. Paul, the gardener, states, “If it doesn’t rain soon, this lawn is going to die, all the lawns of England will die, all

the gardens will wither” (12). In other words, England, which is embodied by the garden, is unfertile now, and the way to make it prosperous is to embrace differences and to receive the possibility of multicultural England. Then in the 2001 play *Credible Witness*, garden is the exiled child Henry’s favorite place, so he finds a gardening job to start his new life in England. Garden now symbolizes a hybrid place, which on the one hand represents the trait of England, and on the other hand, is full of differences. From the chronological order of the publishing of the three plays, we observe that Wertebaker still has confidence in England and also in history as long as we understand the multiplicity of history.

Like her optimistic attitude toward history, love becomes the dramatist’s medicine to cure historical paralysis. Wertebaker in *Three Birds* points out the English island mentality and questions who and what English is, but her inquiry does not mean the hopelessness of England. Stephen at the end of *Three Birds* concludes, “When England began doubting itself, why did it have to stop loving itself?” (444). Love keeps England as well as Stephen and Biddy moving on. Biddy eventually gets divorced again, but she wins Stephen’s love. She claims that love is all she wants (445). Similarly, in *The Break of Day*, love, maternal love in particular, is obvious when Nina tries her best to look for her girl and Tess to have a child. Besides, the cross-cultural love is also what the play emphasizes, and it is called “ethnic friendship” (87). Boian, one of the foreigners who helps Nina in East Europe, responds to Nina’s thankfulness by saying, “Tell your child a gypsy help you. One day when my children need connection, they find your child or grandchild and call on ethnic friendship” (87). Love, crossing any boundary, is unselfish. Not only does love help others but it also saves us. Hence, in *Credible Witness*, when Petra helps Ameena to claim asylum, her maternal love saves Ameena and also helps herself to understand her stubborn insistence. Alexander also passes on love to his students. Aston, pointing



out the importance of Petra's and Alexander's love, writes, "Significantly, both Alexander and Petra come to care for children who are not their biological children, but children in exile" ("The Bogus Woman" 15). Even for Shivan who causes a little riot in the detention center, love is what he longs for. He quotes from *Paradise Lost* to rebel against the authority, but "[t]he central theme of *Paradise Lost* is Love" (Day 435). All in all, Wertebaker shows that historical paralysis is inevitable, but love may help people to get through.

### C. Gender as a Useful Category of Historical Analysis

Similar with Hayden White's claim of history as narrative form, Wertebaker in *Credible Witness* reveals that everyone, no matter foreign or native, is a rightful storyteller as well as a legitimate historian. Based on the characteristic of changeability and rewritability of history, the dramatist further points out a fluid identity and the multiplicity of history while we "dance with history." *Credible Witness*, *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* and *The Break of Day* all display the disavowal of a fixed and stable concept of history, which conveys only one interpretation or one truth, in the globalized age. Interestingly enough, Wertebaker enlightens the reader on the issue of history through the awakening of female protagonists. The transformation of Petra in *Credible Witness*, Bidy in *Three Birds*, and Tess and Nina in *The Break of Day* represent the reader's perceptive process from ignorance to awakening. Interpreting history from female perspectives complicates the discussion of history, complementing the lack of gender in White's theory of history, and becoming one of the major traits in Wertebaker's plays.

White's metahistory refers to history as a literary artifact so he offers feminists chances to write women into history. However, since Gayle Rubin theorizes "the sex/gender system," which means "the set of arrangements by which a society

transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied” (159), instead of “women,” “gender” becomes a term that designates the production of the social and cultural relationships between two biological sexes. Hence, nowadays feminists prefer to deal with gender issues instead of women’s problems for the following reasons: men and women are both socially and culturally constructed; men as well as women in a way are victims of the arbitrary sex/gender system; their relationship, which involves power and the interconnection with other social institutions, influences our acknowledgement of history. In Rubin’s viewpoint, patriarchy is not a proper term to describe the origin of the oppression of women due to the reason that patriarchy, which means a society dominated by men only, is too large and vague to designate different oppressions in society (167). She, proposing “sex/gender system” instead of patriarchy to mean a system which oppresses women, writes, “Sex/gender system [...] is a neutral term which refers to the domain and indicates that oppression is not inevitable in that domain, but is the product of the specific social relations which organize it” (168). Rubin regards sex as biological differences while gender is the social conventions that command sexes. To be a woman or a man in society means to place her or him in the sex/gender system; as Toril Moi explains, “The individual men and women we meet in everyday life are *products* of the sex/gender system; no human being exemplifies ‘raw’ or ‘natural’ sex” (25 emphasis added). Although the system, forcing individuals to fit in it, is arbitrary, Rubin is optimistic, believing that since the system is man-made, the oppression is evitable (Rubin 203). All we need is to see through the illusion that covers the system as nature and to reconstruct it politically (Rubin 204).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Rubin prefers to use “the sex/gender system.” She intends to expose why and how a woman is transformed from a female to a woman and this transformation is important because it means a woman finds a position and an identity in society. Rubin’s idea of the sex/gender system forms a basic theoretical ground in this book. Her idea explains why women are expected to be feminine and men masculine based on biological determinism, and femininity and masculinity are the two main focuses

After Rubin, gender becomes a target that feminists endeavor to deconstruct. Hence, due to the limited analysis of gender in history, feminists call for a feminist history after the so-called second wave feminist movement during the 1970s (Scott, *Gender* xi). Tosh and Lang examine the contribution of women's history under the influence of the second feminist movement, commenting that women's history is one of feminist manifestations, which intends to find women in history and to challenge the male-centered history. However, women's history requires an "effective strategy" (244) to modify mainstream history; otherwise, women's history simply turns into a slogan or an ideal of feminist movements, instead of a power or a method to change history politically. Tosh and Lang express, "[I]t was unclear whether women's history would become one among several intellectual strands in the women's liberation movement, or a potentially transforming dimension of academic history" (244). It is not until "gender" becomes popular as, gender history, rather than women's history, that it has the power to challenge mainstream history, as Tosh and Lang explains,

The history of gender represents a theoretically informed attempt to bring the two sexes and their complex relations into our picture of the past and in so doing to modify the writing of *all* history. It is by no means the only current within women's history, but it holds out the greatest promise for the discipline as a whole. (246 emphasis in original)

Consequently, when Joan Scott in 1986 declares the importance of gender history in her well-known article, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," the phallogocentric history is indeed challenged.<sup>17</sup> Joan Scott, on the one hand, follows Rubin's sex/gender system to emphasize gender as "a socially imposed

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of discussion in my book.

<sup>17</sup> "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis" was first published in 1986 in *American Historical Review* 91.5 (1986): 1053-75. Then it is included in Scott's book *Gender and the Politics of History* (1988).

division of the sexes” (Rubin 179); on the other hand, she follows Foucault’s analysis of power to stress gender as “a primary way of signifying relationships of power” (Scott, *Gender* 42). Scott advocates gender not only as a useful tool to analyze history but also as a crucial category of historical analysis.<sup>18</sup>

Starting her theory from evaluating “her-story” or “women’s history,” Scott well explains the approach of her-story to highlight women as historical subjects. Writing her-story gives value to the women who were silenced in history or hidden from history. Scott mentions that her-story has several usages. It gathers information about women (*Gender* 18), and interprets the structure of common women’s lives, not just great, noble and famous women’s (19). Besides, her-story also attempts to reveal and awaken women’s feminist consciousness (19). For Scott, the most important function of her-story approach is to change the standards of historical significance, asserting “‘personal, subjective experience’ matters as much as ‘public and political activities,’” especially because “the former influences the latter” (20).

Unlike her-story which emphasizes only women as historical subjects, Scott proposes gender as an important tool to comprehend history. She develops her theory from her astonishing observation of a lack of a theory to describe gender differences and how gender exercises socially even though the her-story approach has gathered so many documents. Feminist historians are better at description than theorization; therefore, they are anxious about a system of theoretical formations to explain different social experiences of gender (*Gender* 30). They have proven that women have history and women are involved in important social movements in the western

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<sup>18</sup> There are three main categories of history: political history, economic history, and social history (Tosh and Lang 115). Women as well as “poverty, ignorance, insanity and disease” (131) are the subcategory of social history. However, because of the dominance of political history in historical analysis, social history has been overlooked, not to mention the fact that the role of women in history is extremely marginalized. In order to analyze history from a new perspective, Scott suggests that “gender” should become the fourth main category of history alongside political, economic, and social histories.

civilization (30), but their documents cannot answer how gender works in society or how gender gives meanings to the perception of history. Thus, it is not enough for Scott to emphasize that women indeed exist in history or to simply collect a lot of documents. What interests Scott is how the inclusion of gender in history changes our perception of history and how gender is constructed socially. Scott explains, “The emphasis on ‘how’ suggests a study of processes, not of origins, of multiple rather than single causes, of rhetoric or discourse rather than ideology or consciousness” (4). In other words, Scott is not eager to find out the origins of gender differences, such as “patriarchy” for many feminists or the “sex/gender system” for Rubin, but she pays more attention to the interaction between gender and other institutions, such as gender versus politics, war, and economics. To emphasize “how” means to emphasize the exercise of discourses. Hence, Scott’s purpose of comprehending history genderedly is very political: “to point out and change inequalities between women and men” (3).

As a feminist historian, Scott seeks a proper approach to use “gender as an analytic category” (31), analyzing the relations between gender and history, and equally valuing the two without prejudice. In order to justify her own theory, Scott explains and criticizes three main approaches of the analysis of gender first,<sup>19</sup> and then proposes her definition of gender, which contains two propositions. The first proposition is that “gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes” (42), and Scott further provides four aspects to see how gender interacts with history. First, one must re-examine the meaning of

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<sup>19</sup> The first approach is applied by theorists of patriarchy, who try to explain the origins of patriarchy (33). Their analysis is based on physical and biological differences between two sexes, but in this way, Scott observes that gender becomes “ahistoricity,” (34) meaning there is no connection between gender and history. History turns out to be “epiphenomenal” (34) and gender becomes a fixed and unchangeable entity which conveys the eternal physical differences and inequality (34). Second, the Marxist feminist approach emphasizes the important role of economic factors in the determination of the gender system (35), so gender is the production of economic structures. In other words, gender under Marxist explanation “has had no independent analytic status of its own” (37). Third, the psychoanalytic approach tends to deal with how the individual subject is constructed; therefore, the specificity and variability of history is ignored (39).

“culturally available symbols” (43) in society and how this symbol becomes the meaning we think they are. Second, we should reconsider “normative concepts,” (43) which are mostly inscribed in religion, education, science and politics, and have appeared as binary gender representations, such as femininity versus masculinity. The purpose of reconsideration of normative concepts is to disrupt any fixed notion and binary in order to uncover the nature of gender (43). Third, followed by the second aspect, “a notion of politics and reference to social institutions and organizations” (43) cannot be overlooked when history is reinvestigated by gender. The fourth aspect is to link history with “subjective identity” (44), examining the way in which gender identities are constructed and relative to social and cultural organizations. Scott’s first proposition of gender contains the above four aspects, revealing gender is not just about the issue of women, but it has to be concerned with a wide range from personal identity to culture, society, religion, science, politics and wars. In other words, Scott’s contribution lies in expanding the narrow definition of gender to include politics, diplomacy, wars or others that usually are seen independent from gender.

Scott’s second proposition of gender is that it is “a primary way of signifying relationships of power” (*Gender* 42). That is to say, gender is where power is articulated (45). While the her-story approach seeks for documents about female ancestors, Scott questions why some facts are ignored but others are not. History is not merely a search for facts; thus, Scott’s question reveals that history as well as gender is manipulated by power, and gender, through power, rationalizes and justifies itself. Moreover, Scott is not satisfied with the insistence on the co-existing connection between gender and power, but she further points out that it is more important to understand “the organization of equality or inequality” (48). Her emphasis on the structure of how equality or inequality is organized and exercised obviously follows Foucault’s idea of power, which is that power is inside, instead of



outside, relationships. Scott, consequently, asserts that gender and power construct each other (49). Without the consideration of power, gender cannot be fully comprehended.

To see gender as a useful category of historical analysis is Scott's contribution to feminism as well as history. She affirms, "My point was to clarify and specify how one needs to think about the effect of gender in social and institutional relationships, because this thinking is often not done precisely or systematically" (*Gender* 44). Scott is the first person who provides a useful approach to reexamine gender in history, and her strategy is based on Foucault's post-structuralist approach, especially her insistence on inclusion of power into gender.<sup>20</sup> Scott expresses Foucault's influence on her idea of gender, stating,

Gender [. . .] means knowledge about sexual difference. I use knowledge, following Michel Foucault, to mean the understanding produced by cultures and societies of human relationships, in this case of those between men and women. Such knowledge is not absolute or true, but always relative. (2)

Based on Foucault's ideas, seeing gender as knowledge also indicates that gender is produced and constructed socially. Scott, from this perspective, believes that we have to recognize men and women are both "empty" and "overflowing" categories, and she explains, "Empty because they have no ultimate, transcendent meaning. Overflowing because even when they appear to be fixed, they still contain within them alternative, denied, or suppressed definitions" (49). Since gender is constructed, not natural, men and women are empty without an absolute essence. Since gender is produced socially,

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<sup>20</sup> Not only Scott, but Denise Riley also follows the post-structuralist strategy to define women. By asserting "'women' is historically, discursively constructed, and always relatively to other categories which themselves change" (1-2), Riley criticizes the essentialist definition of women. Also, Catherine Hall observes that post-structuralism provides a way of analyzing history and a possibility of feminist history (23).

men and women cannot be understood exclusively without the interaction with history.

#### **D. Wertebaker's Concept of Gender**

Both White and Scott are historians, so what they are more concerned about is historiography. Their new historical approaches prove to be illuminating when we transform their ideas of history into a history comprehension or a reading strategy to read literary works. Since White affirms history has a literary form, then history must be consumed by the reader. History has been textualized by White to liberate our perception of history while literature could be historicized to deepen and broaden our percipience of literature. Similarly, since Scott declares gender as a useful category of historical analysis, then gender is also useful to re-read all historical works. White's theory legitimates Wertebaker's rewriting history and her history plays; Scott's theory further justifies the significance of gender in history and Wertebaker's emphasis on gender in her history plays. The following is going to explain Wertebaker's concept of gender along with the same three plays as illustrations in order to generate a further understanding of gender and to set up the theoretical background for the next two chapters.

##### **1. A Constitutive Element of World Relationships**

As suggested by Joan Scott, gender is not independent from social relations; instead, gender is "a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes" (*Gender* 42). According to the conventional sexual differences that men are superior to women, gender constitutes all the social relationships in a nation, and gender, rather than exclusive, is highly relative to other social institutions. However, *Credible Witness*, *Three Birds Alighting on a Field*, and

*The Break of Day* further show that gender is not only an important constitutive element in society, but it is also an element of reorganizing world relations, especially when a nation deterritorializes in a globalized age. The above statement is not only expressed in these three plays, but it runs through most of Wertebaker's plays, including the other seven plays that are going to be investigated in the next two chapters.

*Credible Witness* exposes that gender is one of the foundations in a nation, and it is interrelated to politics, political asylum in particular. Macedonia is also established by patriarchs like many other countries, and Macedonian society and history are based on the superiority of sons and men. However, when Petra questions history, she simultaneously doubts the traditional gender relationships. She expresses, "When we give birth to our sons, we hold them more tightly than our daughters [. . .] Our history tells us to make sons that will fight—if that's not right, what have we been doing for hundreds of years?" (226). Gender relationships are the basic unit in society, teaching men to be warriors and women to be housewives. They organize a country and establish a national history. Nevertheless, when Alexander rejects Macedonian history, Petra wonders, "Nothing's solid any more" (*Credible Witness* 226). Even so, her action of helping Ameena to claim political asylum reveals her feminist awakening. Ameena's body is a credible witness; by implication, women's body or maternal body inscribes and conveys the production of nation because of the ability of having children. Women's body then becomes a credible witness that exposes the unfair gender relationships in society. At the end, when Petra asks Simon to accept asylum seekers by declaring, "Look at us: we are your history now" (236), the meaning of "us" includes different races, classes, nations as well as different sexes, including women. Interpreted in this way, the discussion of nation and transnational world relations cannot be exclusive of gender.

Like the same argument that gender is a constitutive element in society in *Credible Witness*, Wertebaker in *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* shows that gender relations in the business world are challenged with the increase of many successful career women. Women are no longer confined to the house, and their success in career threatens the traditional male-center business world. For example, while Julia, leaving Jeremy's company, is able to run her own gallery, Jeremy, threatened by her leaving, ridiculously asks Julia to marry him in order to save his company. In addition, Biddy's process of learning to be an art collector is also a process of understanding herself and her country, England. Afraid of a second divorce, Biddy helps her social-climber husband by collecting works of art. She at the beginning loses words to articulate herself and to describe art, but at the end she turns into a speaker who is going to be invited to give a lecture on art and on England (444). As a woman traditionally regarded as inferior in relations of gender, Biddy has a different insight into things. She presents, "Sometimes I feel I have two pairs of eyelids. The first pair are like everyone else's, but behind them, there's a kind of clingfilm, and if I could open those too, I would see the world differently" (414-15). Her gender identity gives her different perspectives and her "two pairs of [female] eyelids" empower her career as an art collector. Julia and Biddy's successes reveal that the business world cannot exclude women because gender relations are also changed within it. With more and more women involved in the business world, gender issues are getting more and more relevant to economics.

Moreover, gender is not independent of class and race issues in *Three Birds Alighting on a Field*. Because Biddy is an upper-class English woman, Yoyo, a Greek who hates Greek tradition, marries her in order to raise his social status. He complains that Biddy is not English enough, and his house should be more English. Under a threat of a divorce by Yoyo, Biddy becomes Yoyo's "tool" to help him to climb to a

higher social class; that is to say, the gender relation is the fundamental oppression when it is compared with the class relation. Furthermore, their unfortunate interracial marriage also reveals that women are inferior to men even though she is an upper-class white English woman. The gender relation is not only the relation between men and women, but it is complicated and problematic involved with power that exercises in class and race. It is this kind of power inside the gender relation that constitutes social as well as world relations.

In *The Break of Day*, through the theme of motherhood, gender is highly relative to science, especially the reproductive technology. Tess, unlike Nina who prefers to adopt, is unable to conceive, and decides to accept infertility treatment. Because of advanced technology, having a baby is just like choosing a product. As the doctor explains, “Before we get to that we would suggest different sperm, we have very nice donors, all nationalities, Jewish, anything you need. And once we don’t have to deal with your eggs, Tess, there’s no age limit. We can go on for years” (70). The doctor’s name ironically is “Dr. Glad,” which contrasts sharply with Tess’s negative result. April believes that “IVF is a male conspiracy to sell women drugs” (64), but Tess would rather lose everything to do the treatment a second time to have a baby. Aston asserts that Wertebaker’s purpose is “to politicise (rather than to personalise or ‘emotionalise’) reproductive technology” (*Feminist Views* 157). She further expresses that “if formerly feminism was concerned with contraceptive technology, it now has to address the issue of how, or indeed whether women can take advantage of the new reproductive technology” (157-58). On the one hand, as April suggests, the reproductive technology is male-dominated and it grants men’s power to decide motherhood. On the other hand, biotechnology offers women chances to decide their own body and especially it helps women who cannot conceive. Wertebaker asks a good question, whether science helps or is an obstacle to women’s

autonomy of their own body, but she offers no answer in the play; her purpose is to force women to rethink their identity. After all, no female identity can be thought thoroughly without a consideration of motherhood (Carson, “Language and Identity” 146). As Carson affirms, “Mothering, then, is not a biological issue here, but an economic, cultural, and political one” (146). Hence, from this perspective, the gender issue cannot be separated from science, economics, cultures and politics.

Aston claims that the gender of the adopted child is important (“Geographies of Oppression” 248). At the time when *The Break of Day* was performed, “the issue of overseas adoption” or “transracial adoption” was headline news in England (248). Aston explains, “The issue of unwanted female children in China received widespread publicity in the UK [. . .]” (248). The unwanted Chinese girls reveal that the gender issue does not only constitute social relations in a country as Scott suggests, but it also becomes a constitutive element of international world relations. Hence, the cross-border child in the play as a little girl is especially crucial because she, symbolizing a hope for a multicultural and transnational future, passes love on to the next generation owing to her maternal ability of having children, and because adopting a girl challenges the patriarchal value of the superiority of boys over girls. The unwanted Chinese girls and the ill Eastern European girl in the play leave their own countries, and then grow up in England to reorganize a new system in a new country, and to re-construct new world relationships.<sup>21</sup>

Understanding gender from the perspective of Nina and Tess reveals that gender is closely related to science and other social issues. However, reading the play from the perspective of the Eastern European mother of the cross-border girl uncovers

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<sup>21</sup> At the beginning of the play, Wertenbaker quotes a popular nursery rhyme, and names the title of the play after it: “Hark to me, / Listen what I say, / Little girls are important / At the break of day” (*The Break of Day* 6). Indeed, little girls are important especially for a new start, and Wertenbaker also implies that the gender issue is still going to be important especially in a new millennium.



another hidden issue. Komporály argues that Nina and Hugh in a way buy the cross-border girl with their superiority of western capitalism (134), while Aston points out the “unequal positions” between the absence of the mother of the cross-border girl and Nina’s effort to be a mother in the play. This Eastern European mother is outside the text, but her disappearance indicates that gender is not only relations between men and women; it also complicates the relations among different women, including different races, classes and nations. If gender constitutes social and world relations, then it also problematizes the statement that all women are oppressed without differentiation.

## 2. The Possibility of Reconstruction of Gender

Rubin’s definition of gender as “a socially imposed division of the sex” (179) shows gender is not natural but rather is socially and culturally constructed. However, since gender is constructed, then gender has the potential and possibility of reconstruction. Characters in most of Wertebaker’s plays suffer from the stereotypical images of men and women; with the exposure of gender as a social and cultural construction, some of them reconstruct their gender identities. In *Credible Witness*, Aziz is feminized by his own country because he does not join the civil war (205). Alexander’s crying lessons are criticized as feminine by Petra because she thinks “[l]amenting is for women” (219) and because Petra is trained by history to teach her son masculinity (226). In *Three Birds Alighting on a Field*, Bidy does not want a second divorce because she cannot stand the comments on divorced women by society (378). Fiona is sorry for the two ugly stepsisters in *Cinderella* because they cut off parts of their feet to fulfill the idealized femininity (*Three Birds* 443). In *The Break of Day*, Robert’s and Jamie’s masculinity is in crisis for the reason that Robert has been unemployed for one year (18) and Jamie’s hospital is going to be closed

(25). Tess's and Nina's femininity is also in crisis because they lose the ability of having children. Although most characters suffer from the stereotypes of gender, some of them, such as Alexander, Petra, Bidy, Robert and Nina, recover from their identity crisis by the experience of exile, working, and adopting children respectively. In other words, Wertebaker intends to deconstruct their gender identities first and then to reconstruct them as fluid and changeable ones in her plays. More importantly, similar with Stuart Hall's cultural identities, Wertebaker's reconstruction of gender is always in process without an end, and endless deconstruction and reconstruction of characters' identities also remind us of Scott's statement that men and women are both "empty" and "overflowing."

Wertebaker in her plays emphasizes "how" men and women recreate their identities, such as Alexander through learning to be an exiled guest in England, Petra through the experience in the liminal, hybrid and in-between detention center, Bidy through learning to be an art collector, Robert through the power of theatre, and Nina through adopting a cross-border girl. Although breaking the stereotypical images of men and women does not mean that the sex/gender system is broken or reversed, the possibility of reconstruction of gender suggests the dignity of human beings to find a way forward in the existing unfair society. Chapters Three and Four further discuss this statement with an emphasis on "how" characters, including women and men, challenge social norms to deconstruct and reconstruct themselves.

### **3. Reshaping the Traditional Perception of History**

Wertebaker in her plays stresses that human beings in history are active agencies. Rather than being objects that are determined by history, they fight for their chances to articulate, to question the male-dominated history, and to re-identify themselves. Therefore, interpreting history in the light of gender reshapes the

traditional perception of history, which is stable, linear, phallogentric and politics-centered. *Credible Witness* exposes that women, like Petra, are usually the conveyers who pass down the history of a nation, but history is not supposed to be fixed and unchangeable. Petra's transformation represents the change of the traditional perception of history. Like Petra's change, Biddy's enlightenment of art in *Three Birds* helps her career and changes herself into an independent woman; more significantly, she realizes that the position of England in the global age is not supposed to be isolated. The "two pairs of eyelids" of her see history from a different point of view, so when Constantin asks her to go to Romania, she rejects it by saying, "I love England at the moment" (425). Also, Nina's cross-border child in *The Break of Day* suggests a multicultural future, in which history is always interconnected with others. Thus, we find that the reconstruction of gender and the perception of history have a closed relation, and from these three plays, we also realize that chronicle history needs to be reconsidered with space, and this reconsideration involves the reconstruction of gender.

In short, Wertebaker regards gender as a constitutive element of world relations, and to know the interaction between gender and other social institutions is to know how gender is exercised in history. Although gender is imposed by society arbitrarily, to understand the construction of gender is to understand the possibility of reconstruction of gender. Furthermore, owing to the potential of reconstruction, reading history from the perspective of gender reshapes the existing, traditional and phallogentric historical perception. How characters in plays reconstruct their gender identity and how their reconstruction influences our acknowledgement of history are the dramatist's major investigations in her plays. While Hayden White's theory has provided Wertebaker the right to rewrite history, the following two chapters explore the deconstruction and reconstruction of gender and how gender influences our

acknowledgement of history.

Chapter Three is going to discuss four of Wertebaker's history plays, which use historical materials as the backgrounds of the plays, and to examine how characters reshape their identities and our historical perception. Wertebaker adapts real historical figures, such as Isabelle Eberhardt (1877-1904) in *New Anatomies* (1981) and Robert FitzRoy (1805-1865) and Charles Darwin (1809-1882) in *After Darwin* (1998), and she also creates a fictional character Mary Traverse in *The Grace of Mary Traverse* (1985) to review the historical event of the Gordon riots in 1780. In *Our Country's Good* (1988), Wertebaker rewrites colonial history in Australia with a true event when the First Fleet transported convicts from England to Australia in 1788 and with real historical figures, such as Captain Philip, the captain of the First Fleet. The playwright uses these historical materials to retell her own stories and to provide an alternative history different from the official description. Thus, through rewriting history, Wertebaker emphasizes history as narrative and multiplicity and gender as a constitutive element of world relations.

## Chapter Three

### Rewriting History: Gender in Wertebaker's History Plays

The previous chapter has explained that history as narrative opens possibilities of writing and rewriting gender in history. While Hayden White's metahistory justifies Wertebaker's rewriting history in her history plays and while Joan Scott's gender theory provides a useful perspective to reread history, this chapter focuses on four of Wertebaker's history plays and emphasizes the inclusion of gender indeed helps us to perceive the gaps in history. *New Anatomies* (1981) and *The Grace of Mary Traverse* (1985) both describe how women break the stereotypical image of women by cross-dressing and by crossing the spatial division individually. In the former, Isabelle Eberhardt (1877-1904), a real historical woman at the turn-of-the-20<sup>th</sup>-century, travels to Africa alone, revealing that traditional femininity could be reinvented. In the latter, the Gordon riots (1780) in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century are rewritten through a perspective of a fictional female character Mary Traverse, who traverses conventional spatial segregation to challenge the idealized femininity that confines women to home.

*Our Country's Good* (1988) and *After Darwin* (1998) are both male-centered plays, describing the crisis of masculinity respectively in 18<sup>th</sup>-century imperialistic England and in 1990s England. The historical event of the First Fleet sailing to Australia in 1788 is based on the expansion of masculinity and imperialism; however, the ambivalence between the masculine colonizer and feminine colonized causes a crisis in imperialist masculinity. Also, masculinity is in serious danger in the 1990s when the role of men changes a lot in work and family. Through the device of a play-within-the-play in which two actors perform Robert FitzRoy (1805-1865) and Charles Darwin (1809-1882), *After Darwin* exposes that masculinity has never been a stable quality that any man can really possess.

Wertenbaker in *New Anatomies* and *The Grace of Mary Traverse* describes two women who break the stereotypical image of women by cross-dressing and crossing the spatial division respectively, and in *Our Country's Good* and *After Darwin* the dramatist delineates a crisis of masculinity in 18<sup>th</sup>-century imperialistic England and in 1990s England. These four history plays reveal that by rewriting gender into history, Wertenbaker asserts that history is no longer based on the model of men's coercive domination over women and only the acknowledgment of gender as a social construction can deconstruct the stereotypes of masculinity and femininity.

#### A. Cross-Dressing and Identity in *New Anatomies*

As suggested by Ryan Claycomb, feminist playwrights are not satisfied merely with recovering women's identities, but they pay more attention to how women act themselves (527). They see women as "dynamic agents" (527); therefore, they, rather than claiming women as beings in history, describe the process how women become what they are (526-27). For the same reason, feminist history plays do not merely aim to prove that women indeed exist in history, but they depict how women are silenced in history and how they struggle to articulate themselves. This emphasis on "how" means that gender issues are not supposed to be limited to women themselves only, but the interactions between gender and social institutions are needed to be considered, too. Wertenbaker in *New Anatomies* well describes how a woman is "officially forgotten" (57) and excluded by history not only because of her gender but also because of her cultural and national transgressions. This play resonates with Claycomb's statement that a woman's "real-life performances rather than merely her identity" (527) are important when it comes to the discussion of gender in history. In the play, we see the female protagonist acts herself by cross-dressing to break the distinction of sex and gender, and her transgressions are not simply confined to gender,



but also relative to culture, religion, and nation.

*New Anatomies* was written for the Women's Theatre Group in 1981 and first published in 1984.<sup>1</sup> Portraying a true historical woman, Isabelle Eberhardt (1877-1904), the play takes place at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Europe, Geneva and France mainly, and Africa, Algeria in particular. This history play describes a common white woman's travel, representing a shift in history writing from recording "great women" to common, ordinary women. Women, strictly speaking, are not completely hidden from history; rather, we have many great women, such as queens, female religious characters and patriots in history, but they cannot represent the majority of women (Lerner 145-46). Therefore, with the uprising of feminisms, feminists start to find out most women who are silenced and invisible in history, and one of the characteristics of feminist history plays is to focus on these "supporting roles" (Palmer 135). Isabelle Eberhardt, a female traveler without a noticeable social status at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, now is rediscovered. Wertebaker rewrites this historical female figure in order to emphasize that Isabelle breaks the stereotypical image of women by cross-dressing; Isabelle deconstructs and reconstructs her identity beyond the sexual role of femininity.

### 1. Isabelle as a "Weird" Woman

Isabelle is seen "weird" because her character does not conform to the

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<sup>1</sup> Held in 1973, the Women's Theatre Festival gathered more than one hundred women to discuss the roles of women and actresses in theatre (Wandor 47). They came to a certain agreement and called their group "Women's Theatre Group" (47). From then on, feminism in theatre has been getting more and more attention. Women's Theatre Group is an all-women's group with a strong political purpose. At the beginning, the group emphasized feminist issues so much that the performances they produced were didactic and agitprop (Wandor 61-62). In 1977, it produced *Pretty Ugly* and *In Our Way* by collective creation, and these two plays opened the scope of the performance of British female theatres, extending from urban British women's experience to other women in different cultures (66). After these two plays, Women's Theatre Group produced Wertebaker's *Breaking Through* (1980) and *New Anatomies* (1981). Therefore, *New Anatomies* played an important role not only in Women's Theatre Group but also in other theatre groups at that time.

femininity that society expects a woman to have. Due to her weirdness, she is famous and caught the authority's attention. "They'll want to know everything," says Isabelle, "I'm famous now, not just anybody, no, I'll be in History" (*New Anatomies* 6). At the beginning of the play, Isabelle is accompanied by her chronicler, Séverine, who accepts a mission from the French government to record Isabelle's journey. Seen as a trouble maker by the French government and Muslims, Isabelle disturbs them because of her trans-gender behavior. She is "famous" for the reason that she breaks laws and social conventions to travel alone to North Africa by cross-dressing as a man. Her transgressive behavior attracts the authority's attention. In order to restrain this weird woman, they have to keep track of everything she does and says.

The reason why the French government is threatened by Isabelle is that she destroys the fundamental relationships that constitute a society. In other words, Isabelle breaks the sex/gender system, in Gayle Rubin's term, which is "the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied" (159). Rubin draws a line to distinguish sex as a biological term from gender as a social construction. However, based on biological determinism, the patriarchal society arbitrarily turns biological sex into gender; in this way, women are supposed to be feminine and men masculine. Gender becomes "a socially imposed division of the sex" (Rubin 179) and "a production of the social relations of sexuality" (179). As a foundation of a society, the sex/gender system inscribes how a biological sex is forced to become a social gender. According to this system, Isabelle has to behave femininely, wear skirts, stay at home, and have and raise children. Nevertheless, Isabelle, transgressing this system, challenges this foundation that constitutes a society.

Isabelle's life history justifies the statement that no one is born to be totally feminine or masculine, and Isabelle's speech at the beginning of the play explains that

her gender identity is not based on her biological sex. The play opens when she is twenty-seven years old. When she claims, “I need a fuck” (*New Anatomies* 5), she completely reverses the stereotypical image of a woman; especially, the background is set in the Victorian period; Palmer describes that the age was a metaphor for sexual repression (152). Twenty-seven-year-old Isabelle is not lady-like at all: “She is dressed in a tattered Arab cloak, has no teeth and almost no hair” (*New Anatomies* 5). Compared with her chronicler Séverine who dresses “a long skirt and jacket” (5) in the desert, Isabelle is relatively masculine. Drunken, smoking, this woman in the guise of a man flashes back to her past.

Having a Russian father and a German mother, Isabelle is born in Geneva, but she never fits in the western civilization and the western sexual role of a woman. Despite her European background, she has dreamed about traveling in the desert in Africa since she was young. Little Isabelle likes to play at dreaming in the desert with her old brother, Antoine. Unlike Antoine who is “frail and feminine” (8) and wants to be a girl, Isabelle wishes to join the army and to take on adventures. The childhood with her brother becomes Isabelle’s sweetest memory in her life. Instead of seeing their special bond as incest,<sup>2</sup> this memory represents a “non-gendered childhood utopia” (Carlson, “Self and Sexuality” 170) and “Isabelle’s dream of a genderless existence” (169). As Rubin suggests, the sex/gender system turns gender into oppressive social conventions, which are arbitrary and without reasons, and it imposes unnatural and artificial norms upon sex. Hence, based on Rubin’s concept, Isabelle’s dream of traveling in the desert and her childhood with Antoine both stand for a genderless utopia, in which no gender conventions would restrict them. A girl could be adventuresome and outgoing, whereas a boy could be feminine and introverted.

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<sup>2</sup> Some critics mention the connotation of the incest between Isabelle and Antoine. For example, Mel Gussow suggests a “possibly incestuous relationship” between them (“A Sexual Cover-Up”).

In her family, Isabelle is different; she is especially different from her mother Anna, her sister Natalie, and her sister-in-law Jenny. Anna is passive and incapable of keeping a house, and the disordered house in Act One, Scene Two, shows Anna's inefficiency. Unable to face her alcoholic father and weak mother, Natalie, Isabelle's elder sister, runs away from home, marrying a man she does not love in order to have a regular life. Natalie accuses her father of seducing her, but Anna is too weak to leave her husband. Jenny, Isabelle's sister-in-law, is pregnant and her life centers around her family only. Unlike these three women who depend on husbands and marriages, Isabelle prefers "a gallop on the dunes" (17) when Natalie suggests her marriage in order to have a secure life. For Isabelle, the traditional conventions of marriage or feminine behavior are like "Swiss clocks" (11). All the rules command her behavior like the regularity of clocks. "Tick tock, a Swiss clock, the needle that crushes the dreams to sleep" (21), says Isabelle. The metaphor of Swiss clocks indicates order, but Isabelle prefers adventures instead of regularity. She laments over Natalie's marriage, saying, "Poor Natalie, left the dreams to look for order, but order was not happiness" (8).

Concerning Isabelle's "weird" ideas, Natalie believes that it is because Isabelle reads too much, and especially for Natalie, reading is a "disease" (24); Jenny thinks it is because Isabelle cannot find a husband. Despite people's comment on her, Isabelle survives in the patriarchal society through dressing as a man. Conventionally, women are restricted in the private space, such as home, but in the guise of a man, Isabelle may go out alone without a male companion; more importantly, she may fulfill her dream of traveling in the desert. After Isabelle dresses herself in an Arab jellaba, Antoine marvels at Isabelle's ambiguous identity by stating, "Isabelle looks like all our recruits. No one would know you were a girl. Is this male or female?" (25). Therefore, if the sex/gender system aims at a direct transformation from a biological

female to a social woman, then cross-dressing challenges this arbitrary system. Based on biological determinism, gender imposes unnatural conventions to restrict sex; however, since gender is constructed by artificial social norms, then femininity or masculinity is constructed too, and it may be re-constructed, such as by cross-dressing. Isabelle may survive and fulfill herself through cross-dressing, and disguising as a man helps her to avoid the gaze of being a weird woman.

## 2. Cross-Dressing as Subversion and Submission

Joanne Entwistle observes that it is dress that catches people's eyes on the sex of the wearer (40); as a result, dress creates people's identity. It categorizes people into two main groups: men who wear male clothing while women female clothing. In order to give sexes social status and to organize sexes, this division is so clear that it cannot be blurred. Gender, in other words, is established by man-made dress, and dress is "one of the means by which bodies are made social and given meaning and identity" (7). Furthermore, because the social and cultural meanings that dress imposes upon sexes have been taken for granted for a long time, people then believe that this artificial manner of dress is natural and inherent (141). This is also why Entwistle comments that "when it comes to clothes we are far removed from the realm of 'brute' biological facts and firmly located within the realm of culture" (141). Dress creates a "false consciousness" to control people's consciousness of sexes,<sup>3</sup> and it is one of the means to consolidate the sex/gender system.

However, this arbitrary cultural system is challenged by cross-dressing. As Entwistle well explains, for cross-dressers, "When the masquerade is so convincing

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<sup>3</sup> The term "false consciousness" comes from Engels's letter to Franz Mehring, meaning "ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, it is true, but with a false consciousness" (qtd. in Hawthorn 164). Engels's ideology is widely known as a false consciousness, and it describes how the consciousness of the working class is shaped by the dominant class. Marxist feminists usually appropriate this idea to illustrate how the patriarchal ideology dominates women (Tong 97-98).

that they can ‘pass off’ their appearance as ‘reality’, it testifies not just to the importance of clothing in marking out gender, but to the way in which *sex* can be radically discontinuous with *gender*” (144 emphasis in original). Although dress creates a false consciousness that sees gender as natural, cross-dressing questions this seemingly natural link from sex to gender. In *New Anatomies*, Isabelle, dressed like a man, is able to go out at night alone, to travel to North Africa, to adventure in the desert, to join the Sufi sect, and to become a Qadria. Isabelle fulfills her dreams only under cover of male clothing. Her cross-dressing manifests that “sex” indeed “can be radically discontinuous with gender” (Entwistle 144); in other words, the link from biological sex to cultural gender is challenged by cross-dressing.

*New Anatomies* is a play about cross-dressing, and it is a play performed by five female cross-dressers. Except the actress who plays Isabelle only, the other four play all the other characters, and each of the four has chances to perform at least one male character. In this way, Wertebaker attracts the audience’s attention to gender role playing. “Having a woman play a male role quickly creates an alienation effect” (153), says Palmer. Brecht’s alienation effect in drama intends to “draw the attention of the audience to the fact that what they see on the stage is a constructed literary image, not a natural reality” (Barry 162). As a result, the audience may judge critically without falling into the imaginary reality that the play creates, and the alienation effect stimulates the audience to challenge the stereotypical images of men and women.

Theater has been dominated by men, including male playwrights, directors, actors, and backstage technologists (Wandor 29); women could not appear on the stage until the 17<sup>th</sup> century (20).<sup>4</sup> The reason that women were not allowed to perform on the stage was for moral concerns and the society’s restrictions on women;

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<sup>4</sup> Even though women were allowed to perform then, actress and prostitute were synonymous at that time (Wandor 23).



therefore, female characters were played by boys (21-22). However, this cross-dressing in the past is very different from nowadays. Michelene Wandor observes that all forms of cross-dressing have the following functions: first, they have “the potential to arouse erotic responses in both men and women” (25); second, they are “functional” (25); third, they represent “a symptom of creative responses suppressed in other areas, or forms of freedom of expression for performers” (25); fourth, they are “an indirect effort to contain rebellion” (25). Wandor, furthermore, notices that when people’s repressive attitude toward sex and gender are changed, cross-dressing in the theatre would become more popular (25). Therefore, the most important function of cross-dressing performance is “an expression of rebellion; a form of witty subversion in which one sex impersonates the other, and by so doing shows up some of the ridiculous constraints which define femininity and masculinity” (25). In other words, dramatists in play writing and directors in the theatre both recognize that cross-dressing has a subversive power to challenge the sex/gender system.

Nevertheless, that the function of criticizing or rebelling against society by cross-dressing could be fulfilled or not is another question. As Wandor suggests, cross-dressing could be simply “functional” (25) or practical to satisfy the needs in the theatre, such as the shortage of actors. Similarly, cross-dressing is functional and convenient for women who go out to the public space in disguise as men. In this light, cross-dressing loses the power of subverting and challenging the existing sex/gender system politically.

Act Two begins with a get-together in a salon in Paris with five women, including Isabelle, Séverine, Lydia, Verda, and Eugénie. However, this part asserts that only Isabelle’s cross-dressing stands for a power of subversion whereas the other four women, gaining the practical function of cross-dressing, represent submission to

the mainstream of society. In the conversation among the five women, they share their stories and experiences of dressing as men. Séverine says, “I wear male clothes so I can take my girlfriends to coffee bars without having men pester us” (*New Anatomies* 38). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the separation of spheres was clear: women were confined to the private sphere while men belonged to the public sphere. Even at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, if a woman wanted to go to the public place, she needed a companion; otherwise, she had to dress as a man (Wolff 41). In this way, it is impossible for Séverine to have a cup of coffee with her girlfriends if women go outside without dressing as a man. Women “had to take a good deal more care about the ‘signs’ of their dress, which would be scrutinized for an indication of their social rank; in the nineteenth century, the scrutiny would be in order to differentiate ‘respectable’ from ‘loose’ women” (Wolff 40). For being treated as a “respectable” woman, Lydia in this get-together is the only woman who wears skirts because “there are some German diplomats here [in a salon] and they’re very sticky about these things” (*New Anatomies* 39). Dressed as a man facilitates a woman to go to the public space easily and freely because even if a woman can go outside, she has to care for her dress cautiously in order not to be seen as a “loose” woman.

For Séverine, cross-dressing fulfills her practical purpose of having coffee in bars; for Lydia, dressing like a man inspires her to write.

Do you know that in order to write seriously I must dress as a man? I finally understood why: when I am dressed as a woman, like this, I find I am most concerned with the silky sound of my skirt rustling on the floor, or I spend hours watching the lace fall over my wrist, white against white. But when I dress as a man, I simply begin to think, I get ideas. (*New Anatomies* 38)

According to Entwistle, the Victorian age was the time “when decoration with lace

and ribbons seemed to reach a new zenith” (157). Neither practical nor comfortable, too many decorations in dress cause trouble for women. Lydia cannot concentrate on her writing simply because her dress distracts her attention from her work. Dressing as a man hence helps Lydia to write.

The practical function of dressing as men also facilitates Verda and Lydia to perform music and act respectively. In order to share her music with people, Verda, a female musician, has to masquerade as a man. However, being a cross-dresser, not a transsexual, Verda eventually needs to reveal her gender and sexual identities and to reject her female fan’s love. She states, “I left my hair all the way down and wore the most feminine gown I could find. And then I gave her [a fan] a good talking to. She never came back” (39). Verda’s experience expresses that when the masquerade is so real that both gender and sex are changeable. In addition, another Lydia is an impersonator.<sup>5</sup> She started her acting career when she was three years old. Playing many female roles, Lydia runs out of inspiration. One day when she accidentally wears men’s clothes, she realizes cross-dressing may restart her acting career. Lydia states, “I saw the hat and cape and put them on. I went to the mirror and when I saw myself I suddenly had hundreds of exciting roles before me. I’ve been a male impersonator ever since” (*New Anatomies* 38). Through Verda and Lydia, Wertebaker emphasizes that the manner of dress confines women to certain works, but cross-dressing provides women more chances of jobs.

In the play, the last woman in the salon in Paris, Eugénie, regards cross-dressing as a way to submit and compromise with society. Having big feet and a raucous voice, unable to have a good conversation with men, Eugénie is seen as abnormal by people and even by her parents. Since Eugénie cannot fit the standard of traditional

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<sup>5</sup> Obviously, there are two Lydias in *New Anatomies*. One is the female writer who has to dress like a man in order to write; however, there is another Lydia, who is an impersonator. There is a conversation between the two Lydias on pages 37 and 38.

femininity, her parents think the best way for Eugénie is to travel. She has to travel to get away with people's judgment, so her traveling in the guise of a man represents surviving and compromising with society. She says, "I have not been unhappy, but I would have liked to be useful" (*New Anatomies* 39). Therefore, dressing like a man to travel is not her choice made by her free will; rather, cross-dressing is the way for her to survive since she is seen abnormal in society.

While the five women are talking about the fashion of cross-dressing, Lydia says, "I believe the century we're entering will see a revolution greater even than the French Revolution" (39-40). What she means is that women through cross-dressing may cause a gender revolution greater than a political one. However, while she says so, she is the only woman who wears skirts in the salon in order to avoid the German diplomats' scorn (40). Thus, although Eugénie, Verda, Lydia and Séverine all have the experiences of cross-dressing, theirs are different from Isabelle's, mainly because they value the functional aspect of cross-dressing more than the subversive power that cross-dressing carries. When they first meet Isabelle who dresses as a male Arab, they are as curious as the imperialists who first see native people from the Third World. Eugénie mistakes Isabelle for "a young oriental prince" (35). Verda is interested in Isabelle's "charming costume" (37) because it inspires her to write an oriental and exotic song. Séverine, a lesbian, even invites her for a night because she likes "women with character" (40). Their behavior shows that as long as cross-dressing loses its practical function, like Séverine's taking girlfriends out to a public sphere, Lydia's writing and performance, and Verda's music composition, cross-dressing for them becomes exotic and romantic.

The following conversation clearly reveals that four of the women out of five, except Isabelle, maintain society's patriarchal attitude although their behavior of cross-dressing is very anti-patriarchal. For them, cross-dressing is a matter of

practicality and convenience, and they simply cross the gender boundary for a practical purpose, not for a feminist awakening.

Isabelle I'm not a woman. I'm Si Mahmoud. I like men. They like me.  
As a boy, I mean. And I have a firm rule: no Europeans up my  
arse.

*Freeze.*

Verda I really must go. My husband . . .

Isabelle Did I say something wrong?

Eugénie The nomadic turn of phrase: so childlike.

Séverine I don't like vulgarity. I'm afraid I can't help you.

Isabelle You look just like Captain Soubiel now. He wanted to 'protect  
me'. And there was something to protect then. (*Drinks,*  
*hopeless.*) I spent nine months working on the docks of  
Marseilles to pay for this trip. Loading ships. (*New Anatomies*  
40-41)

Isabelle's "vulgarity" scares them; working on a ship is beyond their imagination. Lydia even wants to teach Isabelle some manners while Séverine believes Isabelle "probably has malaria" (41). D. Keith Peacock says, "Their cross-dressing is, however, *merely* an acknowledgement of male supremacy and a betrayal of their own gender" (*Radical Stages*, 166 emphasis added). In fact, the problem is not that they "merely" repeat men's patriarchal values, but "how" they repeat them and "why" they repeat them.

Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990) asserts that gender and sex are "performative." Butler declares "gender is not a noun" (34); rather, it is more like a verb because gender is "performative" and "always a doing" (34). In other words, Butler echoes Simone de Beauvoir's remark, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a

woman” (267). Since gender is performative, it is “neither true nor false” (186), and femininity and masculinity are constructed, not natural (192). Butler proposes, “That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality” (185). Each act is performative, and acts constitute so-called reality. However, Butler believes that although gender is performative, a doing, it is “not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed” (34). In other words, there is no preexisting doer who performs acts. Sara Salih well explains the meaning of no preexisting subject by stating, “This is not, then, ‘the death of the subject’, or if it is, it is the theoretical death of an old, fixed subject, and the birth of a new, constructed one characterized by subversive possibility and agency” (67). Because of no preexisting subject, the performer may enact the roles he or she likes. Because of gender as performativity, the performer may recreate a role different from their biological sex. From this perspective, those female cross-dressers in *New Anatomies* perform and enact the roles they choose. They, as women, through cross-dressing, transgress the sexual conventions to perform a new gender identity as men.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the title of the play “New Anatomies” becomes “new structures of gender” (Peacock, *Radical Stages* 166).

The importance of cross-dressing lies in challenging the traditional dichotomy of femininity and masculinity, and cross-dressers symbolize a subversive and destructive power. In *New Anatomies*, those female cross-dressers do not represent a “third gender,” but they create a space for themselves to perform themselves and to

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<sup>6</sup> As Butler’s famous manifestation declares, gender is performative; furthermore, sex is gender because the sexed body cannot be represented without gender (Butler 11). Hence, the distinction between sex and gender is not necessary for Butler for the reason that they are the same and they are both performative. For example, through cross-dressing, Verda’s disguise is so convincing that people believe she is a man, so Verda’s masquerade reveals that not only can gender change but also sex. Verda’s experience elucidates that Butler’s gender equals sex. However, Toril Moi points out that Butler’s statement is based on the belief that sex is natural and gender is cultural, so that she can deconstruct the essence of sex as cultural construction (51). Moi, nevertheless, explains that sex itself is never essential, natural, ahistorical or outside discourse (36), and the most obvious example is “transsexuals” (51). Hence, Moi declares that Butler’s theory has “internal contradictions” (58).



question the existing system. Marjorie Garber designates this space “space of possibility,” explaining, “*transvestism is a space of possibility structuring or confounding culture*; it is the disruptive element that intervenes, not just a category crisis of male and female, but the crisis of category itself” (qtd. in Entwistle 177).<sup>7</sup> Through cross-dressing, Isabelle, Séverine, Verda and Lydia may open a space that makes impossible possible.

Although Butler asserts that gender is performative, which means “gender is always a doing” (34), the gender performativity is a “parody” (188), which is “an imitation without an origin” (188). Not unlike her belief that there is no preexisting subject who performs acts, the gender parody is a set of repeated actions without an origin. Furthermore, from the examples of the four women in the salon in *New Anatomies*, including Séverine, Lydia, Verda, and Eugénie, we find that their gender parodies are not subversive; instead, they dress as men for a practical purpose. The play reveals that these women’s parody itself is not subversive but Isabelle’s gender parody is subversive. Therefore, the coin question lies in how one makes parodic repetitions, and how one subverts the existing gender norms by repetition. Butler asks good questions but without providing answers, stating, “What performance where will compel a reconsideration of the place and stability of the masculine and the feminine? And what kind of gender performance will enact and reveal the performativity of gender itself in a way that destabilizes the naturalized categories of identity and

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<sup>7</sup> Cross-dressing and transvestism are often seen as synonyms. According to *Oxford English Dictionary*, cross-dressing means “transvestism” (“Cross-”) while transvestism contains two meanings: “The action of dressing in the clothes of the opposite sex; the condition of having an abnormal desire to dress in the clothes of the opposite sex” (“Transvestism”). Also, Entwistle explains that these two have the same meaning under a broad definition, but specifically, transvestism has the connotation of psycho symptom. She says, “The word ‘transvestism’ can refer simply ‘to the act of cross-dressing, when one sex adopts the clothes of the other’ [. . .] However, contemporary definitions make it more specific—sexologists and psychologists see it as an act of cross-dressing accompanied by fetishistic obsessions” (200). Wertebaker apparently uses cross-dressing as a subversive power to challenge the gender norms; hence, although Garber uses “transvestism” to express the power of the “space of possibility,” under a broad definition, cross-dressing also have the ability to create this space that provides everyone to disturb and challenge the existing system.

desire?” (189). In other words, gender performativity and gender parody have the “effect” of rebellion against gender norms, but the “cause” of gender performativity and gender parody has not been explored yet.

Hence, from Butler’s questions above, we observe that cross-dressing itself is not subversive even though it has the effect of revolution, which is to say that cross-dressing could be used to be subversive and also to be submissive. To dress as a man itself is not rebellious, but “how and why” to dress as a man distinguishes the subversive power of cross-dressing from the submissive power of cross-dressing. Furthermore, Sara Salih comments that “Butler is not suggesting that subject is free to choose which gender she or he is going to enact” (63). That is to say, when Butler suggests gender is performativity, she does not mention whether the performer has free will to perform or not. The performer may simply repeat patriarchal values without consciousness, but he or she may also repeat them with a subversive purpose. That is the reason that gender performativity, such as cross-dressing, functions both as submission and subversion.

Entwistle also mentions the two opposite sides of cross-dressing: to confirm conventions and to subvert tradition. Like Butler’s suggestion of reviewing how gender is performed, she believes that the subversive power of cross-dressing “depends on the context in which drag is worn” (177). Cross-dressing manifests that the existing system cannot be overturned upside down, but it also indicates a power of transgression. As suggested by Peacock, Séverine, Lydia, Verda, and Eugénie, dressing as men, gain male supremacy and repeat the value of patriarchy, but their cross-dressing is just a “cosmetic,” instead of a feminist awakening (*Radical Stages* 166). In contrast with them, Isabelle transgresses the boundary of gender norms, escaping from a Swiss-clock-like life to fulfill herself. “Of them all only Isabelle has, however, really traversed the gender gap” (166), affirms Peacock.

Therefore, cross-dressing could be both subversion and submission to the authority, and the experience of cross-dressing for the four women in the salon represents submission to the mainstream of society while Isabelle's cross-dressing stands for a power of subversion. The difference between Isabelle and the other four women rests on the difference in the acknowledgement of self-fulfillment. Isabelle, eager for freedom, expects a genderless society to do whatever a common person can do, while those four women only pursue the convenience or the practical function that cross-dressing gives them. Hence, while we analyze how cross-dressing challenges the sex/gender system, subjectivity should be taken into consideration. In other words, cross-dressing can change a person's gender identity, but a person's free will or subjectivity makes cross-dressing subversive or submissive. The following demonstrates how Isabelle makes cross-dressing subversive, and it reveals that without personal free will or subjectivity involved, cross-dressing does not unsettle the gender system of patriarchy. But with one's free-will incorporated, cross-dressing becomes subversive and makes not only gender trouble but also make culture, religion, and nation trouble.

### **3. Isabelle's Identity through Cross-Dressing**

Joan Scott has mentioned that "gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes" (*Gender* 42). She expands the narrow definition of gender as cultural sex; gender, under her definition, is not merely about the issue of women, but it should be approached from wider perspectives ranged from personal identity to culture, nation, politics and wars. Isabelle's gender, therefore, is not a personal matter, but it is especially highly relative to her cultural, religious and national identities.

Born in Geneva, having a Russian father and a German mother, possessing the

name of Eberhardt that indicates a Jewish nomad's background (*New Anatomies* 35), Isabelle seems to be born to travel around without restriction. Susan Carlson describes Isabelle as an "outsider" by saying, "Events suggest that she is othered in *both* cultural realms; a self-created cross-border child, Isabelle is always an outsider" ("Language and Identity" 141, emphasis in original). Preferring dreams instead of marriage, adventures instead of order, deserts instead of flowers, Isabelle does not fit any requirement that the western civilization prescribes for a woman, so she decides to leave the western world. She declares, "I have to travel" (48). By cross dressing, Isabelle performs her new gender identity, a man named "Si Mahmoud." She, erasing her identity as a "European," "woman," and "Isabelle," claims that she is a person who needs freedom, moving and space.

If, down an obscure alleyway, a voice shouts at me: hey you,  
shopkeeper—I'll not turn around. If the voice pursues me: foreigner,  
European—I'll not turn around. If the voice says: you, woman, yes,  
woman—I'll not turn around, no, I'll not even turn my head. Even when  
it whispers, Isabelle, Isabelle Eberhardt—even then I won't turn around.  
But if it hails me: you, you there, who need vast spaces and ask for  
nothing but to move, you, alone, free, seeking peace and a home in the  
desert, who wish only to obey the strange ciphers of your fate—yes, then  
I will turn around, then I'll answer: I am here: Si Mahmoud. (*New  
Anatomies* 26)

In order to escape from the restriction of civilization, the desert in North Africa becomes her utopia; nomad Arab culture is her ideal; Muslim is her religious faith. Cross-dressing helps not only her reconstruction of gender identity, but also reestablishes her cultural and religious identities.

In the guise of a man named Si Mahmoud, Isabelle is accepted to join the Sufi

sect and becomes a Qudria. She declares, “I wanted to possess this country. It has possessed me” (42). Her pursuit of being a part of Arab culture is assisted by Bou Saadi and Saleh, two Qudrias. When her female identity is revealed by French Captain Soubiel, Saleh replies that in Arab culture people do not doubt a stranger’s words (32). Isabelle calls herself Si Mahmoud, so they accept Si Mahmoud is Isabelle. Because her/his medicine knowledge cures Arab people, s/he is welcomed in Arab society. More importantly, Saleh says, “Si Mahmoud knows the Koran better than we do. He’s in search of wisdom. We wish to help him” (33). Bou Saadi also mentions a famous female marabout named Lalla Zineb (27). She is “[n]ot an ordinary woman” (28) because she is extraordinarily wise and has predicted that France would colonize their country. Compared with civilized French Captain Soubiel, “savage” Arabian people have a mind more open to accept strangers and women.<sup>8</sup>

However, although Isabelle’s cross-dressing helps her to perform new gender, cultural and religious identities, her behavior of crossing gender boundaries is offensive to other orthodox and conservative sects in Muslim. As a result, Isabelle is to be assassinated. Failing in killing her, the murderer, a Muslim brother, accuses Isabelle, “You’re offending our customs” (45). Isabelle’s cross-dressing is so subversive that she disturbs and troubles different Muslim sects. Once again, because of her “gender trouble,” she has to leave the desert, just like why she has to leave Europe. “But that’s why I left them [Europeans],” Isabelle laments, “No, you’re an

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<sup>8</sup> In *New Anatomies*, Wertebaker seems to idealize Arab culture, especially the Sufi sect, as a genderless utopia without gender bias. Saleh says that they have known Si Mahmoud is a woman, but they still want to help her/him to join the Sufi sect because s/he knows the Koran well. However, this is very different from the general idea that Arab culture is one of the most patriarchal societies in the world. Moreover, Wertebaker’s description about Arab culture is contradictory. Here, Wertebaker through Saleh’s mouth laughs at the hypocrisy of western patriarchal society and admires Arab culture for its genderless bias. However, Wertebaker in *New Anatomies* also criticizes patriarchal Arabian culture for seeing women inferior to animals. Saleh expresses that “a mare is more valuable than a wife to us” (28). Saleh’s comparison between a mare and a wife is similar with Captain Soubiel’s. Captain Soubiel says to Isabelle, “You remind me of a delightfully unbroken young filly” (31). In other words, both Arabian and western cultures are based on patriarchy, which regards women as inferior to men and even to animals. Therefore, as far as the image of women in Arabian society is concerned, Wertebaker’s description is a little contradictory and inconsistent.

instrument, but why? A riddle . . . Brothers, if it was written that I must die . . . But so young, without understanding . . . no. I can't die in this silence. Don't let me die here. Don't let me disappear, without a trace. Who wants to do this to me?" (45). Isabelle escapes from western customs to search for her new identity, but now she once again falls into other customs that also confine her to the so-called femininity.

Although Isabelle is sentenced to stay away from the desert, she still finds a way back because as she claims, "I belong in the desert" (48). Her construction of identity is not only relevant to culture and religion, but also nation. Obviously, Isabelle's national identity is not the European empire; instead, she identifies with the subjugated Algeria. Isabelle is always seen as a foreigner wherever she goes, and so is her sister Natalie. Natalie's husband is a "pure" Genevan, so her hybrid blood bothers her parents-in-law. "Stéphane's family's a little upset I'm foreign. But they'll see, I'll make a wonderful home for him" (14), says Natalie. If Natalie is seen as a foreigner by Genevans, Isabelle is seen as a foreigner by all Europeans for the reason that she irritates Europeans and helps Arabians. The turn-of-the-20<sup>th</sup>-century North Africa was France's colony. The French government got rid of sheikhs, so many sheikhs became beggars, wandering in the street (27). Some Arabian people were misjudged, and then they were sent away to Corsica for labor (28). Revolutionaries gathered in monasteries, but they were monitored by the French government (30). Isabelle, as a European, criticizes French imperialism in Africa by commenting, "France could have helped this country so much, with medicine, with technical knowledge. But for some reason it has made the people here worse off than they already were. And soon the French will be so hated—" (47).

Isabelle identifies with Arab culture and life; especially the wide and free desert is her paradise. But now the paradise is under the control of France. This makes her identify more with Arab and scorn European more. As Bou Saadi asserts, "We were



born crossing the desert, but now we have to ask permission to go to certain places” (28). When French Captain Soubiel asks to see Isabelle’s papers to pass the desert, she cannot believe that the free and natural desert now is organized and dominated by human beings. Without papers, Isabelle is expelled from the desert. The other reason that Captain Soubiel expels her is because Isabelle’s cross-dressing offends him. He asserts that the duty of the French Army is to “rescue” ladies who need help (31), but Isabelle would rather “kiss the open mouth of a Maccabean corpse dead of the Asiatic cholera” (31) than be escorted by the French Army. For her, her national identity is Arab, and Europe or anything relevant to Europe becomes a symbol of scorn. For example, she blames at her chronicler, Séverine, saying, “Your face looks like a big hungry European cock. No offence: not your fault you look European” (6). Because of the experience in the desert, Isabelle detests the European colonialism in North Africa.

Isabelle’s gender identity through cross-dressing is highly relevant to her national identity. As suggested by Carlson, “[T]his unresolved quest for a reconceptualising of gender identity is not completely separable from Isabelle’s simultaneous interrogation of nation-based identity” (“Language and Identity” 140). Men are not the only subjects in a nation, and women’s everyday experience is not supposed to be excluded from the comprehension of a nation. As long as women’s personal experience is related to the national stuff, we may argue that Isabelle’s personal experience of traveling via cross-dressing echoes the feminist manifestation, “the personal is political” (Roth, “Engaging Cultural Translation” 160). Because of personal cross-dressing, Isabelle realizes how she is offensive to the French government. The French Judge states, “But no more gallivantings in that offensive masquerade” (49), and “the French government is not afraid of women” (49). Isabelle understands that not only does her national identity displease France, but her gender

identity also offends French people. She retorts, “It’s not even what I am doing, is it? It’s what I am. You hate what I am. But what harm am I doing? What?” (49). Because Isabelle is a woman, the manly behavior of traveling in the desert is not allowed. It is the gender (who she is) that bothers the French government, rather than the behavior (what she does). As suggested by Scott, gender is “a constitutive element of social relationships” (42) and “a primary way of signifying relationships of power” (42); in other words, gender is the basic and fundamental unit in society. If gender is challenged, the whole structure of society is shaken, too. Isabelle, under cover of a man, transgressing gender boundaries, realizes that gender is the primary and radical problem in culture, religion or nation. Hence, Isabelle’s cross-dressing becomes a subversive strategy to challenge the patriarchal society. She de-naturalizes gender through cross-dressing, arguing, “Nature defined by you [Judge], confined by you, farmed by you to make you fat” (49). Her condemnation of the sex/gender system manifests the injustice and hypocrisy of society to women.

This kind of women with “perverted nature” (49), like Isabelle, should be governed and even edited out in history for the reason that history inscribes only great and noble women. Isabelle’s cross-dressing agitates the French government, and then the French government commissions Séverine to record everything Isabelle does and every word she says. Colonel Lyautey explains to Séverine that “your pen strikes more terror in the heart of the French Government than the rattle of the Arab sabre” (51). His words echo with Lydia’s; indeed, gender revolution is even greater than the French Revolution (40). Especially, Isabelle’s cross-dressing is so subversive that she threatens the existing society. She is like “the young Arab warrior who wears bright colours so he’ll be seen first by the enemy” (51). After Isabelle dies in a flash flood in the desert, the French Judge decides to completely edit out this perverted woman, claiming, “Close the file. This person must be officially forgotten” (57).

*New Anatomies* records how Isabelle is silenced and erased from history, but it also describes how she struggles for her identities through cross-dressing. Séverine describes that those women who are cross-dressers or those “weird” women, such as lesbians like her, are “labelled as the weird mistakes of nature, the moment of God’s hesitation between Adam and Eve, anatomical convolutions” (39). Wertebaker sympathizes with those “weird” women; therefore, while she rewrites Isabelle’s story, she leaves an open ending. Séverine is always fond of Isabelle and Colonel Lyautey always helps Isabelle. After Séverine reports to the Judge that Isabelle is dead in a flood and after the Judge decides to close the file of Isabelle, Colonel Lyautey invites Séverine to see some journals, Séverine replies, “With pleasure” (57). They “walk off, arm in arm” (57). This suggests that maybe they will help Isabelle to escape from the French government and now that since Isabelle is officially dead, she is completely free. With the excellent skill of masquerade, Isabelle may successfully survive in the desert, which is where she rightly belongs.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the flood represents not only destruction or death but also reconstruction or rebirth. That Wertebaker dramatically re-writes the ending also shows that history is never the only truth and the women who disappear in history do not vanish.

### **B. Crossing the Spatial Division in *The Grace of Mary Traverse***

Wertebaker in *New Anatomies* highlights cross-dressing of Isabelle Eberhardt, a real historical woman who traveled to Africa alone at the turn-of-the-twentieth century. By using particular real historical figures, events, and situations, the dramatist gives us an alternative history of French colonization in North Africa

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<sup>9</sup> Depending on the reader’s interpretation, the ending of *New Anatomies* is various. David Ian Rabey considers the ending to be positive by asserting, “Finally she [Isabelle] escapes, under cover of a thunderstorm . . . and is officially presumed dead . . .” (522). In an unpublished interview with Susan Carlson, nevertheless, Wertebaker comments that the play ends with “a dark note” (“Language and Identity” 141), which implies Isabelle dies at the end.

through Isabelle's journey with masquerade; therefore, it is not difficult to define *New Anatomies* as a history play. *The Grace of Mary Traverse*, however, is problematic; especially Wertebaker refuses to see the play as a history play by saying,

Although the play is set in the eighteenth century, it is *not* a historical play. All the characters are my own invention and whenever I have used historical events such as the Gordon Riots I have taken great freedom with reported fact. I found the eighteenth century *a valid metaphor*, and I was concerned to free the people of the play from contemporary preconceptions. (*Mary Traverse* 66, emphasis added)

What the playwright emphasizes is that the play is a metaphor for our age, which functions as a criticism for our contemporary society rather than a re-estimation of the past. Wertebaker expresses that when the Brixton riots happened in 1981, where she was living, someone told her about the 1780 Gordon riots (Introduction, *Plays One* vii). Apparently, *The Grace of Mary Traverse* is the dramatist's reflection upon the Brixton riots as well as her comments on Thatcher's government,<sup>10</sup> but Wertebaker's refusal to consider the play as a historical play nonetheless arouses some disagreements.

Regarding Wertebaker's opinion, Ruby Cohn declares, "She is wrong" (192) by explaining, "Any period of history may be a 'valid metaphor' for our time" (194). In other words, one of the functions of history plays is a metaphor that indirectly judges the present and the past at the same time; accordingly, it is needless to emphasize that instead of being a history play, *The Grace of Mary Traverse* is a "valid metaphor" because the play itself is both a history play, which retells the Gordon riots

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<sup>10</sup> Because of Wertebaker's emphasis on *The Grace of Mary Traverse* as "a valid metaphor" to reflect her contemporary society, reading the play as Wertebaker's judgment on Thatcher's government, some critics draw a parallel between the Gordon riots and Thatcher's government. Martha Ritchie is one example in her "Almost 'Better to be Nobody': Feminist Subjectivity, the Thatcher Years, and Timberlake Wertebaker's *The Grace of Mary Traverse*."

in 1780, and a metaphor, which comments on the Brixton riots in 1980. Akin to Cohn's idea, D. Keith Peacock also asserts that instead of merely a depiction of the past, history drama always conveys the comments on the present and reflects the contemporary society; he states that "no matter how assiduous is the collection of historical facts or how objective the dramatist may set out to be, in historical drama the past will always in some measure be refracted by the present" (*Radical Stages* 11). Therefore, Peacock claims that "*all* history was to become *contemporary* history" (179 emphasis in original). As a result, Wertenbaker's interpretation of the Gordon riots in *The Grace of Mary Traverse* reveals her contemporary viewpoint on the past, and simultaneously the play fulfills the definition of history plays. It is without question a history play.

That *The Grace of Mary Traverse* is a history play could also be confirmed by the usage of historical materials in it. Richard Palmer from the perspective of how history drama utilizes historical materials, mentions that one type of history plays is, "Characters and situation are largely fictional, but the style of the play mimics that of a play from an earlier period," such as "Timberlake Wertenbaker's *The Grace of Mary Traverse*" (9). Palmer especially observes that the play has the style of eighteenth-century drama, such as characters' names reveal their personality (154-55).<sup>11</sup> Jay M. Gipson-King further explains that in addition to "allegorical character names" (225), the linear story, actions mainly on the stage, and several soliloquies fulfill the characteristics of the English drama in the eighteenth century (225), so that the audience and the reader immediately sense the style of the history play is in *The Grace of Mary Traverse*.

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<sup>11</sup> People's names in the play symbolize their personality or characteristics. Mary represents the virtue of Mother Mary, and her last name "Traverse" means transgression. Sophie is wisdom. Mrs. Temptwell indicates that she tempts people well. Mr. Manners implies that he is a person who emphasizes manners and order. Mr. Hardlong expresses his oversexed behavior. Lord Extrake means he is an extraordinarily rich and fashionable person with low moral standards.

All in all, despite the dramatist's opinion, to categorize *The Grace of Mary Traverse* as a history play, no matter from the perspective of form or content, is suitable and acceptable. In this history play, Wertebaker retells the Gordon riots through the inclusion of a fictional character, Mary Traverse. Like Isabelle in *New Anatomies*, who transgresses the social conventions of femininity, Mary, as her last name suggests, "traverses" gender, class and sexual boundaries. Nevertheless, unlike Isabelle, who dresses herself as a man and travels to Africa alone, Mary wanders in the city of London, where "good women" are not supposed to go in the eighteenth century, with her housekeeper Mrs. Temptwell. In the name of searching for knowledge, Mary leaves home, degrades herself by living on the streets, works as a prostitute, and then becomes the leader of the Gordon riots. Wertebaker explains that the causes of the Gordon riots are not merely politics or religion, but, with the inclusion of a female protagonist, the issue of gender becomes one of the reasons. Thus, understanding political events, such as the Gordon riots, without considering gender is not complete. As a consequence, the inclusion of the gender issue changes our perception of history.

Gayle Rubin's sex/gender system is "the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity" (159). "A full-bodied analysis of women in a single society, or throughout history, must take *everything* into account" (209), says Rubin, "Equally important, economic and political analyses are incomplete if they do not consider women, marriage and sexuality" (209-10). Since politics, religions, and riots are all "productions of human activity," the sex/gender system cannot be comprehended in isolation and requires the others. Obviously, with the same point of view, Wertebaker in this play stresses the gender issue in the political riots, and examines the inter-relationships between politics and gender. Offering us an alternative history different from the male-centered and



politics-centered history, the dramatist rewrites the historical event from the perspective of gender and supplements the understanding of the political riots with the inclusion of women. Nevertheless, reading politics from the gender point of view is particularly difficult owing to two reasons. Joan Scott claims, “First, the territory is virtually uncharted, since gender has been seen as antithetical to the real business of politics. Second, political history—still the dominant mode of historical inquiry—has been the stronghold of resistance to the inclusion of material or even questions about women and gender” (*Gender* 46). Since the role of gender in politics is a difficult issue, the play becomes more special because Wertenbaker challenges and tackles this hard theme. In what follows I assert that Mary Traverse, restricted within femininity, is excluded from the political realm because of the conventional spatial division that confines women to the house, but she crosses the boundary of the spatial division back and forth to redefine gender identification during the period of the historical event of the Gordon riots.

### **1. The Spatial Division Confining Women to the Private Space**

The reason of women’s political exclusion has been an important topic for feminists. From Plato, philosophers believed that men were more rational so that they were suitable for politics and public life. In contrast, women were seen as irrational beings so they belonged to private home (Freedman 26). As a consequence, “the division between public and private” (26) becomes the main reason that women are excluded from the political realm; furthermore, these separate spheres also reveal that space is gendered and categorized into two opposite parts: “the masculine public sphere of politics and the marketplace, and the feminine private sphere of home and family life” (Lieske 119). This spatial segregation excludes women from political areas and confines them to home; more importantly, it is “a universal occurrence”

(119). Some feminists observe that “the extent to which women are subordinated in a given society is directly related to the degree to which the domestic and public realms are separated” (Wells 366). In other words, the more strictly separate spheres are, the more sexist that society is.

Although the spatial division causes women’s inferior status, the boundary between the public and the private is still controversial. Many critics offer different boundaries from different perspectives to draw the distinction.<sup>12</sup> Alison Jaggar provides a general and commonly acceptable border, explaining, “Wherever the distinction has existed, the private realm has always included sexuality and procreation, has always been viewed as more ‘natural’ and therefore less ‘human’ than the public realm, and has always been viewed as the realm of women” (127-28). While the private space is related to nature and emotion, the public space is associated with culture and artificiality. Moreover, what politics concerns is justice, freedom, collectivity, and citizenship, which are seen as rational, impersonal, and cultural issues that connect or organize different people objectively (Jaggar 254). Hence, space is not only masculinized or feminized, but it is also split into two parts: the public space symbolizes culture while the private space nature. In addition, for feminists, in order to release women from the house, Sheller and Urry claim that “everything outside the household” is the public, which is “including economic institutions such as the workplace or corporations, and political institutions of the state and public spaces” (112). Therefore, it is for sure that men are aligned with public and politics

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<sup>12</sup> “In the context of liberalism,” Alison Jaggar infers that the distinction of the two spheres is that “those aspects of life that may legitimately be regulated by the state constitute the public realm; the private realm is those aspects of life where the state has no legitimate authority to intervene” (34). However, Jaggar comments that this distinction is still “a chronic problem for all liberal philosophers” (144). In order to draw a line between the public sphere and the private sphere, Lawrence E. Klein distinguishes several different public spheres, including the magisterial public sphere, the economic public sphere, and associative public sphere (103-05). Besides, Mimi Sheller and John Urry conclude four approaches to distinguish the two spheres: the liberal-economistic model, the republican virtue mode, the sociability or dramaturgic approach, and feminist critiques (108-13). In short, the boundary between the public and the private spheres is multiple.

and women with private and home. History, however, only records things which happened in the public space, especially political events, so women are “naturally” excluded from history. The spatial distinction, hence, becomes the main reason why women disappear in history, particularly in the political realm.

## 2. Mary in the House

Spatial segregation not only confines women in the house, but what is worse is that it further limits women to gaining knowledge. As suggested by Daphne Spain, “In homes, schools, and workplaces, women and men are often separated in ways that sustain gender stratification by reducing women’s access to socially valued knowledge” (137). What she means is that while women stay in the house, they learn household knowledge, instead of “socially valued knowledge.” As a result, women do not have enough knowledge to survive in society, so that they are willing to stay at home. This vicious circle confines women’s behavior as well as their knowledge. Reading the beginning of *The Grace of Mary Traverse* from this perspective, we find that Mary is coached by her father, Giles Traverse, at home for the art of conversation because “a young woman must make the other person say interesting things” (*Mary Traverse* 68), as Giles suggests. Mary is limited to certain knowledge in a certain place.

Mary’s practice of the art of conversation in a drawing room through a form of monologue starts the play while her father stands behind her, and her speech about nature is an irony to satirize the unnatural gender norms. “Nature” (67) is the first word of the play and the topic on which Mary chooses to practice her conversational skill. Mary’s femininity expressed through the art of conversation is socially and culturally constructed, but it is seen as “natural” in the patriarchal society. Besides, she has trained her unnatural femininity of conversational art in a drawing room,

which is regarded as a private and natural space. The spatial division generates a dichotomy: public space/men/politics/culture and private space/women/home/nature, so a drawing room symbolizes the natural area compared with the cultural public space. Unable to realize the socially constructed spatial segregation, Mary practices her skill of conversation on the topic of nature in order to fulfill the femininity expected by patriarchy, so the irony comes from the unnatural skill of conversational art about nature in the natural space that the man-made spatial division categorizes.

While Giles teaches Mary the art of conversation, he symbolically puts Mary into the sex/gender system; in other words, Giles transforms Mary's biological female sex into a social and gendered woman, and the house provides him a good place to guide Mary into this system. Giles teaches Mary not only conversations but also feminine behavior. As what he says, a good woman should not express "desire" but make conversation (68); a good woman should not talk about "reason" because reason makes women ambitious (69); a good woman is not allowed to study "politics" because it is useless (69). Besides, because feebleness is a good way to show a woman's femininity and a good chance to display a man's masculinity, Giles wants Mary to practice "fainting" in order to create chances to let men save her (68). Moreover, the ideology of spatial division prohibits the appearance of good women in the public space (Wolff 35), but for Giles, Mary is even forbidden to look out of window to see the world outside. He proposes, "Why gape out of the window when I've given you so much to see in the house?" (69). When Mary asks him to allow her to leave the house, Giles refuses, asserting that Mary is his "brightest adornment" (70). By implication, Mary is his property and is supposed to be collected and stored in his house.

In order to fit in the femininity that society expects her to have, Mary practices her "feminine walk" even without the gaze of Giles, who is a representative figure of

patriarchy in the play. In Act One, Scene Two, she walks carefully and gently on the carpet and stops occasionally to see if she leaves any trace. Mary talks to herself,

I've done it. See the invisible passage of an amiable woman [. . .] It was the dolls who gave me my first lesson. No well-made doll, silk-limbed, satin-clothes, leaves an imprint. As a child I lay still and believed their weightless mine [. . .] Air. You must become like air. Weightless. Still. Invisible. Learn to drop a fan and wait [. . .] Later, dare to walk, but leave no trace. Now my presence will be as pleasing as my step, leaving no memory [. . .] I may sometimes be a little bored, but my manners are excellent. (*Mary Traverse* 71)

Mary practices walking without imprints. She is not only coached by her father but also her dolls, which are ideal female figures for women. Like dolls, “an amiable woman” is supposed to be like air, weightless, still, and invisible. Ann Wilson well explains that Mary’s walking without trace on the carpet symbolizes women’s invisible trace in history (“Forgiving History” 148). Demanded by society, Mary as well as other women is trained for good manners in order to become an adornment in her father’s or her future husband’s house, and then she will be further invisible in history.

Wertenbaker in the play reveals that the sexist space segregation confines all so-called good women to the house and to some feminine behavior. More importantly, she, through describing Mary’s mother, emphasizes that not only the generation of Mary is restricted within this norm, but also the generation of her mother and all generations of women to some extent are confined, too. Mrs. Temptwell tells Mary that her mother makes Mary’s dream come true; that is, Mary’s mother fulfills Mary’s dream to become air, weightless, and invisible. When Mary expresses that she tries not to breathe to become air, Mrs. Temptwell answers that her mother is so good at

not breathing because she died. “She went in and out of rooms with no one knowing she’d been there. She was so quiet, your mother, it took the master a week to notice she was dead. But she looked ever so beautiful in her coffin and he couldn’t stop looking at her. Death suits women. You’d look lovely in a coffin, Miss Mary” (73), states Mrs. Temptwell. Death is usually romanticized by men to admire women’s beauty and “death is the ultimate realisation of the feminine ideal of passivity” (Wilson, “Forgiving History” 148). Although Mary is not dead like her mother is, she is dead to some extent. As what Mrs. Temptwell observes, “[S]ome women don’t even have to die, they look dead already” (*Mary Traverse* 73). Also, Wilson states that Mary is “[f]orced into a metaphoric death by her father” (“Forgiving History” 148). Both the mother and the daughter suffer from the convention of femininity which is expressed by the restriction on the private space.

Mary internalizes her father’s words, and even without Giles’s appearance. However, after Mrs. Temptwell tells her a story of a fourteen-year-old girl going outside and her mother’s failed plan of leaving the house, the public space arouses her curiosity. Mary starts to fantasize the outside world. She knows that going outside on foot hurts a good woman’s “reputation” (*Mary Traverse* 74), but she believes that going outside will improve her conversation. Hence, in the name of searching for knowledge to improve the art of conversation, Mary asks Mrs. Temptwell to go to the streets in London with her. “I’ll glitter with knowledge” (74), Mary declares.

### 3. Mary in the City

Houses restrict not only women’s physical action but also their knowledge. Spain distinguishes “feminine knowledge” from “masculine knowledge” based on the spatial segregation. As she points out, “The ‘masculine knowledge’ conveyed in schools and workplaces is typically granted higher status than the ‘feminine



knowledge' associated with the dwelling" (140). The masculine knowledge is seen superior because it is much more related to "socially valued knowledge" (137). What Mary learns at home is "feminine knowledge," but she is no longer satisfied with it. She decides to leave the private space and transgresses the boundary into the public space: the streets in the big city of London.<sup>13</sup> This part first proposes that while the public space is described as a corrupt place, where a good woman loses her reputation and even her virginity, women are coerced in the house and unable to learn masculine knowledge, so moving to the public sphere is the first step for Mary to gain political equality with men and to be involved in the political realm.

In order to threaten women away, the public space, such as the city of London in the play, is usually represented as a polluted place. Mary's first experience in the public space is not good, especially because she is almost raped. Mary, an upper-class woman, wanders in the city like a tourist. When she sees an old ugly woman, she naively wishes her to come home and be a beautiful peasant. When she sees the dirty and nasty streets in London, she wants to go home because she concludes, "There's nothing here to improve my conversation" (*Mary Traverse* 77). On her way, she meets Lord Gordon, a person who never draws anyone's attention. In order to be noticed, the first way he expresses his masculinity is "politics" (75). He plans to give a speech in the House of Parliament on severe punishment of criminals, but when stealing a handkerchief is sentenced to death, Gordon has to think another way to show his manly power. Unable to actualize political power, his manhood is in crisis, and he becomes desperate to display virility. He cries, "They must notice me, if only because I'm a lord. Oh God, please make me noticed, just once. Please show me the way" (75).

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<sup>13</sup> The most famous character who leaves the private space with courage is Nora Helmer in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879). Both Nora and Mary are treated as dolls and men's property, their awakening is both leaving the house. However, Ibsen does not depict what happens to Nora after she leaves home; in contrast, Wertebaker in *The Grace of Mary Traverse* takes the major portion of Mary's experience in the public sphere.

He is eager to gain power and attention, and that is the reason why he is angry that Mary does not notice him when she passes him by. Scaring Mary in order to obtain masculinity, Gordon appears in the play as a comic figure. As he finds that women are frightened by his strength, he realizes that the most direct and immediate way to retain his manhood is rape.

Conventionally, as long as women stay at home, they are safe from being raped, so the fear of being raped in the public space compels women to be in the private space more. Also, the fear of being raped is a fear of men's power. Rape is a power through sexuality, and by consciously controlling and violating women's body, men get power. In addition, this power is based on women's fear. Susan Brownmiller asserts that rape "is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear" (15). What she means is that rape is always conscious and the purpose is to make women scared of men's power. Owing to this fear, men's masculinity is established and ensured. Brownmiller further claims, "His forcible entry into her body, despite her physical protestations and struggle, became the vehicle of his victorious conquest over her being, the ultimate test of his superior strength, the triumph of his *manhood*" (14 emphasis added). Therefore, when Mary is scared by Gordon's strength, she cries out "Help" (78). He replies, "This is the word" (79). Gordon successfully makes Mary in a state of fear, which is both the fear of being raped in the city and the fear of men's power.

The threat of rape in the public place confines women to the house, but in the name of looking for knowledge, Mary insists on staying in the city. Sexist men, like Giles, restrict women in the house and caution women to stay away from the public space and men's gaze. If a woman does not listen to their warning and insists on going to the public sphere, she is supposed to take the whole responsibility for being raped by men. Hence, this caution makes women live in a life of fear (Brownmiller 398),

and it restricts women in the private space more. Gordon's rape signifies the danger in the public space, but because Mary is not successfully raped by Gordon at the end, she decides to keep searching for knowledge away from her safe home in the so-called corrupt public place.

Because of the randomness of rape in the public space, the fear of being raped for women becomes stronger. Sophie, instead of Mary, is raped by Gordon. She, a waif, wandering on the street, looking for her aunt, sees Mary in danger. She blames Gordon's behavior, but unfortunately, Gordon attacks her instead. Sophie becomes Mary's surrogate. Without sympathy, Mary naively stands beside, looking at how Gordon rapes Sophie. Barbara Mehrhof and Pamela Kearon clearly explain the "indiscrimination" of rape in the public space by claiming:

Rape is a punishment without crime or guilt—at least not subjective guilt.

It is punishment, rather, for the *objective* crime of femaleness. That is why it is indiscriminate. It is primarily a lesson for the whole class of women—a strange lesson, in that it does not teach a form of behavior which will save women from it. *Rape teaches instead the objective, innate, and unchanging subordination of women relative to men.* (qtd. in Jaggar 262, emphasis in original)

By the same token, since Gordon's purpose is to gain his masculinity through violating women's body, it does not matter if the victim is Sophie or Mary. This randomness explains why Gordon rapes Sophie instead of Mary, and also reveals that rape makes all women in a state of fear for their bad behavior of showing themselves in the public places no matter who they are.

When women are scared under the threat of rape in the public space, men gain more power relatively. In this way, women are restricted within houses more intensively while men are freer to control women. Gordon gets power through rape,

announcing, “My strength rises. I can’t contain myself” (*Mary Traverse* 79). When Mr. Manners sees Gordon raping Sophie, he does not do any justice because it is Sophie’s fault to show herself in the public place.

Mr. Manners: Have I disturbed you?

Lord Gordon: Not at all. I’m finished.

Mr. Manners: Who are these women?

Lord Gordon: Just women. What shall we do tonight? I feel exceptionally lively. (80)

Under the value of patriarchy, Sophie, a victim, is supposed to take the responsibility of being raped, so Mr. Manners does not care about her at all. After Gordon has obtained power through scaring Mary and raping Sophie, he further declares, “My fortune has turned” (81), and “I’m a different man” (81). When Mr. Manners asks him why, he responds, “Power” (81). His confidence in himself after raping is a sharp contrast with his doubting manhood earlier. Gordon successfully gains power by violating and threatening women.

Wertenbaker in the play describes the ambivalent attitudes toward rape in western culture. While rape is represented as a way to threaten women away from the public space, rape is also romanticized as a love story between male gods and female mortals. Mary’s fantasy toward rape expresses the ambivalence of rape. Mary, escaping from Gordon’s rape, watches Sophie’s rape beside her, but she does not help her because she romanticizes rape. “Rape? What the Greek gods did? Will he [Lord Gordon] turn himself into a swan, a bull, a shower of golden rain? Is he a god?”(81), Mary wonders. Brownmiller criticizes that western society threatens women by rape, but ironically it also romanticizes rape in mythology. She scrutinizes rapes in Greek mythology, and observes that the male gods “raped with zest, trickery and frequency. Yet on the other hand, the goddesses and mortal women who were victims to these

rapes [. . .] rarely suffered serious consequences beyond getting pregnant and bearing a child, which served to move the story line forward” (283). All the rapists are gods; all the victims are safe, although they might get pregnant; all rapes move the story line to go on. In this way, Greek myths rationalize god’s rapes and beautify the brutal rapes. Naïve Mary, looking at Gordon’s rape with curiosity, expects him to turn into a beautiful creature because mythology in books informs her that rape is romantic. Nevertheless, when she sees Gordon threatening Sophie with a sword and the whole violent process of rape, she realizes, “It’s not like the books” (*Mary Traverse* 80). Her realization suggests that she sees through the controversy of ambivalent attitude toward rape in the male-dominated society. Rape is violence, not romance.

In the journey of Mary’s wandering in London, she encounters the threat of rape and also some limitations of the spatial segregation to women, such as women cannot enter some places which belong to men only. A waiter blocks Mary from entering a coffee house. As Janet Wolff remarks, “The ‘public’ person of the eighteenth century and earlier, whose demise is charted, and who passed the time in coffee-houses, paraded in the streets and at the theatre, and addressed strangers freely in public places, was clearly male” (39-40). Mary is accordingly not allowed to enter a coffee house for the reason that the public sphere belongs to men only. The waiter lets her see the inside of the coffee house through the window, but Mary replies, “I’ve spent my life looking through window panes. I want to face them” (*Mary Traverse* 82). Sick of the sexist world, Mary reveals her eagerness to be a man, and Mrs. Temptwell, as her name suggests, tempts Mary well by claiming, “You could be like men if you wanted to. But there’s a price” (83). Mrs. Temptwell promises to arrange different experiences for Mary as long as she never goes home. Mary, in the name of seeing the real world, accepts her “Faustian pact” (Introduction, *Plays One* vii).

The pact in the play represents that Mary challenges the convention of the

spatial division on purpose by crossing over the boundary of the private space in order to learn masculine knowledge. She learns a lot of things that she could never know as a so-called refined woman earlier. The first thing Mary experiences the real world is her sexual initiation. Like Gordon, who gains power through sexuality, Mary also obtains power by prostituting a gigolo, Mr. Hardlong, expressing, “At first, power. I am the flesh’s alchemist” (*Mary Traverse* 90). After experiencing buying sex as a man, Mary is still hungry for knowledge so she learns how to gamble, play cards, and compete at cock-fighting, which are all men’s activities in her time. It is only when Mary enters the men’s public places that she could do those things.

Moreover, Mary is eager to experience everything men do at the expense of everything. When she loses all her money on a running race of two old women, Mrs. Temptwell asks her to cry in order to gain men’s sympathy. She refuses by stating, “What? Turn female now?” (109). She enjoys the privilege that only men have and rejects to be a woman who is confined to the house and restricted in the concept of the idealized femininity, like she was in the house before. Furthermore, not only is she satisfied with heterosexuality with Mr. Hardlong, but Mary also pays money for buying a woman’s sex service, just like men do. By inviting men to watch Sophie’s sexual service for her, she declares that the private part of the female body which is usually considered as unknown darkness in fact is not as what men imagine.

What is it, gentlemen, you turn away, you feel disgust? Why don’t you look and see what it’s like? When you talk of sulphurous pits, deadly darkness, it’s your own imagination you see. Look. It’s solid, rich, gently shaped, fully coloured. The blood flows there on the way to the heart. It answers tenderness with tenderness, there is no gaping void here, only soft bumps, corners, cool convexities. (106)

Mary’s sexual experiences include heterosexuality and homosexuality; more

shockingly, she then becomes a prostitute and almost has incest with her father. Leaving her home, Mary is “polluted” by the “corrupt” public space.

In order to gain more knowledge in the city of London, Mary needs money to experience being a man. But since what she had learnt was feminine knowledge that could not help her to survive in society, such as the art of conversation and feminine walk, Mary now in the city cannot find a proper job but to be a prostitute. Without a financial support and without “socially valued knowledge” (Spain 137), she prostitutes her body for money. Esther Beth Sullivan suggests that Mary “soon discovers, though, that she is constantly hailed as ‘Woman’ and routed into the only and oldest profession that patriarchy supports for women—sex trade” (146). In fact, while Mary decides to leave home forever, she has been seen as a prostitute already by society. In a society with a strict division of the public and private spheres, the women in public places are regarded as prostitutes, especially when prostitution is seen as a moral disease. Jeffrey Weeks comments, “The double standard of morality relied upon this separation between the public and the private. The private was the nest of domestic virtues: the public was the arena of prostitution, of vice on the streets” (81). Therefore, home is a place for refined women whereas the streets are for prostitutes who have a moral disease. Any educated woman would not appear in the public, and women who appear in public places are prostitutes.

In the public sphere, prostitution is not only a moral issue but also a hygienic problem. According to Weeks’s survey, since the 1690s, prostitution has become a serious moral issue, and London even established the Society for the Reformation of Manners at that time in order to keep prostitution under moral control (84). Because people presume that prostitution is a moral degradation, prostitutes become “an object of pity” (Walkowitz 92). For example, Robert, one of Mary’s card partners, plans to build a school for women for the reason that he wants to “help all those lost girls find



virtue and religion again” (*Mary Traverse* 95). On the other hand, prostitutes are also regarded as “a dangerous source of contagion” (Walkowitz 92). Prostitution is a contagion, and it infects all refined good women. Interpreting Mary from this perspective, it is obvious that Mary is not only a metaphorical contagion but also a physical disease. She, without a financial support from her father, working the oldest job for women, wandering in the streets, is no longer beautiful. She has “a rounded stomach under dirty clothes” (*Mary Traverse* 111). She curses, “Damn this leech in my stomach, sucking at my blood, determined to wriggle into life” (112). Entering the corrupt public place as the city of London, Mary is regarded as both morally and physically corrupt.

Mary’s transgression of the spatial division by being a prostitute is radical because prostitution is an idea of transgression of sex from the private sex to the public bargain in the city. From its Latin etymology, prostitution means “to set or place (*statuere*) in public (*pro*)” (Lobanov-Rostovsky 320); in other words, it means women (who are set) in public. As a consequence, prostitutes are considered dangerous as they transgress the boundary of the public and the private. Sex is supposed to be private and to belong to the familial domain. However, since sex is brought to the public by prostitutes, the spatial distinction is blurred; by implication, the order of the spatial division is destroyed by them. Nevertheless, men in *The Grace of Mary Traverse* are contradictory to those dangerous public women. Some see them “an object of pity,” some “a dangerous source of contagion,” but most men treat them like a commodity. Mr. Hardlong buys Sophie in order to serve his “luxury” (93); Giles buys any woman as long as she has “not a personality” (115); Lord Exrake wants to exchange stakes for Mary’s fleshly body while they gamble (96); Locksmith believes that as long as he can pay, he has “a right to that whore” (132). No matter what their attitudes are, none of them want to have any further connection with public women.

Giles's comment on prostitutes illustrates that people believe that a prostitute has no relative, especially no father, but Mary exposes men's prejudice against women. When Mary reveals her identity to her customer, who is her father, Giles surprisingly replies, "You're a whore" (117). Mary criticizes men's contradictory attitudes to women because they confine women to the house with their fatherhood and sexism, but they also buy women in the public. She argues,

Is a daughter not a daughter when she's a whore? Or can she not be your daughter? Which words are at war here: whore, daughter, my? I am a daughter, but not yours, I am your whore but not your daughter. You dismiss the 'my' with such ease, you make fatherhood an act of grace, and honour I must buy with my graces, which you withdraw as soon as I disgrace you. (117)

In other words, women in the house have fathers but as long as they become public women, they are whores without fathers. Crossing over the private space, Mary learns that women are powerless and inferior, especially when they do not have any survival skill. She, however, is brave to criticize the unfair gender relations between the sexes.

Through the character of Mary, Wertebaker neither agrees with prostitution nor justifies prostitutes; rather, what she criticizes is men's patriarchal attitude toward women in the private and the public places. Wertebaker attacks society for offering limited job opportunities for women because they are trained only for "feminine knowledge," which is not socially valued, such as the art of conversation and feminine walk in Mary's case.<sup>14</sup> Naively, Mary believes that she can gain knowledge

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<sup>14</sup> Christine Overall observes that the issue of prostitution has been rarely discussed because too many diverse opinions separate feminists themselves (706). For example, Gayle Rubin thinks prostitution is "innocuous" (707) while Susan Cole and Andrea Dworkin believe it is an institution that solidifies patriarchy (707). Especially, when Mary is willing to choose this job (in her defense, she wants to learn), prostitution becomes more problematic for the reason that Mary, or any woman, has the right to their body. However, in my analysis, Mary obviously lacks what Spain calls "socially valued knowledge," her "feminine knowledge" limits her to find other jobs, except prostitution. From this

through experiencing everything herself. As a result, when Giles judges her to work as a prostitute, she replies, “I learn. I do not whore” (119). Blackmailing her father, Mary gets enough money to quit the job of prostituting. Later on, this experience becomes Mary’s main argument to fight against the government for the liberty of all human beings. She hopes in her new world where “there will be no whores, there won’t have to be” (132) because “[n]o one has the right to pleasure at the cost of another’s pain. In the new world, everyone will have their natural, just, share of pleasure” (133), Mary believes.

As suggested by Jane Freedman, the division between the public and the private excludes women from politics (26). Therefore, in order to gain political equality with men and also to be included in history, the first step for women is to move into the public sphere. Mary traverses the spatial boundary and after she suffers a lot from the patriarchal public world, including the threat of rape and being a prostitute, she then decides to be involved in the political arena. Sophie introduces Mary to her lover Jack, who introduces Mary to his new world, where there is freedom, equality, justice and right, instead of fear and obedience (*Mary Traverse* 129). Like Jack who longs for freedom, Mary decides to help Jack to articulate their statements to parliamentarians. She emphasizes, “I understand what it is to need freedom. I thought it was something only I wanted, but now I know it is a longing in every human heart. I have watched freedom, beautiful freedom, hunted from every street and I know what it is to bang at the doors of tyranny” (129-30). Mary uses her past experience of being confined to the house to persuade Jack that she understands people’s need of freedom. More importantly, Mary does not assert for herself or women only, but she speaks for all

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perspective, Wertenbaker does not reveal her attitude to agree or disagree with prostitution, but she does criticize the restriction of women within the private sphere, which reduces their choices to find a proper job in society. Furthermore, when Gordon expresses that he does not want to marry a woman he knows (86), Wertenbaker also asks another question: what difference is there between prostitution and marriage when husband and wife do not know who each other is.

human beings, claiming, “I know the humiliation of being denied equality, Jack, and that it is a dignity due to all, men and women, rich and poor” (130).<sup>15</sup>

Even though Mary realizes the importance of the political right for the powerless, including women and working-class people, she, as a woman, cannot even enter the House of Parliament, not to mention speak for the powerless. Mary is blocked from entering the House, just like she cannot enter a coffee house. The guard warns her that there are “no petticoats in the House of Parliament” (131). The strict spatial distinction excludes Mary from the House, which symbolizes politics, government and the masculine public space. Scott well explains the importance of exclusion of women from politics for men:

High politics itself is a gendered concept, for it establishes its crucial importance and public power, the reasons for and the fact of its highest authority, precisely in its exclusion of women from its work. Gender is one of the recurrent references by which political power has been conceived, legitimated, and criticized. It refers to but also establishes the meaning of the male/female opposition [. . .] the binary opposition and the social process of gender relationships both become part of the meaning of power itself; to question or alter any aspect threatens the entire system. (*Gender* 48-49)

What Scott means is that the hierarchical relation between superior men and inferior women solidifies men’s privilege in politics; in other words, it is important to confine

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<sup>15</sup> In an interview, Wertenbaker is asked why if a male writer writes about a relationship, it is believed to be connected with universal significance, but if a female writer writes a relationship, it is only seen as a personal and feminist relation. Wertenbaker replies that one of critics of *The Grace of Mary Travers* complains of Mary’s feminist statements, but in fact, she quotes from Thomas Paine, one of the founding fathers of the United States, to replace Mary’s words. Wertenbaker expresses, “Now, the quotes Mary was using were directly from Tom Paine, but the fact that a woman was saying that, and I think unconsciously the fact that I was a woman playwright, turned it all into something feminist. It was feminist, but it was the eighteenth century and it was Tom Paine” (“Interview,” *Rage and Reason* 139). Mary’s speech is both for women and men.

women to the house in order to maintain politics only for men, and in this way politics confirms itself through this spatial distinction. The spatial division then becomes a gender issue involved in a power relation from Scott's perspective. In light of Scott's viewpoint, Mary's traverse indeed challenges a power relation, especially a political power relation.

In the play, Wertebaker examines if a woman gains power, whether she abuses power. With the help from Mr. Manners, Mary becomes a female leader of the working-class people in the Gordon riots. Also, because of Mr. Manners's intrigue, the riots fail. Both Mary and Jack demand liberty for all human beings, but Mr. Manners manipulates their protest against classism into a protest against the Catholic Church. The slogan of the riots then changes from "Liberty" to "No Popery." Without political experience, Mary, Jack, Sophie, and even Gordon all fall into Mr. Manners's trick. The mob starts from Parliament to Sardinian, the Bavarian embassy, Holborn, and then the Bank of England, and Mary is getting more and more worried about the riots as the mob attacks and fires everything in its way. Sophie loses her mind, laughing hysterically; Mrs. Temptwell piles the bones of dead people. Dark and full of bad smell, everywhere is burning. A big part of London is demolished. Mr. Manners stands beside the riots without doing anything to help until the mob attacks the Bank, which obviously stores the fortunes of many aristocrats, including his. He has to stop the mob now because they threaten his wealth. Mr. Manners then sends soldiers to shoot the mob in spite of Mary's begging.

The Gordon riots led by Mary, a woman, fail. She abuses her power to create a mob while Mr. Manners abuses his power to manipulate Mary's plan. "There is nothing so cleansing as massive death, Mary. People return with relief to their private little pains and stop barking at the future. It's what they want. This will last forty years at least, forty years of rule and order" (150), announces Mr. Manners. The riots

become Mr. Manners's plan to ensure the order of society. He is the one who orchestrates the riots against the Catholic Church, but he is also the one who prevents any change to the social order. As he states, "Real power prefers to remain invisible" (122). Hiding his political purpose behind Mary and Jack, he is good at manipulating the crowd. He asserts, "The mob can be good or the mob can be bad [. . .] it depends on whether they do what you want them to do" (122). Mr. Manners, as his name implies, looks for any way to make sure that "whatever happens, nothing must change" (124).

Wertenbaker reviews the history of the Gordon riots from her new perspective through a fictional female character in order to impart a teaching to us: reading history from the relationship between gender and politics provides us an alternative recognition of history, in which the recourses of the political events come from the division of space and the oppression of women, rather than simply conflicts between parties, politicians, and religions. As suggested by Scott, gender is "a useful category of historical analysis." Wertenbaker displays another possible reason for a historical event. More crucially, by creating a female leader, the dramatist does not idealize that a society led by a woman must be better than by a man; instead, a belief that women's usage of power is different from men's is exactly what Wertenbaker objects to. *The Grace of Mary Traverse* answers Phyllis Chesler and Emily Jane Goodman's question:

Or, is there some possibility that once in power, women would overcome the established economic and social system and would be more humanist? [. . .] Do women lust for power? Do they really resist the pressure of ambition? [. . .] Do women possess greater morals, more substantial values than men, or are they just as conditioned to relate to short range personal goals, or do they just lack information? (qtd. in hooks, *Feminist*

*Theory 84)*

The ending of the Gordon riots in *The Grace of Mary Traverse* answers their question: women are not born to have greater morals to avoid the lust for and the abuse of power.

bell hooks claims, “Women, though assigned different roles to play in society based on sex, are not taught a different value system” (*Feminist Theory* 85). For the same reason, Mary’s idea of power is not much different from Mr. Manners’s, Gordon’s, or Giles’s, since they all have the same eighteenth-century background and are cultivated by the same value system. Like Mr. Manners who manipulates the crowd to gain his political goal, Gordon who attempts to attract people’s attention by joining political events, and Giles who announces Mary’s death in order to enter the Cabinet, Mary expects a new world to be ruled by herself. She realizes that when men dream about a new world, “they think about the country, and then they rule the country” (*Mary Traverse* 129). Accordingly, she and Jack expect a new world that will “be a world ruled by us, for our delight, a world of hope for all” (130). In the name of a better world, Mary asserts that in her new world, “power” and “good” will be “identical” (131). In the riots, she leads the mob to attack the government and asks them to perform her command. “Drunk” with what she has done (146), Mary says, “I feel so powerful I can’t think any more” (147). Intoxicated by power, Mary loses a clear mind, and her behavior of abusing power to gain her political goal is not so much different from men’s.

Mary’s quest for knowledge represents that a woman who crosses the boundary of the private sphere into the public sphere has a chance to articulate and fulfill her political statement. In the public domain, Mary learns “socially valued knowledge” as well as “masculine knowledge”; however, the knowledge also reveals that she shares the same value with men. bell hooks observes, “Participants in feminist movement



acted in accord with sexist mystification of women's experience by simply accepting that women are different from men; think and act differently; conceptualize power differently; and therefore have an inherently different value system. It simply is not so" (*Feminist Theory* 86). Wertenbaker, in an interview, also expresses the same idea, remarking, "I was getting annoyed with a lot of the idealism that when women have power the whole world will change" ("Interview," *Rage and Reason* 140) because "women are not necessarily better by nature" (141). *The Grace of Mary Travers* is a play that not only attacks the oppression of women by patriarchy, but it also inspires us to rethink of power exercised by women.

"Women are not necessarily better by nature"; by implication, women, like men, would also abuse power and also have an inclination to cause violence, riots, and wars. bell hooks criticizes some feminists' naïve thinking that women are better and more peaceful than men by nature. If people believe women would neither abuse power nor act violently, they fall into the fallacy of biological determinism. hooks confirms, "So far feminist movement has primarily focused on male violence and as a consequence lends credibility to sexist stereotypes that suggest men are violent, women are not; men are abusers, women are victims" (*Feminist Theory* 118). Mary organizes the riots, commands the mob, and later even tries to kill her little daughter. All of these examples show that women and men are not different by nature, but their differences are created and cultivated by the sex/gender system.

Despite the failure of the Gordon riots, Mary, compared with other women in the same century, is successful in the public political domain; nonetheless, her success is dangerous for the reason that she does not care about other women, including Sophie, Mrs. Temptwell, and Old Woman. As suggested by hooks, classism is one of the reasons that separate women (*Feminist Theory* 61). Mary, as an upper-class woman, maintains her aristocratic status to command other women all the time.

Sophie serves her, but she is even treated as “the currency” (Wilson, “Forgiving History” 151) to pay for Mr. Hardlong’s sexual service for Mary. Mrs. Temptwell is always her servant no matter whether Mary is at home or in the public. She ferociously beats Old Woman because she loses the running race. Mary’s success is personal and her achievement does not mean that she improves the equality between all women and men. “These women” like Mary, hooks states, “need to know their success has little impact on the social status of women collectively and does not lessen the severity of sexist oppression or eliminate male domination” (*Feminist Theory* 92). She further claims that when a personal success simultaneously improves the collective, the achievement counts as a real success; otherwise, it is simply narcissistic and dangerous for other people (92). In spite of the other women’s misery, Mary’s achievement in the political domain is not quite successful.

#### **4. Mary Returning to the House**

Mary’s longing for knowledge pushes her to enter the public space from the private space, so that she has a chance to be involved in the political arena. Regardless of the fact whether her traverse is successful or failed, her spatial transgression illustrates that the reason for women’s political exclusion is the spatial division, as suggested by Freedman. This part further suggests that the boundary between the public and the private, instead of being dissolved, should be transgressed back and forth to redefine oneself. Although Mary at the end returns to the house, which is no longer male-centered, she learns how to love people and how to live freely in both the public and private places.

Interestingly, all of the main characters at the ending of the play return to the private place: Giles’s garden in the potteries. Not only does Mary return to the private house, but she also returns to the same structure of the patriarchal family since Giles

is still “the father” in this space. Even though, the play on the surface reinforces the spatial segregation, the “quality” of this private space is different, and Mary is different, too. Through joining the riots, Sophie for the first time speaks out her opinion: “Save the children” (*Mary Traverse* 143). Then when Mary tries to kill her daughter, she stops Mary bravely, and comforts her by singing. Mary returns Sophie’s care by accompanying with her as Jack is going to be beheaded. Giles accepts his daughter despite the fact that he believes a whore has no father. By expressing, “I love your wrinkles, Father” (159), Mary stops hating Giles. Mrs. Temptwell no longer tempts her foe’s daughter.<sup>16</sup> Mary ends the play by emphasizing, “I’m certain that when we understand it all, it’ll be simpler, not more confusing. One day we’ll know how to *love* this world” (160 emphasis added). As Ritchie asserts, “Wertebaker implies that women’s capacity for love [. . .] will be an aspect of this grace” (413). In other words, Mary’s ability to love her daughter, her father, and other sisters whose social status is lower than hers, fulfills the “grace” of the play’s title. Thus, when all the people return to the private sphere again, they are no longer confined by classist and sexist spatial division.

Freedman acknowledges that although the spatial distinction causes women’s political exclusion, only a few feminists agree with the demolition of this division

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<sup>16</sup> Mrs. Temptwell’s past is another story line in the play. Her father and Giles both used to be farmers, but Giles then bought her father’s land to build his garden. Her father then worked in Giles’s potteries and died (88). Giles became rich and had power to make his brother a magistrate (120), and this magistrate hanged Mrs. Temptwell’s grandmother, accusing her of witchcraft (114). Therefore, Mrs. Temptwell, in order to revenge her dead father and grandmother, tempts and degrades Mary on purpose. Besides, through Mrs. Temptwell’s grandmother, Wertebaker deals with the issues of witchcraft in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. As Caryl Churchill claims in her famous play *Vinegar Tom* (1976), witches did not exist, but the women who were “accused of witchcraft were often those on the edges of society, old, poor, single, sexually unconventional” (Churchill 129-30). Mrs. Temptwell’s grandmother is old and poor. Angry at the magistrate taking her cottage away, she stayed at his gate without leaving. Her speech for justice was taken to be a witch’s spell. Mrs. Temptwell emphasizes how people humiliated her grandmother (114), which echoes Churchill’s statement that a woman who is seen as a witch suffers a lot from “humiliation,” (130) instead of physical torture. Mrs. Temptwell’s story of working-class people is opposite to Mary’s story of upper-class people.

(30).<sup>17</sup> Instead, most feminists assert “a reconstruction and rearticulation of the division” (30). Ruth Lister’s opinion of the public-private division provides us a good perspective to rethink the issue. She argues that the articulation of each space “involves the deconstruction of the sexualized values associated with public and private so that it is the gendered quality of the distinction and of the attributes associated with each of the spheres that is dissolved, rather than the distinction itself” (Lister 120). Thus, what we have to criticize is the stereotypical gender quality in both the public and the private spheres, rather than dissolving the distinction. Only as we recognize that the gendered quality and the attributes of the spatial division are culturally and socially created, not by nature, can the articulation of the two spheres be possible (Freedman 30). In this light, although the characters at the end return to the private garden, through the process of Mary’s traversing spatial division, the play indicates that the two spheres are not fixed without any possibility of changes. More crucially, the quality of the private sphere in Giles’s garden is changed. Mary and Sophie find the “grace” of love, and their sisterhood is more significant than Mary’s personal success. Mrs. Temptwell learns to forgive the past and then lives in Giles’s potteries, which used to belong to her father. Giles learns to be a father who regards his daughter as a human being, rather than as his property. As Freedman and Lister suggest, to destroy the stereotype of gender roles in each sphere is more crucial than to destroy the spatial division because it reveals the possibility of rearticulation of each other without a risk to turn everything into all public or all private.

Overall, *The Grace of Mary Traverse* is a history play that retells the Gordon riots. Through a fictional female character, Wertebaker illustrates women are

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<sup>17</sup> Radical feminists argue that “personal is political” in order to break the division of the private and the public. However, that everything is political is problematic because this statement implies that “feminists sanction state intervention in all areas of a person’s private and personal life” (Freedman 29). The division, thus, is still needed, and how to articulate and communicate with each sphere is the main concern then.

excluded from politics as well as history due to the spatial division, and her alternative history also provides us with another perspective to see the cause of a historical event, which derives from the oppression of women by the spatial segregation instead of conflicts among men. By crossing the boundary of the spatial division to and fro, Mary's quest for knowledge remains positive.<sup>18</sup> Admiring women's challenge to the existing norms, Wertebaker admits, "I've always liked women on quest" ("Interview," *Rage and Reason* 140).

### C. Crisis of Imperialism and Colonial Resistance in *Our Country's Good*

Timberlake Wertebaker not only questions the construction of femininity, but she thinks the idea of masculinity equally problematic. Unlike choosing two outstanding women in *New Anatomies* and *The Grace of Mary Traverse*, she focuses on men and masculinity in *Our Country's Good* and *After Darwin*. This section deals with *Our Country's Good* first. The play describes a colonial history in Australia, which is also a history of the British Empire in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Because masculinity develops along with imperialism (Connell, *Masculinities* 185), when imperialism encounters resistance, masculinity is also challenged, too. The colonial ambivalence and resistance manifested in the play indicate that British imperial history in Australia is revised and the relation between the superior masculine colonizer and the inferior feminine colonized is subverted.

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<sup>18</sup> Some critics read Mary's quest pessimistically. For example, both Ester Beth Sullivan and Mary Karen Dahl read the play from the perspective of Althusser's hailing ideology. Sullivan concludes that both *The Grace of Mary Traverse* and *Our Country's Good* "are unflinching in their portrayals of the oppressive conditions of capitalistic, colonizing, and patriarchal societies" (148-49). What she means is that both plays re-confirm the existing society for the reason that all main characters are none the less hailed by mainstream ideology. Similarly, Dahl comments, "Reading Wertebaker's play [*The Grace of Mary Traverse*] through Althusser, I find it affirms the (1) longing to, and (2) difficulty of, standing outside ideology" (157). Martha Richie, on the other hand, reads the play as an allegory of Thatcher's government in the 1980s, concluding, "Wertebaker is clearly pessimistic in this play, not only about the efficacy of revolutionary action but also the possibility of a woman leading such action" (409-10). Instead of seeing the play pessimistically, I, by reading the play from the perspective of crossing spatial division, submit that the ending is positive because of the possibility of the fluidity of the spatial distinction.

*Our Country's Good* was premiered at Royal Court Theatre in London in 1988, and then moved to Sydney, Australia in the next year. Among all the plays Wertenbaker creates, *Our Country's Good* is the dramatist's most critically and commercially successful work, and it solidifies Wertenbaker's reputation as a crucial playwright in British and world theatre. The play is described by Robert Brustein as "an award-winning play" (29). It won Wertenbaker the 1988 Laurence Olivier Award for the Best Play, six Tony Awards nominations, and the 1991 New York Drama Critic's Circle Award for the Best Foreign Play, to name just a few.<sup>19</sup> *Our Country's Good* is based on Thomas Keneally's novel, *The Playmaker* (1987), which describes a real historical event in 1789 when a group of English convicts performed George Farquhar's comedy, *The Recruiting Officer* (1706), to celebrate the birthday of British King, George III, in Australia, which was an English penal colony.<sup>20</sup>

When gender is taken into consideration to read this play, the relation between the colonizer and the colonized is no longer seen as oppositional, but ambivalent. However, from the reviews of the play, we observe a serious lack of the discussion on gender; instead, the theme of the function of the theatre is highly noticed, especially when Wertenbaker also reveals her purpose of writing the play is to "explore the redemptive power of the theatre, of art, for people who had been silenced" (Introduction, *Plays One* viii).<sup>21</sup> Owing to more limited discussion of gender for the

<sup>19</sup> The most important award *Our Country's Good* won is supposed to be the Laurence Olivier Award for the Best Play. The highest honor in English theatre, starting from 1976, Laurence Olivier Award has been given to only three female playwrights by 2009: Caryl Churchill's *Serious Money* in 1987, Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good* in 1988, and Pam Gems' *Stanley* in 1997.

<sup>20</sup> Wertenbaker was commissioned by Max Stafford-Clark, a well-known director in British theatre, to rewrite Thomas Keneally's novel. Directed by him, *Our Country's Good* fulfilled Stafford-Clark's commission in 1988. Then in 1993, finishing his directorship in the Royal Court, Stafford-Clark established his own theatre company, Out of Joint, which produced another play by Wertenbaker, *The Break of Day*, in 1995. *The Break of Day* was also commissioned by Stafford-Clark to rewrite Chekhov's *Three Sisters*. The comparison and contrast between the play *Our Country's Good* and the novel *The Playmaker* are not the main thrust in this section; therefore, for more detail about this topic, see Ann Wilson's "Our Country's Good: Theatre, Colony and Nation in Wertenbaker's Adaptation of *The Playmaker*." *Modern Drama* 34 (1991): 23-34.

<sup>21</sup> *Our Country's Good* gains different reviews in different places, and we may conclude that the issue



play, this section intends to focus on gender in this history play in order to explore the construction of history through the power relation between the sexes. More importantly, to understand gender in the play, we have to go beyond gender and take race and class into consideration. Since gender is a constitutive element of world relationships, it should not be examined separately.

Wertebaker's treatment of the gender issue in her plays always reveals a possibility of reconstruction and a transformative power of gender roles; thus, the discussion on gender in *Our Country's Good* illustrates the dignity of human reformation, and more crucially, the ability of resistance to unfair and coercive domination. This different reading from the perspective of gender is especially significant because many critics read the educational function of theatre from a negative point of view. Wertebaker emphasizes "the redemptive power of theatre" (Introduction, *Plays One* viii), but this "redemptive power" is manipulated by the government, turning it into a means of domination, for many critics. Ann Wilson explains that the convicts in the play learn civilization through the art of theatre, but "the production of *The Recruiting Officer* amounts to the adoption of cultural values of the dominant community and hence is a means of colonization" ("*Our Country's Good*" 33). Esther Beth Sullivan, agreeing with Wilson, also comments, "*The Recruiting Officer* indeed recruits the convicts to England's imperialist project, making them willing rather than resistant participants" (143). Besides, Carlson, giving a pessimistic reading of the ending of the play, declares that "the play ends by reproducing the dominant ideology at the expense of a social critique" ("Language and Identity" 138-39). The function and value of theatre, for those critics, is a way of

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on and about theatre is the favorite among critics and reviewers; the issues of race and class attract a glimpse of attention; gender is the minor and marginalized topic. As for more detail about different comments in London, Sydney, and the United States, see Susan Carlson's "Issues of Identity, Nationality and Performance: the Reception of Two Plays by Timberlake Wertebaker." *New Theatre Quarterly* 9.35 (1993): 267-89.



homogenizing individual differences under the dominance of the British Empire, teaching the convicts to be subject to the imperialist ideology. However, the convicts' learning the language in theatre does not simply mean that they are "hailed" into the British imperialistic ideology unconsciously,<sup>22</sup> but neither does it mean that they lose the awareness of resistance to colonialism. Instead, learning British civilized language and art performance could be a resistant way to menace the colonial authority from the inside of imperialism. Language helps those convicts to set up their gender, race and class identities, and also facilitates them to fight for their own voices.

Reading *Our Country's Good* from the binary structure of colonialism, this section reveals that both the aboriginals and the English people, including English officers and convicts, are stereotyped and gendered as feminine in order to serve the British Empire. During the colonial period of Australia, on the one hand, British imperialism feminizes and marginalizes men as well as women in the colony; on the other hand, the colonized people resist the dominant authority by reconstructing their gender, race, and class identities. These two forces reshape the colonial history of Australia, reversing the humiliation of Australian forefathers as British convicts to the noble image of human dignity illustrated by their ability of resistance to the British Empire. The first part of this section, analyzing the opposition between British people and Australian Aboriginal peoples, emphasizes that the feminized aboriginals' resistance through the counter-discourse challenges the historical discourse from the Empire. The second part discusses the opposition between the British officers in the Navy and the British convicts, which symbolizes the relation between the colonizer and the colonized, and focuses on the convicts' resistance by mimicry. The third part of the section then takes a step further to deconstruct the dominant and masculine

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<sup>22</sup> Sullivan appropriates Althusser's theory of ideology to read *Our Country's Good*, concluding that the convicts are "hailed" into the British imperialist ideology (143).

British officers due to the reason that they have been feminized by the British Empire so that their masculinity is in crisis. The three parts of the discussion demonstrate how the imperialistic masculinity of the British Empire in Australia is decentralized by the aboriginal resistance, the British convicts' colonized resistance, and the British officers' feminization; at the same time the theme of crossing and blurring borders of race, class, and gender by colonial resistance is highlighted.

### **1. British People versus Australian Aboriginal Peoples**

*Our Country's Good* is based on real historical facts about the First Fleet's transportation of criminals from England to Australia to build New South Wales in 1787. Most characters in the play, including convicts and officers, are named after real people who sailed on the First Fleet. Also, *The Recruiting Officer*, the first play performed in Australia, indeed was performed by some convicts and an officer (Gibson 1). According to Jane Gibson's research, about 160,000 people, including men, women, and children, were sent to Australia into slavery, and most of them were criminals (1). Australia became a British penal colony, and the early Australian history started with convicts who created and cultivated their new state. This early period of colonial history is the "convict stain" of the Australian past because it reminds Australians that their country was built on barbarian and unjust law (Buse 154). The First Fleet arrived at Botany Bay in 1788; after two hundred years, when Australians celebrated their anniversary in 1988, they mentioned a little about their colonial past and their bad treatment of Australian Aborigines, who even refused to celebrate the anniversary, trying to forget this "convict stain" (154). Coincidentally or deliberately, *Our Country's Good* was premiered in London in 1988, which became another way to celebrate the anniversary and to commemorate this unforgettable past which belonged to Australia as well as England (155).

Although *Our Country's Good* is “welcomed by Australians as a gripping account of their colonial past” (Carlson, “Issues of Identity” 279), some Australian critics still question the authenticity and authority of this past described in the play. The main question they ask is: is that the Australian past or is that our Australian country (280)?<sup>23</sup> Paul McGillick wonders, “Whose history is it anyway? When does it stop being England’s history and become Australia’s?” (qtd. in Carlson, “Issues of Identity” 280). In other words, McGillick questions the fixed, unchangeable concept of history which centers on one country (England) only. Gilbert and Tompkins also criticize this narrow idea of history because it is Eurocentric and it overlooks the aboriginals or colonial history in Australia, claiming, “[A] colony’s history frequently ‘began’ when the whites arrived: any events prior to contact with Europeans were irrelevant to the official record which became *the* history, a closed narrative designated to remove traces of alternative histories” (106 emphasis in original). As mentioned in Chapter Two, when commenting on the concept of history, Wertebaker asserts that the flexibility of history always welcomes the other and difference. While the playwright criticizes the island mentality of English people in *Credible Witness*, *Three Birds Alighting on a Field*, and *The Break of Day*, she by implication also disapproves of chauvinism and nationalism, which insist on only one interpretation of historical narrative. History is always hybrid and mixed with a great variety of different components. The colonial history in Australia is also English history and a responsibility for English people to face and remedy.

Moreover, the gender issue is always an important theme in imperialism. R. W. Connell explains that while “masculinities are not only shaped by the process of

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<sup>23</sup> Based on Susan Carlson’s survey, Krug thinks that *Our Country's Good* is “not about Australians but displaced Britons” (“Issues of Identity” 280) whereas McGillick questions, “Whose history is it anyway?” (280). Carlson concludes that Australian reviewers ask whose country their country is since the play is named “*Our*” *Country's Good* (280).

imperial expansion, they are active in that process and help to shape it” (*Masculinities* 185). What he means is that masculinity and imperialism develop hand in hand.

Particularly, Connell further describes that men of the frontier, such as British officers in Australia, are the symbolic characters of masculinity (185). The colonizer expresses masculinity through violence and power in the colony, and therefore the colonized is feminized, men and women alike. Revathi Krishnaswamy observes that masculinity rationalizes colonialism (292), and one of the strategies of colonial domination is to “justif[y], naturaliz[e], even legitimiz[e]” the effeminacy of the colonized men (303). That is to say, to feminize the colonized facilitates and rationalizes the dominance of the colonizer, and to “genderize” the colonizer and the colonized as masculine and feminine is an imperialist strategy to dominate the colony.

In light of such a gender perspective, one can easily find that English people in *Our Country’s Good* are defined as the masculine colonizer whereas Australian Aboriginal peoples are the feminine colonized; hence, it is needless to stress the gender of the character “The Aborigine” because he/she has been predetermined as female.<sup>24</sup> In the play, the representative of Australians and the colonial victims is “The Aborigine,” a character without gender and name. This character suggests that he/she is so marginalized that his/her identity is worthless to mention. More crucially, to call this genderless character “The Aborigine” contains a pejorative connotation. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin express that “aborigine” is “considered by many to be too burdened with derogatory associations” (4) because of “the feeling that the term fails to distinguish and discriminate among the great variety of people [. . .]” (4). In other words, the term “aboriginal” suggests that the differences among aborigines are

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<sup>24</sup> From the cast list of the premiere, *The Aborigine* is performed by an actor, named Jude Akuwudike (*Our Country’s Good* 183). However, in light of the discussion that the colonized has been to be genderized as female, I suggest that it would be more dramatic and meaningful for the character to be performed by an actress.

erased and reduced to a homogeneous and inferior people.<sup>25</sup> All in all, this genderless, nameless character without an origin functions as a feminine other in opposition to the masculine British colonizers and settlers in the play.

The Aborigine's soliloquy also shows "her" marginal position in the colony.<sup>26</sup> Appearing only four times, she delivers her soliloquies without talking with people. In her monologues, The Aborigine describes her reaction toward the coming of English people from disregard to disillusion. In Act One, Scene Two, "A Lone Aboriginal Australian Describes the Arrival of the First Convict Fleet in Botany Bay on January 20, 1788," The Aborigine portrays the coming of English people, which embodies the western civilization, as a big giant canoe, murmuring, "A giant canoe drifts on to the sea, clouds billowing from upright oars. This is a dream which has lost its way. Best to leave it alone" (*Our Country's Good* 186). The dreamlike scene of the arrival of the First Fleet is incomprehensible for The Aborigine, so she thinks the best way is to ignore it. However, when she appears next time, she starts to wonder about the meaning of the dream which represents the arrival of English people. In Act Two, Scene Four, "The Aborigine Muses on the Nature of Dreams," she ponders, "Some dreams lose their way and wander over the sea, lost. But this is a dream no one wants. It has stayed. How can we befriend this crowded, hungry and disturbed dream?" (249). Unable to resist the "giant canoe," the aboriginal peoples are compelled to accept the dominance of the British Empire. This undesired dream, insisting on staying in the land they consider their own, leaves them questions and even fear.

Without the presence of any other character during her soliloquy, the two scenes mentioned above center on The Aborigine. Nevertheless, some British characters are

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<sup>25</sup> Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin explain that now the most common and appropriate way to describe aborigines is "Australian Aboriginal peoples" (4 emphasis added).

<sup>26</sup> To stress the feminizing power in the colonial discourse, I deem it more appropriate to use "she" and "her" to refer to this character.

present in the last two scenes in which she appears, but they do not have any communication. In Act Two, Scene Seven, "The Meaning of Plays," the British convicts in rehearsal are discussing the meaning of plays; in other words, having learnt civilization through the performing of a play, the English convicts use the proper language to express their thoughts and then to improve themselves. However, on the other hand, Australian Aboriginal peoples have suffered a lot from the British colonization. The Aborigine describes that their ancestors die at the arrival of the British people, stating, "Ghosts in a multitude have spilled from the dream. Who are they? A swarm of ancestors comes through unattended cracks in the sky? But why? What do they need? If we can satisfy them, they will go back. How can we satisfy them?" (257). Aboriginal ancestor spirits do not rest, coming back to the earth due to the hatred of the British arrival. The Aborigine cannot find a way to send them back; nor can she understand why they return to the earth.

Not until The Aborigine is going to be like her dead ancestors, death, does she realize the dream is a cruel reality rather than a fantasy that takes away many people's lives. Her final appearance shows in Act Two, Scene Eleven, "Backstage," and she horrifyingly reports, "Look: 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" (272). Her horrible appearance predicts her coming death, and her body represents a living attack on British colonialism. Her final appearance is also the last scene in the play. While she is announcing her death, the English convicts are going to perform the first play in Australia. This sharp contrast between The Aborigine and the English convicts manifests British barbarism and exploitation without any consideration for the aboriginal peoples; accordingly, the last scene of the play is a strong charge against British colonialism. Kate Blich remarks, "While some of the characters' (Mary Brenham, Robert Sideway) dreams are about to come true, the Aborigine is already

living the nightmare of viral and spiritual pollution that the Europeans took with them to Australia” (181). Australian Aboriginal peoples had no immunity to western diseases, such as smallpox, so numerous local people died after the arrival of the British colonizers.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, while the last scene shows the British convicts’ dream is going to come true, Australian Aboriginal peoples die in multitudes in the nightmare that English people create.

These four soliloquies, on the one hand, illustrate The Aborigine’s marginalization by British people; on the other hand, they reflect her eagerness to speak for her own people. Gayatri Spivak in her well-known article, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” first asserts that the subaltern cannot speak, but in her revision, she admits that to declare the subaltern cannot speak is “an inadvisable remark” (2206). One of the reasons that the subaltern cannot speak is because no matter how hard he or she tries to speak, no one listens to him or her; however, Spivak, changing her mind, believes that any kind of speaking in a way works to the speaker and the listener. “All speaking, even seemingly the most immediate, entails a distanced decipherment by another, which is, at best, an interception. That is what speaking is” (2207), Spivak affirms. In other words, the consequences caused by speaking, including interpretation, reaction, feedback or even neglect, more or less influences the speaker and the listeners, so the importance of utterance cannot be overlooked.<sup>28</sup> Interpreted in this way, The Aborigine’s four soliloquies are particularly crucial for the reason that

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<sup>27</sup> According to Jane Gibson’s research, after the English people came to Australia, “soon the aboriginal population, estimated at 300,000, that is one person to every ten miles, was decimated” (1).

<sup>28</sup> “Can the Subaltern Speak?” has been published in many different versions since 1985, but in 1999, Spivak publishes an expanded revision of the same article in Chapter Three of *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. In this latest version, Spivak mends her early assertion that the subaltern cannot speak. The term “subaltern” is derived from Antonio Gramsci, but Spivak expands the original definition of “the unorganised groups of rural peasants based in Southern Italy” (Morton 48) to “denote a broad range of disempowered social groups and positions, including upper-middle-class women [. . .] as well as subsistence farmers, unorganized peasant movements, *tribal groups* and the urban sub-proletariat” (61 emphasis added). Therefore, it is appropriate to use the subaltern to describe Australian Aboriginal peoples.



they provide another historical narrative different from the British Empire's. Moreover, The Aborigine expresses her right to narrate history. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the narrative element in history provides everyone, including the colonized aboriginals, chances to retell their history.

The Aborigine's speaking is a counter-discourse against British colonial discourse, and her version of the colonial history is a direct and strong attack on British imperialism. Colonialism depends on racism and sexism to justify its dominance, as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin suggest (46-47). The colonizer also feminizes the colonized so that colonialism rationalizes their violent masculinity. In the name of education or civilization, colonialism evades the barbaric exploitation of the colony (47), and it even develops "a system of ahistorical categorization" to designate those societies that are inferior to the imperialistic country (48). Overall, the colonial discourse conceals any statement about the exploitation and massacre of the colonized, and justifies itself by the installment of civilization in the colony (43).

The colonial discourse is illustrated by Captain Phillip and the other British people in *Our Country's Good*. Captain Phillip is a commissioned Governor-in-Chief of New South Wales, and his job is to educate the convicts as well as the colonized aboriginal peoples in order to create a civilized English colony. He encourages Ralph Clark to direct *The Recruiting Officer* performed by convicts, believing that both convicts and audiences, who are other convicts and aboriginal peoples in Australia, could be changed into civilized citizens. That is to say, the performance is not only for convicts but also for the aboriginal peoples. Confirming the educational function of theatre, Captain Phillip claims, "The Greeks believed that it was a citizen's duty to watch a play. It was a kind of work in that it required attention, judgment, patience, all social virtues" (207). Captain Phillip expects that watching plays may teach the aboriginal peoples all virtues; put it another way, in the name of education, Captain

Phillip rationalizes his colonial dominance. Nevertheless, once in a while he still exposes his racist and imperialistic attitude toward them. For example, he says to Ralph, “I don’t know why they asked me to rule over this colony of *wretched souls*, but I will fulfil my responsibility” (246 emphasis added), continuing, “But the citizens must be taught to obey the law of their own will. I want to rule over responsible human beings, not tyrannize over a group of *animals*” (246 emphasis added). Captain Watkin Tench does not believe that the educational function of theatre would work on aboriginal peoples, announcing, “It’s like the savages here. A savage is a savage because he believes in a savage manner. To expect anything else is foolish. They can’t even build a proper canoe” (204). The colonial discourse does not always coordinate without cracks that expose its purpose of benefiting the self and exploiting the other; the aforementioned statements by Captain Phillip as well as Captain Tench illustrate this point.

However, The Aborigine’s monologues speak for all the colonized; in her monologues she provides a discourse that is against the colonial discourse. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin explain that a counter-discourse under the context of colonialism means any narrative that challenges the imperialist ideology, and it has a connotation of “symbolic resistance” (56). Accordingly, as British colonizers justify their dominance in the name of education, The Aborigine reveals that in fact they violently and brutally take advantage of the colony and people in it. Her “speaking,” as suggested by Spivak, affects and works to some extent, and symbolizes resistance to the colonial discourse that conceals the barbaric dominance in the colonial history in Australia. Furthermore, her monologues also represent that the colonized people are eager to tell their own story and to provide an alternative history different from the colonizer’s, even though they are feminized and marginalized as a genderless and nameless person.

## 2. English Officers versus English Convicts

A focus on The Aborigine's speaking manifests that the power of the British Empire is challenged by Australian Aboriginal peoples' counter-discourse, which undermines the strong hierarchical power relation between the colonial English people and the colonized aboriginals. While racism and sexism developed along with colonialism enslave and feminize the aboriginal peoples, classism and sexism, also derived from colonialism, enslave and feminize English convicts. In other words, there is a binary relation, English officers versus English convicts, among the English people whereas the English people dominate the Australian Aboriginal peoples. This "inner" binary system is constituted as a form of colonialism, separating the colonial English officers in the Navy from the colonized slave English convicts. Ann Wilson uses "the colonized" to designate "the convicts and the aboriginals" ("*Our Country's Good*" 23). Due to the fact that they are prisoners enslaved to build a new colony for the British Empire, these convicts are seen as the colonized in terms of imperialism.

Furthermore, this inner binary system within the English people is also constituted as a form of sexism, distinguishing the masculinized English officers from the feminized English convicts. As suggested by Krishnaswamy, to feminize the colonized justifies the colonizer's expression of masculinity through colonialism (303); more importantly, "social misfits" are not regarded as the representative of masculinity (293), so that misfits are feminized to contrast with the masculinity illustrated by white, middle-class, European men (293). In this light, English criminals, as typical examples of social misfits, have been genderized as women because they lack "mental discipline and emotional moderation," which are the traditional expression of masculinity (293). Therefore, either from the perspective of classism, sexism, or colonialism, it is proper to propose that the English convicts in

the play are seen as the feminized colonized. Only when gender is taken into consideration in the condition of the colony can it uncover the doubly marginalized positions the colonized men as well as women have. But the colonized is never submissive to the empire without resistance; these colonized male and female convicts in the play feminized by British imperialism get a chance to articulate and resist assimilation of colonialization through mimicry.

Opposite to the English convicts, the English officers in the Navy represent the masculine colonizers, and among all the characters in *Our Country's Good*, Major Robbie Ross is a striking example who shows his bigotry and deep prejudice against criminals and non-British people. Symbolizing a coercive power of the British Empire, Ross, throughout the play, continues to discriminate against prisoners and the aboriginals. He announces, "This is a convict colony, the prisoners are here to be punished and we're here to make sure they get punished" (203). He, despising non-English people, maintains British nationalism and imperialism. Ross regards Rousseau as "a foraging Frenchman" without realizing that Rousseau is in fact Swiss (203). He refuses the qualification of *The Recruiting Officer* performed by convicts because the playwright George Farquhar is an Irishman (205). When two convicts run away, he suspects Caesar and John Wisenhammer simply because the former is black and the latter is Jewish (239). The way to express his coercive power is severe corporal punishment and insults to prisoners. By enslaving and taking away the convicts' masculinity, Ross confirms his power and ensures a social hierarchy and order in the colony. He punishes Arscott for escaping by flogging him into unconsciousness (250). In order to make fun of the performance, he intentionally punishes Arscott on the other side of the rehearsal site so other prisoners can hear Arscott's shouts (253). From Ross's point of view, Arscott's screams indicate his fear and subjection to his power. Moreover, Ross humiliates Robert Sidaway by taking off

his clothes to reveal the scars on his body, which of course are produced from Ross's flogging; by so doing, he discredits Sideway's masculinity as well as Arscott's and feminizes him in order to legitimate his dominance.

Most convicts who are exiled from England to Australia are petty criminals, but the punishment is severe, including capital punishment by hanging and sentence to transportation. *Our Country's Good* is set in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century when the punishment system is the strictest and the most violent. *The Grace of Mary Traverse* also describes the severe punishment of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century when "stealing a handkerchief is already a hanging matter" (*Mary Traverse* 75). Because of poverty, Sophie prostitutes herself and Jack steals bread. As Mary is planning the riots, Jack resonates her, insisting, "Every man has a right to eat" (138). Similarly, the convicts in *Our Country's Good* commit crimes due to poverty. A 17-year-old young man named Thomas Barrett steals one ewe, so he is punished to transport to Australia seven years (188), though at last he is still hanged (254). Even an 82-year-old woman called Dorothy Handland is sentenced to death penalty by hanging because she steals a biscuit (189). When Captain Phillip is wondering whether to hang her or not, the old woman has hung herself already. Handy Baker is hanged too because he steals food from stores (192). Duckling Smith is sentenced to death for the reason that she steals two candlesticks, but Harry Brewer puts her name on the transport lists because he loves her (192). Most convicts, impelled by the human instinct of hunger, commit minor crimes out of poverty, but the severe punishment takes their lives away.<sup>29</sup> The reason why the criminals commit crimes also reveals that the British Empire in the

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<sup>29</sup> According to Jane Gibson's survey of the First Fleet which sailed in 1787, "The criminals who were transported were all thieves; there were no transportations for violent crime" (29). This punishment reflected that not only was the penalty system in England too strict, but also England in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century was full of criminals in prisons so that England had to transport some criminals to the colony. Moreover, the 82-year-old woman, who hanged herself in the colony, is historically true. Gibson observes, "There was a real life character aged 82 years who was transported to the penal colony because she was convicted of perjury" (8).

late 18<sup>th</sup> century in fact is in a crisis of economy. Ketch Freeman describes that he is a coal heaver in London, but because of low salary, several coal heavers, including him, go on strike for better payment (223). Then he loses his job, but because he becomes and is a thief caught by police officers, he is transported to Australia.

Starving in England, the convicts are still hungry in the penal colony; that is to say, the reason that causes them to commit crimes is still unsolved. Captain Phillip is anxious about the delay of the supply ship, worrying, “If a ship does not come within three months, the supplies will be exhausted. In a month, I will cut the rations *again*” (246-47 emphasis added). Owing to the lack of food, female convicts prostitute themselves to male convicts and even officers in order to get more food, like what Sophie and Mary do in *The Grace of Mary Traverse*. Including Mary Brenham, Ducking Smith, Dabby Bryant, Liz Morden, and Meg Long, all the female characters in the play exchange sex for food. This indicates that women are seen as a commodity for trade by men, and exposes the need of sex for men in the frontier, especially when they leave their wives in London. As Ralph criticizes Duckling’s prostitution in the colony, Harry defends his lover and justifies his need, stating, “It’s not her fault—if only she would look at me, once, react. Who wants to fuck a corpse!” (193). Because of survival and the men’s need of sex, women are exploited to complete the accomplishment of the British Empire in Australia.

Although the convicts are colonized by British officers and trained to learn the civilized language in theatre, ironically, their ability to use a proper language turns out to be a weapon to resist the English officers in the Navy. Captain Phillip, in the name of education, suggests that performing a play may help convicts to be more civilized, and Ralph, in order to be promoted to the first Lieutenant in the Navy, decides to direct *The Recruiting Officer*. Ralph expresses his opinion of staging a play: “And it seemed to me [ . . . ] they [convicts] 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—” (208). He believes that theatre saves them from corruption, and the change of Mary manifests his assertion. However, theatre may help convicts to learn some civilization, but theatre cannot prevent them from poverty. It is still possible for Mary to sell herself for food even though she is the leading actress in the play. Hence, the name of education in the colonial discourse overlooks the material condition in the colony, and this neglect of convicts’ real need becomes one of the motives for them to resist British colonial power.

The convicted prisoners are supervised under Ross’s coercive power, but as suggested by Foucault, “Where there is power, there is resistance” (*History of Sexuality: An Introduction* 95), and more importantly, “this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (95). The colonized criminals consciously resist Ross by mimicking British upper-class language in theatre. They are taught to learn how to play in the theatre, which is one of the most gracious arts in English tradition, and how to use language properly, which is opposite to their working-class slang. Captain Phillip and Ralph intend to cultivate them by the beauty of language, but as long as they learn the power of language, they mimic the language the colonizer teaches them to challenge the colonizer’s barbarism, instead.

In the convicts’ second rehearsal, Ross, despising the function of theatre for convicts, humiliates criminals on purpose while they are performing, but they resist Ross’s violence by mimicking the language in the theatre. Ross asks Sideway to take off his clothes to show the scars on his body, insults Dabby because of her prostitution for food, and lifts Mary’s skirt to show her tattoo on her inner thigh. While he humiliates the convicts with the dominator’s power, Sideway and Liz start to rebel in their own way.



Ross [. . . ]

Where's your tattoo, Brenham? Show us. I can't see it. Show us.

*Mary tries to obey, lifting her skirt a little.*

If you can't manage. I'll help you. (*Mary lifts her skirt a little higher.*) I can't see it.

*But Sideway turns to Liz and starts acting, boldly, across the room, across everyone.*

Sideway '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.'

Liz 'Come, Sir, you and I have been jangling a great while; I fancy if we made up our accounts, we should the sooner come to an agreement.' (252)

Using the civilized and proper language from the drama, Sideway and Liz quote some sentences from *The Recruiting Officer* to make a sharp contrast between Ross's barbaric behavior and the convicts' civilized words and behavior. What is more ironic is that, Sideway's lines reveal that Mr. Worthy, the character in *The Recruiting Officer* he plays, has met so much cruelty in his own country that he believes in less cruelty abroad. These lines spoken by Sideway create an irony because Sideway is suffering from cruelty no matter whether he is in England or Australia, and even right now he is encountering Ross's barbaric treatment. Liz, "one of the most difficult women in the colony" (245), now plays a noble lady, speaking elegant language. In contrast with Ross's words of humiliation and sexual connotation, Sideway and Liz's civilized behavior expresses their resistance to the coercive and inhuman power of the dominator.

Sideway and Liz mimic the language they are taught by the colonizers and use

it to resist them. The mimicry with a power of resistance under the context of colonialism is highly regarded as a proper strategy to undermine the coercion of the Empire. Mimicry can simply mean, “The action, practice, or art of mimicking or closely imitating, either in sport or otherwise, the manner, gesture, speech, or mode of action of persons, or the superficial characteristics of a thing” (“Mimicry”). In other words, mimicry is an imitation of something that could be abstract or concrete repeatedly. It ought to be noticed that imitation cannot substitute for the one it imitates because each repetition causes difference. Repetition “has always had a dubious side,” Mike Bal continues, “Two events are never exactly the same. The first event of a series differs from the one that follows it, if only because it is the first and the other is not” (qtd. in Hawthorn 302). Therefore, mimicry is “repetition with difference” (Huddart 57), and the difference derived from mimicry turns out to be a threat that shakes the authority of the first. Homi Bhabha claims, “The ambivalence of colonial authority repeatedly turns from *mimicry*—a difference that is almost nothing but not quite—to *menace*—a difference that is almost total but not quite” (91 emphasis in original). What Bhabha means is that mimicry as a repetition with difference, even a small difference, has a subversive potential to undermine colonial discourse.

Owing to the fact that mimicry is “almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha 86), it reveals an ambivalence between the colonizer and the colonized. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin explain, “When colonial discourse encourages the colonized subject to ‘mimic’ the colonizer by adopting the colonizer’s cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits” (139). In light of this interpretation of mimicry, when Captain Phillip and Ralph intend to cultivate the convicts with their own culture, the result is that the convicts use it to resist them. It seems like that those convicts are trained, homogenized, and even produced as the way colonizers want, but accepting the colonizer’s culture and

education does not mean that they are totally “hailed” into the colonial ideology without resistance. The ambivalence between the colonizer and the colonized generates “mimicry,” which provides the subjugated people with a strategy to resist coercion within the power of colonialism, just as Bhabha suggests that “mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge” (85). Hence, mimicry exposes the limitation of colonialism, and the colonial discourse is inevitably full of menace from the colonized and ambivalence that undermines the foundation of the Empire.

Bhabha asserts that “mimicry is at once resemblance and menace” (86), but this “menace” is never a military or direct rebellion against colonialism. Instead, mimicry is in a form of “mockery” (86), laughing at colonialism, producing difference, and opening more cracks and slippages in colonial discourse. For example, Ralph asks Wisehammer to play two roles, but Wisehammer believes that it would confuse the audience. Trying to persuade him, Ralph comments, “Nonsense, if the audience is paying attention, they’ll know that Bullock is a country boy and Brazen a captain” (261), continuing, “People who can’t pay attention should not go to the theatre” (261). Ralph explains that the audiences’ imagination would make them believe everything happening on the stage. However, when Ralph refuses to let Dabby play a man, Dabby mimics his words to assert, “If Wisehammer can think he’s a big country lad, I can think I’m a man. People will use their imagination and people with no imagination shouldn’t go to the theatre” (264). Her mimicry creates a comic relief and more significantly, her mockery allows her, a convict, to retort to Ralph without being punished. Dabby’s resistance against the colonial domination is clearly revealed when she mimics Ralph’s words, so at the end of the play, her plan for escaping from the colony to England echoes her spirit of resistance throughout the play.

Another example of mimicry in the play is Liz’s mockery of upper-class rich

women.<sup>30</sup> Liz imitates the way refined women are supposed to be with exaggeration to criticize the idealized stereotypical image of women, and simultaneously attacks the imperialist policy in Britain to make working-class people hungrier. In the first rehearsal, Ralph wants Liz to play a rich lady.

Ralph [. . .]

You're a rich lady. You're at home. Now a rich lady would stand in a certain way. Try to stand like a rich lady. Try to look at Silvia with a certain assurance.

Liz Assurance.

Wisehammer Confidence.

Ralph Like this. You've seen rich ladies, haven't you?

Liz I robbed a few.

Ralph How did they behave?

Liz They screamed.

Ralph I mean before you—euh—robbed them.

Liz I don't know. I was watching their purses. (234-35)

It is difficult for Liz to perform a rich lady because every time when she sees/robs them, they are screaming. As a result, Ralph asks her to imagine if she were a rich lady, but Liz mimics good ladies' behavior in her exaggerative mockery.

Ralph When acting, you have to imagine things. You have to imagine you're someone different. So, now, think of a rich lady and imagine you're her.

*Liz begins to masticate.*

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<sup>30</sup> When Susan Carlson discusses *Our Country's Good* through comparison with *The Playmaker*, she finds that Wertebaker's "most significant change was to alter the role of the women in her play" ("Issues of Identity" 278), especially her creation of a new female character in the play, Liz Morden (278).

What are you doing?

Liz If I was rich I'd eat myself sick.

Dabby Me too, potatoes.

*The convicts speak quickly and over each other. (235)*

Liz cannot find a proper model to imitate so she uses her own way to mimic rich ladies.

Liz's inability of imitating an authentic lady reveals that there is no ideal lady for everyone, and so there is no authentic femininity at all. Liz deconstructs the fantasized femininity, and this disillusion echoes Bhabha's assertion that the original does not exist. Bhabha claims that "the originary is, really, only an 'effect'" (113). In his theory, under the context of colonialism, because of mimicry and the ambivalent relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, the colonial subject is "partial presence" (88), and therefore is hybridity (114). As a consequence, Bhabha argues, "The desire to emerge as 'authentic' through mimicry [. . .] is the final irony of partial representation" (88). Deconstructing the authenticity and the identity of the original as "hybridity," Bhabha insists, "Hybridity intervenes in the exercise of authority not merely to indicate the impossibility of its identity but to represent the unpredictability of its presence" (114). From this perspective, no wonder Liz cannot find an authentic model to copy because the model is only partially represented. This non-existing model has to be represented by its partial presence in different time and different places; more crucially, it has to be shown by Liz's mimicry. Without Liz's mimicry, it does not exist; however, when it is represented by Liz's mimicry, its authenticity is challenged. Thus, Bhabha declares that the original is just "an effect" (88), which is produced and represented by mimicry. Interpreting Liz's mockery in this way, we observe that Bhabha's mimicry deconstructs the idealized femininity, so his theory is colored with a feminist consciousness that rejects the existence of patriarchal

femininity and colonialism and sexism to some extent.

Another example of mimicry comes from Wisehammer's mockery. At the end of the play, Wisehammer mimics Gorge Farquhar's prologue in *The Recruiting Officer* with a big change in order to suit the convicts' condition in the colony, which becomes the most satiric mimicry in the play. Due to the sensitivity of language, Wisehammer likes to play with words, revealing the instability of the meaning in language. For example, he notices that "country" has two opposite meanings: one means land and nature that release people, and the other is power that requires people to die for it (224). Wisehammer, as his name suggests, is "suggestive of a 'wise' force which hits out hammer-like at society's ideologies" (Gibson 35). His sensitivity toward language facilitates him to mimic Farquhar's prologue and to resist the colonizer's dominance with an indirect and satiric way.

Discovering Farquhar's prologue does not "make any sense to the convicts" (258), Wisehammer imitates the tradition of prologue at the beginning of the play with Ralph's permission. He reads:

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. (279).

All the so-called barbaric convicts at the end turn to be well-trained actors and actresses. They were punished to exile and leave England because of poverty and lack of education. However, after they are taught to perform and learn some art of British

theatre, they all transform into refined people or even writers, such as Wisehammer. The convicts' performance, thus, becomes the biggest satire on the British government for it criticizes the severe punishment and inhuman treatment in the colony. These disgusting criminals are supposed to leave their home country so as to make England clean without pollution; in this way, their departure is based on the precondition that convicts are born to be evil and cannot be cultivated by education. The theatre performance, nevertheless, proves that everyone has the potential of transformation, and the punishment of transporting convicts to the colony like goods, by contrast, is brutal. Therefore, Wisehammer's mimicry of Farquhar's prologue, "at once resemblance and menace" (Bhabha 86), mocks and satirizes British imperialism.

Wisehammer's mimicry is ironic with menace but without a direct attack on the Empire. After Wisehammer's new prologue, Ralph understands the menace within it, so he predicts, "When Major Ross hears that, he'll have an apoplectic fit" (279). Also sensing the menace caused from the satire, Sideway comments on the prologue with admiration: "It's very good, Wisehammer, it's very well written, but it's too—too political. It will be considered provocative" (279). Dabby claims that the line of "we left our country for our country's good" is the best in Wisehammer's prologue (279). All the people in the theatre realize Wisehammer's menacing mimicry, but his mimicry is still under the permission of Captain Phillip, the governor in the colony, who encourages them to perform throughout the play. Hence, his mimicry is a compromise between his subversion and submission to British colonialism. As Bhabha describes, mimicry is "an ironic compromise" (86). It compromises but it is ironic. Wisehammer's prologue illustrates this ironic compromise well.

Through the discussion of the convicts' mimics, we notice that mimicry is always indirect and compromising with the reality. The resistant power of "almost the same, but not quite" sabotages imperialism within imperialism. As suggested by



Foucault, “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (*History of Sexuality: An Introduction* 95). This is to say, “[W]here there is no resistance it is not, in effect, a power relation” (Mills 40), and resistance always happens within the relation (40). No matter how powerful British imperialism is, there is always inner resistance. Foucault also realizes that the resistance within a power relationship is not a direct or strong military rebellion, but the strength of resistance spreads inside the relationship as different “points of resistance” (95). These individual, small points of resistance undermine the power relation. Mimicry, a possible way of rebellion, is like a strategy of a point of resistance, but it has to be compromised. Although it is individual and strategic, it threatens the coercive power. Foucault describes the points of resistance inside a power relation as the following:

Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations. (95-96)

These compromised points of resistance, just like mimicry as an ironic compromise, does not mean that they are “passive, doomed to perpetual defeat” (96); rather, they are “producing cleavages in a society that shift about, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings, furrowing across individuals themselves, cutting them up and remolding them, marking off irreducible regions in them, in their bodies and minds” (96). These points of resistance make a rebellion possible. Interpreting the menace of mimicry from Foucault’s points of resistance uncovers that a possible

resistance always happens within a power relationship. Although the resistance is not an immediate attack, it undermines the relationship gradually, disseminatively, and widely. At the end of the play, despite the fact that no revolution occurs, the convicts resist the homogenization by the British Empire; instead, they reverse the language they are taught in theatre to satirize and make fun of the British Empire and to express their resistance to coercive and brutal dominance. More crucially, they all survive at the end. Sideway plans to open a theatre company. Wisehammer decides to keep writing and become a writer in Australia. Mary dreams to have three children. Dabby finally makes up her mind on escaping. Liz survives, escaping capital punishment. They all live.

### **3. English Officers: Both the Colonizer and the Colonized**

The binary relation between English people and Australian Aboriginal peoples discussed in the first part exposes the counter-discourse within the British colonial discourse through The Aborigine's speech. The English convicts, like the feminized aboriginals, are also feminized in order to rationalize and authorize the dominance of the English Empire. The second part, analyzing another binary relation within the English people between the English officers in the Navy and the English convicts, indicates that through the convicts' mimicry, the opposite relationship between the two has been blurred and the power of English imperialism is undermined by the ambivalence between the colonizer and the colonized.<sup>31</sup> Taking a step further to deconstruct the authority of English officers, this part will assert that they themselves

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<sup>31</sup> I observe that, from the cast list of the premiere at the Royal Court Theatre in 1988, each actor or actress performs two roles, an English officer and a convict, except an actor who performs three roles, an English officer, a convict, and The Aborigine (*Our Country's Good* 183). This cast arrangement is meaningful because it indicates the blurring of the colonizer officers and the colonized convicts. In addition, several actresses have to perform male officers, and their cross-dressing also implies the playwright's intention of transgression of gender roles.

are both the colonizer and the colonized. Like the previous two parts, reading colonial relations from the perspective of gender reveals that not only women are victims under imperialism and patriarchy, but men, especially the English officers in the colony, are also victims who are feminized by imperialism. It is only when gender is taken into consideration can the inner structure of men's relations be exposed and the masculinity developed along with imperialism be deconstructed, too.

The development of masculinity is highly related to imperialism. R. W. Connell explains that since the 15<sup>th</sup> century when the overseas empires were prosperous, men “who applied force at the colonial frontier, the ‘conquistadors’ as they were called in the Spanish case, were perhaps the first group to become defined as a masculine cultural type in the modern sense” (*Masculinities* 187). Masculinity then becomes the foundation of imperialism. In particular, Krishnaswamy observes, “The cult of masculinity rationalized imperial rule by equating an aggressive, muscular, chivalric model of manliness with racial, national, cultural, and moral superiority” (292). In other words, masculinity and imperialism depend on each other: masculinity relies on imperialism to display and represent men's power while imperialism needs masculinity to justify and rationalize itself. In addition, the co-existence of the two involves racism, nationalism, and sexism. The brutal and violent Major Ross in *Our Country's Good* exemplifies imperialistic masculinity, showing his racism against black people and the Jews, nationalism against France and Ireland, sexism against female convicts. In order to maintain the hierarchical system in the colony, Ross fiercely rejects the performance of *The Recruiting Officer* by claiming, “You don't take anything seriously, but I know this play—this play—order will become disorder” (210). His masculinity is established by the power of being a dominator in the colony.

As Connell explains, men in the frontier, conquistadors, or colonizers are “often extremely violent in the search for land, gold and converts” (*Masculinities* 187). In

Ross's case, he is extremely violent in the maintenance of order through brutal punishment, and he believes, "This is a convict colony, the prisoners are here to be punished and we're here to make sure they get punished" (203). Echoing with Ross, Captain Tench thinks that convicts are born to be evil so they deserve to be punished (203). Corporal punishment is harsh, and the scars on a convict's body inscribe the historical evidence of imperialism. Like Ameena's body as a credible witness in *Credible Witness*, the body of Sideway, who is forced to take off his clothes to show the scars caused by Ross, inscribes a credible witness of colonialism and violent imperialistic masculinity in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Accordingly, masculinity and violence are often linked together (Connell, *Masculinities* 185-86).

Connell observes that "masculinities are not only shaped by the process of imperial expansion, they are active in that process and help to shape it" (*Masculinities* 185). The interdependence between the two influences each other. Connell also finds that men in the frontier are easily changed in the colony in order to survive (185); in other words, the condition of the colony challenges the western Europe-centered masculinity. Leaving their country, the British officers suffer from a sense of displacement and loss of identity. These settlers, as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin describe, "are frequently constructed within a discourse of difference and inferiority by the colonizing power ('colonials/colonial') and so suffer discrimination as colonial subjects themselves" (211). As a result, settlers "are simultaneously both colonized and colonizer" (212), and in this way, their masculinity is unstable and in crisis. The identity as the colonizer allows the settlers to display their white, western masculinity, but the other identity as the colonized feminizes them, instead.

The crisis of manliness makes Ross more violent in order to maintain his white Europe-centered masculinity. Ross came to Australia because England lost its colony in America. He, as a military captain, expecting to fight in the battle, now becomes a

settler to build a new colony. “My marines who are trained to fight are turned into ghouly gaolers, fed less than the prisoners” (269), Ross continues, “This is a profligate prison for us all, it’s a hellish hole we soldiers have been hauled to because they blame us for losing the war in America” (269). Obviously, his manliness is in danger because the aggressive and violent traits of masculinity in battle are incomplete. The way to release his virility in crisis is stricter surveillance and dominance; in particular, the violence toward women directly revives his masculinity. In the convicts’ second rehearsals, Ross intends to lift Mary’s skirt to show the tattoo on her inner thigh, and he also commands Dabby to bark like a dog (252). These insults are not only a punishment due to their crime, but also a way to restore his masculinity.

bell hooks notices that men as well as women are the victims of patriarchy, particularly the men who are inferior in the status of class and race (*Feminist Theory* 80). Those men who cannot fulfill the white, western, middle-class, and Europe-centered masculinity are regarded effeminate, and their manliness is then feminized. hooks explains that not being seen as real or masculine, “[a]lienated, frustrated, pissed off, he may attack, abuse, and oppress an individual woman or women” (73). Thus, because violence directly embodies the western masculinity, Ross is a major in the Navy, but now he is feminized to be among the settlers in the colony by the British Empire. Losing a chance to display the aggressive masculinity in battle, he turns to abuse female convicts and punishes convicts more brutally. hooks’ comment does not attempt to justify the abuse of women by men because of their crisis of masculinity; rather, she emphasizes the study of masculinity is especially important in feminisms. The oppression of women is not simply derived from patriarchy or sexism. In *Our Country’s Good*, the oppression of women is complicated with imperialism, classism and patriarchy, and “women” in the play also refers to

feminized English male and female convicts and aboriginal peoples.

In addition, Midshipman Harry Brewer's madness is also an example to show his manliness in crisis owing to his double identities as both a colonizer and a colonized. Harry at the very beginning of the play uncovers his secret: he used to be a criminal. This secret indicates that he is supposed to be like other colonized convicts, who are hanged or transported to Australia, instead of being a hangman who hangs convicts. Worried about the exposure of his double identities, he talks to Ralph: "Look at the convicts and I think, one of those could be you, Harry Brewer, if you hadn't joined the navy when you did. The officers may look down on me now, but what if they found out that I used to be an embezzler?" (191). In order to hide the other identity, he keeps this secret so hard that he starts to have mental problems. While he is claiming that Handy Baker deserves to die because he steals food, he is conscious that he also should be hanged. However, now he becomes a hangman whose job is taking people's life away. Feeling guilty and confused with his double identities, he first sees Baker's ghost and then many ghosts that he had hanged. In Act Two, Scene Three, Harry talks to himself "in the different voices of his tormenting ghosts" (247). Then while he and Ketch are measuring Liz, he speaks in a 17-year-old young boy's voice because he is haunted by the boy he hanged (254). As a consequence, Harry goes crazy and then dies. Unable to handle his double identities, Harry loses confidence in himself so he suspects Duckling loves other men all the time. But in fact, under the context of imperialism, Harry has been treated as a feminized colonized person by the British Empire, so his identity has never been stable and always fluid in the double identities. In this light, his masculinity is questioned by his uncertain identities.

In a way, all the English officers in the Navy in Australia suffer from a crisis of manliness; as a consequence, they use strict punishment to maintain their power and

to feel or construct their masculinity. Seeing through the illusory idealized masculinity, Ralph is the only one who recovers from the crisis and re-identifies himself. Ralph leaves his wife in England, and then comes to Australia alone. In order to follow stoicism, he keeps away from female convicts. According to Chris Barker, two of the traits of conventional masculinity are “stoicism” and “control” (115). Not only does a masculine man have strength, violence and power, but he must also have the ability to control himself, particularly sexual desire. In Foucault’s discussion of Ancient Greek and classical Roman arts of existence, men’s faithfulness to their wives was a way to show their self-control: “The sexual ‘fidelity’ of a husband with respect to his legitimate wife was [. . .] a question that people raised and a form of austerity on which some moralists set a high value” (*Use of Pleasure* 18). “The form of austerity” in relation to sex meant “moral” for men; in other words, Foucault finds, “For a man, excess and passivity were the two main forms of immorality in the practice of the *aphrodisiac* [sexual activity]” (47). “Moderation” or self-restraint is therefore considered as a quality of being noble and moral men (61), and the training of practice of moderation “was indispensable in order for an individual to form himself as a moral subject” (77). Hence, Foucault concludes, in Ancient Greece, “the ‘ascetic’ that enabled one to make oneself into an ethical subject was an integral part—down to its very form—of the practice of a virtuous life [. . .]” (77).<sup>32</sup> The self-restraint on sex has become one of the traditional characteristics to express masculinity since ancient Greece.

Unlike the other officers who violently treat convicts to show their virility,

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<sup>32</sup> Foucault in his research on Ancient Greek and Roman sexuality in *The Use of Pleasure* mentions two meanings of morality: one means “a set of values and rules of action,” (25) which he calls “morality,” and the other means “the real behavior of individuals in relation to the rules and values” (25), which he calls “the morality of behaviors” or “ethics.” In other words, the “ethical subject” Foucault mentions designates a subject who acts a set of practices, such as austerity, in relation to morality.



being indifferent to sex and women is a way for Ralph to display his masculinity while his manliness has been in danger in the colony. However, his stoicism is laughed at by other officers and convicts. Ralph is cruel to female convicts, believing that they do not deserve kindness. Harry tells him that not all women are disgusting, and asks him if he has ever been tempted by women. Ralph angrily affirms, “Never” (193). The self-restraint on sex for him is a way to express his manliness and morality, but for the others, his stoicism becomes effeminacy. Long Meg seduces him in order to get a role in *The Recruiting Officer*, and Ralph’s refusal confirms the gossip that he is a “mollie” (molly) (195). Even when Harry asks Duckling if she would like to perform the play with Ralph, Duckling answers, “With that Mollie? No” (214). Dabby thinks that Ralph restricts sexual desire for too long that “he’s ripe for the plucking” (215). Both men and women laugh at the way he shows his masculinity through stoicism, so besides his double identities of being a colonizer and a colonized, the conventional ascetic way to represent masculinity makes Ralph’s manliness in danger, too.

Nevertheless, at the end Ralph liberates himself, realizing the disillusion of traditional masculinity expressed by stoicism through directing and performing *The Recruiting Officer*. Ann Wilson well explains Ralph’s two extreme attitudes toward women: “seeing women either as whores—the convict women—or as the Madonna—his wife” (“*Our Country’s Good*” 25). Ralph is faithful to his wife, Betsey Alicia, who is far away in England, and rejects to have another lover in the colony. His insistence expresses his self-control and moderation that are regarded as representatives of morality and masculinity. In a scene, “The Loneliness of Men,” Ralph misses his wife by speaking to her even though she is in England (190). In another scene “Ralph Clark Tries to Kiss His Dear Wife’s Picture,” his most intense desire for women is a kiss on the picture of his wife (220). Then while he plays the

male protagonist in *The Recruiting Officer* and practicing lines with Mary who performs the heroine, Silvia, at the beach, he finally releases his emotion from stoicism through being Plume, the hero in the play.

*They kiss.*

Ralph Don't lower your head. Silvia wouldn't.

*She begins to undress, from the top.*

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.

Let me see you.

Ralph Yes.

*He begins to undress himself. (267)*

Obeying the traditional masculinity through stoicism cages Ralph in prison, but the transformative power of theatre changes the convicts as well as Ralph. Wilson illustrates:

The Scene in which gaoler and convicts taking off their clothing, an image of stripping away the social roles which separate them and their resulting discovering that each is simply a person, suggests that the transformations effected on the personal level by theatre are as powerful and as politically radical as the act of resistance to the oppressive force of Campbell and Ross which we saw during the rehearsal. ("*Our Country's Good*" 27)

Wilson emphasizes the important function of theatre, and more interestingly, she mentions that taking off clothes suggests both Ralph and Mary get rid of the roles that

society imposes upon them. As the aforementioned cross-dressing in *New Anatomies* and Gayle Rubin's sex/gender system, society arbitrarily compels women to be feminine and men masculine through such a method as dressing to confirm the sex/gender system. Masculinity as well as femininity is man-made, idealized, and fantasized to designate the representation of men's life. The social gendered roles confine not only women but also men to certain behavior and ideas, forcing them to practice femininity or masculinity, which is impossible to achieve. Ralph represses his emotion and sexual desire to satisfy the social norms of masculinity and to fit himself in the sex/gender system, but his practice is doomed to fail and his "incomplete" masculinity, "partial presence" (88) of masculinity in Bhabha's term, is meant to be in crisis.

Enlightening Ralph on the notion of manliness, theatre performance liberates Ralph and changes him from an indifferent officer to a warmhearted friend to the convicts. The opening of the play displays Ralph overseeing the punishment of the flogging of Sideway, counting the number of lashes (185). Ralph, in favor of death penalty and corporal punishment, shows no kindness to convicts (192). In fact, the reason he directs *The Recruiting Officer* is for the sake of a promotion in the Navy (193), rather than a belief that the convicts could be educated. Nevertheless, the performance of Farquhar's play links all participants together and changes all of them. Ralph at the end expresses his kindness to the convicts, persuades Liz into telling the truth, allows Wisehammer to write a new prologue, performs a role with the convicts, and falls in love with Mary with a dream of three children. Ralph's transformation indicates a release from the prison that confines men's behavior and thinking by the sex/gender system, and he re-establishes a new relationship with women and the convicts. Ralph's changing attitude toward gender and his new relations with others confirm that gender is a constitutive element of social relationships, which has been

emphasized in Chapter Two. More significantly, this new relationship shaped by gender transforms the colonial history of Australia from a masculine, cruel, penal colony to a new settlement where a new gender relation without stereotypical images of masculinity is possible.

Through the settlers' double identities and crisis of masculinity, the superior status of the English officers as colonizers is challenged and destroyed, and this deconstruction reveals that any binary relationship in colonialism is ambivalent and unstable. A clear hierarchy is important in the building of imperialism because any binary division between either English people/ Australia Aboriginal peoples, English officers/ English convicts, or masculinity/ femininity confirms the superiority and the dominance of the Empire. However, any division is always shifting, blurring, and full of challenges. Reading *Our Country's Good* from the perspective of gender manifests the side-by-side development of imperialism and masculinity, and this reading explains that feminizing the colonized justifies the dominance of masculine imperialism. More crucially, the viewpoint of gender breaks down the authority of men. It distinguishes the feminized male convicts from the male English officers, and questions the male English officers by exposing their masculinity in crisis. In a way, gender, fluidizing any power relationship, not only constitutes a society but it also deconstructs the hierarchy of the social system. Then the comprehension of history through gender is not restricted within the top-down power controlled by the authority, but history is full of bottom-up resistance which rejects homogenization by mainstream historical narrative. In this way, in *Our Country's Good*, the authority of British imperialism in the early history of Australia is subverted and the power relation between the superior masculine colonizer and the inferior feminine colonized is challenged by the aboriginal resistance, the British convicts' resistance, and the British officers' feminization.

#### D. Crisis of Masculinity and Evolutionary History in *After Darwin*

In *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* (1991) and *The Break of Day* (1995), Wertebaker has displayed a historical paralysis caused by millennial malaise, pointing out people's anxiety and the sense of powerlessness at the turn of the millennium. Facing this important historical moment, Wertebaker, like her characters who are overwhelmed by fin-de-siècle paralysis, confesses, "There is a sense of general trepidation, of fear," continuing, "I felt a sense of discomfort myself, a feeling that the world was trying to redefine itself, no one really knew who they were and even basic assumptions about human beings were coming into question" (Introduction, *Plays Two* vii-viii). The playwright senses her own discomfort of encountering a crucial historical moment, and she explores this discomfort through analyzing gender relations at the end of the century. In *The Break of Day*, three sisters question what a woman is by individual methods, including Nina's adoption, Tess's fertility treatment, and April's single life without a marriage. Redefining themselves, women at the turn of the millennium encounter a sense of loss but they still expect a better future. *After Darwin*, the play written after *The Break of Day*, shifting from the focus of women to men, discusses the crisis of masculinity at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the loss of progress and evolution that history usually promises us.<sup>33</sup>

In 1988 as Wertebaker rewrites the early colonial history of Australia in *Our Country's Good*, she has explored the crisis of manliness in the heyday of patriarchal masculinity developed along with imperialism by revealing the ambivalence between

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<sup>33</sup> Although *The Break of Day* focuses on the dilemma of feminisms in the 1990s, the play also reveals men's crisis of masculinity in it, especially by exposing that men have lost their superior status in the work field. Robert has been unemployed for over a year. Jamie's career is in serious danger because his hospital is going to be closed, and his manliness is threatened by April's help. Hugh's career is also encountering a crisis because his musician, Nina, cannot produce music any more. Therefore, the historical paralysis the play discusses is also derived from the characters' crises of identities, be they men or women.

the colonizer and the colonized and the ambiguous double identities as settlers. In 1998, when Wertenbaker rewrites two historical figures, Robert FitzRoy (1805-1865) and Charles Darwin (1809-1882), she analyzes their friendship through the lens of fin-de-siècle paralysis in order to explore the crisis of masculinity in the 1990s and masculinity per se. Many critics have observed that the 1990s is a crucial decade in terms of gender relations. During this decade, feminist theory had been thriving for over twenty years; while women become more and more independent and professional even though they still have problems as illustrated in *The Break of Day*, men are getting more and more troubled. According to Elaine Aston's research, men in this decade, losing their traditional patriarchal superiority as men, no longer hold the advantages either at work or in the family. As a result, some men blame feminism for taking away their vantage, and their crisis of masculinity turns out to be anti-feminism or a backlash against feminism (*Feminist Views* 2-3). Aston compares men in the 1990s with John Osborne's angry young men in the 1950s, calling the crisis of masculinity in the 1990s "new laddism" (2).<sup>34</sup> Hence, it is very obvious that there is a trend of men's crisis in the 1990s in both British and American societies (3; Pilcher and Whelehan 89; Barker 115), and this trend has influenced gender relations a lot.

Joan Scott expresses that the purpose of examining history from the perspective of gender is "to point out and change *inequalities* between women and men" (*Gender*

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<sup>34</sup> John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* (1956) describes young men's anger and discontent to the post-war English society. Because of the success of the play, British theatre in 1950s and 1960s focused on the discussion of social and political issues. Then Osborne and some playwrights, such as Edward Bond and Harold Pinter, who also deal with social realism, are categorized as "Angry Young Men" for the reason that their plays expose anger and bitterness toward British society. However, there are some "Angry Young Women" who also share the same ideals with "Angry Young Men" during this period of time, and two outstanding plays by angry young women are Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* (1958) and Doris Lessing's *Play with a Tiger* (1962). During the 1990s, men's anger turns to the crisis of masculinity owing to feminism and capitalism, and men's superiority is also challenged by successful women. More men lose their authority in jobs and families, getting more troubles, and committing more crimes. Critics name these new angry young men "new lad[s]" (Pilcher and Whelehan 89) and call the drama mirrored their anger as "in-yer-face theatre" or "drama of new laddism" (Aston, *Feminist Views* 2).

3, emphasis added). R. W. Connell further emphasizes the significance of men's studies nowadays, claiming, "To understand a system of *inequality*, we must examine its dominant group—the study of men is as vital for gender analysis as the study of ruling classes and elites is for class analysis" ("A Very Straight Gay" 736, emphasis added). Therefore, it is not complete to understand the inequality between men and women unless it is supplemented with men's studies. Wertebaker's plays are characterized as a new review of gender relations because she sees gender as a constitutive element of social relations with a power of deconstructing stereotypical images of women and men. As suggested by Scott and Connell, only when men are taken into consideration does it become apparent that gender indeed alters the comprehension of history and gender exposes the system of inequality.

*After Darwin* was first performed in 1998 when history was going to move to a new millennium. Wertebaker scrutinizes the crisis of masculinity in the 1990s and the loss of history at the end of the century. Centering on men, *After Darwin* describes FitzRoy and Darwin's friendship in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Ian and Tom's performance in theatre in the 20<sup>th</sup> century through the device of a play-within-the-play. Darwin's theory of evolution threatens not only FitzRoy's identity but also all people who believe the Bible is the only truth. Besides, Tom's and Ian's masculinities are in danger at the turn of the millennium, and their anxiety for manhood causes them different attitudes toward history and different ways to perform historical Darwin and FitzRoy. In order to have a further understanding of how and why Wertebaker rewrites the historical event that happened in the Voyage of the Beagle, this section begins with an exploratory discussion of men's studies in the 1990s, then the gender hierarchy, and last the evolutionary concept of history. This discussion expects to conclude that history of the 1990s and the Voyage of the Beagle during the 1830s are rearticulated, and only by deconstructing masculinity and femininity can old gender



construction be destroyed for a better future.

### **1. Men's Studies in the 1990s**

“Men's studies” is also called “masculinity studies” or “critical studies of men” (Connell and Messerschmidt 829-30). It is a reaction to the second-wave feminist movement and gay liberation (Connell, “Big Picture” 598). “Men's Movements,” following the Women's Liberation Movement, appeared at the end of the 1960s. Like women's consciousness-raising groups, men's consciousness-raising groups also developed in the 1970s (Pilcher and Whelehan 85). However, the scale of men's movements was very limited and not accepted by the majority (Barker 120). It was not until the 1990s when men's problems were increasing and patriarchal masculinity was in serious crisis that men's studies attracted people's attention again (Barker 120-21). When Gayle Rubin describes “the sex/gender system” as “the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity” (159), she explains that masculinity and femininity are man-made constructions that force masculinity to males and femininity to females. The sex/gender system prescribes an essential quality for males and females individually in order to place everyone in this system; therefore, masculinity and femininity become the cultural and social meaning of being men or women. Chris Barker observes, “Traditional masculinity has encompassed the values of strength, power, stoicism, action, control, independence, self-sufficiency, camaraderie and work amongst others” (115). Nevertheless, men realized that traditional masculinity was too ideal to achieve and it did not suit their condition in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, so “the crisis of masculinity” bursted out in the 1990s.

Because the idealized masculinity is impossible to be fulfilled by most men, “multiple masculinities” become the thrust of men's studies. Pilcher and Whelehan

explain, “The plural ‘masculinities’ is also used in recognition that ways of being a man and cultural representations of/about men vary, both historically and culturally, between societies and between different groupings of men within any one society” (82-83). What they mean is that masculinities differ in different cultures, times and places. Even in the same time and space, masculinities are different because of different classes, sexualities, jobs, and so on. Multiple masculinities release men from the idealized masculinity and provide them a position and an identity in society.

R. W. Connell is one of the first theorists who proposed and applied multiple masculinities in the 1990s to a wide range of applications, such as criminology, sports, health, media images of men, art and law. In Connell’s opinion, masculinity is “a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture” (*Masculinities* 71). In other words, masculinity is a set of social practices for men, which place men in different positions and influence human experience in history. Connell’s masculinity as social practices is similar with Rubin’s masculinity as “products of human activity” (159), but what makes Connell’s theory special is that he takes race, class and sexuality into his consideration of masculinity. As a consequence, he suggests a hierarchy of masculinities: hegemonic masculinity, complicit masculinity, subordinated masculinity, and marginalized masculinity (*Masculinities* 76-81).

If we read the main characters in *After Darwin* from the perspective of Connell’s gender hierarchy, we will further understand multiple masculinities, the structure of masculinities, and the interaction between masculinities and femininities in society. Notably, because social practices by human beings create history, when Connell proposes gender is social practices, he simultaneously emphasizes the important role of gender in history. However, if multiple masculinities are all in crisis,

then the identity that gender hierarchy offers men and women will collapse and need to be reorganized. By extension, the traditional concept of history centered on men and scientific accuracy is broken down, too.

## 2. Multiple Masculinities

Representing Connell's "hegemonic masculinity" which is at the top of gender hierarchy, Robert FitzRoy in *After Darwin* is under the illusion that his identity is secured by nature. What Connell calls "hegemonic masculinity" designates the traditional patriarchal masculinity; it is social and cultural norms of being men. The idea of hegemonic masculinity comes from Antonio Gramsci's "hegemony," which "refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life" (*Masculinities* 77). Hence, as the top position in the gender hierarchy, hegemonic masculinity embodies all the superior characteristics of being noble men, excludes men who have no power in society, and represses all women. According to Connell, hegemonic masculinity "embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (77). Connell's explanation reveals that patriarchy rationalizes and legitimizes hegemonic masculinity while hegemonic masculinity puts patriarchal ideas into practice.

Moreover, based not only on sexist patriarchy but also classism, hegemonic masculinity builds up itself through ideological and institutional power. As the word "hegemony" suggests, hegemonic masculinity is organized by "a combination of force, and more importantly, consent" (Barker 84). It exercises power over the subordinate classes, such as women and the majority of men, but it is also accepted and agreed upon by society. Therefore, Connell observes that hegemonic masculinity "is likely to be established only if there is some correspondence between cultural ideal

and institutional power, collective if not individual” (*Masculinities* 77), and the representatives of hegemonic masculinity are “the top levels of business, the military and government” (77).

In this light, FitzRoy fulfills all the qualities of hegemonic masculinity. As the captain of *The Beagle*, FitzRoy’s status is superior in the gender and social hierarchies. He, born to be a noble Tory, has served in the Navy since he was fourteen years old. His heritage, upbringing, and work all represent his aristocratic masculinity. Although Darwin is also born in a noble family, compared with FitzRoy’s career, which represents the authority of the military, Darwin’s social status is inferior to FitzRoy’s. In order to maintain his status, FitzRoy requires his crew’s complete obedience, sometimes at the price of corporal punishment. He insists on the necessity of flogging in the ship, so the drunkenness on the day after Christmas is not an excuse for not being punished. Claiming, “From the ship’s crew I expect only obedience” (*After Darwin* 119), FitzRoy protects his absolute power through punishment, believing, “A captain who cannot assert discipline betrays his men, goes mad himself, mad” (119).

FitzRoy’s strict personality is also expressed through his scientific research. Despising Darwin’s record full of personal enthusiasm about the new land, he tells Darwin, “Mr. Geographer, while you were gallivanting about the countryside, I have measured, remeasured, and measured again every inch of this coast. Back and forth, back and forth—there will no error in the charts of these waters” (125-26). His quest for scientific perfection also implies his attitude toward history. FitzRoy, allowing no narrative element in historical records, expects accurate scientific truth and disdains Darwin’s personal narrative. Describing the same coast of South America, Darwin’s and FitzRoy’s observations are totally different. Darwin’s description is full of literary narrative and figures of speech, representing Hayden White’s argument on history as narrative form. Darwin reads his record of the coast, “—The next morning we saw the

sun rise behind the outline of the Grand Canary island and suddenly illumine the peak of Tenerife, whilst the lower parts were veiled in fleecy clouds” (117). However, FitzRoy’s response to Darwin’s record is: “Such enthusiasm. So few facts” (118). Completely different from Darwin’s, FitzRoy’s record is filled with scientific numbers and evidence:

Vessels in the offing, and distant land looming much; a few mottled, hard-edged clouds appearing in the east; streaks (mare’s tails across the sky) spreading from the same quarter; a high barometer (30.3) and the smoke of chimneys rising high into the air and going westwards, were the signs which assured us of a favourable wind. (118)

He values scientific evidence more than personal narration because for him mathematical facts convey truth and show the authority of being a captain. Therefore, in order to preserve his power, gender, and social status, FitzRoy practices his hegemonic masculinity through discipline, punishment, and scientific accuracy.

FitzRoy’s voyage to the Galapagos Islands is not simply a man’s adventure to display his masculinity, but also an expression of British imperialism overseas. Connell, pointing out that the co-existence of masculinity and imperialism, states, “[M]asculinities are not only shaped by the process of imperial expansion, they are active in that process and help to shape it” (*Masculinities* 185). The overseas empire provides men a rational excuse to embody their masculinity, and Connell further comments, “Empire was a gendered enterprise from the start, initially an outcome of the segregated men’s occupations of soldiering and sea trading” (187). In other words, imperialism excludes women and has a prejudice in favor of men’s aggressive and violent masculinities. Like in *Our Country’s Good*, Captain Phillip, who dominates New South Wales in the name of civilization and education, and Ross, who insists on punishment to maintain his power, Captain FitzRoy exercises his hegemonic

masculinity through the colonization in the overseas empire. Bible-trusting, faithful, FitzRoy claims that his voyage with Darwin is a “civilising mission” (118). He has been to Tierra del Fuego once, and captured four native people. In this voyage with Darwin, he plans to release three of them, because one died of smallpox, to see whether English education works on native people. Regarding the aboriginals as “the most miserable and savage creature” (106), FitzRoy intends to cultivate them by the means of western civilization.

In the name of education, like Captain Phillip in *Our Country's Good*, FitzRoy hides his imperialism and aggressive masculinity under the mask of civilization. The purpose of this voyage is to build a colony in South America; FitzRoy states, “I am bringing all three back with a young missionary who will establish a settlement on that wild coast” (106-07). In order to set up an English empire, he insists that slavery in the colony is necessary and believes that the aboriginals like to be slaves. When Darwin criticizes slavery in South America, FitzRoy justifies himself, arguing, “I once questioned a landowner on that very subject. He called in twenty of his slaves and asked them what they thought and to a man they said slavery was a good thing” (126), continuing, “I do not say we should have slavery in England, but here—” (127). Apparently, FitzRoy rationalizes imperialism in the name of religious mission, but in fact his imperialistic attitude despises the aboriginals in South America. While he is defending British imperialism, he is simultaneously justifying his hegemonic masculinity which is practiced through overseas colonialism.

Just like Captain Phillip and Ross's hegemonic masculinities are challenged and questioned due to the resistance from Australian Aboriginal peoples and the double identities derived from the ambivalence between the colonizer and the colonized and between the colony and England, Captain FitzRoy's masculinity is in crisis, too. As Connell suggests, masculinity is social practices; “masculinity, not as an isolated

object, but as an aspect of a larger structure” (67). What he means is that from the perspective of multiple masculinities, a masculinity, instead of being coherent, is always negotiating and interplaying with others in order to position itself in gender relations (71). Therefore, although FitzRoy’s hegemonic masculinity represents the superior level in the gender hierarchy, it is still challenged by others, particularly Darwin. Darwin’s theory of evolution breaks down the belief that the world is centered on God. FitzRoy uses the flood in the Bible to explain the extinction of some animals (125), and he believes that “scientific truths are there to reveal God’s intentions” (143). Nevertheless, Darwin’s new discovery collapses his long-term faith and hope, which always supported for a long time his concept of being a man. At the end, FitzRoy, claiming he is saving humanity, breaks the moral code that one should not shoot an unarmed man so as to menace Darwin not to publish his theory (168). His aggressive behavior reveals that his identity is threatened, and “violence” is the most immediate way to protect his identity and to maintain his masculinity (Connell, *Masculinity* 185-86).

Although FitzRoy embodies Connell’s hegemonic masculinity, his interaction with Darwin reveals that masculinity is built up through social practices and masculinity is neither something essential to possess nor something coherent forever. Connell argues, “‘Hegemonic masculinity’ is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. It is, rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable” (*Masculinities* 76). Interpreted in this way, FitzRoy symbolizes a western, white, heterosexual hegemonic masculinity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century England, and this gender status provides him with an identity at the top of the gender hierarchy. However, it is not for good because it has to negotiate and compromise with others through social practices. This unstable and shifting identity connotes that the superiority of



masculinity no longer exists; at best, it exists in the relations with others temporarily, but it would shift immediately. FitzRoy as well as Captain Phillip and Ross in *Our Country's Good* strives to maintain their hegemonic masculinity through discipline, military power, voyage, and imperialism without realizing that masculinity per se is always eluding to be grasped.

According to Connell's definition, Darwin, like FitzRoy, is also categorized as "hegemonic masculinity" for the reason that his class, race, family and career offer him a superior status in gender relations. However, even though society affords him a position at the top of the gender hierarchy, Darwin still cannot fulfill this ideal quality of being a man. Especially, Darwin's body degrades his manliness. Men's body usually is considered as a direct way to represent and display masculinity. Rubin's sex/gender system has explained that society directly links the biological sex with social and cultural gender; hence, since the male body must display masculinity, the effete and effeminate male body is despised. Connell further illustrates, "True masculinity is almost thought to proceed from men's bodies—to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body. Either the body drives and directs action [. . .] or the body sets limits to action [. . .]" (*Masculinities* 45). As a result, masculinity indicates strength, vigor and the connotation of determination and resolution.

Darwin's virility is questioned by FitzRoy because he does not have a "masculine" nose. The captain tells Darwin, "According to the laws of physiognomy, it [your nose] indicates a certain weakness of temperament" (*After Darwin* 111). Darwin's nose almost makes FitzRoy decide not to invite him to The Beagle. Furthermore, Darwin's seasickness is also laughed at by the crew and even by three aboriginal people. "I was sick as soon as we left the Channel. Even the Fuegians laugh at me. Have you seen Jemmy Button mimicking my sickness?" (114),

complains Darwin. Even three subjugated colonials, who are feminized by the colonizer, laugh at Darwin's weak body. His manliness is seen as effeminacy, which suggests Darwin's crisis of hegemonic masculinity and the impossibility of fulfilling it. What is worse is that Darwin even wants to give up the Voyage of The Beagle, but with the help and encouragement from FitzRoy, he stays at last so that his theory of evolution could be discovered then.

Connell's multiple masculinities propose that each masculinity is a position in gender relations and the position is set up temporarily in contrast to others. Therefore, each masculinity is relative to others and also blurring, overlapping with others in the gender hierarchy. From this perspective, although FitzRoy and Darwin are both classified as hegemonic masculinity due to their class, race, career, family and the power that they are born to have; by comparison, FitzRoy represents hegemonic masculinity while Darwin symbolizes complicit masculinity, which is inferior to hegemonic masculinity and is practiced by the majority of men (*Masculinities* 79).<sup>35</sup> In *The Beagle*, FitzRoy is the captain whereas Darwin is his companion. Darwin has to obey the captain's order. However, their power relation is reversed when Darwin's theory threatens FitzRoy's identity, and their gender relation is reversed, too. FitzRoy's hegemonic masculinity is degrading while Darwin's is uplifting. In light of Connell's theory on multiple masculinities, masculinity is no longer a fixed identity that men can possess or lose or a stable characteristic inscribed in the male body; instead, it is social practices in relation to others in gender relations.

Through the device of a play-within-the-play, Wertebaker in *After Darwin* explores men's crisis of masculinity in two centuries. The inner play describes the friendship between FitzRoy and Darwin in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and their relation reveals a complicated power structure within masculinities. The outer play centers on how the

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<sup>35</sup> Complicit masculinity will be discussed later. See pp. 168-70.

friendship is performed at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ian who performs FitzRoy and Tom who plays Darwin embody other kinds of masculinities in the modern age. According to Elaine Aston's analysis, *After Darwin* symbolizes the "crisis in masculinity" in the 1990s, and the crisis "that involves an understanding of how men's roles are changing in work and family" (*Feminist Views* 162). Different from FitzRoy and Darwin who are both seen as the representatives of ideal masculinity and both at the top position in the gender hierarchy, Ian and Tom are not noble and upper-class people, and their lives and jobs are insecure. The idealized hegemonic masculinity cannot fit their condition at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, so one may say their roles as men in modern gender relations change in a different way from FitzRoy's and Darwin's.

According to Connell's gender hierarchy, the next position inferior to hegemonic masculinity is "complicit masculinity," which is practiced by Ian in *After Darwin*. As suggested by Connell, few people qualify the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, but most men, who are less aristocratic and less powerful in social institutions, still benefit the superiority of being men in gender relations. Due to the fact that most societies are patriarchal, most men, who are complicit with patriarchy, share the advantages of hegemonic masculinity. Connell argues that "the majority of men gain from its hegemony, since they benefit from the patriarchal dividend, the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women" (*Masculinities* 79). Ian, as a white English actor, gains a superior power over women, and he becomes a complice with hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy.

Before the advent of the theory of multiple masculinities, hegemonic masculinity has been regarded as the only norm of all men's behavior without the considerations of class, race, sexuality and professions. Connell and Messerschmidt observe, "It [hegemonic masculinity] embodied the currently most honored way of

being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men” (832). Though few men can qualify, this criterion becomes the standard to judge all men. In the 1990s, because of the inability to solve their gender crisis and because of the economic crisis coming with globalization and capitalism, more and more men lost themselves at the end of the century. Noticing the dilemma of modern men stuck in patriarchal and feminist ideas, bell hooks argues, “As workers, most men in our culture (like working women) are controlled, dominated. Unlike working women, working men are fed daily a fantasy diet of male supremacy and power. In actuality, they have very little power and they know it” (*Feminist Theory* 121). Encouraged to pursue the masculinity that is too idealized and fantasized to achieve, men suffer from a crisis of manliness and their crisis turns out to be social problems. For example, bell hooks points out the violence that men do to women owing to the unsolved manly crisis (121).

In *After Darwin*, Ian, symbolizing Connell’s complicit masculinity, cannot achieve hegemonic masculinity, so he grasps every chance to manifest his manliness. Unemployed for two years before he takes the role of FitzRoy, he, a hard-working actor, believes that he can succeed in both films and theatre. Performing some roles on principle in spite of the temptation of money, Ian waits for a chance to express himself. However, because of bad luck and his stubbornness, unemployed life makes him become a cynical person. Despite the fact that he himself wants to perform in films, he criticizes, “Too many film stars give bad performances. It’s not that they’ve lost their talent, but their sense of self” (148). In addition to the failure in his job, Ian fails in his marriage and in the relation with his daughter. The image of a dignified father as tradition collapsed in the 1990s, especially when more and more men lost advantages in family because they failed in job and marriage. Ian has to rebuild a

bonding with his daughter through taking care a tamagotchi. He explains to Tom, “My daughter’s tamagotchi. She comes every other weekend and I look after it [the tamagotchi] the rest of the time. If something happens, she’ll never trust me again” (147). Ian, representing the majority of men whose status in society is getting lower and lower, cannot fulfill the norm of hegemonic masculinity, so he becomes more anxious to grasp something. His betrayal to Tom at the end of the play indicates that he would like to do everything to protect and confirm his masculinity.

Insisting on showing traditional manliness, Ian refuses to express tenderness. During the rehearsal, the director Millie is never satisfied with his representation of FitzRoy, and she criticizes that he cannot express more emotion and tenderness. Ian asserts that English men do not embrace or show their emotion because English men are repressive (113). The emotional repression of men is a traditional quality of patriarchal masculinity because the norms of sexual roles demand men to emphasize strength instead of weakness, and to tolerate pain instead of displaying pain. bell hooks observes that this repression is conventionally considered as an expression of masculinity. She explains, “As the psychology of masculinity in sexist societies teaches men that to acknowledge and express pain negates masculinity and is a symbolic castration, causing pain rather than expressing it restores men’s sense of completeness, of wholeness, of masculinity” (*Feminist Theory* 122). As a result, men have to repress their emotion in order to fulfill “the fantasy of masculinity that is socially constructed by ruling groups in capitalist patriarchy” (122). Ian, confined to hegemonic masculinity, is doomed to fail in actualizing manliness because it is an idealized norm established in the sex/gender system in order to put men in a set arrangement. Connell’s complicit masculinity, which is embodied by the majority of men, corresponds with Ian’s position in the gender hierarchy; however, as long as hegemonic masculinity has become a social norm to review men, Ian’s virility cannot

recover. Moreover, if any kind of masculinity exists by contrast and comparison with the other, as suggested by Connell, complicit masculinity is also doomed to fail. By the same token, Ian's complicit masculinity is destined for instability.

Tom, a gay, represents homosexual masculinity, which Connell designates "subordinated masculinity," but his manhood is disgusting to other men. While complicit masculinity takes class into reconsideration, "subordinated masculinity" emphasizes the importance of sexuality in practicing masculinity. "The most important case in contemporary European/American society is the dominance of heterosexual men and the subordination of homosexual men" (*Masculinities* 78), claims Connell. Because of the superiority of heterosexuality, homosexuality is oppressed, and "[o]ppression positions homosexual masculinities at the bottom of a gender hierarchy among men" (78). It ought to be noted that homosexual men are usually seen as feminine; in other words, people take away gay men's masculinity, considering that they do not and cannot actualize manliness. Gay men are feminine, so that Connell observes that straight men are taught to be homophobic in order to show their virility ("A Very Straight Gay" 736). In *After Darwin*, Ian apparently despises Tom's sexuality. When Millie asks Ian to embrace Tom for illustrating the close friendship between FitzRoy and Darwin, Ian rejects by saying, "English men don't embrace, Millie, particularly not these Englishmen" (112). Ian confirms his masculinity through his disgust of the feminized gay.

Connell proposes that homosexuality is based on men's sexuality rather than masculinity, so gay men are not supposed to be excluded from the discussion of manliness ("A Very Straight Gay" 737). However, granted that gay men's virility is placed in subordinated masculinity in the gender hierarchy, it does not mean that their identity or position in the gender hierarchy is fixed and secure. Tom's masculinity is never ensured by society or by himself. His manliness is not only questioned by

hegemonic masculinity because of his sexuality but also challenged by AIDS because of the threat of death. Men's body directly displays virility; therefore, when the male body cannot fulfill hegemonic masculinity, such as Darwin's nose and seasickness, or when the male body is damaged, such as Tom's disease, men's manliness is in serious danger. Refusing to have a test that would indicate that Tom is probably HIV positive, he defends himself by claiming, "I don't want to know. It's bad enough every time I get the flu, people ring you up, you know, they wait, they don't quite ask" (170).

Death threatens Tom's masculinity, and he states, "My father died of a heart attack when he was forty, I had a lover who died of AIDS, my best friend was murdered. I'm a modern boy, death lurks around the corner. I'm used to that, the only question is when and what it's going to look like" (171). Tom's masculinity is threatened, but unlike Ian who is desperate to grasp something to re-affirm his manliness, Tom decides to despise social conventions, to have an easy life, and to live with his own style. He declares, "I'm tired of everyone trying to enlist me in their ideas. I don't want to be told that this idea is the best idea that ever existed and that I have to fight for it, lose my job for it, even leaflet for it. When I see an idea floating around, about to get stuck on my jacket, I move" (130). Hence, Tom's masculinity is threatened because of the disease that degrades his male body, and his gender crisis causes him to play around with the world.

Ian and Tom both are insecure of their masculinities, and their gender crises are reflected in different attitudes toward history. Ian is eager to seize a fixed identity to express both himself and the character FitzRoy he performs, whereas Tom believes neither identity nor history. Depending on Darwin's "autobiography," which symbolizes an authorized fact, Ian maintains the friendship between FitzRoy and Darwin as books, and he announces that following the historical evidence is the only way to perform historical figures (120). When Millie asks Ian to "create" FitzRoy



with tenderness, Ian replies, “He is an historical character, I am finding him” (112). Gipson-King argues that Ian stands for “nineteenth century positivism,” believing there is only one truth to be found in history (231).

Ian reminds us of the immigration officer Simon Le Britten in *Credible Witness* for they both emphasize the scientific evidence in official papers and both refuse to accept the narrative element in history. Without official records and credible witnesses, Simon does not permit asylum seekers to stay in England. By the same token, Ian follows what the historical books tell him to perform; his job is to “find” FitzRoy instead of “creating” FitzRoy. Therefore, as Millie requires him to embrace Tom, he proclaims, “I have read everything there is about FitzRoy, which isn’t much, I admit, but I can assure you he would not embrace or be embraced—he would never show what he feels” (112).

By contrast, Tom’s crisis of masculinity reflects his nihilist attitude toward history. He does not read books about or by Darwin or FitzRoy because he simply does not believe in books or history. Not only does he announce that the changeability of history provides no fixed idea or identity, but he totally refuses to believe what actually happened in history. Tom asserts:

Yeah, but history’s shifty too, I mean, isn’t it supposed to be rewritten all the time? Things happened that we were told never happened, like those Yugoslavs who helped us in the war—you know—the partisans those English politicians sent back to be killed—It’s in the film script. And then some things that maybe didn’t happen, like the Holocaust. (122)

Gipson-King explains that the difference between Ian’s and Tom’s concepts of history symbolizes “the debate between the nineteenth century view of ‘history as truth’ and the postmodern view of ‘history as fiction’” (231). Seeing history as fiction turns Tom into a nihilist, who believes nothing has any value and nothing has really happened,

such as the Holocaust. Nevertheless, Hayden White has explained that history and fiction are not polar opposites; rather, history is manifested through “the imaginable” and “the actual” (*Tropics* 98). In other words, seeing history as a narrative form does not suggest the unimportance or the meaninglessness of historical facts. Instead, the understanding of history is constituted by historical facts which actually happened and people’s interpretation of facts. Tom’s gay masculinity is disregarded and in danger owing to the dominance of heterosexuality as well as the threat of AIDS, so his gender crisis reflects a historical nihilism. He considers that history does not exist, just as his manliness is claimed to be nonexistent by the heterosexual society.

Like gay men’s subordinated masculinity at the bottom of the gender hierarchy, black men’s “marginalized masculinity” is also disdained by white men.<sup>36</sup> In *After Darwin*, the playwright Lawrence embodies marginalized masculinity in gender relations. Connell in his theory of multiple masculinities takes race into consideration of manliness; he finds that “[r]ace relations may also become an integral part of the dynamic between masculinities” (*Masculinities* 80). When a society is dominated by white people, black men are not only repressed but their male body is also seen as “ugliness.” Krishnaswamy claims, “If masculine beauty was an expression of white European racial, moral and cultural superiority, ugliness was evidence of nonwhite, non-European inferiority” (293). Re-defined by white hegemonic masculinity as “ugliness,” black men’s masculinity is marginalized.

As an African American playwright, Lawrence’s manliness is always shifting with no stable position in society. Born into a poor working-class family, Lawrence is

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<sup>36</sup> According to Connell’s gender hierarchy, it is not clear whether subordinated masculinity or marginalized masculinity is the lowest of multiple masculinities. For the western society which is based on heterosexuality and white people, homosexual masculinity and non-white masculinity are both considered at the bottom of masculine hierarchy. Connell does not have a further discussion on which one is higher than the other because he emphasizes that masculinities as social practices and each one is revealed in comparison with the other.

tutored at home. His mother does not allow him to read books by or about blacks, including books about black history and slavery. Lawrence tells her the story of Caliban in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, and then she angrily tears out the play in the book (161). Lawrence's identity is unstable mainly because he does not understand his own black history. He is fascinated with history, but what he is interested in is white men's history. When Tom asks him why he loves England, he responds, "Because your pavements burn with history" (137). He explores the historical event of the Voyage of The Beagle and the friendship between FitzRoy and Darwin, with an expectation to understand history in his own interpretation and to find himself in history. However, his passion for history excludes his own black history and slavery history, which is to say that he identifies with white, western men more than his own black people. Tom asks him, "Why don't you write yourself a part: Jemmy Button?" (136), and he replies, "It's FitzRoy I'm interested in" (136). Lawrence is not interested in Jemmy Button because Jemmy Button's history is similar with black people's slavery history, which Lawrence has no idea about it. He becomes what his mother expects him to be: a black who does not know black history. Learning Shakespeare, Milton and *Moby Dick*, Lawrence identifies with white hegemonic masculinity and sees western masculinity as a social norm.

Lawrence's fascination with non-black history is derived from his crisis of identity, but his quest for an identity through studying white men's history is doomed to fail for the reason that the understanding of the present is built on the interpretation and comprehension of the past. He rewrites history in order to reflect his identity crisis and the crisis of masculinity in the 1990s, but his method cannot make his black identity clear. His new discovery of evolution shows that evolution is a good excuse for modern people to escape from their past into a selfish future. Lawrence, emphasizing the tension between FitzRoy and Darwin, plans to destroy the images of

hegemonic masculinity represented by the two historical characters through breaking the moral codes of each other. In Lawrence's vision, a highly religious and moral captain betrays the moral code by threatening an unarmed man with a gun. Darwin also breaks the promise that he would not publish his theory because he later does publish *The Origin of Species* (1859). In order to maintain their individual belief, they do not care about social morality, and more crucially, their behavior generates a new vision of evolution, which suits the capitalized society at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that is evolution developed by human being's selfishness. Later, when he finds Ian's and Tom's betrayal, Lawrence is unable to accept selfishness as an excuse to ensure their social status; consequently, he gives up the play, which symbolically means he gives up the quest of searching for his identity.

Through the device of a play-within-the-play, how history is constructed is displayed in front of the audience; furthermore, the audience senses the revision of history is directly influenced by each character's crisis of identity. Ian still insists on acting FitzRoy as what books describe. Tom proposes a gay vision of FitzRoy and Darwin. Lawrence suggests a vision with a gun to break the morality and hegemonic masculinity that FitzRoy and Darwin embody. While they are discussing how to rewrite history, the audience clearly perceives that their construction of history is based on their crises of identities and their understanding of gender relations in the 1990s.

### **3. The Bottom of the Gender Hierarchy**

Although Connell divides masculinity into four levels with considerations of class, sexuality, and race in order to explain men's crisis of masculinity in the 1990s due to the unfulfillability of hegemonic masculinity, Connell proposes that any manliness is relative to others and a temporal place in the gender hierarchy with the

possibility of changing position or overlapping with others. From the perspective of multiple masculinities, in *After Darwin*, five male characters represent different masculinities: FitzRoy and Darwin actualize hegemonic masculinity, Ian complicit masculinity, Tom subordinated masculinity, and Lawrence marginalized masculinity. Each of them embodies and exercises different masculinities, and their identities have to be concerned with others' because manliness is social practices in the gender hierarchy rather than an entity that men can possess. Connell explains, "I emphasize that terms such as 'hegemonic masculinity' and 'marginalized masculinities' name not fixed character types but configurations of practice generated in particular situations in a changing structure of relationships. Any theory of masculinity worth having must give an account of this process of change" (*Masculinities* 81).

Connell's multiple masculinities release men from the idealized, fantasized manliness, and plural masculinities do not intend to categorize every man into different levels in the gender hierarchy. Instead, this theory emphasizes the fluidity of each position and interaction within gender relations. However, Connell's discussion still regards hegemonic masculinity as the superior status, and as long as hegemonic masculinity is still a norm to grade men, men's manliness is always in crisis. In other words, Connell does not deconstruct the illusion of hegemonic masculinity, and his multiple masculinities ironically reiterate the superiority of hegemonic masculinity. From this point of view, all male characters in *After Darwin* stand for different masculinities, but they still suffer from crisis of masculinity. Their crises suggest a need of rearranging or even deconstructing gender relations in order to ease their identity anxiety, and obviously, multiple masculinities cannot ease their identity discomfort.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Connell insists on distinguishing "crisis" from "crisis tendencies" (*Masculinities* 84). He explains that crisis "presupposes a coherent system of some kind, which is destroyed or restored by the outcome of the crisis" (84), and since, in his opinion, masculinity is not a coherent system but "a configuration

In addition, excluding women from re-arranging new gender relations, multiple masculinities are still based on patriarchy and sexism, simply seeing femininity as the bottom of the gender hierarchy. Hegemonic masculinity as well as other masculinities “allow[s] men’s dominance over women to continue” (Connell and Messerschmidt 832); in other words, multiple masculinities in the 1990s did not take women into consideration for new gender relations; hence, women were still the repressed. Regarding the neglect of women in men’s studies, Connell and Messerschmidt propose, “We consider that research on hegemonic masculinity now needs to give much closer attention to the practice of women and to the historical interplay of femininities and masculinities” (84). As the aforementioned discussion in Chapter Two indicates, gender is “a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes” (Scott, *Gender* 42). Thus, because history is an accumulation of men’s and women’s social practices and the effect of their interaction, men’s studies cannot be discussed exclusively for masculinity; by the same token, feminism must include the discussion on men. Emphasizing the possibility of changes in the gender hierarchy, Connell’s theory of multiple masculinities intend to liberate men from an impossible idealized hegemonic masculinity, but this liberation is not complete when women are still repressed. Some critics accordingly announce that “unless those [men’s] groups exercised some consciousness about the social and ideological advantages they held over women, their call for liberation would be an empty politically naïve gesture” (Pilcher and Whelehan 86).

In *After Darwin*, Millie (Amelia), a female Turkish-Bulgarian director,

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of practice *within* a system of gender relations” (84 emphasis in original), then masculinity, instead of having crisis, has tendencies toward crisis (84). However, because masculinity has been traditionally seen as some essential qualities imposed on the male body, and it is this traditional idea of masculinity that Wertebaker in her plays attempts to deconstruct. The usage of “masculinity in crisis” is proper to represent a challenge and a break from conventional values of masculinity.

symbolizes the bottom position in gender relations. In fact, if we appropriate Connell's terminology correspondingly, femininity is supposed to be multiple, too: hegemonic femininity which represents an idealized, western, traditional singular-formed femininity, complicit femininity which is illustrated by the majority of white western women, subordinated femininity which describes homosexual femininity, and marginalized femininity which is manifested by non-white women. In this way, due to her race and nationality, Millie's femininity not only stands for the inferior position compared with masculinity, but also the bottom of femininities.

Notably, multiple masculinities are discussed in the 1990s, but multiple femininities have not been analyzed until the 1970s. Gerda Lerner in *The Majority Finds Its Past* (1979) takes class into consideration, claiming, "Women of different classes have different historical experiences" (146). Then Chandra Talpade Mohanty in "Under Western Eyes" (1988) asserts the importance of race in the discussion of femininity, and criticizes that women as a group "assumes an ahistorical, universal unity among women based on a generalized notion of their subordination" and "limits the definition of the female subject to gender identity, completely bypassing social class and ethnic identities" (72). Monique Wittig in "One Is Not Born a Woman" (1992) discusses women from the perspective of homosexuality and concludes that lesbians are not women because they are expelled from the heterosexual system. She asserts, "Lesbian is the only concept I know of which is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), because the designated subject (lesbian) is *not* a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically" (316 emphasis in original). In short, multiple femininities derived from different groups of women, in contrast to multiple masculinities, were not new in the 1990s. However, we find that critics scarcely mention women's "crisis of femininity" because different groups of women all see femininities as social and cultural confinement which restricts them to different



methods and different time and space. Therefore, men's crisis of masculinity indicates their unconscious desire to dominate women still, whereas women strive to deconstruct femininities that repress them to the bottom of the gender hierarchy.

Unlike Ian, Tom, and Lawrence who express a strong anxiety of losing identities in history, Millie, an Eastern European immigrant, makes an effort to re-identify herself optimistically and to be "a guest in a new country" (188), as Alexander tells his exiled students in *Credible Witness*. Because of proclaiming her Turkish heritage, Millie, a Turkish-Bulgarian, is persecuted by Bulgaria and forced to restart her new life in England. Like Bulgarian women "who refuse to kneel" in *Credible Witness*, Millie refuses to accept everything with resignation and she struggles hard to create her identity. Different from Lawrence who does not know his own black history, she has actually lived in the war between her ancestors: Turks and Bulgarians. Different from Ian who stubbornly insists on a fixed concept of history, Millie invents her new identity and history in England. Also, different from Tom who loses himself in history and becomes a nihilist, Millie fights hard for her life. She works as a cleaner in Bulgaria and then pretends to be a director in England. In order to make her life anew, she changes her name from Bulgarian Amelia to English Millie and gets rid of her vowels to learn the English accent. Millie claims, "I can become good at this [directing], I know I can become good at this, I will work and work and become good at this—and then at last I will be safe" (156). She works hard to change her original inferior social status and the marginalized position in the gender hierarchy, expecting to fulfill herself by breaking the social stereotypical image of an Eastern European woman.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Millie breaks not only the stereotype of women but also the stereotype of Eastern Europeans. When Millie criticizes how people romanticize Eastern Europeans, her words remind us of another character, Constantin, in *Three Birds Alighting in a Field*. They both judge English people's fantasy of Eastern Europeans and overlook the harsh condition they live. Millie's criticism once again condemns English island mentality.

However, Millie's effort to reinvent herself is frustrated by the possible cancellation of Lawrence's play, and till the end of the play her identity is still in danger. Tom decides to accept a role in a film, and his leaving threatens Ian's career. Ian then secretly e-mails to Tom's film director that Tom is HIV-positive. Tom cannot prove Ian's mail is wrong because he is too scared to have a test. Together with Ian's betrayal and Tom's behavior of putting others at risk, Lawrence refuses to participate in the play, leaving Millie's dream broken. When Elaine Aston analyzes the end of the play, she asks, "A question that the play poses, however, is whether Millie can have a role in the future?" (*Feminist Views* 164). Wertebaker leaves us an open ending, but it is clear that the 1990s under Wertebaker's description is a time when the whole gender hierarchy is shaking, losing boundaries and ready to be remapped. Not only are the superior multiple masculinities in crisis but women also encounter frustrations of reversing conventional images of femininities. The history of the turn-of-the-21<sup>st</sup>-century is created by a confusion of gender identity as men lose their superior status and women cannot break the restriction that the sex/gender system enforces upon them.

#### **4. Evolutionary History**

Although *After Darwin* concludes with an open ending, some critics read the ending optimistically. Maya E. Roth believes that in the last scene that six characters by three actors and one actress across time and space get together and talk, and she claims, "Wertebaker's characters finally succeed in moving and speaking across locations, in interaction" ("Engaging Cultural Translations" 173). Similar to Roth's view, Sara Freeman suggests that "the boundaries between performance and life blur and intermingle, as a type of collective instinct is called for in future evolution" ("Adaptation *After Darwin*" 650). However, reading the ending from the perspective

of blurring performance and life and of crossing time and space cannot successfully explain that all the characters' crises of identities have been solved. Moreover, when all characters appear in the last scene, they talk to themselves without communicating with each other. Millie reads the title of books. Darwin talks about his theory of evolution. FitzRoy talks about something in a biblical tone. Lawrence speaks of his memory. Their words intervene in each other and do not have a dialogue. Therefore, the last scene still resonates with characters' loss in history and crisis of each other's identity.

Nevertheless, the title of the last scene, "Evolution," gives us a clue to understand Wertebaker's intention. If history is evolutionary as Darwin's suggestion, the future is supposed to be bright and the characters' crises symbolize some turning points to an optimistic tomorrow rather than a pessimistic prediction. In other words, Wertebaker expects a new mode of gender relations in the future. Through the device of a play-with-the-play, the dramatist shows us two versions of evolution. One is Darwin's discovery of "biological evolution" and the other is modern people's "cultural evolution" (Aston, *Feminist Views* 168). According to Darwin's theory, in order to survive in a new environment, creatures have to vary themselves to adapt to it, and then variations turn to be a new species. This adaptation of creatures is also what Darwin calls survival of the fittest or natural selection. The theory of evolution indicates a process to a better future because only strong and superior creatures can survive in the future. However, Darwin's biological evolution becomes an excuse for an immoral competition in the modern time. Tom, who ironically performs Darwin, uses evolution to rationalize his selfish behavior, stating, "I'm hungry, Ian, I want to go where there's lots of food" (149). Ian blames him for understanding evolution in a wrong way and argues, "You're playing a man of extreme decency and you're taking the most superficial reading of his own words to excuse your disgusting, criminal,

your tawdry—” (150). Darwin’s great theory of biological evolution at the end turns out to be an excuse for modern people’s selfishness and develops itself into a new species of evolution, cultural evolution.

The new variation of Darwin’s biological evolution is named as “cultural evolution” to describe people’s behavior of caring about their advantage only (Aston, *Feminist Views* 168). It justifies itself with Darwin’s theory of survival of the fittest and disregards the importance of morality. Millie also criticizes Tom for using evolution as an excuse to gain his own benefit, arguing biological evolution cannot rationalize a human being’s selfishness, especially when Tom has the ability to survive. “But I cannot understand you, Tom. I come from a culture where many of us had to do terrible things, but you do not have to do this” (159), Millie wonders. Then after Lawrence realizes Ian’s and Tom’s betrayals, he refutes, “Human beings have evolved a moral sense, we don’t know why, but they have. Lose that—lose what makes you human [. . .]” (172). Understanding the ending of *After Darwin* from the perspective of evolutionary theory uncovers two things. First, if the crisis of gender relations in the 1990s indicates an expectation for a better future, then what kind of the variation of new gender relations is there in the future? Second, what does the role of morality play in new gender relations in the future?

In *After Darwin*, multiple masculinities and multiple femininities apparently cannot solve the characters’ crises of identities because giving them a position in the gender hierarchy cannot liberate them from the traditional masculinity and femininity. After all, those gender conventions still restrict men and women. Then the play takes a step further to suggest the deconstruction of masculinity and femininity, demystification of gender, and denaturalization of the essence of gender. The gender relations in the future are supposed to be based on equality between men and women without hierarchy no matter what race, class, sexuality, and nationality they are. More

crucially, owing to the emphasis of equality, morality is significant in gender relations because it explains the reason why human beings are different from animals. No group of people is supposed to be left for extinction or repression. This moral responsibility of human beings will not become another kind of dominance by the majority or the powerful because Wertenbaker in *Our Country's Good* explains that the resistance from the inferior rejects homogeneity and colonization and the resistance indeed exists and works.

In addition, the deconstruction of masculinity and femininity does not suggest androgyny, which means a combination of masculinity and femininity in a person.<sup>39</sup> bell hooks well explains that feminism fails to attract men into feminist movements because men's studies has been overlooked by feminists, and the solution to men's crisis of masculinity through asking men to become more feminine and more emotional is not proper.

To a grave extent feminist movement failed to attract a large body of females and males because our theory did not effectively address the issue of not just what males might do to be anti-sexist but also what an alternative masculinity might look like. Often the only alternative to patriarchal masculinity presented by feminist movement or the men's movement was a vision of men becoming more "feminine." The idea of the feminine that was evoked emerged from sexist thinking and did not represent an alternative to it. (*Feminism* 69-70)

What bell hooks intends to emphasize is that to affirm men have femininity or women have masculinity cannot answer men's and women's crises of identities. Androgyny, homogenizing the individual developments of masculinity and femininity, reduces the

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<sup>39</sup> Androgyny in terms of biology means "the union of both sexes in one individual" (Hawthorn 13), but it is more often used to "refer to culturally acquired characteristics rather than to biologically determined ones" (13).

differences of the two and disregards the social interaction between them. The equality derived from androgyny sacrifices the individuality of different groups of men and women.

Hence, the social conventions of being masculine or feminine indeed exist, and they still regulate people up to the present time. But they exist only in contrast with each other and in gender relations. Their temporal existence helps us to review the inequality of men and women and to see the historical process exercised by the interaction of them. Ultimately, their existence proves the convention of gender is arbitrary and ideologically invented in order to serve the sex/gender system. To deconstruct masculinity or femininity does not mean to erase their existence but to acknowledge the illusion and ideological construction that they confine men and women to. Only with this understanding can we realize why Joan Scott states that men and women are both “empty” and “overflowing.” She asserts, “Empty because they have no ultimate, transcendent meaning. Overflowing because even when they appear to be fixed, they still contain within them alternative, denied, or suppressed definitions” (*Gender* 49). When masculinity and femininity exist or appear to be fixed, they simultaneously show their multiple definitions and their fluidity to elude only one interpretation. When masculinity and femininity then are asserted to be multiple, they are symbolically empty because they do not contain an ultimate ideal to regulate men and women.

The idea of deconstruction of gender goes through Wertenbaker’s four history plays. It is very obvious that Wertenbaker expects a new mode of gender relations with no hierarchy and no man-made regulations that restrict the development of each person based on their sexes. In *New Anatomies*, Isabelle, rejecting femininity, re-defines herself not through following the social norms by the sex/gender system; instead, she uses cross-dressing to transgress the gender boundary and to disillusion

the arbitrariness of femininity. Wertebaker in *The Grace of Mary Traverse* also deconstructs the illusion of idealized femininity by Mary's crossing the spatial division. After Mary gains the political power in the public sphere, like men do, she realizes the deception of masculinity, so she decides to go back to the private sphere with a new understanding of the spatial division. *Our Country's Good* and *After Darwin* both focus on men's issues, including the representation of men and the crisis of masculinity. Imperialism develops with masculinity, but the ambivalence between the colonizer and the colonized deconstructs the masculine colonialism and challenges the superiority of western manliness. The crisis of virility goes to the highest in the 1990s when feminism, capitalism, and globalization threaten men's status in jobs and family. Wertebaker in these two men-centered plays demystifies the idealized patriarchal masculinity, as she does to femininity in *New Anatomies* and *The Grace of Mary Traverse*, and rewrites history from the perspective of the crisis of masculinity. In *After Darwin*, the open ending suggests an idea of evolutionary history, which looks for optimistic and equal gender relations in the future. The dramatist also proposes that the first step to a better future is to deconstruct stereotypical images of masculinity and femininity in order to liberate men and women from traditional gender conventions.

Chapter Three emphasizes that the four history plays by Wertebaker reveal that gender is socially constructed and should be deconstructed, so one can redefine oneself and re-interpret male-centered and scientific history. The same idea of the deconstruction of gender is also very important for us to understand how Wertebaker rewrites myth and fairy tales, which is what the following chapter aims to explore.



## Chapter Four

### Retelling History: Gender in Wertenbaker's Oral History Plays

History has been revealed as narrative that conveys more than one interpretation as suggested by Hayden White; gender has been reconsidered as a constitutive element of social relations and a useful perspective to analyze history as argued by Joan Scott. In this way, Wertenbaker's re-interpretation of male-centered history and gender relations are probable and sensible. Chapter Three has discussed that Wertenbaker's history plays manifest that gender is a social construction so that it can be deconstructed to release men and women who are confined to stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. In this light, history is no longer based on men's coercive dominance over women and women's willing submission to men; rather, history is moving with the unstable, dynamic gender relations and full of resistance to the mainstream historical discourse. Following the same line of gender discussion in Chapter Three, this chapter scrutinizes how Wertenbaker retells oral history in three of her plays: *The Love of the Nightingale* (1988), *Dianeira* (1999), and *The Ash Girl* (2000). It argues that by rereading against male-centered oral history of myth and fairy tales from a gender-oriented perspective, Wertenbaker criticizes the traditional gender relation and proposes a break from male chauvinism in oral history and to have self-awareness for women in the past and the present as so to have a new mode of gender relations in the future.

Before exploring three of Wertenbaker's oral history plays, it is necessary to explain what oral history is and why it is important when we study gender in history. Historians divide two subcategories under a big category named "history by word of mouth" (Tosh and Lang 310): one is "oral history," which means "the first-hand recollections of people interviewed by a historian" (310), and the other is "oral tradition," which refers to "the narratives and descriptions of people and events in the

past which have been handed down by word of mouth over several generations” (310). According to these definitions, myth and fairy tales belong to oral tradition; for example, Betsy Bowden asserts that myth generates from oral tradition (431), and Christine Goldberg also traces fairy tales back to oral tradition (202). However, because oral history and oral tradition are both oral materials about the past, they both are usually categorized as “oral history” or “history by word of mouth.” Tosh and Lang argue that oral history can identify with “oral tradition as well as personal reminiscence” (334), while Frank de Caro insists that oral history denotes all “[o]ral information about the past and the recording of that information” (475). Therefore, it is reasonable to claim that the Philomel myth in *The Love of the Nightingale*, the myth of Dianeira and Heracles in *Dianeira*, and the fairy tale of Cinderella in *The Ash Girl* are all under the big category of “oral history.”

*The Love of the Nightingale*, *Dianeira*, and *The Ash Girl* are plays about stories in oral history, so they can be defined as “oral history plays.” In fact, M. H. Abrams’s definition of “history plays” can cover “oral history plays” because according to him, history plays refer to “any drama based mainly on historical materials” (37), which by implication, plays based on oral materials about history are also history plays. Nevertheless, emphasizing oral history plays different from history plays intends to achieve two purposes. First, history plays are often based on historical characters or events, such as *New Anatomies* re-describes Isabelle Eberhardt (1877-1904), *The Grace of Mary Traverse* the Gordon riots in 1780, *Our Country’s Good* the First Fleet sailing to Australia in 1788, and *After Darwin* Robert FitzRoy (1805-1865) and Charles Darwin (1809-1882); in other words, comparatively speaking, history plays tend to rewrite historical materials that are written down or scientifically proven truth, while oral history plays tend to retell oral materials about the past that cannot be scientifically proven. Chapter Two has explained that history is not supposed to be

limited within scientifically-proven facts, so in order to broaden our comprehension of history, oral history that conveys people's wisdom and tradition should be highly valued.<sup>1</sup>

Second, in order to study the role of gender in history, the sources of history are not supposed to be merely based on historical documents because traditional history recorded men only. Women were hardly inscribed, and the interaction between men and women appeared as only one mode: men coercively dominated women. Therefore, many scholars are eager to find new references and sources in order to uncover the hidden women in history and re-examine the relations between men and women.

Deirdre Beddoe declares:

The fact that the historical sources are not always obvious or conventional stimulates the investigator to look for and use new sources. Novels, hymn books, songs, criminal records, myths, old wives's tales, folk remedies, rituals, women's magazines and oral testimony need scrutiny as well as do such traditional historical materials as parish registers, census returns and Parliamentary papers. (7)

In this way, oral history, including myth and fairy tales, is required to be reread and to be valued as written history, so oral history plays emphasize and highlight women and their interaction with men in oral tradition.

Especially, June Hannam believes that oral history reveals the experience of the

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<sup>1</sup> It ought to be noted that even though White does not restrict history within scientific historical facts, and he emphasizes the narrative element of history, it does not suggest that White overlooks the importance of facts that really happen. In the section of *After Darwin* in Chapter Three, I have emphasized that seeing history as fiction turns Tom into a nihilist who does not believe anything has value or really happened, such as holocausts. In other words, White's theory of narrative history does not mean that scientific facts are not important; rather, history is supposed to be understood by both "the actual" and "the imaginable" (*Tropics* 98). From this perspective, oral history, including myth and oral tales, is usually considered as fiction, but I propose that also according to White's theory, oral history is as valuable as written history. Oral history is not totally "the imaginable." Also, it is "the actual," but not in a scientific way. This argument will be made clear in the first part of *The Love of the Nightingale* when I assert that myth as well as fairy tales is not opposite to history.

majority men and women, instead of kings and queens (307). Oral history uncovers not only the invisible women as well as men, but also the opinion of the past from the ordinary people's perspective. However, because women's past are seldom recorded, most critics assert that oral history is much more important for women than men, and that knowing women's pasts for women is "strength, encouragement and admonition to women engaged in current initiatives for change" (Beddoe 6). Hence, the book argues that plays based on oral history potentially emphasize the importance of gender in oral tradition and contain a broader historical source of gender to review the relations of the sexes.

Because *The Love of the Nightingale* directly refers to the Philomele myth, *Dianeira* the myth of Heracles and Dianeira, and *The Ash Girl* the fairy tale of Cinderella, they, focusing on myth and fairy tales, can be categorized as oral history plays. In addition to these three plays, Wertebaker exposes her opinions of oral history in other plays by her, and her attitude reflects and influences her oral history plays. In *Credible Witness*, speaking through Alexander, Wertebaker reminds us that history is understood by words of mouth, stating, "[U]ncover the bands of your history through the witness. Go to your grandmothers who have hoarded memories, kept words hidden in the folds of their clothes. Go to the old man muttering in the café" (185). History is not only in the books but it also lives around us. To find truth in official documents is limited sometimes, futile and even wrong. For example, in *Credible Witness* Simon's insistence on official papers blinds him to see asylum seekers' miserable life, and it is not until Petra forces him to see Ameena's body that he realizes history is inscribed in everyone.

Wertebaker in *Credible Witness* stresses oral history is as significant as history that has been written down and scientifically proven, but as she points out the limitation of written history, the dramatist also exposes the hidden danger of oral

history. Even though, Wertenbaker's purpose is quite clear: to manifest that history should be open to any kind of interpretation by any kind of people. When Alexander tells Petra about how his narration is misinterpreted by immigration officers, he says, "The embassy man misinterpreted everything I said to the official. It made me unsure, hearing it in another language, but so different—I became confused," continuing later, "He [the interpreter] told the official I seemed hysterical, I remember the word, hysterical [. . .]" (219). Like Alexander who is treated as hysteric, Ameena is regarded as a prostitute when her narration is misinterpreted by male immigration officers (232). Although the officers in the detention center value the narrations by the asylum seekers, they still cannot find the truth because they have had a prejudice against foreigners before they make a judgment.

As suggested by Tosh and Lang, the significance of oral history is to provide first-hand historical sources recorded by the non-elite people (311), but the dangers of oral history lie in whether historians are objective and whether interviewees are unaffected by external forces (318). In *Credible Witness*, historian-like immigration officers are prejudiced against asylum seekers so that even though they value the first-hand references, they still cannot know the truth of history. FitzRoy, the captain who represents the power of British imperialism in *After Darwin*, asks the native people in South America whether they like slavery or not, and the powerless aboriginals answer that slavery is a good thing (126). FitzRoy's first-hand material is questionable because the interviewees are threatened by the power that FitzRoy stands for. Darwin criticizes the captain's judgment by claiming, "What else could they [native people] say in front of a man who could put them to death?" (126). The aboriginals have to provide fake oral evidence in order to survive under the dominance of the British Empire. Such fake oral evidence gives England an justification to colonize South America.

The contribution of oral history is easily twisted in a coercive society or in the condition that the power relation is unbalanced, such as native people in the British colony or asylum seekers in a British detention center. In this way, historians' attitude is important because they are the people who decide what history is. Similar distortion due to the asymmetry of power can also be found in *New Anatomies*. The historical record of Isabelle is twisted under the dominance of the French Empire in North Africa, but this misdescription helps Isabelle instead. Séverine is commissioned by the French government to record every word Isabelle remarks; however, the more she understands Isabelle, the more sympathy she gives Isabelle. Séverine at the end reports to the French government that Isabelle is drowned in the desert, so that Isabelle can escape from France's surveillance and can live in the desert by her marvelous skill of cross-dressing.<sup>2</sup> Séverine's fake historical report helps Isabelle to survive in the coercive condition when the French government is more powerful than the Arab and men are superior to women.

Wertenbaker in her plays shows the limitation of oral history, including how the interviewees are threatened to offer wrong oral evidence and how historians misinterpret interviewees either prejudicially or sympathetically, but the playwright also values the significance of oral history especially when traditional written history overlooks ordinary people's everyday experience in social history. Wertenbaker does not abandon oral history; instead, she rewrites stories in oral history in order to sustain the value of oral history that conveys different truth from written history, to give voices to those who are silenced in history, and to modify the words threatened by the authority. Therefore, the playwright's attitude toward oral history is dual, to carry on

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<sup>2</sup> For the discussion of the ending of *New Anatomies*, please see Chapter Three, pp.92-93. I suggest that the play has an open ending and Isabelle does not die. Therefore, here I emphasize that Séverine is not faithful to her history recording, but she is faithful to sisterhood, which assists Isabelle with escaping from the surveillance of the French government.

the value of oral history and to adjust the deficiency of oral history, and her dual attitudes directly reflect on her revision of myth and fairy tales.

Describing the experience of pre-civilization, myth and fairy tales represent the collective wisdom, and they are conveyed by mouth for several generations. They are the evidence of how history is constructed by non-elite people, but they also leave out-of-date ideas. Rather than denying oral history, Wertebaker chooses to retell myth and fairy tales to fulfill her dual attitudes toward oral history. Take myth as an example. Hollis Seamon observes that many feminists are not satisfied by the female images in myth because for them myth is full of patriarchal and even misogynistic values, but owing to the fact that feminists realize “the richness and usefulness of traditional myth” (277), they do not reject myth overall. Feminists, on the one hand, recognize the patriarchal values in oral history, but on the other hand, they still can find the hidden female power in it (Seamon 276). From this point of view, instead of abandoning myth, feminists encourage people to rewrite myth from the perspective of the silenced and hidden mythical women (276).

This chapter aims at scrutinizing Wertebaker’s oral history plays respectively, including *The Love of the Nightingale*, *Dianeira*, and *The Ash Girl*, and pays special attention to gender in them. Since feminists have pointed out a hostile attitude toward women in oral history (Seamon 276), then the revision of female images and the new gender relations are the first steps for the rewriting of old stories. Judged from such revisionary view, Wertebaker in these three oral history plays fulfills three purposes: to re-examine female images, to deconstruct femininity and masculinity, and to create a new model of gender relations.



### A. *The Love of the Nightingale: A Modern Revision of the Philomele Myth*

Based on Sophocles' lost play *Tereus*, Wertebaker creates *The Love of the Nightingale* to rewrite the Philomele myth, which is also recorded in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. First performed by Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford in 1988, winning the Eileen Anderson Central Television Drama Award in 1989, *The Love of the Nightingale* is set in ancient Athens and borrows some conventions from Greek theatre, such as chorus. In Greek mythology, Athenian princess Procne marries Thracian king Tereus, but Tereus falls in love with Procne's sister, Philomele. Tereus rapes Philomele and cuts her tongue off. Later, Procne knows the truth; in revenge, she kills their son. While Tereus tries to kill the two sisters, the three of them all turn out to be birds: Philomele becomes a swallow, Procne a nightingale, and Tereus a hawk (Hamilton 284).<sup>3</sup> Retelling this myth, Wertebaker's revision reshapes the images of the two heroines and provides a reconsideration of female identity.

This section contains three parts. It begins with a quest of the meaning of myth, and discusses what a myth is according to the male chorus in the play and the importance of revising myth for women. Meanwhile, due to the flexible characteristic of myth, Wertebaker revises the myth and allows her myth to be retold and revised continuously by the reader. Then the second and the third parts analyze how Wertebaker revises the old Philomele myth, and especially focuses on the two heroines, Philomele and Procne. Unlike the Philomele who is silent in the old myth, Philomele in Wertebaker's play is a smart woman who is sensitive to language while Procne is no longer an evil-hearted mother in the old myth, but a woman with a well-developed psychological transformation and a feminist consciousness. Finally,

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<sup>3</sup> In the literary tradition, both Procne and Philomele (sometimes is spelt Philomela or Philomel) may refer to nightingales. However, according to Edith Hamilton, it is ancient Roman writers who confused Procne with Philomele because it is "obviously absurd" to argue that the tongueless Philomele is the nightingale (284-85). In *The Love of the Nightingale*, Procne finally transforms into a swallow, Philomele a nightingale, and Tereus a hoopoe (352).

the Bacchic festival in the play is discussed in order to present the feminine power represented by Bacchus and the two heroines. Through these parts, this section affirms that through rewriting myth, the gender relation is no longer based on submissive women and coercive men and mythical voiceless female characters are uncovered to recreate female identities.

### 1. The Meaning of Myth: A Reconsideration

Starting from the definition of myth, this part asserts that Wertenbaker's revisionary myth stimulates readers to actively reconsider old myth, to see through the truth of myth, to understand the task of myth, instead of passively accepting it. Myth originally means "speech or word" (Coupe 9). In classical Greek, myth means any story or plot, which could be true or invented (Abrams 170). It offers the explanation of the origins and destinies, and it answers why the world or the thing is as it is, such as where nightingales and swallows come from. There are many kinds of theories of myth, and they all provide different definitions.<sup>4</sup> However, one characteristic of myth that should not be neglected is its fluidity. M. H. Abrams explains myth as "a work," which means "an ongoing and ever-changing process that is expressed in oral and written narratives and includes the diverse ways in which these narratives are received and appropriated" (171). Myth, interpreted in this way, is a work which could be rewritten and recreated, and that is the reason why myth is still prevalent today and

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<sup>4</sup> There are a lot of theories of myth, and Wertenbaker follows the feminist approach to analyze myth. William Righter sketches four fundamental theories of myth: functionalism, such as Malinowski's and Van Gennep's theories; psychology, such as Freud's and Jung's theories; religious theories, such as Joseph Campbell's and Mircea Eliade's theories; theory of symbolic form, such as Cassirer's theories (14-24). Christ Barker mentions that in cultural studies, based on Roland Barthes's theory in the late 1960s and early 1970s, myth is similar to "ideology," and it is something "unchallengeable," "natural" and "God-given" (129). Hollis Seamon argues that for feminists, myth is "deeply grounded in patriarchal, misogynistic traditions" (276), so a feminist critique of myth has two missions: to uncover "the misogyny embedded in traditional mythological stories" (276), and to expose "a hidden core of female power in myths" (276). Obviously, Wertenbaker's revision of the Philomele myth is feminist: to reveal both the patriarchal values and a feminist consciousness.

accepted by modern writers, such as novelist Margaret Atwood, poet Sylvia Plath, and playwright Timberlake Wertenbaker, to name just a few. Myth itself is fluid and flexible no matter in form or in content; it is because of this fluidity that many modern writers tend to recreate myth for their own purposes.

Paula Gunn Allen accentuates the truth of myth, discovering that reality is the main object of myth. She maintains,

Myth acts as a lens through which we can discover the reality that exists beyond the limits of simple linear perception; it is an image, a verbal construct, which allows truth to emerge into direct consciousness. In this way, myth allows us to rediscover ourselves in our most human and ennobling dimensions. (11)

Myth helps people to be able to see what they cannot see and to see through what people think they see. Hollis Seamon also notices that myth conveys truth, and she comments that myth “is repeated in oral or written form, until it becomes accepted as truth, often achieving sacred status” (276). Truth exists in myth, and myth expands secular human minds. In other words, the truth of myth is neither secular nor scientifically-proven, but rather myth is “a truer (deeper) version of reality than (secular) history or realistic description or scientific explanation” (Williams 212).

If myth represents the truth of the spiritual, psychological and unconscious human mind, then myth is not illusory or deceptive, and the opposition between myth and history becomes “problematical” (White, *Tropics* 83). As suggested by White, history is revealed by the comparison and contrast between “the actual” and “the imaginable” (*Tropics* 98); by the same token, myth is also disclosed by “the actual” and “the imaginable” because myth conveys the spiritual actualities through imaginable plots. When White affirms the narrative element in history, he simultaneously refuses a clear cut between history and myth (*Tropics* 83, 91).

Myth, the word itself, came into English in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and it used to be contrasted with “history” (Williams 210). The 19<sup>th</sup> century is the time when science came to the zenith. Under the scientific atmosphere, history pursued scientific facts while myth became an illusion or fantasy. However, history and story come from the same root (Williams 146), and the Latin word of myth, *mythos* derived from Greek *fibula*, meaning “story” and “tale” (Bowden 431). In other words, containing the narrative element as story, neither history nor myth is completely scientific facts; conveying truth (one is what exactly happened, and the other is the truth of human psyche), neither history nor myth intends to deceive. In short, to claim the truth of myth is especially important because, as Paula Gunn Allen proposes, myth helps people to see the truth that we do not notice, and the part that we overlook is usually the parts about “the other,” women in particular (Seamon 276).

Wertenbaker’s *The Love of the Nightingale* is not only a myth about the Philomele myth, but it is also a myth about what a myth is. Discussing what a myth is in Scene Eight, the male chorus offers three definitions: myth is “public speech;” myth is “the content of the speech;” myth is “the oblique image of an unwanted truth, reverberating through time” (315). The male chorus then laments that a myth loses its value as time goes by. They claim a myth is a public speech, the content of the speech, or what the speech is about. However, they wonder, “[H]as the content become increasingly unacceptable and therefore the speech more indirect?” (315). The more the unacceptable content a myth includes, the more indirect the speech is. The male chorus sorrows for the devaluation of myth by people, grieving that a myth even turns out to be “an unlikely story” and “a remote tale” (315). As long as myth is unacceptable, the way to speak myth becomes more indirect. The male chorus, therefore, announces that “we cannot rephrase it [myth] for you. If we could, why would we trouble to show you the myth?” (315). In other words, the male chorus

asserts that they cannot tell us what a myth is but they can “show” us and let audiences decide the meaning of the myth by themselves. Myth originally is a speech but now, paradoxically, it cannot be spoken. It can be shown and be represented, but it cannot be explained by any specific definition. The male chorus members first offer the meaning of a myth and then they deconstruct it; in this way, they give audiences the right to interpret myth, and they simultaneously manifest the flexibility of myth, so that myth can be retold, represented, and reinterpreted. At the end, what a myth is depends on the audience.

From this point of view, the third meaning of myth given by the male chorus is sensible: myth is “the oblique image of an unwanted truth, reverberating through time” (315). Myth is a truth; nevertheless, with the devaluation of myth and development of civilization, the truth of myth becomes unwanted and oblique. Then we cannot see or tell the truth of myth directly, but myth still reverberates in each different generation while the meaning of myth is different from each epoch. The flexibility of myth facilitates itself to suit different periods and to be fulfilled for various purposes. The male chorus, therefore, claims that if the audience thinks of everything carefully, “You will be beside the myth” (315). “[T]here is no content without its myth;” the male chorus further states, “Fathers and sons, rebellion, collaboration, the state, every fold and twist of passion, we have uttered them all” (315). Although myth cannot be spoken and it is even unwanted and oblique, it is related with everything, everyone, every time and everywhere.

While the male chorus members explore what a myth is, they reveal the fluid and flexible characteristic of myth. Due to this trait, myth could be reconstructed and retold to fulfill different intentions. Also, due to this trait, even the same myth could have different interpretations. One of the three epigraphs in *The Love of the Nightingale* starts from Eavan Boland’s “The Journey,” and it also enlightens us upon

the “sound” of myth: “Listen. This is the noise of myth. It makes the same sound as shadow. Can you hear it?” (285). This epigraph indicates that although people talk about the same myth, their interpretation and their understanding are different. A myth, therefore, becomes noises because it is full of different voices. Any interpretation is possible, and more crucially, no interpretation can reduce the authenticity of a myth. Marina Warner asserts, “Every telling of a myth is a part of that truth; there is no Ur-version, no authentic prototype, no true account” (qtd. in Coupe 189). Each telling does not diminish or exploit the authority of the myth; instead, every revision is a rebirth of that myth. Wertebaker’s *The Love of the Nightingale* is a revision of the Philomele myth and also a rebirth of Philomele.

Because of the fluidity of myth without a closure, Wertebaker may rewrite the Philomele myth and then provide a space for readers to go on or to rewrite the myth on their own. At the end of the play, while three main characters transform into different birds, Hero concludes, “The myth has a strange end” (352). But Echo replies, “No end” (352). Jennifer A. Wagner furthermore observes that it is also Echo who ends the last word when she reports the myth ends with “metamorphosis” (Wagner 249). Echo’s word indeed echoes the end of the play. Besides, her word sums up the myth and this summary “recognizes that there is no ending, either to myth or to history, but only the repetitions with differences that myth and parody alike are best able to capture” (Wagner 249). The open ending allows the myth to be repeated. The last scene is the conversation between Philomele as a nightingale and Itys, and it ends with endless questions. The form of open ending characterizes the fluidity of the myth, and it grants the old myth to be reborn and to be renewable.

In *The Love of the Nightingale*, unlike the male chorus who never is involved in the action of the play, the female chorus members are five characters in the play, serving as Procne’s Thracian companies. While the male chorus talks about the

meaning of myth objectively and impersonally, the female chorus creates the meaning of the Philomele myth by including themselves in it. Those five female chorus members are named after five mythical women: Hero, Iris, Juno (Juno), Echo, and Helen. No matter whether in Greek mythology or in *The Love of the Nightingale*, they all are the “the other” in the stories. Allen has explained that the truth of myth facilitates people to see beyond the human mind and to discover the part we do not notice, and feminists remind us that women are “the other” in mythology (Seamon 276). In other words, myth requests people to observe “the other,” and women are the most typical example of the other. Laurence Coupe claims that “the task of myth” (197) is to notice otherness because myth is “an ethics of ‘otherness’” (196). The task of myth has three purposes.

Firstly, the myth recalls and projects an ‘other’ world. Secondly, the myth reminds us that there is always something else, something ‘other’, to be said or imagined. Thirdly, the myth, as a play of past paradigm and future possibility, gives expression to the ‘other’, to those persons and causes excluded from the present hierarchy. (196-97)

Hero, Iris, Juno, Echo, and Helen are “the other” in Greek mythology, and in *The Love of the Nightingale*, because of being both women and Thracians, they are “double” otherness. The ethics of myth reminds us to pay attention to the other and to listen to the parts that are silenced.

Being “the others” in mythology, these five women all symbolize female submissiveness to men’s dominance, and even Juno (Hera), the queen of Zeus, is no exception. Portrayed as a woman who is full of jealousy and anger, Juno has a job in Greek mythology: to punish the women Zeus loves (Hamilton 28). Echo is one of the women Juno punishes because she suspects that Echo is loved by Zeus. As a result, Echo is punished to repeat the last word said by others and not to speak first (91).



Juno's identity depends on Zeus, and in order to ensure her identity as Zeus's wife, she punishes other women without justice. While Juno becomes a patriarchal assistant without a feminist consciousness, Echo also loses her subjectivity for she can only echo others. Like Juno who is described negatively, Helen is claimed to be charged with the Trojan War due to her beauty, but her voice is lost in the myth. Without subjectivity, Helen is portrayed as an object that all men are eager to gain, and she accepts her life passively with resignation. Hero is also another passive woman in Greek mythology. Lighting a torch every night, Hero guides her lover Leander to meet her in a tower. When a storm blows out the light, Leander dies in the sea and Hero follows him (Hamilton 307). Greek mythology is filled with these passive women, and Iris is another. She is "a messenger of the gods" (37). She has no right to speak because her job is to convey male gods' words. In brief, these five mythical figures are all submissive to men, passive to create their own identities, speechless for themselves.

Conscious of using these allusions in *The Love of the Nightingale*, Wertebaker re-arranges these women to be the chorus members, who are usually considered as the representative of the playwright and the commentators who express wisdom, according to the tradition of Greek theatre. When Procne feels lonely and isolated in Thrace, Helen tells her: "You will always be a guest there, never call it your own, never rest in the kindness of history" (*Nightingale* 298). Juno is "the protector of marriage" (Hamilton 28), but now she states, "All service is danger and all marriage too" (*Nightingale* 317). Gaining wisdom from being others in mythology, now they become wise predictors in the play to remind Procne the coming danger. Again, Iris also serves the job as a messenger as in mythology, but this time she conveys women's wisdom instead of men's order. She is the first one who warns Procne the coming danger (316); unfortunately, Procne does not listen to them because she, an

Athenian, does not understand the connotations in the Thracian language.

The male chorus explains the meaning of myth objectively, but the female chorus is involved in the myth to remind people of “the task of myth.” Their appearances as characters in the play represent that the others are not satisfied with being objects anymore. Their voice is eager to be heard, and their appearances also request people to notice the existence of the other in the play. Wertebaker’s revision of the Philomele myth therefore has important purposes, to give the voiceless people voice and to reconstruct female identity. Adrienne Rich well explains the importance of revisionary myth for women:

Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for woman, is more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society. (18)

Looking back by retelling myth not only re-creates the stereotypical images of women in the past, but it also helps women to survive nowadays, to know themselves, to search for their identity, and to refuse the domination of patriarchy. Rewriting Philomele and Procne, *The Love of the Nightingale* provides the old myth a modern interpretation. This new reading is important because it prevents us from restricting within the outworn norms in myth. Rich claims, “We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us” (19). In short, a reconsideration of the meaning of myth helps us to understand the truth of myth and the task of myth, and this rethinking uncovers the hidden and powerless others, women in particular.

Starting from the next part, this section is going to discuss how Wertebaker rewrites two heroines in the Philomele myth. The dramatist's revision retells many parts of the old one; especially her reconstruction of two heroines is full of feminist awakenings. Philomele in *The Love of the Nightingale* is bold, smart and sensitive to language, and Procne has a well-developed psychological transformation. Wertebaker animates the two sisters and reshapes their female images and female identities. In this way, the playwright gives voices to the women who were treated as the other and were silenced in the old myth.

## 2. Philomele: A Woman without a Tongue

The background of *The Love of the Nightingale* takes place in ancient Athens, but Philomele appears as a bold and smart modern woman at the very beginning of the play. Particularly, Philomele's curiosity about sex shocks the reader. bell hooks criticizes:

Sexist thinking taught to females from birth on had made it clear that the domain of sexual desire and sexual pleasure was always and only male, not only a female of little or no virtue would lay claim to sexual need or sexual hunger. Divided by sexist thinking into the roles of madonnas or whores females had no basis on which to construct a healthy sexual self.

(*Feminism* 85)

hooks' comment explains that women for a long time had been confined to sexual repression and sexism, and it is not until the feminist movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that women are released from the repression. However, Philomele is an anachronistic woman. She lives in the ancient time but she has a modern feminist consciousness, which is developed through her sensitivity of language.

In Scene Two, Philomele shows her curiosity by asking Procne about the

knowledge of sex. After she sees a handsome soldier, she wants to wrap her legs around him (*Nightingale* 292). When she falls in love with a captain, she puts his hand on her breast and asks him to obey his sexual desire (325). Philomele feels free to talk about sex and to express her desire and love. She, however, is not shaped as a woman who always and only thinks about sex and desire; instead, she is clever and intelligent, too. She likes to listen to the philosophers' speeches and discuss the philosophical issues. When Procne requests her not to talk about sex, she smartly answers, "Not today. Tomorrow I'll think about wisdom" (294). Wertenbaker's Philomele is a bold and clever woman. As hooks suggests, conventionally there are only two extremely different woman images in literary works: one is elegant and smart like a goddess, and the other is evil and sexual like a witch; but neither of them is a normal person. Sensible and graceful, Philomele also has a sexual desire like a common human being. Therefore, Wertenbaker does not intend to create an extremely good goddess or an extremely bold dirty witch; rather, she shows women as they are.

Female characters in myth or literary works are usually silent and voiceless, but Wertenbaker's Philomele is talkative and sensitive to language. Philomele uses language to express her subjectivity and controls her situation. Her agility with language could be shown in three methods. First, Philomele makes witty retorts, which are illustrated in Scene Five while Philomele and her family watch a tragedy *Phaedra*. Tereus thinks that Phaedra should not tell a lie, but Philomele retorts, "When you love you want to imprison the one you love in your words, in your tenderness" (305). After Tereus expresses his disagreement with the Nurse's advice to Phaedra, Philomele retorts, "No, Tereus, you must obey the gods. Are you blasphemous up there in Thrace?" (303). Her father, King Pandion, reminds her that she is talking to the king of Thrace, but she is still brave to retort him.

Second, Philomele uses a lot of "questions" to classify things and express her

ideas. While the captain she loves comments that the men living in Mount Athos believe it is women who cause all disasters in the world, Philomele is against him; she questions him: “Why do they [men in Mount Athos] believe that? You don’t agree with them, do you, Captain?” (310). In order to persuade the captain, Philomele then attempts to start a Socratic dialogue, which means to use endless questions to clarify a question. Philomele explores new things by asking questions, but the captain deems that she asks too many. She replies, “And you ask none, why?” (324). Philomele is clever enough to use more questions to reject the captain’s request of no question, and her curiosity and endless questions make her different from any other conventional quiet princess.

Philomele also uses numerous questions to accuse Tereus’s violent rape; for example, she queries, “I was the cause, wasn’t I? I said something. What did I do?” (335), or “What did you tell your wife, my sister, Procne, what did you tell her? Did you tell her you violated her sister, the sister she gave into your trust? Did you tell her what a coward you are and that your could not, cannot bear to look at me?” (335-36). Philomele’s questions, on the one hand, force the listener to rethink the things that they believed before, and, on the other hand, she expresses her own judgment in an indirect way. More importantly, her subjectivity is set up by those abundant questions. She is eager to speak up, to articulate, and to present her identity, but her questions challenge the existing sexist society ruled by Tereus. Tereus cuts her tongue off. As the female chorus remarks, people have the right to ask questions to find out the truth, but as long as asking questions is forbidden, the rebellion comes along.

Hero: We can ask. Words will grope and probably not find. But if you  
silence the question.

Iris: Imprison the mind that asks.

Echo: Cut out its tongue.

Hero: You will have this [Philomele and Procne's rebellion].

June: We show you a myth. (349)

It seems that Wertebaker's play indicates that in the mythological and patriarchal world women are voiceless, and as long as a woman is fluent in speaking, like Philomele, she would be silenced, like Philomele loses her tongue. However, Wertebaker reveals that for Philomele "silence" is the most powerful language.

The third way to show Philomele's agility with language is, paradoxically, silence, or we may say body language. After Tereus violently cuts her tongue off, Philomele spends all her time in making three big dolls. In the feast of Bacchus, she performs how she is raped by Tereus, and then Procne realizes the truth by seeing her performance (342). This intrigue is different from the old Philomele myth. According to Greek mythology, Philomele weaves a beautiful tapestry on which Tereus's violence is revealed, and she sends it to Procne (Hamilton 284). Compared with the old arrangement, Wertebaker's revision emphasizes both the importance of language and the power of the theatre and performance.

In *The Love of the Nightingale*, Wertebaker rewrites Philomele by giving her a sense of theatrical language. In the feast of Bacchus, Philomele uses dolls to perform and she even cruelly acts how Tereus cuts her tongue off: "The rape scene is re-enacted in a gross and comic way [. . .] Philomele does most of the work with both dolls. The crowd laughs. Philomele then stages a very brutal illustration of the cutting of the female doll's tongue. Blood cloth on the floor. The crowd is very silent" (342). Philomele's performance reminds us of Artaud's theatre of cruelty.<sup>5</sup> Based on

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<sup>5</sup> Joe Winston mentions Artaud's theatre of cruelty but without any further detailed explanation. He writes, "The form and content of Philomele's theatrical language, with its grotesque manipulation of life-sized puppets, is reminiscent of Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty*" (516). Also, Esther Beth Sullivan mentions that Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre and Antonin Artaud's theatre of cruelty function in Wertebaker's plays, but she does not mention that *The Love of the Nightingale* is also influenced by Artaud's and Brecht's ideas.

Artaud's theory, theatre is like "renewed exorcisms" (89). It functions as a ritual or a festival, so it needs to be performed in the crowds, not on the stage or in the auditorium. Artaud asserts, "Theater of Cruelty proposes to resort to a mass spectacle; to seek in the agitation of tremendous masses [. . .]" (85). Therefore, the feast of Bacchus provides Philomele a good chance to perform her own theatre of cruelty. While she acts among people, the crowd laughs. "Laughter" is the way to resist the authority, as Artaud argues (91). Besides, Philomele uses "only" three "huge dolls" to perform what Tereus does to her, and her performance is also very Artaudian. There is no need of a set in the theatre of cruelty, except "manikins, enormous masks, objects of strange proportions" (Artaud 97). Philomele's three huge dolls are manikins, and manikins are important for the reason that theatre is like a ritual and the manikins, or dolls, puppets usually play as substitutions for gods, ancestors, tribal heroes, or scapegoats. Artaud attempts to release the ritual and magical power from the theatre since theatre stems from rituals.<sup>6</sup> In this light, Philomele releases her anger and feminine power through comic performance in the crowds.

Philomele's "silence" is full of theatrical power, and her sense of theatrical language is also expressed in her self-consciousness of estrangement from the theatre. Philomele loves to go to the theatre, but she does not accept every word or the idea represented on the stage. Tereus expresses to Philomele that his love for her is like Phaedra's love for Hippolytus, which is to say that Tereus takes the play as an excuse to justify his unfaithfulness to Procne. Tereus rapes Philomele in the name of love. Nevertheless, Philomele, as a theatre fan, does not believe everything performed on the stage; instead, she keeps a distance from the performance so that she can judge the performance critically without the influence of the theatre. She, responding to Tereus, asserts, "Tereus, it was the theatre [. . .]" (*Nightingale* 329). Philomele worships love,

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<sup>6</sup> Especially, both theatre and drama stem from Dionysus Festival (Hamilton 62-63).



but she does not think that love could be an excuse to do everything. She rejects Tereus, and then Tereus rapes her. Philomele's sense of theatrical language is Brecht's alienation effect, which is "to prevent the emotional identification or involvement of the audience with the characters and their actions in a play" (Abrams 5). In this way, audiences, such as Philomele, know what happens on the stage is not real, and they are supposed to have their own thinking instead of simply accepting everything on the stage.

Through Tereus's excuse of believing him as Phaedra, it is very obvious that Wertebaker points out "the abuses of theatre" (Wagner 252). Unlike the educational and resistant power of theatre in *Our Country's Good*, Wertebaker in *The Love of the Nightingale* cautions the audience to maintain a clear mind to judge theatre critically. Like the device of a play-within-the-play in *Our Country's Good*, *The Love of the Nightingale* also uses the same technique by performing *Phaedra* to examine the function of theatre, and this device achieves Brecht's alienation effect. In fact, there is another play-within-the-play in *The Love of the Nightingale*, that is, Philomele's performance of her rape by Tereus in the feast of Bacchus. When Procne sees her performance with dolls, she does not believe the truth immediately. Philomele's play forces Procne to link the play with her own life, and compels her to search for the truth. Finally, Philomele's mouth becomes a "credible witness," like Ameena's body in *Credible Witness*, so Procne believes her.

Philomele in Greek mythology is a voiceless pretty woman, but in Wertebaker's re-fashioning, Philomele is a wise woman who is especially sensitive to language, and through language she sets up her identity. In mythology, because Philomele is "beautiful as a nymph or a naiad" (Hamilton 283), Tereus loves her and eventually rapes her and cuts her tongue off. The only thing she does for herself is to weave a tapestry on which Tereus's violence is exposed to Procne. However, in order

to emphasize the importance of language for setting up a woman's identity, Wertenbaker's Philomele is a woman with agility of language. She uses not only witty retorts and questions to express herself, but she also uses body language and the performance to criticize Tereus's violence.

### 3. Procne: A Woman as a Gift

A. Hudson-Williams laments the absence of Procne in the Philomele myth while readers and critics pay more attention to Philomele. He argues, "Indispensable a member of the cast as she normally is, one of the two great child-slayers of antiquity, Procne seems entirely forgotten" (qtd. in Boneschanscher 148).<sup>7</sup> Wertenbaker, however, reconstructs the image of Procne by giving her a well-developed psychological transformation so that Procne is not a voiceless woman who submits to male authority without rebellion.

Wertenbaker adds three epigraphs at the beginning of the play. Two of them are from fragments in Sophocles' lost play *Tereus*.

Now, by myself, I am nothing; yea, full oft  
 I have regarded woman's fortunes thus,  
 That we are nothing; who in our fathers' house  
 Live, I suppose, the happiest, while young,  
 Of all mankind; for ever pleasantly  
 Does Folly nurture all. Then, when we come  
 To full discretion and maturity,  
 We are thrust out and marketed abroad,  
 Far from our parents and ancestral gods,  
 Some to strange husbands, some to barbarous,

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<sup>7</sup> The two famous mothers who kill their children in Greek mythology are Medea and Procne.

One to a rude, one to a wrangling home;  
 And these, after the yoking of a night;

We are bound to like, and deem it well with us. (*Nightingale* 285)

The above lines obviously are from Procne. She expresses the misery of leaving her hometown and how unfortunate a woman is to be forced to marry a man she does not love. In addition, the last epigraph also describes Procne's loneliness in a strange land: "Much / I envy thee thy life: and most of all, / That thou hast never had experience / Of a strange land" (285). It seems that Wertenbaker adds Procne's speech as epigraphs on purpose to show that Procne is as important as Philomele in the myth. Her image in the myth and her action of killing her child are revised by Wertenbaker and this revision offers readers a reconsideration of female identity and motherhood.

Ann Wilson well describes Procne's marriage with Tereus as a bond between two kings, and she comments, "Procne [. . .] is given in marriage to Tereus as his reward for having defeated the Spartan forces which threatened her father's kingdom, thus serving as currency in a transaction between the two men" ("Forgiving History" 156-57). Wilson thinks Procne is "a currency" linked with two countries and two men. Similarly, Gayle Rubin explains that women are seen as gifts to serve two tribes, and the importance of women as gifts is to connect the two tribes as kinship (173). Men have the right to send or accept their female kin, but women do not have the right to male kin even to themselves. The convention of "the exchange of women" explains that the patriarchal tribal world is established by exchanging women to ensure the unity of tribes (177). Procne is the exchanged woman. Like an object without subjectivity, Procne is a reward, a currency and a gift to be sent and accepted. Being a woman and a daughter of the King Athens, she has no choice.

Moreover, it seems that no one in Athens sympathizes with this woman who sacrifices herself to ensure the safety of her country. Instead, Athenians are eager for

the coming of the marriage between Procne and Tereus. The male chorus describes, “After an elaborate wedding in which King Pandion solemnly gave his daughter to the hero, Tereus, the two left for Thrace. There was relief in Athens. His army had become expensive, rude, rowdy” (297). It is not until Procne and Tereus leave Athens that Athenians are released from the fear of dominance by Thracians. Both the kings and the two peoples benefit from this marriage, but no one observes the pain of Procne. The male chorus, as a commentator outside the play, concludes this marriage by commenting, “Had always been, but we see things differently in peace. That is why peace is so painful” (297). Peace is painful because it scarifies women to achieve it, especially when women are usually not the ones who cause wars.

Like Philomele who loses her tongue, Procne also metaphorically loses her tongue. After she marries Tereus and moves to Thrace, she has a strong sense of “dislocation.”<sup>8</sup> Procne cannot talk to her husband or her little son. Lonely in a different culture and society, Procne asks Tereus to bring Philomele to Thrace. She mourns, “Where have all the words gone?” (297). Athenians and Thracians speak the same language, but for Procne, “The words are the same, but point to different things. We [Athenians] aspire to clarity in sound, you [Thracians] like the silences in between” (298-99). Procne cannot communicate with her female companions (the female chorus) so she cannot understand their warning.

Ten years later, Procne is different. She becomes not only a mature woman and mother but also an “other,” a Thracian. She begins to enjoy her sex life. She talks to Tereus, “I was frightened of your evenings when we were first married. That is why I sent you to Athens for my sister. I am a woman now. I can take pleasure in my husband” (340). Her words indicate the rape in marriage that scared Procne every

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<sup>8</sup> Ann Wilson observes that the theme of dislocation or displacement, dispossession, appears a lot in Wertebaker’s plays (148).

night at the beginning of their marriage. Strange to Tereus, Procne marries Tereus without love. For her, every intercourse is a rape, and every night is a nightmare. Susan Brownmiller gives a clear and short definition of rape: against women's will is a rape (18). Brownmiller asserts, "If a woman chooses not to have intercourse with a specific man and the man chooses to proceed against her will, that is a criminal act of rape" (18). Interpreted in this way, Procne, like Philomele, is raped by Tereus even though she is Tereus's wife. However, ten years later, compared with the young Procne in Athens who dares not to talk about sex with her sister, now she feels free to ask from her husband. Compared with the young Procne who was scared by her husband's rape, now she is mature by her sexual awakening.

In addition, these ten years transform Procne from an Athenian who passes on civilization to Thrace into a Thracian who is assimilated by Thracian culture instead. After Tereus helps King Pandion to win a war, he asks King Pandion for war booty by stating, "What I want is to bring some of your country to mine, its manners, its ease, its civilized discourse" (296). Because "culture was kept by the women" (296), Tereus demands for a princess in the name of culture. Nevertheless, ten years later, giving up the worship of Apollo, Procne turns to idolize Bacchus like the women in Thrace. She says to Tereus, "And tomorrow is the feast of Bacchus. I will go out this time. I will go out with the women of this country. You see how I become Thracian" (340). Besides, after she knows about Philomele's torture by Tereus, she evokes Bacchus, instead of Apollo, for helping them to revenge (344).

From an object "gift" to a Thracian, Procne's identity is never set up by herself. It is not until she and Philomele reunite that she starts to reconstruct her identity. Like Philomele who uses language to set up her subjectivity, Procne finds those words that are gone. Like Philomele who accuses Tereus with questions, Procne denounces him, "What kept you silent? Shame?" (350). In order to suit the femininity that the

patriarchal society enforces upon a woman, Procne does it at the price of her own subjectivity. When Tereus tells her that there are no rules, she argues, “I obeyed all the rules: the rule of parents, the rule of marriage, the rules of my loneliness, you. And now you say. This” (351). Procne, as an educated and civilized Athenian, is forced to marry the one she has no feeling for. She moves to Thrace, becomes a Thracian and a mother of a Thracian. No longer going to the theatre or listening to the philosophers’ speech, worshiping Athenian Apollo, Procne totally loses her subjectivity and becomes a woman disciplined by the patriarchal society in Athens and Trace.

Hence, Procne uses a radical way to reject the femininity that patriarchy confines to her body: to kill her son. Killing Itys means Procne rejects identification with the definition of a woman under patriarchy, which defines a woman’s identity as a biological mother (Wilson, “Forgiving History” 160). The concept of woman in patriarchy denies the individuality and subjectivity of woman; instead, patriarchy attempts to homogenize women and reduce them to two functions only, one is maternity and the other is women as “the other” so men can be the subject (160). Killing her child, however, symbolizes her strong attack against patriarchy. It is also a radical way to end the cycle of patriarchy since king Tereus is a symbol of patriarchy and prince Itys stands for the circle of the structure (Farrell 191-92). By doing so, Procne may reject to be “the other,” cutting off the cycle of patriarchy.

It is worth arguing whether Wertenbaker considers motherhood as women’s ultimate identity or not. Ann Wilson observes that in *The Love of the Nightingale* and *The Grace of Mary Traverse*, “mothers contemplate killing their own children because this is the only way they can envision that the mistakes of the past will not be repeated” (“Forgiving History” 156). Both Procne and Mary Traverse are forced to behave as good women as expected by the patriarchal society, so they are both silenced and requested to follow the rule of their parents. However, at the end, Mary

does not kill her daughter whereas Procne kills her son. Wilson explains Wertebaker's two different attitudes toward motherhood, and she believes that in *The Grace of Mary Traverse* "Wertebaker suggests that the maternal, identified with 'natural' unconditional love, can redeem a world ruined by patriarchal values" while in *The Love of the Nightingale* "there is no such hope because the maternal is a construct within [ . . . ] the patriarchy" (156). From Wilson's point of view, it seems that Wertebaker's attitude is contradictive because motherhood can be "the 'grace' of Mary Traverse," but it cannot be "the 'love' of the nightingale (Procne)."

In fact, instead of rejecting motherhood itself, what Wertebaker rejects is the motherhood under the patriarchal values, which require women to identify with nothing but biological motherhood. In *The Break of Day*, that women have the right to do what they want with their body is manifested. Nina finally becomes a mother by adopting a girl. Although she is not a biological mother to her daughter, she is still able to give the child her maternal love. Tess wants to have her own biological child; in other words, she follows traditional values that women have to have their own children otherwise they are not women. Without children, Tess claims that she is "nothing" (*Break of Day* 65). The different results of Nina and Tess express Wertebaker's comment on motherhood. Women, rejecting biological determinism, have the right to decide to be a mother or not, and motherhood is no longer restricted within patriarchal values. Interpreted in this way, in *The Grace of Mary Traverse*, Mary by crossing the spatial division realizes women are oppressed by many social conventions, so when she at the end returns to her home, she becomes a woman with a feminist consciousness and with an ability to love her daughter. Mary's "grace" is her ability to love people without patriarchal bias, including her love for her child. Therefore, Mary's motherhood "can redeem a world ruined by patriarchal values" (Wilson, "Forgiving History" 156) because her maternal love is not based on



patriarchal values anymore. Similarly, in *The Love of the Nightingale*, what Procne rejects is the rules that restrict a mother. She claims that she follows the rules of parents, the rule of marriage, and the rule of loneliness; however, after she kills Itys, she concludes, “There are no more rules” (351). In other words, rather than rejecting to be a mother, Procne rejects the rules that regularize a mother to fit the patriarchal values. Itys’ transformation illustrates that if a mother does not follow patriarchal rules, children, like Itys, could be free from patriarchy, too. In brief, Wertebaker’s attitude toward motherhood is consistent. What she attacks is the patriarchal and sexist conventions that confine women to identifying with biological motherhood only, instead of a refusal to be a mother.

If Itys represents the future of patriarchy, and Procne’s murder symbolizes liberation from patriarchal rules, then Itys’ transformation at the end indicates that the future is no longer based on patriarchal and conventional rules that confine women as well as men. Helen, one of the female chorus, states, “A child is the future” (349), but Procne and Philomele kill Itys because for two sisters, the future is still based on patriarchy and sexist gender relations. In order to stop the cycle of men’s dominance over women, they kill Itys, a symbol of future patriarchy. However, we see a hope in the last scene when Wertebaker arranges a dialogue between Philomele and Itys. In other words, Wertebaker considers the possibility of a new world with new gender relations. In a new world when Philomele is not a woman and Itys is not a king, there is still a hope, which is not rooted in the male-dominated society.

The hope for a new future depends on Itys’ transformation. Philomele, now as a nightingale, teaches Itys by means of questions. Eager to explore new things, Itys asks Philomele lots of questions. In contrast to the Itys at the beginning, now he can think philosophically and critically. When he is alive, he is the exact copy of his father, a warrior and a barbarian. He declares, “I don’t like peace. I like war” (339), continuing,

“So I can be brave. I want to be a great captain. Lead thousands into battle. Like Mars” (339). “The play ends on a hopeful note,” Mary Joanne Farrell affirms and continues, “The transformation of Itys from someone aggressive and overpowering to a thinking and gentle young man is a testimony to the potential for personal change” (196). Nevertheless, the optimistic ending does not mean that Wertenbaker justifies Procne and Philomele’s child-killing behavior, but her revision provides us with a new approach to reconsidering the possibility of the destruction of motherhood under patriarchal values and what the future is if mothers no longer identify with biological women.

Obviously, the last scene is Wertenbaker’s invention, but this open ending allows the myth to keep questioning, being repeated and generating more new stories. In addition to the last scene, Wertenbaker revises the part when the two sisters decide to kill Itys. According to the old myth, after Philomele and Procne get reunited, Procne thoroughly prepares a plan to revenge Philomele’s miserable experience on Tereus. Procne kills Itys and cuts his body into several pieces and cooks them to serve Tereus, who eats his son without recognition (Hamilton 284). In *The Love of the Nightingale*, Procne holds Itys and then Philomele kills him by his sword (349-50). Besides, because the two sisters would not know Itys would intrude in the feast of Bacchus, we cannot tell that the killing plan is well-organized or well-prepared as the old myth. This ritual “is supposed to be a mystery. A woman’s mystery” (344). Men are not allowed to see this women’s festival, but Itys interrupts their ritual. Therefore, another possibility of why Itys is killed is because he breaks the ritual taboo.

Jennifer Wagner points out the importance of Bacchic festival. She clearly explains that the feast of Bacchus is

a sort of female *charivari*; it is the one time when gender norms are dispensed with, and female transgression authorized. The impact of these

transgressions were, however, minimal, as they served, like the medieval *charivari*, to affirm ideological norms, and the most cared rites were held out of view of men, who were forbidden to witness the women at their most powerful moment. (243)

The festival represents a feminine power through carnival, getting drunk, laughter and any transgressive behavior. As Niobe<sup>9</sup> describes, “No place safe from the Bacchae. They run the city and the woods, flit along the beach, no crevasse free from the light of their torches. Miles and miles of a drunken chain. These people are savages” (341). Women are allowed to do anything without restraint at the festival. Because men are forbidden to see their ritual, Itys’ death becomes a punishment for breaking the ritual. More importantly, although Itys is a king’s son, a symbol of patriarchy, he has to respect this female ritual, too.

Because Wertenbaker’s *Philomele* myth ends with the feast of Bacchus, the power of Bacchus should not be neglected. Bacchus, or Greek Dionysus, symbolizes two ambivalent meanings, one is “freedom and ecstatic joy” and the other is “savage brutality” (Hamilton 59). He is “man’s benefactor” and also “man’s destroyer” (62). Bacchus also represents rebirth because he is dead in the winter and reborn in the spring. In Greek mythology, as long as a society is peaceful and orderly, he makes people crazy and brings destruction. As long as a society is in disordered and lifeless, he brings joy and life to the world. When discussing the important symbolic meaning of Bacchus, Lane A. Glenn asserts, “It is worth remembering that Dionysus is the god

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<sup>9</sup> Niobe in Greek mythology is well-known for having fourteen children, seven sons and seven daughters (Hamilton 250). She is a very classical woman who identifies with the motherhood under patriarchal values. Having so many children, Niobe is proud of herself, so she demands people of Thebes to worship her. Her pride is punished by Apollo and Artemis. Gods kills all of her children, and she finally is transformed into a stone crying over the death of her children every day (Hamilton 250). It is very obvious that Niobe is a victim under patriarchy because she is taught to have many children to be qualified as a good mother and good woman, but then she is punished for being proud of her motherhood. The story of Niobe reiterates my previous argument that motherhood itself is not a problem, and women have the right to be a mother or not; nevertheless, the problem is the patriarchal conventions that confine women to identifying with biological mothers only.

of wine and revelry. Wine sets free inhibition and releases passions that are locked inside every one of us. The Greeks adored balance and order and recognized the need for each thing, as well as its opposite” (18). What he suggests is that Bacchus represents equilibrium in everything, and that is the reason why the god symbolizes both men’s benefactor and men’s destroyer. The feast of Bacchus is the only day in a year that women can drink, dance, sing, have fun and release themselves from the everyday housework. Especially, when women are repressed in a coercive patriarchal society, like Thrace, the feast of Bacchus is an outlet for women to relieve their duty and to achieve a physical and psychological equilibrium. In *The Love of the Nightingale*, Thrace under Tereus is stable and ordered, so the festival of Bacchus is a time for women to release their pressure under the firm and inflexible society. Although the power of Bacchus destroys the order of Thrace, the god also brings a hope rooted in Itys’ transformation.<sup>10</sup>

This section starts from a re-request of the meaning of myth and accentuates the flexibility of myth and how looking back is important for women. It then discusses Wertebaker’s revision of the Philomele myth in order to reshape the female images in the myth and to reestablish female identity. Philomele, an ancient woman with a modern mind, is sensitive to language and theatre. She sets up her subjectivity through language and performance. Procne, a child-slayer, is no longer a voiceless woman and not a cruel mother as the old myth, but we see her inner transformation

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<sup>10</sup> The ending of *The Love of the Nightingale* with the feast of Bacchus is colored with Euripides’s *The Bacchae* (405 B.C.), especially when the tongueless Philomele is called as “madwoman” (341) by Niobe and when Procne evokes the “drunken god” to help her to revenge (344). Through a short comparison we may understand that Procne’s murder is conscious unlike Agave in *The Bacchae* who kills her son unconsciously. The madwoman Philomele and Thracian woman Procne in a way become Bacchae, the female followers of Bacchus. They, asking Bacchus to give them power to take revenge, clearly understand their purpose to kill Itys is to end the repeated mistakes by patriarchy. The two sisters are like the female chorus in *The Bacchae* who have wisdom and rationality, but because Agave refuses to honor Bacchus, she, another famous child slayer in mythology, made drunken by Bacchus, kills her son Pentheus unconsciously. Both Procne and Agave are child slayers, but Wertebaker’s revision of the Philomele myth with the allusion of Bacchus illustrates that Procne’s murder is assisted by the power of Bacchus and is self-conscious, whereas Agave’s is a punishment by Bacchus for refusing the feminine power symbolized by the god.

from being an object to being a subject who kills her son with consciousness.

Wertenbaker's revision echoes "the task of myth": to notice the other and to speak for the other (Coupe 197).

However, we have to examine whether Wertenbaker's revision is successful or not. It is very apparent that Wertenbaker's revision is very feminist while she gives two voiceless heroines voices and developments. They become round characters that are full of transformations, instead of flat characters as stereotypical as the women in old mythology. In particular, the dramatist does not romanticize rape; rather, she describes Procne's fear in marital rape by silence and Philomele's anger by washing her body endlessly and inquiring of the rapist endless questions. The romanticization of rape in mythology is criticized in *The Love of the Nightingale* and also in *The Grace of Mary Traverse*. Rape is brutal sexual violence, and it hurts not only the physical body but also the psychological and mental dignity of being a human being. The playwright rewrites the old Philomele myth with a severe judgment on patriarchy and a warm-hearted sympathy for women.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Besides Sophie's rape in *The Grace of Mary Traverse* and Ameena's rape in *Credible Witness*, Wertenbaker in *The Love of the Nightingale* describes several different kinds of rapes, including Philomele's rape by Tereus, Procne's marital rape by Tereus, and Phaedra's fake rape by Hippolytus. Moreover, little girls' rapes in the city are mentioned, too. Helen laments, "Why are little girls raped and murdered in the car parks of dark cities?" (*Nightingale* 349). Also, the rapes in wars are indicated in the play. Niobe's monologue after Philomele's rape implies that she witnesses rapes in the war when Athenians attack her home island (Green 161). When the two soldiers are discussing why women do not share the experience in the feast of Bacchus, First Soldier states, "I never liked this festival. All these drunken women. My girl's in there. And she'll never tell what happens. I tell her about the war. Well. Most of it" (*Nightingale* 344). In other words, what the rest of the part he does not tell his daughter is very possibly the rape in wars. Susan Brownmiller's brilliant research about rapes reveals that rapes in wars for ancient Greeks were "socially acceptable" (33) because women were their booty, gifts, and property. Explaining the rapes in wars, Brownmiller finds that women are not simply regarded as booty; more crucially, female bodies become a battle between two countries. The winner has a legitimate reason to invade the body of the losers' women, which is to say that, to violate the loser's property. In this light, Brownmiller describes, "The body of a raped woman becomes a ceremonial battlefield, a parade ground for the victor's trooping of the colors. The act of that is played out upon her is a message passed between men—vivid proof of victory for one and loss and defeat for the other" (38). Brownmiller's explanation further indicates that an individual, personal rape is also relevant to collective rapes because the raped body stands for not only a woman but also a country. In short, Wertenbaker, illustrating several rapes in *The Love of the Nightingale*, emphasizes that rape is a violence of both the physical body and spiritual dignity of being a human being, and rapes definitely are not as romantic as what the myth describes. The ignorant Mary in *The Grace of Mary Traverse* naively believes that Lord Gordon would transform into another creature since he rapes Sophie and

Wertebaker is very successful in rewriting two heroines by exploring their inner worlds, but the images of men in the myth are still sexist. Her purpose is to deconstruct the conventional ideology of femininity enforced upon women, and with this intention, she rewrites two heroines as two modern feminists. Particularly, the last scene shows her ambition to create a new world where new gender relations different from patriarchy are possible; unfortunately, although the dramatist points out the possibility of a new gender relation, a hidden problem is not solved. Wertebaker pays much attention to the revision of the stereotypical images of women in the myth, giving them voices and feminist consciousness, but by contrast, men are still confined to the patriarchal values without awareness. In this way, Wertebaker's new world overlooks the re-education of men. Philomele and Procne, released from the stereotype of femininity, are two feminist mythical figures, but Tereus does not recognize his fault till the end of the play. Even though they all turn into birds, the hoopoe still chases the nightingale and the swallow all over. In other words, only women's liberation is not enough to generate new gender relations in a new world, and the hidden danger lies in the lack of men's liberation from patriarchy. Moreover, the last scene shows that Itys is different, but the dramatist does not further explain what new gender relations are in the new world. We observe that Itys becomes peaceful and philosophical and we also comprehend that the new world is not based on patriarchy. However, does the new world suggest that matriarchy is possible? Or what are the possible gender relations between men and women in this new world? Furthermore, is violence, such as Procne and Philomele's murder, the only way to start a new world?

The title of the play gives us a clue to answer the questions that Wertebaker

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since the rapist in mythology is usually a god. Wertebaker in *The Love of the Nightingale* revises the romanticization of rapes in mythology, and stresses the anger of Philomele and Procne.

does not answer in the play. What is the meaning of love in *The “Love” of the Nightingale*? The following dialogue between Tereus and Procne is the direct discussion on love in the play.

Tereus I loved her [Philomele]. When I silenced her, it was for love.  
She didn't want my love. She could only mock, and soon rebel,  
she was dangerous.

I loved my country. I loved my child. You—this.

Procne You wanted something and you took it. That is not love. Look at  
yourself. That is not love.

Tereus How could I know what love was? Who was there to tell me?

Procne Did you ask? (351-52)

In the name of love, Tereus rationalizes his violence. Examining this kind of violence in the name of love as “possession,” bell hooks comments, “Love in patriarchal culture was linked to notions of possession, to paradigms of domination and submission wherein it was assumed one person would give love and another person receive it” (*Feminism* 101). Interpreted in this way, love cannot be established in the dominant power relation because “there can be no love when there is domination” (*Feminism* 103). If love is based on a dominant relation, like Tereus and Philomel, then love is not a love.

hooks further suggests, “Mutual partnership is the foundation of love” (*Feminism* 104), and this “mutual partnership” may be the new gender relation in the new world that Wertebaker creates in the last scene of the play. hooks explains, “When we accept that true love is rooted in recognition and acceptance, that love combines acknowledgment, care, responsibility, commitment, and knowledge, we understand there can be no love without justice” (104). From this perspective, “the ‘love’ of the nightingale” is “justice” with love combined with “acknowledge, care,



responsibility, commitment and knowledge.” This love is based on “mutual partnership” between men and women instead of patriarchy or dominance. hooks’ explanation answers the part that Wertenbaker does not reply in the play. Nevertheless, in the dramatist’s defense, she argues that a writer is not supposed to give answers, but he or she has to give questions to make the audience think (“Interview,” *Rage and Reason* 144). Hence, Joe Winston criticizes that the play is “a play in which more questions are posed than answers given” (518), whereas Jennifer Wagner claims that the open ending opens more questions to the silence that Wertenbaker does not answer (251).

Overall, the play has an obvious intention of recreating female images in myth and providing them with voices and identities. The gender relation in the revisionary myth is no longer based on men’s coercive dominance and women’s total submission, but an ideal model of gender relations is implied by the playwright on purpose in order to compel the reader and the audience to think critically.

### **B. *Dianeira*: A Revisionary Myth about Anger**

Through retelling the Philomele myth in *The Love of the Nightingale*, Wertenbaker criticizes the patriarchal and even misogynic values in the old myth while at the same time she installs a feminist consciousness and an expectation for a new model of gender relations in her revision. In addition to *The Love of the Nightingale*, *Dianeira* is another modern version of the myth between Heracles and his wife, Dianeira. Riane Eisler observes that contemporary people are very interested in retelling old myths, and this trend is not a fashion at all for Eisler; rather, it shows that people are no longer satisfied with old myths. Because people’s interest in old myths “stems from the recognition that many of our myths are not only inappropriate for our rapidly changing world but misleading about human possibilities” (Eisler

372-73), revisionary myths especially follow the rise of feminism, which judges sexual chauvinism and gender hierarchies in myth. Also, because people's interest in old myths "stems from the growing consciousness that how we image our personal and social paths can profoundly affect both our own lives and those of others" (Eisler 373), revisionary myths are particularly important for they correct the old sexist values and look for a better future for oneself and for everyone.

In old myths, women were portrayed stereotypically and the gender relation was based on male dominance over female. These myths "have for so long served to mold our minds, bodies, and souls to fit the requirements of a system driven by punishment, fear, and pain" (Eisler 373), so Wertenbaker's revisions are always full of a feminist consciousness and the attack against the sex/gender system that confines men and women according to biological determinism. Like what the dramatist does in *The Love of the Nightingale*, the female character in the Heracles myth, Dianeira, is revised in *Dianeira* in order to break the stereotypical images of mythical women and also to suit the contemporary feminist consciousness.

Broadcasted on BBC Radio 3 on November 28 1999, *Dianeira* is a radio drama.<sup>12</sup> Based on Sophocles' *The Women of Trachis* (or *The Trachiniae*), Wertenbaker's revision becomes a myth about "anger." *The Women of Trachis* is about the death of Heracles, and Brad Levett points out that there were several different stories about Heracles' death, but it is Sophocles' play that gave his death a definitive description (30). In mythology and Sophocles' play, Heracles saves Deianeira<sup>13</sup> from

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<sup>12</sup> Radio drama in England has a special history, and performing *Dianeira* through radio links the ancient married Dianeira with the modern majority of middle-class married women, who are the common audiences of radio. In this way, the theme of marriage in the play is manifested clearly and the female audiences can identify with Dianeira easily. For more discussion on the relation between radio drama and *Dianeira*, see Ann Wilson's "*Dianeira*, Anger, and History."

<sup>13</sup> The name of Heracles' wife is usually spelled as "Deianira." The translator of *The Women of Trachis* Michael Jameson spells "Deianira," but some critics, such as Brad Levett, spell "Deianeira." However, Wertenbaker spells "Dianeira." In this section, I use "Dianeira" to designate Wertenbaker's revision of this new woman while "Deianira" or "Deianeira" to refer to the mythical figure. There are also some different spellings toward the same characters in the myth. I use "Hyllos, Nessos, Akilos and Lychas"

a monstrous suitor, the river-god Achelous, and then he marries her. After marriage, Heracles takes her to cross a river. Burdened with his weapon, Heracles demands the centaur Nessus to carry his newlywed wife over the river. Nessus insults Deianira in midstream of the river, so Heracles, out of rage, kills him. Before he dies, Nessus deceives Deianira that his blood is a love potion. Years later, when Heracles marries another woman Iole, in order to win her husband's love back, Deianira sends Heracles a robe anointed with Nessus' blood and then unwittingly kills Heracles.

In Sophocles' play, Deianira is "extremely womanly" while Heracles is "extremely manly" (Bowra 117). C. M. Bowra describes that both Deianira and Heracles "possess in an advanced form the qualities commonly attributed to his or to her sex" (117). In other words, according to biological determinism, Sophocles' Deianira fulfills all the qualities of patriarchal femininity and Heracles masculinity. However, these stereotypical images of the sexes are usually Wertebaker's target. In order to de-naturalize femininity, the dramatist rewrites Dianeira as a woman full of anger at being forced to be an emotionless lady. The aim of this section is twofold: to examine Wertebaker's dramaturgical device through storytelling as far as the form of the play is concerned, and to review new images of female and male characters as far as the content of the play is concerned. In this way, this section argues that the device of storytelling links the ancient story with the contemporary experience, and this comparison reveals that women as well as men are still restricted within gender stereotypes in the past and the present.

## 1. Storytelling

*Dianeira* starts with "Timberlake," a character named after the dramatist, who

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to refer to Wertebaker's play whereas "Hyllus, Nessus, Achelous and Lichas" Sophocles' play. Besides, I use Michael Jameson's translation of *The Women of Trachis* when I discuss characters in Sophocles' play.

retells the story of Dianeira when she was told by another storyteller, Irene. More precisely, the structure of the play is “a story-within-a-story”: the outer story is about how Timberlake knows the story of Dianeira, and the inner story is about the story of Dianeira told by Irene. This device is meaningful because it first re-emphasizes the importance of oral history as the previous section has discussed; it further reinforces the existence of female storytellers/historians; then it connects the past with the present to express the dramatist’s comment on contemporary gender relations.

Describing how she finds the storyteller and knows the story of Dianeira, Timberlake’s monologue begins the play. Like the typical beginning of a story, Timberlake starts with, “Some years ago” (*Dianeira* 327), continuing, “when I was in Athens, I heard there was a village up north where you could still find storytellers in the Kafeneions” (327). By giving a specific place and time, the dramatist authorizes the plausibility of the story. Although the dramatist does not reveal whether the character Timberlake is she or not, by giving the storyteller a name, Wertebaker intends to strengthen the authenticity of the story. Then Timberlake and her friends find a female storyteller in a Greek café. Irene “was grey-haired, with a slight moustache, dressed in a floppy black and white dress with a dark jacket” (327). It is very obvious that Irene is an old woman, and her age also reinforces the credibility of the story because of the elder’s wisdom and experience. Looking for history in a “café” and from “the elder” both are reminiscent of Wertebaker’s idea of “Café Europe” and Alexander’s lesson to exiled children in *Credible Witness*, which have been discussed in Chapter Two.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, in order to prove the reality of the story, Wertebaker describes Irene as a “blind” person (327), like the traditional prophets, who are physically blind but see through the secular world. Overall, a specific time (some years ago, not a long time ago), place (a café in Athens), person (Irene) all

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<sup>14</sup> Please see Chapter Two, pp. 31-33.

become Timberlake's "credible witnesses" to ensure what she hears is real, instead of being fictive. By doing so, Timberlake also becomes a reliable storyteller and historian (since Chapter Two has argued that a historian is a good storyteller based on Hayden White's theory),<sup>15</sup> who gives us her first-hand reference about the past.

Ann Wilson explains that the opening of the play provides "a sense of veracity" ("*Dianeira*" 210) because "the story being recounted in the play was 'actually' told and so the playwright's recounting is a mode of history and not an artistic fabrication" (210). It is important to emphasize the actuality of the story of *Dianeira* for two reasons: to justify the credibility of the history by mouth, and to guarantee the existence of *Dianeira* in history. In order to achieve the two purposes, Wertebaker arranges for a story to happen in Trachis, which now is in the Balkan States. In other words, the story of *Dianeira* is not only real but it also exactly happened in a place on the map. After Timberlake finds Irene and she and her friends finally decide to hear a story about anger, Irene starts, "I will tell you a story of anger. It took place a long time ago, any time, in Trachis, which is over there, on the other side of the mountains" (*Dianeira* 327). After Timberlake and her friends listen to Irene's story, they leave by driving. Timberlake states, "Outside, in the clear night, we could hear the guns of the country north of the border, where there is always a war. And then we drove silently back to Athens" (374). Irene's storytelling links the ancient Trachis with the modern Balkan conflicts, and the tragedy of *Dianeira* is repeated in a modern way in the Balkan wars. Victoria Pedrick well describes the incarnation of *Dianeira* in the modern time, and she expresses, "*Dianeira*'s ancient personal grievance is put within a modern iteration of the eternal male violence of war" (48). Through storytelling, Wertebaker eventually legitimates the authenticity of this oral history, and she also criticizes the endless wars from ancient time to the present simultaneously.

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<sup>15</sup> Please see Chapter Two, pp. 18-20.

A storyteller plays an important role in storytelling and in oral history, and his or her mission is to pass on stories to the next generations in order to keep stories to be retold. In White's point of view, a good historian must be a good storyteller because he or she has to narrate a story with several individual historical facts (*Tropics* 83). Hence, a storyteller becomes a historian, who especially specializes in oral history. In *Dianeira*, there are two storytellers; more importantly, they are both female. Wilson's discussion focuses on Irene because after all she is the main storyteller who tells the story of Dianeira. Wilson argues, "In naming Irene, so that she is not anonymous, but offering no particulars about her life, Wertenbaker offers a complex feminist response to masculinist historiography" ("*Dianeira*" 212). It is meaningful to arrange a female storyteller to retell a woman's story. This device, on the one hand, is an indirect attack against male-centered historiography, and on the other hand, it emphasizes the existence of female storytellers/historians as well as female characters in history. Retelling a woman's story from a female storyteller is a "feminist response" to the same woman's story from a male storyteller; in the case of Dianeira, it is Wertenbaker's feminist response through Dianeira to Sophocles' Deianira.

When there are fewer and fewer storytellers and people are no longer interested in listening to stories, it is difficult to find a female storyteller. Timberlake asks her friends to take her to find storytellers, and then she describes, "We arrived at dusk and went to the market place, but we discovered that most of the storytellers were already well into their tales" (*Dianeira* 327). They realize that it is not easy to find a storyteller anymore because most of them are dead and the skill of storytelling is not properly preserved. More crucially, people's interest in listening to a story told by a storyteller is replaced by going to see a movie. While Timberlake and her friends decide to leave for "a movie," a café owner tells them a female storyteller is sleeping

on a table (327). This little intrigue reveals that storytelling has declined with the coming of the movie industry and other entertainments to some extent. Irene finally tells them a story about anger, but at the end she is sorry that many stories have disappeared. She states, “Eventually, people stopped telling the story, this terrible story of anger, and it too was forgotten” (374).

Irene in the play is the storyteller, and also functions as a chorus character, a prophet, an advisor, a commentator, and the representative of the playwright. First, as a storyteller/historian, Irene functions in *Dianeira* as a “choral character,” which means “a person within the play itself who stands apart from the action and by his comments provides the audience with a special perspective [. . .] through which to view the other characters and events” (Abrams 36). Compared with the female chorus in *Dianeira*, “whose job is mostly to listen and occasionally to echo” (*Dianeira* 328) as Irene suggests, Irene offers comments, wisdom, and prediction to the audience as the role of the ancient Greek chorus. In the play, the female chorus, consisting of the women of Trachis, does not serve as a commentator or predictor; instead, those chorus members are too young to give *Dianeira* proper suggestions. As *Dianeira* blames them for being inexperienced of marriage, “You don’t know what it is like to be me, you’re too young. Youth basks in its ease and thinks there is no such thing as time, but wait until you get married. Pain after pain after pain, husband, children, you’ll never sleep in peace again, believe me, not for the rest of your life” (335-36). It is apparent that Wertebaker on purpose raises the status of the storyteller, who tells and passes on history, higher than the chorus, and by doing so, Wertebaker reiterates the importance of oral history and the historian of oral history.

Irene becomes a choral character and also the spokesman of the dramatist. She, standing apart from the play, predicts the miserable fortune Hyllos is going to have as Hyllos leaves home searching for his father Heracles. Irene describes, “[T]he shadow



of destiny falls over him too, the son, as he seeks and comes closer to his father. His father's shadow begins to cover him, merges with his own shadow" (*Dianeira* 333). In addition to a prophet, Irene is also a commentator on each character. For example, after the death of *Dianeira*, she remarks, "Dianeira is dead, dead in anger. What kind of life was that? Of what significance? All shadows and quiet, sometimes it makes you angry just to remember those lives" (362). Offering a special perspective to see the relation of truth and anger, Irene expresses that "hearing of the truth late is the worst," particularly "[w]hen a comfortable deception is brutally cut by the truth, it leaves a wound where rage must breed" (341). Offering predictions and comments on the future and the characters, the storyteller tells a story from an omniscient perspective.

More importantly, as a storyteller, Irene relates the ancient story to the contemporary situation, and forcing the audience to think the comparison and contrast between the past and the present is usually the dramatist's purpose. Referring to the conflict between *Heracles* and *Hyllos*, Irene observes that "fathers do eat their sons if they can" (371), and she tells her modern young listeners, including *Timberlake*, "I know you young people like to think differently, but you give yourselves the illusion of too much power. You do what your fathers tell you in the end, one way or the other, even now, you'll die by their order" (371). When Irene's "father's order" eventually becomes the arbitrary social conventions that confine men and women, "fathers do eat their sons." Irene reminds her modern listeners of the old gender norms that still restrict people even though her story happened in ancient Greece.

This historian-like storyteller who passes on the story of *Dianeira* to the next generation is particularly significant as she insists people to pay for her profession, storytelling. Irene stops the story when she talks about the poisoned robe, because she says that is all *Timberlake* and her friends pay her for (347). After *Timberlake* gives

her more money, Irene continues her story. Then Irene stops again when she leaves the unsolved answer to the death of Heracles. "I can stop now. Unless you give me more brandy and a few more bills in there, eh?" (362). Ann Wilson explains that Irene's insistence on payment represents a feminist awareness for the dignity of the labor of storytelling, and she argues, "Irene enjoys some control over her labor by demanding payment for her storytelling. Irene's insistence on being paid, an assertion not only of herself but also of the rights of women, figures as integral to the feminist politics of Wertebaker's *Dianeira*" ("*Dianeira*" 221). Payment for a story is important for Irene because it means both a financial income and a respect for her profession. Although Irene is just a female storyteller, who is not popular in the modern time, she is aware that her profession is important. Her awareness is feminist, full of self-esteem and consciousness of the dignity of her own job.

The meaning of work is redefined by Irene, so the profession of storytelling by women becomes valuable. Storytelling is "the oldest forms of craftsmanship" (Benjamin 91), but with the coming of the age of mechanical reproduction, storytelling is no longer valued in the capitalistic society nowadays. However, for Irene, storytelling is her profession even though it only earns her some bills and brandy, and her insistence of payment reveals that she prizes her job beyond the value of the capitalistic society. To bell hooks, this respect for her own job is an attack on patriarchy, which usually decides the value of the works for women and men. hooks argues that "women must learn to value work" (*Feminist* 103). She further states that few feminists educate women that what they have done in their jobs is as important as men; instead, most feminists encourage women to get a better status in their professions. However, any kind of work is still worthy of respect (103). Filled with feminist consciousness, Irene's respect for her work criticizes the value of the work under patriarchy as well as the male-dominated historiography.

Although Wertenbaker shows the importance of storytelling and the female storyteller, and the power of the story through Timberlake and her friends' silence after they listen to Irene's story, her sorrow over the decline of storytelling is very obvious in *Dianeira*. This sorrow also means the degradation of the importance of oral history because story cannot provide modern people with scientifically-proven answers or visible benefits. Timberlake ends the play by saying, "And then we drove silently back to Athens" (374). No one in the car expresses their feeling after they listen to the story of Dianeira, and their silence exposes the overwhelming power of the story. Walter Benjamin explains that story contains "something useful" and it could be "a moral," "some practical advice," or "a proverb or maxim" (86). Besides, Benjamin believes, "In every case the storyteller is a man who has counsel for his readers" (86), and "counsel is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story which is just unfolding" (86). From this perspective, no wonder Timberlake and her friends cannot speak anything after they listen to the story of Dianeira. Irene's story conveys "something useful" but the listeners do not know what it is. Because what the story gives them is not an answer, but more like a proposal or a question, Timberlake and her friends are speechless. Maybe their minds are full of questions and doubts, but "something useful" is buried in those questions and doubts.

The power of Irene's story inspires the listeners to think of the story of Dianeira and to link the ancient Trachis with the modern Balkan conflicts. Because the news of Balkan conflicts is not fresh, the listeners definitely know the wars through the media. Nevertheless, it is not until Irene tells them the story of anger that they start to have a real reflection upon wars. In other words, Irene's story makes the news meaningful, or we might say that news for the listeners is less functional than story.

While Benjamin compares information with story, he clearly manifests the

powerful influence of story on the listeners. In the age of mechanical reproduction, people get information and news easily and quickly, and the convenience of the dissemination of information is a contrast to the art of storytelling, which needs a certain time and place, a listener, a storyteller who tells stories based on his or her accumulation of wisdom and experience. Comparing information with story, Benjamin profoundly remarks:

The value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only at that moment; it has to surrender to it completely and explain itself to it without losing any time. A story is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time. (90)

If we employ this perspective of Benjamin's to interpret Timberlake and her friends' silence after they listen to Irene's story, their speechlessness shows that the Balkan wars are no longer a piece of TV news; rather, the listeners really understand the actuality of the Balkan conflicts, the endless male violence through wars, the numerous female victims of the wars, and the cycle of unfair gender hierarchy from the past to the present.

The device of a story-within-a-story in *Dianeira* creates the effect of alienation, like the function of the play-within-the-play in *The Love of the Nightingale*, to evoke in the listeners a critical judgment on the wars and gender relations in the past and the present. This complicated structure in *Dianeira* through storytelling exposes Wertebaker's ambition to assert the importance of oral history and the existence of female storytellers/historians in history. The form of *Dianeira* is meaningful, and it also displays Wertebaker's creativity to retell Sophocles' *The Women of Trachis* in a new way. Just like changing the form of the old play, Wertebaker also transforms the content of Sophocles' play. What follows is the discussion on the transformation of

the content. It first analyzes the anger of female characters and then the anger of male characters; by doing so, it reveals two different attitudes toward gender conventions, which indicate the difficulty of breaking the existential patriarchal gender hierarchy in the future.

## 2. Angry Women: Dianeira and Iole

Ann Wilson declares that based on *The Women of Trachis*, *Dianeira* is “a feminist play” (“*Dianeira*” 218), whereas Brad Levett argues that *The Women of Trachis* “is not feminist in covert make-up or intent” (92). In other words, Wertebaker rewrites Sophocles’ non-feminist play into a play whose form and content are both rich in feminist awareness. The difference between the two plays, however, lies in what a feminist play is. Wertebaker sees feminism as “humanism” so she emphasizes both men’s and women’s challenge to authorities (“Interview,” *A Search* 270). Besides, Sarah Daniels gives a brilliant definition of a feminist play, designating, “A feminist play is something that isn’t just about women, but challenges something to do with patriarchal society, or that actually pushes it one step further and challenges the status quo” (qtd. in Bakker 115). Daniels suggests that women are not the only focus in a feminist play; rather, the patriarchal values that restrict both women and men in the past and in the present are the targets a feminist writer intends to criticize.

In order to assert that Wertebaker’s revision of *The Women of Trachis* is a feminist challenge to the patriarchal myth, which generates unfulfillable femininity and masculinity, this part, focusing on two female characters Dianeira and Iole, proposes that women in history are not voiceless or emotionless; instead, women’s anger represents their discontent with society, and they set up their identity through rage. The next part, focusing on two male characters Heracles and Hyllos, argues that

men's anger is derived from women's challenge of breaking the existing values, and in order to ensure their superior dominance in society, men use violence to release their anger and to confirm their society. Wertebaker in the play suggests that as long as men's and women's opinions of gender relations are different and their anger cannot be eased, the future will be filled with male violence of wars and female victims from wars. In this light, Wertebaker's *Dianeira* is a tragic feminist play that criticizes the present Balkan wars through Trachinian people in the past and offers a bleak prophecy that if the phallogentric gender relation does not change, wars will never cease.

In *Dianeira*, Wertebaker's revision is double: she rewrites the mythical woman Deianeira and also the women in ancient Athens. *Dianeira*, based on *The Women of Trachis*, in which Sophocles rewrites the mythical Deianeira to represent the condition of women in ancient Athens, criticizes both Deianeira in the myth and Sophocles' representation of ancient's women in Athens, and then the dramatist offers a modern feminist Dianeira who is more understandable for contemporary audiences and readers. Before Sophocles, there are a lot of different epic versions about Deianeira, but the similarity is that Deianeira is "an aggressive, warlike figure" (Levett 31), especially because her name in Greek means "man-killer" and "husband-killer" (31). Her character shows that she probably is an Amazon or another version of Clytemnestra. Bowar observes that in the legends "Deianira was a kind of Clytemnestra who slew her husband" (117), or she was "connected with the common epithet for an Amazon" (117). In particular, Levett finds that ancient paintings on vases show that Deianeira escapes from the centaur's sexual harassment by herself rather than passively waiting for Heracles to rescue her (31). Moreover, as her name indicates, she kills Heracles on purpose to revenge the insult that Heracles marries Iole (31). All the evidence refers to the fact that Deianira is not a passive woman as

Sophocles' description.

Sophocles transforms this aggressive woman into a submissive and passive woman who waits for her husband to come home all the time but accidentally kills him. In *The Women of Trachis*, Levett claims that Deianeira “is a literary creation of a male poet in a male-dominated society, and so is in part a construction of male ideology” (83). Sophocles' play reflects the condition of women in ancient Athens, so in a way the play is “a historical record” (84), which reveals that ancient patriarchal ideology in Sophocles' time. Levett further asserts that “every artistic work is still, in a sense, a historical record” because “what the play does document is how certain people at a certain time thought about the issues that the play raises” (84). From this perspective, Deianeira symbolizes a woman who fits well in ancient Greece, and because she is a representative figure of a good woman, her tragedy gains ancient Greek audiences' sympathy. By the same token, Heracles stands for a model of a man so that his death is unacceptable for the audience at that time. Both Deianeira and Heracles are symbolic figures for women and men, so they represent femininity and masculinity respectively in ancient Greece.

Sophocles “tames” the aggressive Deianeira into a passive woman who possesses all the qualities of being a good woman under the values of ancient patriarchal Greece, and his revision becomes a moral lesson to the female audience at his time. However, we have to notice that Sophocles' “taming of a shrew” does not mean that her Deianeira is a creation of patriarchal ideology whereas the aggressive Deianeira is not. The extreme image as a man-killer and the extreme image as a passive good woman are both constructed by male-dominated society, as bell hooks attacks the dichotomous images of women as “madonnas or whores” (*Feminism* 85), or as Virginia Woolf describes the dichotomy as “beauty and horror” or “heavenly goodness and hellish depravity” (2197). Wertenbaker in *Dianeira* portrays this



mythical woman neither as an extreme evil man-killer nor as an extreme good woman; instead, Dianeira's voice is heard when her anger at Heracles gets stronger and stronger.

Since Wertebaker states that *Dianeira* is “inspired” by Sophocles’ *The Women of Trachis* (Introduction, *Plays Two* vii), it is Sophocles’ Deianira that she intends to criticize. Bowra explains that *The Women of Trachis* “is the tragedy of the difference between man and woman” (144), and the tragic ending is derived from “the essential differences between manhood and womanhood” (144). To put it in another way, Sophocles, based on biological determinism, intentionally portrays Deianira as an example of femininity while Heracles masculinity. Through polarizing Deianira and Heracles as the differences between femininity and masculinity, Sophocles creates a “universal” theme; “Deianira’s sufferings are all the greater because she is the woman that she is; the fall of so fine a man as Heracles is a piteous spectacle to all who value the traditional grand qualities of manhood” (Bowra 117). However, it is this femininity and masculinity based on biological essentialism that Wertebaker attacks and deconstructs in her play.

In Sophocles’ play, Deianira fulfills many qualities of femininity in the patriarchal society, such as “pretty,” “dainty,” “passive” and “powerless” (Stern 151). Because she is too beautiful, she is pursued by the river-god Achelous, and then sexually harassed by the centaur Nessus. Deianira passively waits someone to save her in these two cases instead of actively reacting. Heracles defeats Achelous and kills Nessus; Deianira’s passiveness and weak femininity give Heracles chances to show his masculinity.<sup>16</sup> After she marries Heracles, she still passively waits for his return.

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<sup>16</sup> Deianira’s weakness and passiveness remind us of the part when Giles Traverse teaches Mary Traverse to faint in *The Grace of Mary Traverse* in order to create chances for men to show their masculinity and her own femininity. In that play, from the incident that she hopes Gordon transforms into a creature after he rapes Sophie, it is obvious that Wertebaker intends to write Mary as a girl who likes mythology a lot. Comparing *The Grace of Mary Traverse* and *Dianeira*, we find that Wertebaker

Deianira does nothing, except crying. It is not until her nurse suggests her to send her son Hyllus to find Heracles that Deianira for the first time actively does something. She still waits for her husband, who is “the one man who is the finest of all” (Sophocles 284), doing nothing at home. Suffering from loneliness in her marriage, Deianira becomes pessimistic about her life, always worrying about her husband. Deianira laments, “But no one seems to know / where Heracles himself can be. I only know / he’s gone and left with me a sharp pain for him. / I am almost sure that he is in some trouble. / It has not been a short time—first a year, / by now still more, and there has been no word of him” (280). Besides, her characteristic of being a so-called good woman is also expressed through her tolerance for Heracles’ other women. Deianira claims, “Heracles has had other women before. / Never yet has one of them earned insults / from me, or spiteful talk” (295).

Bowra argues that Deianira’s personality is “extremely womanly” (117), “natural pessimism” (121), and “natural obedience” (124), and all these characteristics explain that she at the end leaves no word to justify herself after she accidentally and unwittingly murders Heracles.<sup>17</sup> Sophocles describes, “Deianira moves away and leaves by the side” (307). She does not actively say anything for herself because she never actively speaks for herself in her whole life. Her “natural pessimism” makes her accept her death with resignation while her “natural obedience” to Heracles forces her to follow him to death.

By seeing Deianira as “extremely womanly” based on the traits of her sex (117),

Bowra argues that the Greek audiences, especially women, may identify themselves

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criticizes the femininity rooted in male-centered mythology. This is also why to her revision of mythology is important and necessary for women who do not have correct gender consciousness.

<sup>17</sup> Regarding the question whether Deianira murders Heracles intentionally or unwittingly, Levett comments, “While a few scholars have argued that Deianeira in the *Women of Trachis* hides her true motives and in fact kills Heracles on purpose, it is generally accepted that she made an error of judgment in allowing herself to believe the lies of the centaur Nessus when he said that his blood would act as a love charm” (52). Generally, it is believed that Deianira accidentally and unwittingly kills Heracles.

with Deianira and that is the reason why the play arouses the audiences' pity (144). However, will the tragedy of Deianira still arouse the 21<sup>st</sup>-century audiences' sympathy? It seems that Wertebaker is not satisfied with the extremely feminine image of Deianira, so she adds an emotion that she must have in her marriage with Heracles: anger. Victoria Pedrick argues that by providing Dianeira's angry words, Wertebaker exposes "something we long to believe: Sophocles' Deianeira *must* be angry" (47 emphasis in original). Because good women are not supposed to express anger, their anger is repressed. Although anger is not allowed to women, men may display anger because "[w]hen men are angry and indignant, they are godlike, imitating Jehovah" (Marcus 69). Anger is one of the seven deadly sins, but anger is "a necessary attribute of the [male] leader" (Marcus 70). Therefore, our tradition informs us that an angry woman "is out of control" whereas an angry man "is exercising his authority" (70). In this way, Deianeira's anger is repressed and it even disappears. She does not express her anger because she does not know she is angry and what makes her angry.

Wertebaker shows that Dianeira is angry, and more importantly, she knows she is angry. Naming anger is crucial because it is an "act of judgment" (Silver 363). Brenda R. Silver asserts, "This act of judgment [. . .] carries with it the potential for insubordination and change; by becoming angry, by judging, we make ourselves equal to the person we judge and assert the validity of our own standards and views" (363). Wertebaker's Dianeira clearly understands her rage coming out of her marriage in the male-dominated society. After Hyllos accuses her of murdering Heracles, the dramatist does not let "Dianeira move away and leave by the side" as Sophocles arranges; instead, Dianeira speaks her anger. "The things I cannot say: I don't feel pity, not even sorrow, not now. And yet, there must have been love. Now kneaded, pounded, pulled into the shape of anger. Why was this my life? Passive, always in the

dark, waiting for the dawn, a new day, a return, a farewell, waiting” (359), Dianeira retorts. She knows “the things she cannot say” is her anger: the anger toward Heracles’ abandonment for his own great labors, and the anger toward the passive waiting that a good woman should do. Sophocles’ Deianeira does not know her anger, so she kills herself silently without making any justification for herself. Her suicide indicates that she sees herself as a murderer. Unable to sense the unfair gender conventions affecting her, Deianeira becomes a victim, who sacrifices herself to confirm the male-dominated gender relations.

Jane Marcus appropriates Freud’s theory to affirm that anger is a way to protect one’s subjectivity and also a way to look at one’s identity. She states, “Anger is a form of primary narcissism, a result of the ego’s first struggle to maintain itself, to find an identity separate from the mother. Self-preservation is the source of anger” (71). By anger, one’s identity would not be assimilated or erased by the other, so anger helps to separate one from the other, especially when the other is the powerful or the dominator. Therefore, anger is a way to criticize the other and simultaneously to set up one’s identity, as Wertebaker claims that “anger” and “identity” are “linked” (Introduction, *Plays Two* vii).

In Wertebaker’s *Dianeira*, Dianeira clearly expresses her anger at Heracles while he puts two wives under the same roof. “What will happen to the two us [Dianeira and Iole]? Under the same roof, ha, under the same blanket, waiting for him to take one of us in his arms. No need to ask which. And this is my reward for the long years of looking after him, his house, things, children” (343-44), Dianeira complains. Her faithful waiting for Heracles and raising children repaid for by a mistress, who is much younger than her. Dianeira is requested to accept her husband’s other women, and she must show tolerance and dignity, which are traditionally seen as femininities. Dianeira criticizes the polygamy in the patriarchal society that allows

men's unfaithfulness in marriage but requires women not to be angry, so she accuses, "And then they say it's unbecoming of a woman to be angry in such circumstances, it's so common after all, I should behave with dignity, because I'm getting old and what can I expect, bees will be bees" (344).

Dianeira's anger is getting fierce when she defends her decision of using the centaur's blood. Anger at her limited choices to solve the problem of two wives in the same house, Dianeira claims that she is not allowed to kill Iole, her enemy, whereas Heracles is free to kill anybody he hates and still is treated as a hero by people.

What am I do? Kill her now, here, but he'll know and he'll despise me, everyone will cast me off as vile [ . . . ] How come he gets to kill anyone who stands in his way? What other labour have I ever had but to keep his desire? Oh you gods, why have you done this? Do you expect me to sit here meekly and watch my own disappearance? Does he? (345)

Dianeira's anger leads to a series of questions that accuse the existing unfair gender relations. Meanwhile, her identity is created through those questions, like Philomele's questions in *The Love of the Nightingale*.

Although Dianeira does not murder Heracles intentionally, it is very clear that she is indifferent to the death of Heracles. Dianeira, like Sophocles' Deianeira, is shocked when she finds that Nessos' blood is poisonous, but it is ambiguous whether Dianeira knows the truth before she sends the poisoned robe to Heracles. Irene, furthermore, makes this issue more equivocal by saying, "I can't tell you if Dianeira knew what she was doing. How can I know? Anger could have paralysed her mind but made her hands more active than ever. That's not unusual in these women" (352). Anger makes Dianeira out of her mind and lack the ability to make a right decision. Therefore, Wertebaker focuses on why she does the act rather than what she does. Anger drives her crazy and even Dianeira does not know whether she does it

intentionally or unwittingly. She keeps murmuring, “What have I done?” (351, 352, 353). When the chorus asks her if she plans to kill Heracles, she replies, “No, I didn’t. Plan” (354). The period in the sentence of “No, I didn’t. Plan” indicates Dianeira herself does not know what she has done because anger has driven her crazy. But she clearly understands that the reason why she is so angry.

However, Dianeira’s indifference to the death of Heracles is apparent. She admits that comparing with her years-long suffering and loneliness, she gains some pleasure from Heracles’ screams of pain (359). She does not feel pity or sorrow, because if she would die of jealousy of Heracles’ love, she would rather let him die instead (360). Before Dianeira manly kills herself with a sword, she expresses her anger through revealing “the things she cannot say.” She claims, “The things I cannot say: I don’t mind if I die now, I wouldn’t have minded earlier, what has this life been for?” (360). Another anger she cannot express is: “The things I cannot say: I look for the pattern now, the diagram giving my life sense, but I see nothing” (360). She follows the rules, the patterns of a woman’s behavior and the diagrams of life, but like Procne who obeys all the rules, she cannot see the future or who she is. Dianeira is angry at Heracles and at the male-dominated society, because they repress women so much that women even cannot display their anger.

bell hooks declares, “Anger led me to question the politics of male dominance and enabled me to resist sexist socialization” (*Feminist* 10). Anger indeed awakens Dianeira to review her life and to reconstruct her identity. She resists being “Heracles’ wife.” But, seeing no chance of getting rid of the label of the hero’s wife, she chooses to die. The tragic element in Wertenbaker’s *Dianeira* does not lie in the death of an “extremely womanly” heroine as Bowra suggests in *The Women of Trachis* (117); rather, it rests on the death of an angry woman who is like any emotional mortal. Adrienne Rich comments, “The awakening of consciousness is not like the crossing

of a frontier—one step, and you are in another country” (25). Dianeira, through anger, has a feminist consciousness, but she cannot cross the boundary of patriarchy to start a new life and new identity. In other words, she is aware of the unfair gender norms, but she does not transgress them to re-identify herself. Unlike Procne and Philomele in *The Love of the Nightingale* who cross the secular world and begin their new lives with new identities as a swallow and a nightingale, Dianeira’s death is even sadder because she is restricted without a way out.

In addition to Dianeira’s anger, Iole’s anger is manifested in *Dianeira*, too. Because she and Dianeira have many things in common, her anger is very similar with Dianeira’s. Unlike her counterpart’s ephemeral appearance in *The Women of Trachis*, Iole plays an important role in the later part of *Dianeira*. Preferring to give voices to the silenced women in history, Wertenbaker nevertheless still maintains Iole as a woman who never speaks, but through describing her anger, Iole’s voice is heard. Like Dianeira who is Heracles’ booty in a men’s conflict between Heracles and river-god Akilos, Iole is another booty of Heracles when he defeats Eurytos, Iole’s father.<sup>18</sup> When Lychas, Heracles’ herald, brings a group of female slaves, including Iole, to Dianeira, Dianeira gives her deep sympathy to them and states, “They were wealthy, some of them, inhabitants of a strong and safe city, and then one day, war, ravage, rape and servitude. They had names, now nameless, refugees” (339). Then noticing the silence of Iole, Dianeira respects Iole’s pride of silence and commands her people to “let them be well treated” (339). Dianeira senses that she and Iole cannot help but be men’s rewards in the world filled with men’s wars. Dianeira and Iole are men’s “currency.” Ann Wilson observes, “Within the terms of Wertenbaker’s

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<sup>18</sup> Dianeira and Iole both are Heracles’ rewards after he wins a war or a battle with other men. In mythology, even when Heracles is dead and taken to heaven, his twelve labors and suffering on earth is still rewarded by a woman. Hera awards Heracles with her daughter Hebe (Hamilton 179). Women in heaven are still regarded as gifts or booty to reward men.



play, the notion of women as currency exchanged in transactions between men is obviously key to the narrative” (“*Dianeira*” 219). Like the currency-like Procne in *The Love of the Nightingale*, both Dianeira and Iole are men’s currency to be exchanged among men. Instead of being treated properly as a human being, they are gifts, property, and booty. Thus, Iole’s and Dianeira’s anger is rooted in men’s disrespect for considering them as objects.

As long as they are seen as men’s property, Iole and Dianeira’s emotion is erased by men. However, they in fact both suffer from the loneliness of displacement. Like Procne feels a strong sense of dislocation when she moves to Thrace, so do Iole and Dianeira. Iole’s country is destroyed by Heracles, so she is forced to move to Trachis. Dianeira is compelled to wait for Heracles in Trachis, a place that is neither her nor Heracles’ country. She laments, “Here I am, in Trachis, a stranger in the house of a stranger, waiting” (330). Unlike Dianeira who decides to express her anger through words, Iole chooses silence to show hers. Iole’s anger piles to the highest when Heracles demands Hyllos to marry her after his death. Heracles states, “Hyllos, she [Iole] shared my bed, I don’t want an unknown stranger to lay his hands on her when I’m gone. I have decided you will marry her” (369). What Heracles indicates is that Iole is his property and he does not want a stranger to have it/her, except Hyllos, his son, the substitute for himself. Iole’s dignity of being a human being is effaced while her sorrow is disregarded. At the end, the storyteller Irene narrates, “Iole never said a word. She never said a word when she married Hyllos. She never said a word to her children. What was there to say? the bitterest anger is silent. And so anger threads its way through generations” (372). Anger becomes her life and her identity.

Women’s anger is real. Their anger shows their resistance to be men’s property, to be tolerant wives who accept their husbands’ lovers, to be emotionless women, to display all the characteristics of femininity that society demands them to have.

Adrienne Rich argues that women's anger cannot be disregarded because it has spread to everywhere. "Both the victimization and the anger experienced by women are real, and have real sources, everywhere in the environment, built into society. They must go on being tapped and explored by poets, among others. We can neither deny them, nor can we rest there" (25), Rich asserts. While Rich cautions people to notice women's anger, Brenda R. Silver suggests transforming anger into "collective, public concepts associated with social and political change" (361).<sup>19</sup> As Rich states that the awakening of feminist consciousness is not enough (25), women have to cross the boundary to another field, where anger is heard and released. Nevertheless, in *Dianeira*, although Dianeira and Iole set up their identities through displaying anger, their anger does not become a political stance to cease another anger in the next generation. *Dianeira* hence becomes a feminist tragedy, which describes a woman's downfall derived from her self-awareness of being a human being as equal as a man.

### 3. Angry Men: Heracles and Hyllos

*Dianeira* is a myth about anger, including not only women's anger but also men's. Women's anger, lying in the restriction within patriarchal femininity, strives hard to break gender rules. On the contrary, men's anger in the play is derived from any challenge to destroy the society that is built up by men's dominance. The tragedy then comes from the insolvable conflict between women's anger and men's.

Wertebaker, like how she rewrites *Dianeira* and *Iole*, emphasizes Heracles' and Hyllos' anger in order to show that anger confirms men's power in society. Unlike women who are powerless to transform their anger as a political act, men usually

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<sup>19</sup> Silver believes that women's anger could push society to improve and change, and the women's movement in the 1970s is an example of moving women's anger into a political act (362). However, bell hooks observes that women's anger sometimes is so radical and fierce that "feminism was more a declaration of war between the sexes than a political struggle to end sexist oppression" (*Feminist* 33). Using anger in a proper way hence becomes an important issue in feminism.

release their anger through violence, especially when violence is often linked with masculinity. As a representative of Connell's "hegemonic masculinity," Heracles in *Dianeira* embodies all the patriarchal values of being a man. He claims his authority through anger and leaves his anger to Hyllos. Heracles' heritage symbolizes that he leaves his kingdom and the gender hierarchy he builds up to the next generation. Through describing Heracles' and Hyllos' anger, Wertebaker asserts that if the model of gender relations still centers on men, the wars that are based on men's violence and anger at other men will still go on.

Heracles is regarded as a representative figure of masculinity. According to Bowra, "Of all Greek heroes he [Heracles] is perhaps the most familiar" (131). He is well-known for his strength and the achievement of Twelve Labors. His strong body wins him a name of "a model of manhood" (*Dianeira* 328), as Irene calls him. Heracles' masculinity is displayed through his body, and "[t]he body [. . .] is inescapable in the construction of masculinity" (Connell, *Masculinities* 56). The chorus members can easily see Heracles in the crowd because "[y]ou recognise him by muscle and height" (*Dianeira* 344). When *Dianeira* first sees him, she is also caught by his body. "Heracles. He came, tall, a protrusion of muscles" (329), describes *Dianeira*. Heracles' amazing strength triumphs in every battle. He announces, "I crossed swords with a thousand men, I braved an army of giants, I mastered the wild beasts of the earth, I purified my country of diseases and the scourge of monsters" (363). Moreover, he defeats the river-god Akilos, kills the centaur Nessos and sacks the city of Euboea. His son calls him "the greatest man on earth" (358) and "the best of fathers" (358). His strength wins him not only battles but also women, and both *Dianeira* and *Iole* are his booty.

"True masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men's bodies—to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body" (*Masculinities*

45), states Connell. That is the reason why Heracles is “a model of manhood” and the reason why Bowra claims that the tragedy comes from “the fall of so fine a man as Heracles” (117). The strong male body not only symbolizes masculinities but also “a means of survival” and “a means of asserting superiority over women” (Connell, *Masculinities* 55). Men’s body is their survival skill and their asset to exchanging their labors for fortune. Heracles trades his strength for several cities he defeats, and in this way, he survives in society and simultaneously wins a fortune. A strong body shows his masculinity and becomes his labor and his asset. Sacking the city of Euboea, Heracles enslaves all the citizens and robs their fortune. Especially, Bowra remarks that Heracles is famous for sacking cities, so he gains another reputation as “breaker of gates” (133). Through winning several battles, his strength brings him the economical fortune and a good name of a representative figure of masculinity.

More importantly, Heracles’ strength also becomes a threat to people, especially to women. Unable to resist Heracles’ power, Iole is a victim under the threat of Heracles’ strength. Because of her beauty, Heracles sacks her country, kills her father, and enslaves all her people. Iole’s status of being a female slave reflects Heracles’ power and superiority over her. Dianeira in a way is also Heracles’ slave because he defeats Akilos to win her. Through Iole and Dianeira, Wertebaker reveals that masculinity expressed through strength threatens women. Scared by Akilos’ masculinity through violence, Dianeira would rather die than marry him. After she marries Heracles, her fear in marriage is still not relieved. Worrying about Heracles, Dianeira is scared that his masculinity actualized through completing several impossible missions causes his death. Wilson explains that to Dianeira, Heracles’ heroic actions “reproduce the terror of masculinity which Akilos represented to her” (“*Dianeira*” 213). Men’s masculinity displayed through strength and violence becomes a coercive dominance, representing men’s superiority over women.

Heracles' masculinity is secure since he is "the greatest man on earth," but as long as someone challenges his power, he is easily irritated to revenge. His anger comes from the purpose of confirming his masculinity and the society he establishes, and he does not allow anyone to offend the existing order. Marcus has explained that when men are angry, "they are godlike" (69). Moreover, anger is "a necessary attribute of the leader" (70). Heracles is the hero and the leader in his society, so his anger is "godlike," powerful, and sometimes it is necessary in order to rule a country.

Nevertheless, Wertebaker in *Dianeira* does not celebrate Heracles' godlike anger, but instead she criticizes Heracles' anger is aggressive and violent. Because Eurytos, Iole's father, does not treat him well when Heracles is a guest in Euboea, he pushes Eurytos' son over the cliff. Like he kills Eurytos' son from the back, he shoots Nessos from the back, too. While Nessos is dying, Heracles asks him, "Why did you make me so angry?" (350). Nessos replies, "Why didn't you control yourself, Heracles? You're a man. You're supposed to be rational—" (350). Losing self-control, Heracles is drunk with anger, and the way to ease his anger is to kill others. Heracles tells Dianeira, "He [Nessos] made me so angry. I couldn't let him get away within it. Don't keep looking at him. He's no more than a beast" (351). Besides, when Heracles is suffering from the pain owing to the poisoned robe Dianeira gives him, he once again tries to ease his anger through killing somebody. Unwilling to listen to Lychas' explanation, Heracles "grabbed Lychas by his heel and hurled him against a rock" (357). Lychas dies because of Heracles' anger at the wrong person.

Wertebaker rejects the glorification of men's anger or to see the hero's anger is godlike; rather, she demythologizes men's anger through revealing the aggressive anger of "the greatest man on earth." Heracles exposes that men's masculinity is set up by self-centered, male-centered ascendancy and it overlooks the voices of the powerless. In addition, Wertebaker furthermore deconstructs Heracles' masculinity

by feminizing him. Like Sophocles, Wertebaker also emphasizes that Heracles is feminized by the suffering when he is going to die. Heracles curses Dianeira, “[S]he, without a sword, her hatred only, she’s turned me inside out, revealed me to be no more than a girl, a girl. Crying, begging for help, I have no strength, not even courage, I’m a girl, a girl” (*Dianeira* 363-64). Both Sophocles and Wertebaker delineate Heracles’ pain of losing strength like a girl, but the difference lies in the two different understandings of Heracles about the oracle. After Hyllus tells Heracles the poison of Nessus’ blood, Sophocles’ Heracles realizes that it is the oracle that demands his death while Dianeira is just an instrument of the god’s will.<sup>20</sup> However, in *Dianeira*, when Hyllus asks Heracles, “Don’t you love my mother?” (371), Heracles replies, “I hate her now” (371). In other words, Heracles does not truly understand the oracle and he finally dies with his anger at Dianeira’s anger.

Heracles never relinquishes his anger at Dianeira although Hyllus has explained that Dianeira’s action is derived from Heracles’ lust for Iole, and his anger pushes him to confirm the gender relations of men’s domination and women’s subordination in society more. It is apparent that Wertebaker’s Heracles does not care about Dianeira nor does he realize the oracle. Instead, after he knows Dianeira’s anger, he becomes eager to ensure the society he establishes. Thus he commands Hyllus to marry Iole. Hyllus is Heracles’ substitution while Iole is Dianeira’s, particularly when Wertebaker dwells upon the similarities between Iole and Dianeira. Hyllus’ marriage with Iole reproduces Heracles’ with Dianeira. By implication, the society Heracles creates is confirmed; furthermore, the gender relation that Heracles dominates Dianeira, or men rule women, is safely repeated by the next generation.

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<sup>20</sup> The oracle states that in Euboea Heracles would retire and rest from all his labours. The meaning of the oracle is that Heracles would die in Euboea because death is a real release from labours. Moreover, the oracle also warns him that he would not die at the hands of a human being; indeed, Heracles eventually dies from the blood of the centaur.

Wertenbaker revises the ending of Sophocles' *The Women of Trachis* by providing Hyllos' anger to emphasize that men's and women's anger would never ease if the gender relation like Heracles and Dianeira is repeated in the future. Before Heracles dies, he, in the name of being a father, demands Hyllos' absolute obedience to marry Iole. Hyllos is angry at his father's command, denying, "Father: Iole's presence caused my mother's death, your unendurable pain now;" he further declares, "I would rather die than share a house, a bed with my most hated enemy" (369). Regarding Iole as his enemy and the reason that causes his parent's death, Hyllos is irritated by Heracles' request, but he in the end cannot refuse his dying father's last requirement. He marries Iole, who is older than him, and both of them live in anger.

Greek mythology does not tell the result of the couple, but Wertenbaker adds a short story to complete what the myth does not say; that is, Hyllos and Iole "must" be angry in their marriage.<sup>21</sup> Suffering from the bitter and angry marriage life, Hyllos one day tells Iole that he would let her go and help her to rebuild her country Euboea if she forgives his family. Hyllos persuades her: "Iole, my life was ruined by the hatred of my parents for each other. Do you want to ruin our children?" (373). However, Iole does not agree to leave because Irene explains, "She has suckled her children with her anger, she is her anger, how can she relinquish the anger that she is? Anger is her life, her identity, and even a not too unpleasant habit" (373). Iole's refusal makes Hyllos angrier, and Hyllos' suggestion irritates Iole. At the end, both of them are getting angrier and angrier in their marriage.

Through the marriage between Heracles and Dianeira and the marriage between Hyllos and Iole, Wertenbaker reveals that the gender relation under male dominance is the source of anger and wars. As long as women are treated as booty in men's wars

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<sup>21</sup> This sentence, Hyllos and Iole "must" be angry in their marriage, is appropriated from a sentence by Victoria Pedrick's comments that "Sophocles' *Deianeira must be angry*" (47 emphasis in original).



and their anger is repressed, the male violence of wars will never cease because violence manifests masculinity and men's superiority over women. The ancient Trachis now is in Balkan States, a place filled with civil wars and endless conflicts. After Irene finishes her story, Timberlake and her friends drive home, and she describes, "Outside, in the clear night, we could hear the guns of the country north of the border, where there is always a war" (374). Linking the tragedy of Dianeira with the current Balkan conflicts, Wertebaker suggests that the ancient gender relation changes so slowly that the wars from Heracles' battles to the Balkan wars are still derived from men's violence all for their need to confirm their masculinity and society. Connell explains that to express masculinity is to gain "power," which is "the capacity of certain men to control social resources through gender processes" (*Masculinities* 205). Therefore, based on the patriarchal gender hierarchy, men, in order to gain power, display their masculinity through violence and war, which is to say that violence and wars are "genderized" as patriarchal masculinity, and women become the victims under men's conflicts of striving for power. In this way, violence and wars are highly related with the issue of gender.

Wertebaker reviews the ancient Greek oral history and the Balkan wars nowadays at the same time from the perspective of anger. Women's anger cannot be released while men's anger generates endless wars for the next generations. Anger then becomes a perspective to examine the realities of certain historical moments, such as wars, and no wonder Petra in *Credible Witness* claims, "History is full of anger" (223). In *Dianeira*, angry at men's dominance and all the patriarchal rules that restrict her, Dianeira finds no way to relinquish her anger so she commits suicide. Refusing to ease her rage, Iole identifies with anger and raises her children who probably will be angry in the future. In *The Love of the Nightingale*, both Procne and Philomele are angry at men's violence and gender conventions, so they kill Itys so as

to stop the cycle of the patriarchal society. Those women reveal that “history is full of women’s anger” while they are inferior in gender relations. However, we also may find “history is full of men’s anger” in these two plays. Heracles is angry at anyone who challenges his masculinity. Hyllos is angry because he has to maintain the patriarchal society established by his father. Tereus is also angry at Procne’s and Philomele’s challenges to his rules and masculinity.

We observe that women in *The Love of the Nightingale* and *Dianeira* strive hard to liberate themselves from male dominance whereas men are eager to ensure the existing order. Wertebaker retells these two tragedies, in which women are no longer silent or submissive without identities whereas men still grasp the benefit of male superiority in society. The dramatist nevertheless leaves optimistic hopes in the two plays. In *The Love of the Nightingale*, Itys’ transformation at the end suggests a positive future; in *Dianeira*, Timberlake and her friends’ silence in the car at the end indicates their critical judgment on wars is sprouting. Wertebaker’s two revisionary myths rewrite female characters by providing them with voices and feminist consciousness, but the gender relation in the two play is still based on men’s dominance over women although women are no longer submissive to it. This is also the reason why the two plays are tragedies. Both are the tragedy of the uncompromising conflicts between men’s anger and women’s anger.

### **C. *The Ash Girl*: New Cinderella in the New Millennium**

Like myth derived from oral history, fairy tales transmit orally and source themselves from oral tradition. Storytelling conveys the cultural values in myth and fairy tales to the next generations and finally establishes the social and cultural norms. In *Dianeira*, Wertebaker, in order to emphasize the important role of storytelling in oral history, retells the myth between Heracles and Dianeira by supporting two

storytellers to reshape the story from the women's point of view, instead of following the male storyteller Sophocles' version. Storytelling is especially crucial for the transmission of fairy tales because till now fairy tales have been the bedtime stories that adults tell to their children (Robbins101). Fairy tales are stories "of various kinds of marvels" (Abrams 101) usually involved with fairies and magic. Bruno Bettelheim explains the reason why children prefer fairy tales, and that is "because they [fairy tales] offer new dimensions to the child's imagination" (7). He further claims that "the form and structure of fairy tales suggest images to the child by which he can structure his daydreams" (6), and also the content of fairy tales provide flat characters, which are "either good or bad, nothing in between" (7). Children are easily caught by such a simpler and fantastic form and content of tales.

Widely known, Carl Jung believes that fairy tales and myth are collective unconscious, which is shared by all people in all cultures (Abrams 251). Since fairy tales and myth are accepted as the unconscious part of the human psyche, Alexandra Robbins asks, "The problem [. . .] is that we accept the tales and their values as a part of our psyche without questioning their validity" (102). Fairy tales, like myth, are criticized a lot for they maintain patriarchal, sexist values and despise female power. For example, Karen Rowe observes, "These [fairy] tales which glorify passivity, dependency, and self-sacrifice as a heroine's cardinal virtues suggest that culture's very survival depends upon a woman's acceptance of roles which relegate her to motherhood and domesticity" (239). The patriarchal values along with fairy tales become the collective unconscious of our human psyche, and then unconsciously encourages women to be confined to "motherhood" and "domesticity" based on biological determinism. Jennifer Waelti-Walters as well as other radical feminists even argues that reading or hearing fairy tales is "one of the first steps in the maintenance of a misogynous sex-role stereotyped patriarchy" (qtd. in Kelley 88).

Thus, it is the time to reread fairy tales and re-examine the values that these tales convey.

While Adrienne Rich strongly emphasizes the importance of “re-vision” (18), Riane Eisler points out the emergency of reconstruction of stories because old stories are not only “inappropriate” but also “misleading” (372). Wertebaker, admitting the necessity of revisionary works, rewrites the stereotypical images of women and the male-dominated gender relation to explore the silenced women and the hidden and repressive rebellion. Like what she does in *The Love of the Nightingale* and *Dianeira*, Wertebaker in *The Ash Girl* retells the story of Cinderella by reshaping a new image of the heroine. Notably, premiered in 2000, the beginning of a new millennium, *The Ash Girl* represents a modern version of Cinderella, which is different from two well-known versions by three male authors, Charles Perrault and the Grimm brothers.

Wertebaker’s ambition to challenge fairy tales is strong because she chooses Cinderella, “the best known folktale in the world” (McNeil 130), to start her criticism of fairy tales. The story of Cinderella could be found in almost everywhere, but many people claim that “the earliest known text dates from the ninth century in China” (McNeil 130).<sup>22</sup> In the tradition of British literature, Huang Mei argues that since Samuel Richardson, English novelists follow the pattern and structure of the story of Cinderella (1).<sup>23</sup> Therefore, rewriting Cinderella is meaningful and challengeable not only because it is a famous tale in every country but also because it is the fundamental pattern of British novels. Providing a feminist consciousness to Cinderella, Wertebaker has to maintain the fantastic magical part of the old tale on the one hand,

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<sup>22</sup> The convention of foot-binding in Chinese culture echoes the essential element of small foot size among hundreds of Cinderella versions (Mei 4). Like McNeil, Huang Mei also claims that “the ancient Chinese ‘Cinderella’ has been found to be the earliest one” (3).

<sup>23</sup> Perrault’s “Cinderella” was first compiled in *Tales of My Mother Goose* in 1697 in France, and then Robert Sambers translated “Cinderella” into English in 1729. From then on, Perrault’s “Cinderella” is the standard version of Cinderella in England (Mei 2).

and to run the risk of turning *The Ash Girl* into a feminist didactics on the other hand. Her version, as the following is going to argue, becomes Cinderella's "rite of passage" in a multicultural society.

Different from these male versions, Wertebaker's revision of the story of Cinderella is more like a female Bildungsroman which records the heroine's journey of searching for identity. In what follows is a brief critique on the two versions of Cinderella by three male authors, which argues that while the old tales emphasize gender as biological determinism, Wertebaker reacts against the fallacy of biological essentialism. Then Ashgirl's rite of passage will be analyzed to assert that gender identity is created by oneself, not by the arbitrary sex/gender system.

### 1. Three Cinderellas

Cinderella has some seven hundred versions in the world (Mei 2), but the two well-known versions of Cinderella are Charles Perrault's 1697 "Cinderella, or The Little Glass Slipper" and the brothers Grimm's 1812 "Ash Girl (Aschenputtel)."<sup>24</sup> These two versions respectively represent the social values in 17<sup>th</sup>-century France and 19<sup>th</sup>-century Germany, which are both rooted in patriarchy. In Karol Kelley's survey of Cinderella stories, she observes that the earliest Cinderella in oral history is "a strong independent woman who rebels against the hard labor forced upon her and uses her wits and her dead mother's help to regain her upper class status in society" (88). However, Perrault "tames" this Cinderella and turns her into a beautiful but passive girl, just like the aggressive and warlike Deianeira in oral history (Levett 31) is tamed by Sophocles. After Perrault, the brothers Grimm's Cinderella is also a stereotype of female passivity although some intrigues in "Aschenputtel" are different from

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<sup>24</sup> Alexandra Robbins argues that in addition to Perrault's and the brothers Grimm's versions of Cinderella, the third well-known Cinderella is Walt Disney's 1950 animation, which is based on Perrault's version (102).

Perrault's "Cinderella."<sup>25</sup> Wertebaker's *The Ash Girl* is based on both Perrault's and the brothers Grimm's Cinderella, and her combination in *The Ash Girl* apparently aims at criticizing the two male versions at the same time. By comparing the two stories of Cinderella written by male writers, I argue that Wertebaker criticizes the male versions in *The Ash Girl* because they reinforce the fallacy of biological determinism.

Among some seven hundred versions, Perrault's "Cinderella" is claimed to be the most popular one (Dundes 14). Due to the simpler plot and the marvelous magic performed by the fairy godmother, Perrault's version is more fantastic than the brothers Grimm's version, which is more violent comparatively. The two biggest different parts between these two versions are the existence of the fairy godmother and the final results of the two stepsisters. In Perrault's "Cinderella," the godmother does magic and transforms a pumpkin into a coach, six mice into six horses, six lizards into six footmen, and Cinderella's ragged clothes into a beautiful dress and a pair of glass slippers. However, the fairy godmother disappears in the brothers Grimm's version; instead, the white bird alighting on the tree in the grave of Cinderella's mother substitutes for the fairy protector. The little white bird throws Cinderella beautiful dresses and slippers from the tree, and because of this, there is no midnight curfew for the dresses and slippers are not magic. The other biggest difference between the two male versions is the final justice. Perrault's Cinderella at the end invites her two stepsisters to live in the palace and then marries them to two lords. Nevertheless, the brothers Grimm's version is bloodier. In order to fit Cinderella's small slippers, one of the stepsisters cuts her toes off and the other cuts a piece of her heels off. At the end, when they join Cinderella's wedding, pigeons peck

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<sup>25</sup> The brothers Grimm's "Aschenputtel" is translated into English "Ash Girl." In order to distinguish their "Ash Girl" from Wertebaker's *The Ash Girl*, I use the German title to designate the brothers Grimm's version, English title "Cinderella" to refer to Perrault's, and *The Ash Girl* to Wertebaker's.

out their eyes. In Wertebaker's *The Ash Girl*, the dramatist keeps the existence of the fairy godmother, like Perrault's version, but transforms her into the Fairy in the Mirror, who encourages Ashgirl to look at herself in front of the mirror. Besides, Wertebaker also keeps the violent part when the two stepsisters cut parts of their feet, like the brothers Grimm's version, but does not blind them at the end.

These two biggest differences distinguish Perrault's "Cinderella" from the brothers Grimm's "Aschenputtel," but Wertebaker keeps them both so that her version is based on both Perrault' and the brothers Grimm's. However, the playwright does not faithfully follow their intrigues. The fairy godmother in the story of Cinderella is usually criticized as "external powers" (Rowe 248), which is to say that Cinderella solves her problem by the external assistance instead of her inner active power. Moreover, it is sensible to argue that the fairy godmother represents the power of patriarchy, who gives a prize to the "good" girl. Wertebaker in *The Ash Girl* transforms this fairy godmother into the Fairy in the Mirror.<sup>26</sup> Encouraging Ashgirl to look at herself in front of the mirror, the Fairy in the Mirror represents the hidden part of Ashgirl. The Fairy claims, "I am the one you find when you see yourself clearly" (*The Ash Girl* 274). When Ashgirl asks her why she helps her to go to the ball, the Fairy replies that it is Ashgirl herself who asks her (the Fairy) to come (281). Because the function of the mirror is to reflect oneself, the Fairy in the Mirror does not symbolize "external powers," but rather it represents that Ashgirl helps herself.

Like Perrault's fairy godmother in "Cinderella," the Fairy in the Mirror in *The Ash Girl* also does magic. Transforming an otter into a coachman, girlmouse into a silver dragon, boymouse into a silver pony, a walnut into a carriage, the Fairy in the

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<sup>26</sup> It is interesting to notice that in Perrault's "Cinderella," the two stepsisters have a large mirror. Perrault describes that "they had looking glasses so large that they might see themselves at their full length from head to foot" (16). The character of the Fairy in the Mirror in *The Ash Girl* might be inspired by this description.



Mirror makes from the spider web a beautiful dress for Ashgirl. Wertebaker leaves the magical parts, which attract people's attention the most, in the play, but she emphasizes that the Fairy is not almighty. Being the mirror-like Ashgirl, the Fairy in the Mirror, like Ashgirl who has to learn to improve herself, is a pupil of magic, and she has to learn how to perform magic. Reading "silver scrolls," she states, "Wait. I think I have the wrong page and I'm doing this the wrong way round. It's a standard recipe this. Let me see—" (275). Then the Fairy even discusses which animal is the best for transforming into a human being with Ashgirl (276). This Fairy apparently is still learning magic, and her imperfection of course brings some comic effect in the play. However, since the Fairy in the Mirror is another Ashgirl, then like Ashgirl who has to learn to find her confidence, the Fairy needs to learn to do magic. Through the character of the Fairy, Wertebaker indicates that no one is born to be someone or to do something, so we have to learn and to improve ourselves. This emphasis also echoes Wertebaker's criticism of biological determinism, which overlooks the power of man-made effort.

In addition, Wertebaker keeps the violent parts of the brothers Grimm's "Aschenputtel," the mutilation of the stepsisters' feet, in *The Ash Girl*, but the playwright refuses to describe the stepsisters as naturally evil. The two unnamed stepsisters are persuaded by their mother to cut parts of their feet to fit Cinderella's slippers.<sup>27</sup> Their mother convinces them that "once you're queen, you won't have to walk any more" (Grimm 28). Similarly, in *The Ash Girl*, the stepmother brings her two daughters to see a woman, possibly a witch, in the forest to mutilate their feet. Wertebaker, showing her sympathy with the two stepsisters, rewrites the two as the victims of the concept of idealized daughters in the patriarchal society, which

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<sup>27</sup> The two stepsisters are unnamed in the brothers Grimm's "Aschenputtel," but Perrault mentions one of them is called Charlotte (Perrault 20).

demands women to have idealized femininity, such as small feet.

Kristine Johanson claims that the names of the two sisters in *The Ash Girl* indicate the dramatist's judgment of the irrational social norms. By giving the elder sister the name Ruth, Johanson notices the allusion of the Biblical Ruth and asserts that the stepsister Ruth is like the Biblical Ruth who obeys her mother-in-law without questioning why (112). Compared with the other sister Judith, Ruth obeys their mother more. Ruth agrees with the stepmother all the time, stating, "Mother says we must be thin" (*The Ash Girl* 245) and "I'd like to paint, but Mother says it makes me look a mess" (246). Helping her mother to persuade Judith into cutting her toes off, Ruth tells Judith, "You have to! Girls don't disobey their mothers" (303). Johanson comments, "The duty Ruth symbolizes thus becomes a dangerous devotion to social convention" (113). Like the allusion to the Biblical Ruth, Johanson claims that the name of Judith also is derived from the Biblical Judith (113).<sup>28</sup> However, unlike the Biblical Judith who outwits her enemy, Judith in *The Ash Girl*, Johanson argues, "fails to question her family's demands of physical mutilation, failing to preserve herself or to reflect on such cruel cultural traditions that can haunt girls' lives" (113). Judith persuades Ruth into cutting her heels and declares, "Obey your mother!" (*The Ash Girl* 310). These two daughters, losing the ability of walking, become the victims of the concept of idealized daughters in the male-centered society.

Because of Wertebaker's sympathy with the two stepsisters who dare not to disagree with their mother and social norms, Ruth's and Judith's final punishments are different from the two stepsisters in the brothers Grimm's version. The Fairy in the Mirror tells Ruth and Judith, "As for you, when someone, even your mother, asks you to do something stupid and harmful, have the courage to say no. It is difficult, I know,

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<sup>28</sup> Kristine Johanson mentions that the Biblical Judith comes from the Book of Judith, which is not included in the Protestant Christian Bible. Included in the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Bibles, the Book of Judith is seen as apocrypha in contrast to the Protestant Christian Bible (112 footnote 4).

and I won't be harsh. Choose your own punishments" (318). Ruth is interested in painting, so the Fairy turns her into a hermit who is to paint the carcasses of dead animals in a cave forever. Judith likes nature, so the Fairy punishes her by making her stay in the forest for the rest of her life. Because Ruth's and Judith's interests are not permitted in the society that restricts women to certain femininities, those punishments ironically make their dreams come true. The different ending of the two stepsisters represents that Wertebaker, instead of seeing them as naturally evil, sympathizes with the women who unconsciously follow wrong rules. Nevertheless, in "Aschenputtel," the two sisters not only have parts of their feet cut but also have their eyes blinded by pigeons. The brothers Grimm narrate, "Thus for their malice and treachery they were punished with blindness for the rest of their lives" (29). The ending of "Aschenputtel" reiterates the moral teaching that good triumphs over evil. In other words, in contrast to Cinderella, the two stepsisters represent the evil girls who should be and will be punished for the reason that they torture Cinderella, who symbolizes goodness and ideal femininity. Thus, their punishment becomes a warning for all the women who disobey the virtues that Cinderella displays; otherwise, they should be and will be punished, like the two stepsisters. Ruth and Judith obey their mother, mutilate their feet, pursue their happiness actively, but at the end, they are blind for the rest of their lives.

Wertebaker in *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* (1991) expresses her deep sympathy with the two stepsisters through the monologue of Fiona. Pitying the two sisters, Fiona laments:

I've always felt sorry for the ugly sisters. In some versions, their mother tells them to cut off part of their foot to get it into the slipper. It works and they go off with the prince until he notices blood. No fine prince wants to see a lot of blood, so he sends them back and eventually gets the

diaphanous Cinderella, who will not bleed. Great, but what happens to the sisters with their half-foot? How do they spend the rest of their lives? Are they angry with their mother for telling them to cut off their foot? Or do they just get on with it. (443)

Published nine years after *Three Birds Alighting on a Field*, *The Ash Girl* (2000) gives the two sisters a new ending. They both stay in the forest forever, but they do what they like even though they have deformed feet. They are angry at their mother, as Judith states, “I hate everyone. I hate everything” (309), or as Ruth shouts at her mother, “You cut off my heel for nothing! It’s infected! I’ll never walk again!” (315). In *The Ash Girl*, they are punished because they lack courage to challenge wrong social rules, not because they do not follow social norms. Wertebaker rewrites their ending to emphasize the importance of critical judgment on taken-for-granted gender conventions.<sup>29</sup>

The existence of the fairy godmother and the different results of the two stepsisters distinguish Perrault’s from the brothers Grimm’s version. Combining the two intrigues, Wertebaker’s *The Ash Girl* has the Fairy in the Mirror and the violent part of mutilation with a strong criticism on patriarchal values based on biological determinism. However, despite the different intrigues between the two versions by men, their differences further expose the same value rooted in male domination and oppression. In addition to the differences among three versions of the Cinderella story, there are two essential similarities shared by all versions: the suffering heroine and shoes (Mei 2). The stepmother in both Perrault’s and the brothers Grimm’s stories

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<sup>29</sup> Wertebaker in *The Ash Girl* also shows her great sympathy with the stepmother although she is punished to be turned into a tree. The Mother defends herself by claiming, “I followed the rules. They were the wrong rules, but I had no way of knowing that” (318). In order to fulfill an ideal of a perfect female body; like she forces her daughters to mutilate their feet, she is made to cut off her legs by her mother, too. At the end, shockingly, lifting her skirts, she shows her own stumps. She is educated by the wrong social norms; without enough knowledge, she passes the wrong rules to her daughters.

forces Cinderella to do lots of heavy works, and those works are all housework. In Perrault's "Cinderella," the stepmother "employed her [Cinderella] in the meanest work of the house: she scoured the dishes, tables, etc., and scrubbed madam's chamber, and those of misses, her daughters" (16). In the brothers Grimm's "Aschenputtel," "There she [Cinderella] has to do heavy work from morning till night, get up before dawn, carry water, light the fire, cook, and wash" (24). Accordingly, doing housework indicates that a good woman identifies only with domesticity.

Cinderella is forced to do housework, and unbelievably, she accepts her works with resignation. Perrault describes that she bears everything "patiently" (16) while the brothers Grimm depict that she obeys her stepmother cryingly (25). Cinderella is not angry because "anger and censoriousness are not feminine" (Kelley 90). In this way, Cinderella becomes "the archetype of the suffering heroine" (Lieberman 390) or "a paradigm of passivity" (Robbins 106). Mei observes that "by enduring injustice patiently and returning ill-usage with love and benevolence, this Cinderella transforms her passive innocence and suffering into a saving power" (3). In other words, society encourages women to restrict themselves within domesticity, to do housework without complaint, and to accept their duty patiently in order to fulfill the virtue of Cinderella. Moreover, women may gain "a saving power" through their suffering so as to earn a happy ending. A suffering heroine, which is the essential similarity among all different versions of Cinderella stories, conveys a stereotype of female passivity, and it suggests that if women are obedient, they will live happily ever after.

Whereas the image of Cinderella indicates that passivity is feminine, the size of the shoes also represents feminine beauty. Both Perrault and the Grimms emphasize Cinderella's small feet and the two stepsisters' big feet. Perrault records that "it [the slipper] was brought to the two sisters, who did all they possibly could to thrust their

foot into the slipper, but they could not effect it” (21), and the Grimms mention that the two sisters have to cut off parts of their feet to fit the slipper (28). The shoes are not only small size but they also are very pretty. Perrault’s shoes are “a pair of glass silver” (18), whereas the Grimms’ are “silk slippers embroidered with silver” (26). Mei explains, “The size and beauty of the slipper imply a delicate physique and an elegant style that are usually related to upper-class female life” (3). More crucially, the physical small feet also suggest that women’s dependence on men spiritually and physically (4).

Wertenbaker’s Cinderella story contains the two essential similarities shared by all versions, but she revises them to make her Ashgirl feminist. Although the playwright in the play keeps the small size of the shoes, she does not emphasize the appearance of them. Nor does she repeat the ill-treatment of the heroine. Her Cinderella at the end learns how to be responsible for her own happiness, and her transformation represents the development of searching for a self-identity. Thus, the next part will focus on Ashgirl’s “rite of passage” and assert that gender identity is created actively by oneself rather than by the sex/gender system.

## **2. Ashgirl’s Rite of Passage**

Karen Rowe learns that many fairy tales, including the story of Cinderella, describe the period of the heroine’s adolescence and focus on the heroine’s predicament caught between childhood and womanhood (240). Rowe designates the development of the whole story as the heroine’s rite of passage, which turns the heroine from a little girl into a woman who is assimilated by society (240). The importance of the rite of passage is to place a female in the sex/gender system and to transform her into a woman based on biological determinism. During this passage, the character of the stepmother is one of the “major obstacles” (Rowe 240), but the fairy

godmother usually is the heroine's "guardian" (242). At the end of the tales, marriage is an important ceremony because it means that the heroine successfully passes through the rite of passage and finds a position as a wife or a mother in the sex/gender system. Rowe argues that the wedding represents "the heroine's conformity to the socially dictated roles of wife and mother" and "her assimilation into the community" (250). Accordingly, fairy tales re-affirm the arbitrary patriarchal sex/gender system and the developments of the heroines all aim at the only direction of being feminine in society.

Although Wertenbaker in *The Ash Girl* also delineates Ashgirl's rite of passage, she does not aim at the final assimilation to the patriarchal order. Instead, the playwright rewrites the rite of passage in the old fairy tale to portray Ashgirl's inner journey to find her own identity, which is not based on her biological sex. Helping her to find confidence and identity, the passage is Ashgirl's awakening to react against traditional gender conventions. In a way, *The Ash Girl* is a type of the Bildungsroman, which describes "the development of the protagonist's mind and character, in the passage from childhood through varied experiences—and often through a spiritual crisis—into maturity, which usually involves recognition of one's identity and role in the world" (Abrams 193). Rather than a romantic rite of passage that transforms Ashgirl from a girl to a wife of the prince, *The Ash Girl* is more like an inner and spiritual journey from innocence to maturity. Therefore, this part focuses on the psychological development of Ashgirl, reviewing her rite of passage from a shy girl to a confident woman.

French ethnologist and folklorist Arnold van Gennep describes a threefold progression of successive ritual stages in what he calls "rites of passage:" separation, liminality and aggregation (Turner 576). All rites of passage consist of these three stages: first separation from previous social life; then liminality as an in-between



condition; finally aggregation to the everyday life. Arnold van Gennep intends to use this term to denote an individual's or a group's changes in social status or seasonal changes, but this part proposes to appropriate the term to describe Ashgirl's psychological transformation. She must separate from her passive attitude, moving to a liminal inner struggle, so that she could aggregate to society. As Wertebaker expresses, "*The Ash Girl* is a fairy tale, the Cinderella story, but Ashgirl has to discover and affirm her own identity before she can find the Prince" (Introduction, *Plays Two* vii). Thus, Ashgirl must pass the rite of passage and find herself first.

At the beginning of the play, Ashgirl is a passive and inactive teenager: "grey, spectral, skeletally thin, a girl of about seventeen" (*The Ash Girl* 247). Unlike the beautiful Cinderella in the old fairy tale, Ashgirl does not count as a charming girl, and she is even "crooked" (274). In Perrault's version, Cinderella is so pretty that her stepmother "could not bear the good qualities of this pretty girl, and the less because they made her own daughters appear the more odious" (16). However, Wertebaker's Ashgirl believes she is ugly (274) and she is even sorry for being in the world (249). She likes to hide in the ashes. The reason is not as the old tale tells that she is forced to do domestic works so that she is covered with cinder; instead, ashes are her best company. She claims, "Ashes are warm and in the ashes no one sees you, you do no wrong. Ashes on your head, no one talks to you, ashes on your arms, no one touches you, ashes are safe. I will stay in these ashes, melt into them, shrink to their weightlessness. Cloak of crumbling grey. My ashes" (250). Especially, after her mother dies and her father disappears, ashes provide her security and make her invisible and dirty so that no one notices and cares about her.<sup>30</sup>

What stimulates Ashgirl to separate from her passivity is the news from the

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<sup>30</sup> Bruno Bettelheim in *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976) uses Freudian psychoanalysis to analyze the story of Cinderella. He emphasizes that "ashes," not "cinder" is the correct translation of the French *cendre* (253-54, footnote). However, these two words are interchangeable in my book.

palace announcing that Prince Amir is going to have a ball.<sup>31</sup> Bewildered, Ashgirl is trapped by Sadness, personified by a woman, and her will of going to the ball.

Sadness as well as seven deadly sins attempts to destroy all human beings. The seven monsters are Slothworm, Angerbird, Envysnake, Gluttonoad, Pridefly, Greedmonkey and Lust.<sup>32</sup> Ashgirl is Sadness's target. She instills in Ashgirl all pessimistic ideas in order to seduce her to death. Sadness defines herself, "I'm the icicle in the heart, the one who makes the world so dark you wish you weren't in it" (264). She intends to annihilate Ashgirl while the cinder girl is wondering whether she should go to the ball or not. Sadness murmurs to Ashgirl, "Come to the ashes and we'll have a little look at death," and she continues, "Death is no worse than life, Ashie, and it's so simple [. . .]" (273). Ironically, Sadness is embodied as a woman, and the emotion of sadness is "permissible for good women" (Kelley 90); in other words, sadness is regarded as a feminine quality in society. In *The Ash Girl*, Sadness, as one of feminine traits, is re-described as a monster, so Wertebaker's judgment on the traditional femininity that confines women to certain emotions is fierce through this new character.

Like a fairy godmother in the old tale, a fairy appears to rescue the cinder girl. However, unlike Cinderella's firm resolution to go to the ball in the old tale, Ashgirl hesitates and cannot make up her mind.<sup>33</sup> The Fairy in the Mirror encourages her to

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<sup>31</sup> Amir is the hero in *The Ash Girl*, and interestingly enough, the dramatist creates the prince as a stranger, probably an Indian. The play sets in the medieval time in an unnamed western country where Zehra, Amir's mother, is the princess. Princess Zehra marries an eastern king and has a son Amir. Several years later, the unnamed eastern country is lost in a war, so Zehra brings Amir back to her mother country. In order to help Amir to settle down in the new land, Zehra holds a ball, inviting all girls to the palace, asking Amir to pick a girl as his wife.

<sup>32</sup> In Wertebaker's *The Ash Girl*, she explains that the absence of the father in the stories of Cinderella is because he is haunted by one of the seven deadly sins, Lust. In both Perrault's and the brothers Grimm's versions, Cinderella's mother dies but her father does not. However, the whole story almost mentions nothing important about her father. Rowe observes, "Many tales implicitly acknowledge the potent attraction between females and the father" (243), and "they often mask latent incest as filial love" (244). Wertebaker uncovers the "latent incest" through the monster, Lust, who possesses Cinderella's father.

<sup>33</sup> Cinderella, both in Perrault's and the brothers Grimm's versions, expresses her resolution to go to the ball from the outset, and her resolution makes her different from other fairy-tale heroines, such as Sleeping Beauty who does nothing but sleep (Mei 5).

look at herself in front of the mirror and to think of who she is. Looking at the mirror, Ashgirl realizes her anger at herself, stating,

Yes, I do want to go to the ball, I always wanted to go the ball, but I can't, and yes, I do mind that I can't and now I'm going to be even more unhappy, I don't mind, I do mind, I don't want to be unhappy, I'm tired of being unhappy, draped in my ashcloth, I do want to go to the ball, oh, go away, I'm going to cry. I'm even getting angry. (275)

The Cinderella in the traditional tale is a woman without personality or emotion, but Ashgirl realizes that she is unhappy and she is angry at her unhappiness. As what we have discussed in *Dianeira*, anger is an expression to set up an identity from the other, and it is especially important for the women who are silenced, repressed, and forbidden to express their emotion (Marcus 71). To name anger is an “act of judgment” (Silver 363). Ashgirl, angry at herself, criticizes her passivity, and then decides to do something to make herself happy. She makes up her mind to go to the ball.

There is a forest located in the middle of Ashgirl's house and the palace. This forest symbolizes “liminality” between Ashgirl's original passivity, which is embodied by Ashgirl's house, and her new life, which is incarnated by the palace. In other words, three locations in the play metaphorically represent the rite of passage: separation (the house), liminality (the forest), and aggregation (the palace). The forest abounds with several monsters: seven deadly sins and Sadness. They are the obstacles in Ashgirl's rite of passage. It is obvious that Ashgirl has to pass the test from the monsters in the forest so that she could complete her rite. Ashgirl does meet Prince Amir, and Prince Amir does fall in love with her. Nevertheless, Ashgirl has not passed all the tests to discover herself, so she cannot live with the prince happily ever after yet. After she leaves a shoe in the palace, Ashgirl and her animal friends pass through

the forest in order to go home, all the monsters come to her to tempt her. They seduce her to kill herself, and this time she is left without the Fairy's help. Surrounded by monsters, Ashgirl is frozen.

Ashgirl makes a final effort to extricate herself.

Ashgirl: Hope . . .

Sadness: They're mice, Ashgirl . . . mice. Mice!

Girlmouse: What's wrong with being a mouse?

Boymouse: Mice are nice and have no vice.

Ashgirl laughs. The Mice take her hands. The Monsters vanish.

(294)

Ashgirl is saved by her animal friends, mice, not by magical help from the fairy. Friendship is important for Ashgirl when she is lost herself. At the end of the play, when all monsters discuss why they cannot destroy human beings, they conclude that "friendship" as well as "energy," "pity," "generosity" and "hope" (319-20) is the reason.

The liminal-like forest is filled with challenges and the monsters that Ashgirl has to conquer. She must confront her fear face to face and by herself, so Wertenbaker arranges another test for her in the liminal stage of her rite. After knowing Prince Amir is going to marry Judith because Judith picks up the shoe that Ashgirl leaves in the palace and also because Judith cuts her toes off to fit the shoe, Ashgirl is heartbroken. Monsters take this chance to seduce her again. While Judith picks up the shoe, Ashgirl leaves the other shoe in the forest when she is frozen by monsters. Without a "credible witness," Ashgirl is not sure whether she has gone to the ball unless she goes to the forest again to find the other shoe. Ashgirl is scared by the monsters in the forest, but she at the end bravely decides to go to the forest again. In the old tale, passive Cinderella only stays at home and waits for the prince to send her

the shoe to try on. Nevertheless, Wertebaker lets her Cinderella find the shoe and search for her happiness actively.

Seven deadly sins and Sadness are the obstacles in Ashgirl's rite of passage. In the liminal-like forest, Ashgirl is possessed by monsters again and she has to confront them by herself. The Fairy's voice is resonant in her mind, reminding her to look into herself and to find courage, hope and good memory. However, simultaneously Sadness suggests her a forever peace, death. It is when Ashgirl recalls her sweet traveling memory with her father that she finds "joy" and "strength" (313). Then she declares, "I know who I am and I will be what I am" (313); moreover, she confidently states, "I know there is darkness, I've seen the monsters of the forest, but I'm not afraid" (314). Ashgirl saves herself, and Sadness realizes that she loses Ashgirl forever.

By the statement of "I'm not afraid of the shadows of this forest, nor of myself, nor of the future" (314), Ashgirl successfully moves to the next stage from liminality to aggregation in her rite of passage. Before she finishes her rite, there is one more test: she has to answer Princess Zehra's three questions in order to prove she loves Prince Amir. She responds to her questions with silence; surprisingly, those questions could not be answered so she passes the test. Princess Zehra's three questions are: "Why do you love my son," "Will you love my son for the rest of your life," and "Will you always be able to wear the silver shoes you wore at the ball" (317). They cannot be answered. Zehra explains that there is no reason to answer why you love somebody; otherwise your love is just a "fraction" (318). The second question Ashgirl cannot answer is because "[i]t is you, Amir, who must make her love you as she will make you love her" (318), explains Zehra. The third question cannot be answered either because Ashgirl will change in the future, it is Amir who is not supposed to ask her to fit the shoes for her entire life (318).

Princess Zehra's questions are important because she points out that in a marriage, Amir and Ashgirl should both be responsible for each other's happiness. The model of male dominance in the marriage is broken down by Zehra's three questions. Unlike the old tale in which the prince loves Cinderella because of her charming appearance, clothing and small size feet, *The Ash Girl* does not emphasize the appearance of Ashgirl as well as Amir. Especially, the answer to the first question indicates that love is not based on appearances, so the feminine or masculine beauty is not the goal for gender identities. Furthermore, Amir's male tenderness is important for returning Ashgirl's love because love is mutual.<sup>34</sup> Zehra explains to Amir, "Neglect her [Ashgirl], treat her badly, you will kill her love" (318). The third question also reminds Amir not to force Ashgirl to fit the small shoes, by implication, not to fit the idealized femininity for the rest of her life in their marriage. Zehra demands Amir to take more responsibility in the marriage, suggesting that the traditional male dominance in the marriage does not work anymore. Zehra talks to Amir, "The questions could not be answered. Your future wife knew this" (318). Ashgirl at last passes the final test, and her father then appears and reveals her name as "Sophia," which means wisdom (319).

Elisabeth Panttaja argues that the tale of Cinderella is not a romance because "there is actually nothing in the text itself to suggest either that Cinderella loves the prince or that the prince loves her" (91). Panttaja further argues, "The prince marries Cinderella because he is enchanted (literally) by the sight of her in her magic clothes" (91). Therefore, Wertenbaker changes the old false romance into a real romance based on the couple's love instead of the attraction of the appearance. Prince Amir and Ashgirl have several things in common, and their similar experience brings them

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<sup>34</sup> In *The Love of the Nightingale* I have discussed that the meaning of love is mutual and it is not based on male dominance. As bell hooks asserts, "Mutual partnership is the foundation of love" (*Feminism* 104).

together. Johanson argues that Ashgirl encounters a sense of otherness at her home, and Amir also undergoes a sense of strangeness in the new country (115). They both lose their fathers and both feel the sense of dislocation and self-estrangement.

Amir I don't know where my father is . . .

Ashgirl Mine told me he had to leave . . .

Amir We had many enemies . . .

Ashgirl My father spoke of enemies within.

Amir Everything is so different here . . .

Ashgirl It all changed when he [father] left.

Amir I never feel at home . . .

Ashgirl I have to tell you I'm not what I seem . . .

Amir Sometimes I'm no longer sure of who I am . . . (286-87)

By showing the similarities between Ashgirl and Amir, Wertenbaker explains the foundation of their romantic love in the story of Cinderella.

As suggested by Rowe, the wedding ceremony in fairy tales is important because it symbolizes a girl turning into a woman, who identifies with the role of wife or mother only, in the sex/gender system (250). However, in *The Ash Girl*, Wertenbaker does not describe a magnificent wedding ceremony; rather, she emphasizes the gender relations in the marriage through Princess Zehra's three questions. This emphasis reiterates Ashgirl's rite of passage does not aim at assimilation with the patriarchal society, but a feminist awareness of self-identity. Because Amir is the prince, the future king, his marriage with Ashgirl represents a new gender relation in the future. When the Fairy in the Mirror asks them whether they would like to end bad gender conventions, such as the stepmother forcing her daughters to cut off parts of their feet, Amir replies, "We will" (316), and Ashgirl also states, "We will change everything" (316). Their marriage does not simply means a



girl's final aggregation to society, but more crucially, it promises a hope of a new gender relation for everyone in the future.

Overall, *The Ash Girl* examines a serious gender issue of searching for an identity by the fantastic genre of fairy tales. In order to criticize the old versions written by male writers that confine women to the passive femininity, Wertebaker emphasizes Ashgirl's rite of passage and her inner transformation from passivity to activity, from shyness to confidences. In this way, Cinderella is no longer a stereotype of passive feminine beauty. Also, by maintaining the magic performed by the Fairy and by adding six animals which embodied seven deadly sins, except Lust, *The Ash Girl* is still an interesting fairy tale.

As emphasized by the previous two chapters, gender in Wertebaker's plays is always full of possibilities of reconstruction. Gender never merely refers to women only, and gender relations are never based on men's coercive dominance and women's total submission. In Wertebaker's oral history plays, she shows her ambition to reconstruct gender in oral history, and by revising the stereotypical images of women, the dramatist reveals the potential resistance hidden in the male-dominated gender relations. In addition, when oral history is reread from the perspective of gender, Wertebaker exposes the deficiency of oral history, such as the fallacy of biological determinism, so the statement that both history and gender should be reread radically to challenge the traditional concepts of the two is reiterated.

In brief, to examine gender in oral history is particularly crucial for several reasons. First, at the beginning of this chapter, Deirdre Beddoe has explained that the importance of new historical references for women (7) and the significance of knowing the past as strength for women (6), so women's history needs to be traced back to oral history. Second, since oral history is usually treated as the representative of the majority and the origin of the civilization, it is more radical to deconstruct

conventional femininity and masculinity in oral history. Third, to understand gender relations in oral history is a way to know the development of patriarchy, and to rewrite gender relations in oral history is a way to get sexual equality without the confinement of femininity and masculinity in the present and the future. Hence, Wertenbaker's oral history plays emphasize the above three purposes: to review, to deconstruct, and to expect a new gender relation so that human beings are free from man-made gender conventions in history.



## Chapter Five

### Conclusion

Discussing Wertebaker's seven (oral) history plays, this book argues that while the dramatist uses historical materials to reconstruct gender, she simultaneously releases history from an immobilized concept that values scientific truth and official records of male historical events to a polyphonic field that welcomes different people and various voices. Not only does Wertebaker care about women in history, but she also pays attention to men who are also confined to the sex/gender system and the tense power relation between the sexes in history. She, targeting the arbitrary sexual norms based on biological determinism, deconstructs the stereotypes of femininity and masculinity to uncover her "feminist" and "humanist" ideals ("Interview," *A Search* 270) that both women and men are free to develop their talent. Wertebaker's special contribution to drama exactly lies in her reconstruction of history from the perspective of gender.

In the four history plays, Wertebaker reveals a strong intention of deconstructing femininity and masculinity while in the three oral history plays she asserts the importance of knowing the past differently from what we have known. These seven (oral) history plays discussed in Chapters Three and Four are the main objects in the book; however, because the book intends to read Wertebaker's works from a whole perspective, her other plays, articles, interviews are also the major references to understand her concepts of history and gender.

It is noteworthy to find whether Wertebaker's reconstruction of history from the point of view of gender becomes classical, or whether her history writing is successful. Kuisma Korhonen claims, "Literary and artistic representations of history," such as plays or theatre performances, "may not have enjoyed the same kind of official status as academic historiography, but no one can deny that they have had a

crucial impact on those mental images that we have formed from our past” (18).

History rewriting is important because it changes our perception of the past, the present and us in order to look forward to fair gender relations in the future.

Wertebaker’s plays address questions regarding the validity of the male-dominated history, so she, from the standpoint of gender, challenges the traditional and closed concept of history to assert a mobilized concept of history by exposing the dynamic gender relations in history. Artistic imagination, such as drama, plays a crucial role as we try to understand the past; it is “an essential supplement to historical discourse when the intention is to give voice to those who are marginalized from the centralized production of knowledge, or to those who are silenced forever” (Korhonen 18-19). That is the reason why Wertebaker emphasizes mainly the marginalized people, such as women, native people, convicts, and working-class people, in her plays because history is not supposed to belong to male elites only and history comprehension is not based on male-dominated historiography only.

Generally speaking, audiences or readers have had a certain idea toward a certain historical event or figure, so rewriting history becomes troublesome. However, the act of rewriting is worthy of encouragement. For example, not all critics believe that *The Love of the Nightingale* is a successful history rewriting, but most of them agree with the effort of the rewriting (Carlson, “Issues” 270). Like Korhonen who admires the importance of artistic imagination in our history comprehension, Riane Eisler argues that each history rewriting is an “inward and outward” journey and we need different versions of history to complete ourselves (373). She explains:

There are no guarantees that we will succeed in freeing ourselves from the myths and structures that still bind us to dysfunctional, painful, and unjust ways of living and dying. But even attempting it is in itself an extraordinary adventure: a journey that is at the same time inward and

outward, taking us toward ever deeper levels of consciousness and ever wider and more fulfilling life paths. Because, paradoxically, the more integrated we become as we strive to fashion our own life scripts, the more open we are to further changes in consciousness. (373)

Wertenbaker's reconstruction of history through gender, in a way, is not a matter of success or failure; instead, the act of reconstruction itself is important and necessary. Nevertheless, the book argues that Wertenbaker's rewriting indeed is successful in terms of the exposure of the dynamic gender hierarchy. By cross-dressing and crossing the spatial division, Wertenbaker explains the sex/gender system is arbitrary and man-made. By revealing the ambivalence between the colonizer and the colonized, the dramatist asserts the resistant power from the powerless. Also, by providing voices and emotion to the silenced women in oral history, women are no longer passive or submissive to male dominance without resistance. More crucially, although Wertenbaker deals with the past, she intends to criticize the present and expects a better future. She is not nostalgic; instead, she is active to convey her feminist and humanist ideas. Wertenbaker expresses why she likes to explore the past: "It is a much more oblique way of writing about the present. I feel that an audience comes to a contemporary play with a lot of prejudice and expectation" (qtd. in De Vries "Of Convicts"). Therefore, what she targets is the present, and she criticizes the past and the present at the same time.

Theatre is the place where Wertenbaker believes her ideals can be disseminated, and that is one of the reasons why she prefers to use the device of a play-within-the-play in her plays, such as *Our Country's Good*, *After Darwin*, *The Love of the Nightingale*, and *Dianeira*, to reflect the function of theatre. Wertenbaker claims, "I don't think you can leave the theatre and go out and make a revolution [. . .] But I do think you can make people change, just a little, by forcing them to question

something, or by intriguing them, or giving them an image that remains with them. And that little change can lead to bigger changes” (qtd. in Chaillet 554). The impact of a play may be strong or limited, but even a little change is a hope.

The way Wertebaker expresses her ideals however is always indirect. She refuses to give her play a clear ending or to suggest a possible answer because she wants the audience to think critically. When an interviewer asks her why she does not offer a solution in her plays, she replies, “No. I think if you know the solution, you should be doing something else, you should be in politics or writing pamphlets or something. All a playwright can do is capture and phrase the questions as immediately as possible” (“Interview,” *A Search* 268). A playwright is not supposed to give answers in his or her plays. Theatre for Wertebaker always offers more questions than answers, and an open ending becomes one of the characteristics in her plays, such as in *New Anatomies*, *The Grace of Mary Traverse*, *Our Country’s Good*, *After Darwin*, and *The Love of the Nightingale*.

Although this book proposes to read Wertebaker’s plays from an overall perspective, it still leaves some parts untackled, which awaits future research. First, the book only focuses on her plays before *Credible Witness* (2001), but the latest plays imply the changing topic in Wertebaker’s creations. The dramatist defines her plays in *Plays One* as “discovery” (Introduction, *Plays Two* vii), such as the discovery of the self in *New Anatomies* and *The Grace of Mary Traverse* and the discovery of language in *Our Country’s Good* and *The Love of the Nightingale*, and plays in *Plays Two* as “identity” (vii), such as the threatened identity in *After Darwin*, the anger identity in *Dianeira*, and the self-identity in *The Ash Girl*. However, in a conversation, Wertebaker states that the next topic in her future works will be the situation of human beings, expressing, “I’ve probably finished with identity now and am interested in where the human being is in the world at the moment” (“A

Conversation” 167). Wertebaker’s new interest anticipates more future study. Second, this book does not deal with any of her translation, screenplay, or television play, especially when Wertebaker has translated numerous classical works, such as Sophocles’ *The Thebans* (1992) and Euripides’ *Hecuba* (1994) and *Hippolytus* (2009). The research on those works cannot help but be left to the future, too. As a prolific and insightful playwright, Wertebaker will keep writing based on “a real love of theater and a belief in the value of theatre” (Wertebaker, “Prescriptions” 241).





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無研發成果推廣資料

# 國科會補助專題研究計畫成果報告自評表

請就研究內容與原計畫相符程度、達成預期目標情況、研究成果之學術或應用價值（簡要敘述成果所代表之意義、價值、影響或進一步發展之可能性）、是否適合在學術期刊發表或申請專利、主要發現或其他有關價值等，作一綜合評估。

1. 請就研究內容與原計畫相符程度、達成預期目標情況作一綜合評估

達成目標

未達成目標（請說明，以 100 字為限）

實驗失敗

因故實驗中斷

其他原因

說明：

2. 研究成果在學術期刊發表或申請專利等情形：

論文： 已發表  未發表之文稿  撰寫中  無

專利： 已獲得  申請中  無

技轉： 已技轉  洽談中  無

其他：（以 100 字為限）

3. 請依學術成就、技術創新、社會影響等方面，評估研究成果之學術或應用價值（簡要敘述成果所代表之意義、價值、影響或進一步發展之可能性）（以 500 字為限）

我的論文已於 98 學年第 2 學期完成並畢業。論文結合了跨文化與跨領域的研究，包含英國文學、戲劇、女性主義、與歷史學等等。它不僅是國內少數研究劇作家的專書之一，更是第一個研究 Timberlake Wertenbaker 戲劇的論文。Wertenbaker 在英美戲劇界佔有相當的重量與聲望，相信此論文將會開啟台灣對 Wertenbaker 與女性劇作家的作品的研究，更希望這份研究能與歐美戲劇與文學研究接軌。隨著世界對 Wertenbaker 的戲劇研究日增，此論文在未來有很大的機會做進一步的發展，不僅是對劇作家更深一步的探討，也可以與相關劇作家的比較與討論，更可以擴展到藝術、劇場、文學與社會科學等等的跨學科研究。

