

TIMBERLAKE WERTENBAKER

British Council biography

<https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/timberlake-wertenbaker>

Central topics in her work are the efforts of individuals, particularly women: pursuing quests, seeking change, breaking boundaries, and constructing or challenging gender roles. A key technique is the revisioning of actual or imaginary lives from the past, sometimes remote in place as well as in time. (influenced by historiographic fiction and drama of the late 1980s. Compare Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*)

There is a further recurring theme in her work: displacement. In her plays, characters are often removed from the familiarity of home and are forced to live in new cultures, sometimes defined by national boundaries, other times by cultural and class divisions. From this central theme emerge related themes, including isolation, dispossession, and the problem of forging an identity within a new cultural milieu. In her work, individuals often seem to assume roles, as if identity were a matter of persons performing themselves. Wertenbaker's work also demonstrates a keen awareness that communication occurs through language that often inadequately expresses experience. – see Lizzie Morden's monologue from *Our Country's Good* https://youtu.be/eWCed6Yna_E

Wertenbaker was the Leverhulme Artist in Residence at the Freud Museum in 2011.

***Our Country's Good* (1988)**

was adapted from Thomas Keneally's 1987 novel *The Playmaker*. A group of Royal Marines and convicts in a penal colony in New South Wales, in the 1780s, who stage a production of George Farquhar's 1706 Restoration farce, *The Recruiting Officer*.

Most of the characters in the play are based on real people who sailed with the First Fleet, though some have had their names changed. Wertenbaker was able to read the journals of First Fleet members in order to portray them accurately.

First staged at the Royal Court Theatre, London, directed by Max Stafford-Clark.

- 1988 Laurence Olivier Award
 - BBC Award for the Play of the Year (Winner)
 - Director of the Year (nominee)
 - Actor of the Year in a New Play (David Haig (Winner))
- 1991 Tony Award
 - Best Play (nominee)
 - Best Actor in Play (Peter Frechette) (nominee)
 - Best Actress in a Play (Cherry Jones) (nominee)
 - Best Featured Actress in a Play
 - Amelia Campbell (nominee)
 - J. Smith-Cameron (nominee)
 - Best Direction of a Play (nominee)
- 1991 New York Drama Critics' Circle Award
 - Best Foreign Play
 - Drama Desk Award
 - Outstanding Featured Actress in a Play (Tracey Ellis) (nominee)