

Travel and Empire in Wertebaker's Our Country's Good

Yi-chin Shih
Tamkang University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), [Comparative Literature Commons](#), [Education Commons](#), [European Languages and Societies Commons](#), [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), [Other Arts and Humanities Commons](#), [Other Film and Media Studies Commons](#), [Reading and Language Commons](#), [Rhetoric and Composition Commons](#), [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#), [Television Commons](#), and the [Theatre and Performance Studies Commons](#)

Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, [Purdue University Press](#) selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <clcweb@purdue.edu>

Recommended Citation

Shih, Yi-chin. "Travel and Empire in Wertebaker's Our Country's Good." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 14.5 (2012): <<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2153>>

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

The above text, published by Purdue University Press ©Purdue University, has been downloaded 1794 times as of 11/07/19.

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." In addition to the publication of articles, the journal publishes review articles of scholarly books and publishes research material in its *Library Series*. Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <clcweb@purdue.edu>

Volume 14 Issue 5 (December 2012) Article 19
Yi-chin Shih,
"Travel and Empire in Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good*"
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol14/iss5/19>>

Contents of ***CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 14.5 (2012)***
Special issue ***New Work about the Journey and Its Portrayals***
Ed. I-Chun Wang
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol14/iss5/>>

Abstract: In her article "Travel and Empire in Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good*" Yi-chin Shih analyzes *Our Country's Good* from the perspective of travel in order to explore the exercise of empire and the practice of resistance. Considered as one of the luminaries in British theater, Timberlake Wertenbaker (1951-) has produced several successful works, especially *Our Country's Good* (1988), which won her a Laurence Olivier Award for the Best Play and solidified her reputation as an important playwright in world theater. *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. Shih explores aspects of travel in the early colonial period of Australian history and its relationship between travel and empire.

Yi-chin SHIH

Travel and Empire in Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good*

Considered as one of the luminaries in British theater, Timberlake Wertenbaker (1951-) has produced several successful works, including *The Grace of Mary Traverse* (1985), which won her a Plays and Player's Award, and *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* (1991), which won a Susan Blackburn Prize. Among the plays Wertenbaker has written, *Our Country's Good* (1988) is the dramatist's most critically and commercially popular work and it solidifies Wertenbaker's reputation as an important playwright in world theater. It won Wertenbaker the 1988 Laurence Olivier Award for 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. *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 king George III.

Our Country's Good derives from 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 (Gibson 1). 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 and most of them were criminals (1). Australia became a British penal colony and 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 unjust laws (Buse 154). The First Fleet arrived at Botany Bay in 1788 and after two hundred years when Australians celebrated their anniversary in 1988 they mentioned little about their colonial past and their bad treatment of Australian Aborigines (Buse 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 of Australia, as well as England (Buse 155).

In the article at hand I propose to read *Our Country's Good* from the perspective of travel in order to explore the exercise of empire and the practice of resistance. Travel, as far as grammar is concerned, means "the transport of a person from the place where one is to another place that is far enough away" (Van Den Abbeele xv). This definition emphasizes the importance of movement and distance in human activities. When English officers in the navy sent prisoners to Australia from England, they traveled long distances to a place where they did not belong except for the reason of building a colony. Owing to differences of places, travelers, in the context of colonialism, enjoy a superior status of being the colonizers and they regard the new place and the people in it as inferior and subordinate to their country and themselves. Travel, therefore, reveals a hierarchy between the two places and two peoples. In light of such a perspective of travel, I place special emphasis on the relationship between travel and empire and expect to complicate the top-down form of social and cultural control in the colony by exposing the practices of resistance from the colonized.

Our Country's Good begins with a separation from England and the distance of crossing over the southern hemisphere indicates the difficulty of this journey. Named "The Voyage Out," Act One, Scene One describes "the hold of a convict ship bound for Australia, 1787" (185). The beginning of the play narrates Ralph Clark, Second Lieutenant in the Navy, overseeing the punishment of Robert Sideway by flogging on the ship, counting the number of lashes. Clark, in favor of the death penalty and corporal punishment, shows no kindness to convicts, like the other English officers in the Navy. The material conditions on the ship is harsh and difficult in addition to the coercive domination of the English officers and the lack of food is the worst. John Arscott, lusting for food, expresses how hungry he is by saying, "Hunger. Funny. Doesn't start in the stomach, but in mind. A picture flits in and out of a corner. Something you've eaten long ago. Roast beef with salt and grated horseradish" (185). Moreover, owing to the lack of food, female convicts exchange sex for food by prostituting themselves to male convicts and officers. For example, as Clark criticizes Duckling Smith's prostitution, Harry Brewer defends her and justifies his need of sex, claiming that "It's not her fault — if only she would look at me, once, react. Who wants to fuck a corpse!" (193).

The purpose of the travel of the convict ship is to build a British colony in Australia, so it is inevitable to argue that travel confirms the development and the exercise of an empire. Due to the reason that colonies are the booty of European exploration overseas, many critics insist that travel and empire cannot be discussed without each other. Brian Musgrove writes that "Today ... it is virtually impossible to consider travel writing outside the frame of post-colonialism. In many cases now, travel is regarded as a sub-story of the grand narrative of imperialism; in others, travel is the key operation, in language and fact, that makes the colonial adventure possible" (32). In other words, travel and empire go hand in hand: travel not only conveys imperial discourse but also makes the establishment of a colony overseas possible. Travelers are usually "monocular," explaining everything in the colony through a "Eurocentric" perspective (Musgrove 32). This travel is what Steve Clark calls "one-way traffic" because "the Europeans mapped the world rather than the world mapping them" (3). While travel reinforces imperial domination in the colony, travelers reiterate imperial discourse. Sara Mills observes that European travelers' description of landscape of the colony is "panorama" (78). When travelers portray the landscape, they are "mastering" it (78). Mills employs Michel Foucault's explanation of the *panopticon* to explain travelers' gaze of power and how order is imposed on the landscape by travelers (78-79). More importantly, by focusing on difference and something strange as they describe the colony, travelers affirm the social and cultural norms of England (86). In brief, travelers' narrative is monocular, Eurocentric, and panoramic, and travelers, through the lens of imperialism, see difference as strangeness or even "dirtiness" (Mills 90).

In the context of colonialism, travelers are like the colonizers who consider the colony as inferior which is ready to be dominated. In *Our Country's Good*, Clark calls Sydney Cove "iniquitous shore" (*Our Country's Good* 192) and Major Ross even claims that "I hate this possumy place" (269). Australia for them is another "Tyburn" (186), a place of execution near London. After the English travelers arrive at Australia, the first thing they do in the play is to shoot birds. Their hunting represents symbolically a coercive domination: regarding the land as their property, these travelers do not know how to admire or respect the creatures in it or the landscape. Instead, they "master" them as they like, including killing. When they are shooting birds, Captain Collins makes fun of Captain Phillip, a commissioned Governor-in-Chief of New South Wales by saying that "And that, over there on the Eucalyptus, is a flock of *Cacatua galerita* — the sulphur-crested cockatoo. You have been made Governor-in-Chief of a paradise of birds" (186). Besides, as Mills suggests, the travelers' description of landscape is involved with a *panopticon*-like gaze, which aims at controlling the land and the travelers' research intends to show that everything in the colony is in their control. They are in a position of knowledge, unlike the "naïve" and "ignorant" Aboriginal people. Also, their research represents an imperial domination, which seeks to map and pin down the land. Thus, in the play Lieutenant Dawes records the constellations in the sky of the southern hemisphere, Lieutenant Johnston studies the plants, and Captain Collins investigates the customs of the Aborigines in Australia (193).

Travel and empire are interdependent and reciprocal, but two kinds of travelers' narratives especially affirm imperial discourse: "the discourse of the civilised other" and "the discourse of savagery" (Mills 87). Since travelers are Eurocentric, considering the colony as inferior, there is no doubt that they see the people in the colony as savages and they, as "noble" Europeans, have a mission to civilize those barbaric people. In *Our Country's Good*, the discourse of the "civilized other" is illustrated by Captain Phillip. Captain Phillip is a commissioned Governor-in-Chief of New South Wales and his task is to educate the convicts, as well as the colonized Aboriginal peoples in order to create a "civilized" English colony. He encourages Clark to direct the convicts to perform *The Recruiting Officer*, believing that both convicts and audiences — who are other convicts and Aboriginal peoples in Australia — could be changed into "civilized citizens." Confirming the educational function of theater, Captain Phillip claims that "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 would teach Aboriginal peoples virtues, that is to say, in the name of civilization, Captain Phillip thinks that he has a mission to educate them and he rationalizes his colonial dominance in this way. The traveler's narrative, thus, embodies imperial ideology and Captain Phillip exercises this ideology without consciousness, believing he is kind to Native people. The English travelers expose their racist and imperialist attitudes toward the Aboriginal people as "savages." For

example, Captain Phillip says to Clark that "I don't know why they asked me to rule over this colony of wretched souls, but I will fulfill my responsibility ... 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). In turn, Captain Watkin Tench does not believe that the educational function of theater would work on Aboriginal peoples, announcing that "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).

In addition to viewing Aboriginal people as barbaric savages, some see them as happy "noble savages." Different from Captain Phillip and Captain Tench's scornful attitude toward the Aboriginal people, Captain Collins believes that they are happy "savages": "Actually, they seem happy enough as they are. They do not want to build canoes or houses, nor do they suffer from greed and ambition" (204). Collins sees them as "noble savages" who are "conceived to be 'naturally' intelligent, moral, and possessed of high dignity in thought and deed" (Abrams 244). The three officers reveal two extreme attitudes toward the Other, either barbaric and uneducated savages or happy and noble savages. Taking a step further, the travelers' discourse of savagery is also imagination created to serve imperialism: if savages are the travelers' fantasy, then there is no need to civilize them and the discourse of the civilized other is invalid. Travel and travelers' narratives "promote, confirm and lament the exercise of imperial power" (Clark 3) and "travel writing is essentially an instrument within colonial expansion and served to reinforced colonial rule once in place" (Mills 2). Although travel and empire are related to each other, it does not mean that travel always indicates a top-down domination or travelers always maintain authority without confronting with resistance. Steve Clark emphasizes that travel is a "cross-cultural encounter" and it is not supposed to be reduced to "simple relations of domination and subordination" (3). Following Clark's argumentation, I focus on resistance from the Other in *Our Country's Good* and examine the Other's counter-discourse against the travelers' imperial discourse.

A character named the "Aborigine" in *Our Country's Good* is what European travelers call "savages" and the people they are going to civilize. The designation "Aborigine" contains a pejorative connotation "considered by many to be too burdened with derogatory associations" because of "the feeling that the term fails to distinguish and discriminate among the great variety of people" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 4). In other words, the term "Aboriginal" suggests that the differences among Aborigines are erased and reduced to a homogeneous and inferior people. The Aborigine in the play delivers four soliloquies without talking with people, a character without name and gender. However, it is better to use "she" and "her" to refer to this character because the Aboriginal people have been predetermined as feminine colonized in contrast to British masculine colonizers. Her monologues show a strong eagerness to narrate her own history and they represent the Other's counter-discourse against British imperialism. 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 that embodies 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" (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 the 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 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: having learned

civilization through the performing of a play, the English convicts use the proper language to express their thoughts and then to improve themselves. However, the Aborigine describes that their ancestors die at the arrival of the British people stating that "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 die like her dead ancestors does she realize the dream is a cruel reality rather than fantasy. Her final appearance shows in Act Two, Scene Eleven, "Backstage," and she 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 and accordingly, the last scene of the play is a strong charge against British colonialism. Kate Blich remarks that "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 people died after the arrival of the British colonizers (Gibson 1). 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 while on the other hand they reflect her eagerness to speak for her own people. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in "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/she tries to speak, no one listens to him/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). In other words, the consequences caused by speaking, including interpretation, reaction, feedback, or even neglect more or less influences the speaker and the listeners and thus the importance of utterance cannot be overlooked. Interpreted in this way, the Aborigine's four soliloquies are crucial for the reason that they provide another historical narrative different from the British travelers'.

In her monologues the Aborigine provides a discourse that is against the colonial discourse: counter-discourse means any narrative that challenges the imperialist ideology and it has a connotation of "symbolic resistance" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 56). Accordingly, as British colonizers justify their dominance in the name of civilization, 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 of Australia. Since the purpose of the First Fleet is the transportation of convicts from England to Australia to build a colony, the English convicts are also travelers in terms of the definition of travel. Ann Wilson uses "the colonized" to designate "the convicts and the aboriginals" (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. There are hence two groups of travelers in the play: one is the traveler as the colonizer such as the officers and the other is the traveler as the colonized such as the convicts. Different from Eurocentric travelers who see everything in the colony through the lens of imperialism, the colonized travelers re-consider themselves and their mother country in Australia because of the sense of distance the travel brings them.

Musgrove finds that the structure of travel is like "the structure of rites of passages" (31) and he claims that when travelers cross a boundary and enter another place their identities are shifting: "In

travel, the *territorial* passage from one zone to another, the border crossing, represents a critical moment for the identity of the mobile subject" (31; emphasis in original). This explains the "transformation" of the convicts in their "transportation" to Australia and their psychological and spiritual changing fulfills the structure of rites of passage: "rites of separation, transition rites, and rites of incorporation" (Musgrove 38). The following takes the convict John Wisehammer's transformation as an example of the structure of rites of passage in a journey. First, travelers separate from their own country: Wisehammer leaves England for Australia. In the first scene of the play, "The Voyage Out," Wisehammer and other convicts are exiled and he expresses his lament by crying "Take me, my comfort and we'll remember England together" (185). Nevertheless, after arriving in Australia, Wisehammer gets a chance to perform on the stage and an opportunity to re-consider who he is. If theater provides him with the power of redemption and liberation as Wertenbaker claims (viii), then it is travel that makes this performance possible and makes him change: only in the colony could he perform a British drama to celebrate the king's birthday. Explaining that identity is influenced by travel, Musgrove argues that "The travelling subject, wavering between two worlds, is by no means the self-assured colonist; rather, that subject is poised to split and unravel" (39). Wisehammer's identity is denied by his own country: he is expelled and exiled to the colony. However, what Wisehammer encounters in Australia, including the performance and experience in a new place, challenges his original identity. Next, travelers finally incorporate themselves with society and Wisehammer in the end decides to incorporate himself with a new society, Australia, instead of going back to England. Interpreted in this way, Wisehammer finishes a travel and passes through rites of passage.

In a journey, the process of transition, called "transition rites," is a liminal stage that questions the travelers' identity. All travelers encounter this process, but not all of them (re)build a new identity after a journey. English officers in the Navy still maintain the superior status of being English people and their identity is challenged when they enter a new place and encounter with the other, but at the end assert their identity as English colonizers instead. On the contrary, Wisehammer, as well as other convicts changes and re-identifies himself. He finds a way to resist the captains' coercive domination and punishment through mimicking the language they teach him. Meanwhile, by resisting authority, he knows who he is: he is going to be the first famous writer in Australia. At the end of the play, Wisehammer mimics Gorge Farquhar's prologue in *The Recruiting Officer* with a change in order to suit the convicts' condition in the colony and his mimicry is a satire on the British empire. Owing 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 releases 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 ironical manner.

Discovering that Farquhar's prologue does not "make any sense to the convicts" (258), Wisehammer imitates the tradition of prologue at the beginning of the play to scorn British imperialism and to justify his being in Australia as well. In other words, his ability to use a proper language turns out to be a weapon to resist the British government: "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 with exile and left England because of poverty and lack of education. This punishment reflected that not only was the penalty system in England too strict, but also the prisons in England in the late eighteenth century were full of criminals, so that England had to transport some criminals to the colony. However, after convicts are taught to perform and learn some art of the British theater, the journey turns them 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 colonized travelers are supposed to leave their home country so as to make England "clean" and in

this way their departure is based on the precondition that convicts are born to be evil and cannot be cultivated by education. The journey, nevertheless, proves that everyone has the potential of transformation and that 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 Clark understands the menace within it and so he predicts that "When Major Ross hears that, he'll have an apopleptic 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 still has 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 Homi Bhabha describes, mimicry is "an ironic compromise" (86). It compromises but it is ironic. Wisehammer's prologue illustrates this ironic compromise well.

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. 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 Wisehammer, or other convicts, is trained, homogenized, and even produced as the way colonizers want, but accepting the colonizer's culture and education does not mean that he is totally "hailed" or "interpellated" 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.

Wisehammer's resistance by mimicking Farquhar's prologue reveals that he is not a subjugated colonial without knowing how to defend himself. From an abject convict expelled by England to a self-conscious writer who is going to be the first author in Australia, Wisehammer's transformation fulfills a travel having the structure of rites of passage, and his identity is re-constructed after the journey. Nevertheless, since the purpose of the voyage of the First Fleet is to send officers and prisoners to build a colony in Australia, Wisehammer's new identity and the other convicts' become a danger in the colony in the future because they will be the colonizers in Australia. What is worse is that the convicts' attitude toward the colony and the local people is similar with the colonizers'. Like the English officers in the Navy, the English convicts despise Australia and the native people. Dabby calls Australia as "flat, brittle burnt-out country" (215) whereas Mary calls the Aboriginal people as "savages" (272). They do not want the Aboriginal people to watch their performance. While Wisehammer wishes to be the first writer in Australia, his dream exposes an unconsciously imperialistic attitude which believes that no art and no writer in Australia before British arrival. On the one hand, convicts as colonized travelers realize that travel may deconstruct a stable identity and provide them a chance to reconstruct another and on the other hand convicts as English travelers still maintain a superior status to the Aborigines.

Categorizing travelers as two types, Syed Manzurul Islam finds that "sedentary travellers" need to "establish essential difference on a binary" (viii) while "nomadic travellers" depend on a "non-essentialist" living (vii). According to Islam's interpretation of travelers, English convicts, as well as English officers are sedentary travelers because they require an essential difference of "being English" and a clear boundary from the Aborigines: in *Our Country's Good* focus is on the opposition between

English officers and the Aborigines, but it does not delineate the opposition between English convicts as future colonizers and the Aboriginal people. In other words, while the play highlights the transformation of the English convicts through a journey, the play also implies that in the context of colonialism any traveler — no matter whether a colonial officer or a colonized prisoner — is still a "sedentary traveler" who emphasizes essential difference and who has been saturated with imperial ideology.

In conclusion, *Our Country's Good* describes the First Fleet's journey of transportation of convicts from England to Australia to build a colony of the British Empire. Travel and empire go hand in hand, and travelers in the context of colonialism are colonizers. Travel, however, is not a form of top-down domination because travelers always encounter the Other's counter-discourse against their imperial discourse. Although travel questions and challenges the stability of the travelers' identity, travelers in *Our Country's Good* maintain a superior status of being English colonizers. Clark claims that travel inevitably is a one-way journey and travelers are one-eyed: "Travellers, merely through their greater access to the technology of transportation, implicitly belong to a more developed culture, and the strong historical connection of exploration and exploitation and occupation, justifiably make them figures to be feared and shunned" (3). *Our Country's Good* complicates the power relation between English travelers and the Aboriginal people and describes the transformation of travelers such as Wisenhammer, but it does not deal thoroughly with the relation between the colonized travelers as future colonizers and the Aborigines. This lacunae seems to suggest that travel in the context of colonialism is always imbued with imperial power and that the journey of the First Fleet foreshadows the miserable colonial period of Australian history at the very beginning when it first departed at Portsmouth.

Note: The above article is a revised excerpt from Yi-chin Shih, *How Timberlake Wertenbaker Constructs New Forms of Gender in Her History Plays: Exposing the Power Relations between the Sexes*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen P, 2012. Copyright release to the author.

Works Cited

- Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1999.
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Bligh, Kate. "Oppositional Symmetries: An Anthropological Voyage through *Our Country's Good* & *The Poetics*." *International Dramaturgy: Translation & Transformations in the Theatre of Timberlake Wertenbaker*. Ed. Maya E. Roth and Sara Freeman. Bern: Peter Lang, 2008. 177-93.
- Buse, Peter. "Culture and Colonies: Wertenbaker with Said." *Drama+Theory: Critical Approaches to Modern British Drama*. By Peter Buse. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2001. 153-71.
- Clark, Steve. "Introduction." *Travel Writing and Empire: Postcolonial Theory in Transit*. Ed. Steve Clark. London: Zed Books, 1999. 1-28.
- Gibson, Jane. *A Level Notes on Our Country's Good*. Leicestershire: Cotton & Jarrett, 2007.
- Islam, Syed Manzurul. *The Ethics of Travel: From Marco Polo to Kafka*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1996.
- Mills, Sara. *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Musgrove, Brian. "Travel and Unsettling: Freud on Vacation." *Travel Writing and Empire: Postcolonial Theory in Transit*. Ed. Steve Clark. London: Zed Books, 1999. 31-44.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. New York: Norton, 2001. 2197-208.
- Van Den Abbeele, Georges. *Travel as Metaphor from Montaigne to Rousseau*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1992.
- Wertenbaker, Timberlake. "Introduction." *Plays One*. By Timberlake Wertenbaker. London: Faber and Faber, 1996. vii-ix.
- Wertenbaker, Timberlake. *Our Country's Good. Plays One*. London: Faber and Faber, 1996. 161-281.
- Wilson, Ann. "*Our Country's Good*: Theatre, Colony and Nation in Wertenbaker's Adaptation of *The Playmaker*." *Modern Drama* 34 (1991): 23-34.

Author's profile: Yi-chin Shih teaches in the Department of English Language and Culture at Tamkang University. Her interests in research include modern drama and cultural studies. Shih's recent publications include "Wine, Bull, and Carnival: Reading Euripides' *The Bacchae* from the Perspectives of Eating and Food," *Taipei Theatre Journal* (2012) and "In Yer Face: Violence in Sarah Kane's *Blasted*," *Tamkang Studies of Foreign Languages and Literature* (2011). Her book *How Timberlake Wertenbaker Constructs New Forms of Gender in Her History Plays: Exposing the Power Relations between the Sexes* was published in 2012. E-mail: <yichin@mail.tku.edu.tw>