Caryl Churchill’s Representations of Women in Wars: The Plays about the Revolutions

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There have been wars somewhere in the world all the time. Many playwrights, including William Shakespeare, have dramatized various human situations in wars. For playwrights, to dramatize such human situations is fascinating because a war brings about changes in the social structure and people’s sense of values. One of the most active modern playwrights who have been particularly interested in what wars can do to people is Caryl Churchill. She has dealt with four wars up to now, The Hospital of the Time of Revolution (1972), Light Shining in Buckinghamshire (1976), Mad Forest: A Play From Romania (1990) and Drunk Enough To Say I Love You? (2006). These four plays can be divided into two groups: the former three plays centre on revolutions, in which people try to improve their social situation, and the latter one deals with the war relating to the invasions by other countries. This essay focuses on her first group of the three plays about revolutions.

In around 1972, Churchill wrote the first play on a revolution, The Hospital of the Time of Revolution, which deals with the Algerian War of Independence. Churchill was greatly concerned with the Algerian War of Independence, which happened in 1954, continued until 1962. Since then she has presented women’s position at wartime in her plays. After this, she produced two more plays which dramatizes revolutions, Light Shining in Buckinghamshire (1976) and Mad Forest: A Play From Romania (1990). In writing about revolutions and wars, Churchill usually holds workshops and does research on history. In particular, she searches for real stories about women in specific wars in history to dramatize the female capacity to survive through their difficult times. Therefore, her descriptions about people in wars are based on actual histories.
Though political struggles usually regarded as controlled by men, the female characters in all her three plays have characteristics to try to resist the political power which oppresses them and to change their situations by themselves. As Philomena Goodman states in general, women in wars are described as “a symbol of bounty, of home, of peace, of what the men are fighting for” (Goodman, 128). However, in Churchill’s plays, no women are waiting for men to change their situations. Churchill portrays women in the revolutions as participating actively in them. This essay examines Churchill’s representations of women in these revolutions, in order to highlight the characteristics of Churchill’s women, in comparison to those in the plays of David Hare and other contemporary playwrights which also dramatize the revolutions.

1. **The Hospital of the Time of Revolution**

*The Hospital of the Time of Revolution* (hereafter *The Hospital*), her first play about revolutions, has never been performed professionally. Actions in this play take place in the Psychiatric Department of the Blinda-Joinville Hospital in Algeria, revealing the hopeless situation which people were placed in during the Algerian Revolutionary War. According to Churchill’s “Author’s Note,” this play is based on *The Wretched of the Earth* by Franz Omar Fanon, a psychiatrist, essayist and revolutionary at that time (“Author’s Note” *Shorts*, 96). Fanon’s other essay, *Black Faces, White Masks*, gave Churchill a great inspiration in creating the character of Joshua in *Cloud Nine* (1979), a black servant who is performed by a white actor (“Introduction” *Shorts*), embodying the image of black people under the control by white colonists. The main character in *The Hospital* is Fanon, an Algerian doctor, who is black and wears a doctor’s white coat; his white coat represents “civilized” and “educated” society of white people in France, who had colonized Algeria since 1830. Fanon struggles against his sense of the split identities as a black man and an elite medical doctor educated in Europe.
In this play, while men cannot break through the chaotic situation in the revolution, two women can act effectively, pursuing their strong will into action. One is an activist woman who fights in the revolution. However, she is only talked about in the conversation between Fanon and her husband, “A.” She is a nameless wife of “A.” The other woman is Françoise, a seventeen year old girl. She resists against her parents, especially her mother, who imposes high expectations on their daughter's female development, ignoring her own will.

Although Fanon is not a female character, his split identity embodies the conflicts of the socially vulnerable people, in particular of women. Fanon in *The Hospital* takes objective attitudes to others, including his colleagues, his patients and their families. He never articulates his own views, but the audience was well aware that the model of this character is the one who later joined the FLN (Front de Libération Nationale), a socialist political party which led the Algerian War of Independence against France. However, in this play, he does not take any action as a revolutionary whereas the real Franz Fanon was well known for his militant actions during the revolution. Fanon's embarrassment at his double identity may be shown in his silence when it comes to the topic of Independent War. For instance, Fanon's silent protest against his French racist colleague’s words is suggested by his action of going out without listening to his speech to the end. He only walks away silently, instead of arguing with him.

“A” is another character who puts on a “mask” and pretends to be a typically good husband in front of his wife. “A” is one of Fanon’s patients, who used to be a draughtsman, but now becomes a member of the underground organization. Under the “mask” of a good husband, he is actually engaged in his secret job which is to kill people to carry out the revolution, and the qualm with murder always disturbs his mind. “A” attempts suicide because of his guilty conscience for having killed many people: “I felt so dizzy I could hardly do what had to be done” (Scene Three, 127). However, “A” fails even in his suicide.

In contrast, “A”’s wife has never asked her husband what his job is.
While “A” has not told her about his secret job during the revolution, thinking it safer for her not to know about his real mission, his wife succeeds in carrying out her own mission as a suicide bomber and dies without telling “A” about her secret job. Thus, she accomplishes her errand superbly. “A”’s wife has two faces like Fanon and “A;” that is, the face of “A”’s wife and of an active revolutionary. “A”’s wife is different from these males in that, though not given an individual name, she achieves her purpose to pursue her mission, establishing her self-identity, as a female activist in the war.

“A”’s wife, who carries bombs in silence, resembles Ophelia in Sulayman Al-Bassam’s *The Al-Hamlet Summit*, a adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1601). This play was first performed as part of the Edinburgh International Fringe Festival in August 2002, before the suicide bombing in London in 2005, winning the Fringe First Award, and then, the Best Performance and the Best Director Awards in Cairo. Unlike Shakespeare’s Ophelia, Ophelia in *The Al-Hamlet Summit* is portrayed as a strong woman, who eventually becomes a suicide bomber to pursue her will. She speaks her true feeling in her video as her suicide note:

> I have tried to speak the language of women,  
> I have tried to forgive, on many nights I severed my tongue  
> but my silence bleeds from my mouth.  
> Here I am the animal that the world forgets,  
> I have tried to speak language of man  
> but lying no good no change can make to it  
> of injustice in life. (Act Four Scene Five, 78–9)

Though “A”’s wife does not speak her genuine feelings, Ophelia expresses her real intention. However, both women are the same in that they act to pursue their conviction, whereas men think too much to take actions.

Françoise, a seventeen year old girl, is another female character who
tries to change her oppressed situation. It is only Fanon and Françoise that are given individual names in this play, while other characters are called simply “Monsieur,” “Madame,” “Young Doctor,” “A,” “B,” “C” and so on. Fanon and Françoise are the characters who understand the situations where they are placed and try to get away from them. Françoise knows that her parents want her to become a pretty woman who has no strong sense of self. Her parents think that her resistance against being their ideal daughter comes from her delusion that she will be murdered by her mother:

Françoise. The dress looked very pretty but underneath I was rotting away. Bit by bit I was disappearing. The dress is walking about with no one inside it. I undo the buttons and put my hand in. Under the dress I can’t find where I am. So when I take it off there’s nobody there. They can’t see Françoise because she was taken off upstairs and nobody came downstairs and into the room. My mother made that dress to kill me. It ate me away. That was a poison dress I put on. (146)

In fact, Françoise is extremely concerned about her parents’, especially her mother’s, encroachment on her sense of self. Her strong desire to construct her own sense of self leads to her drastic action at her birthday party; she takes off not only her “lovely” and “beautiful blue” dress made by her mother, but also her underwear. Françoise’s “lovely” dress parallels Fanon’s white coat; in order to fit into their roles, they both have to subjugate themselves to the signs which represents their roles in society. And yet, Françoise finally refuses to wear the lovely dress, which functions as a “mask” of her allegiance to her parents. Although she does not give much influence on the proceeding of the plot, her role is important in terms of women’s resistance against the given discourse by others in order to construct their female selfhood.

In this play, Churchill presents not only Fanon’s inner conflicts under his “white mask” as a western medical doctor, but also these
women’s mental strength in the Algerian Revolution. “A”’s wife succeeds in pursuing what she thinks right, and thus, she fulfills her purpose. However, the outcome of the pursuit of her will ends up only as self-destruction. Four years after this play, Churchill wrote another play about a revolution, Light Shining in Buckinghamshire (1976), which deals with the English Civil War in the seventeenth century.

2. Light Shining in Buckinghamshire

Light Shining in Buckinghamshire (hereafter Light Shining) foregrounds the futility of female pursuit of will under the situation of wars. This play features women during the English Civil War. It was first performed at the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh in September 1976, and then after going on tour, was presented at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs. The scenes are set in the period of the English Civil War, from 1642 to 1651. The title of this play comes from a Digger pamphlet published in 1649, is entitled More Light Shining in Buckinghamshire. The Diggers were led by Gerrard Winstanley, and one of the religious Sects which emerged during the Civil War. According to Oxford English Dictionary, “Digger” is “a section of the Levellers in 1649, who adopted communistic principles as to the land, in accordance with which they began to dig and plant the commons” (OED, “Digger” n. 2.d. (a)). In Light Shining, Hoskins, a vagrant preacher of the Diggers, fights against the patriarchal nature of the Protestant religious discourse, but the harsh situation of the lower class remains the same in the end. Churchill shows the fundamental human situation which cannot be changed despite the changes of political power.

The casting list of the play shows Churchill’s intention to underline the unchangeability of the fundamental human situation. The same characters are played by different actors and actresses. A total of six actors and actresses play twenty-six roles one after another. In “A Note on the Production,” Churchill states the purpose of this casting:

The audience should not have to worry exactly which characters
they are seeing. Each scene can be taken as a separate event rather than part of a story. This seems to reflect better the reality of large events like war and revolution where many people share the same kind of experience. When different actors play the parts what comes over is a large event involving many people, whose characters resonate in a way they wouldn't if they were more clearly defined. (“A Note on the Production”)

Because of such a mixing of the casting, the characters are shown to be identified by their social status rather than by their individual characteristics. By being played by many male and female performers, one character’s experience is indicated as not only his or her experience but also that of others as well.

Among the characters in this play, the role of the female characters are especially important. In particular, Hoskins, one of the central female characters, is portrayed as extremely energetic in her actions. Though a vagrant, she preaches to denounce the absurd human situation caused by the system of patriarchal society during the English Civil War, and fights against it despite of her lower social position. She instigates women and men in general to be aware of their real situation and to take actions to be freed from social constraints.

In fact, during the Civil War, some women, like Hoskins, preached, and tried to disseminate their belief in gatherings. Hilary Hinds states that the numbers of women preachers and women’s publications increased during the Civil War (Hinds, 205). After the 1640s, the number of spiritual autobiographies was increasing, and the new way of thinking that all individuals were equal irrespective of their origins in the sight of God was gradually spreading among people. Hinds quotes Phyllis Mack’s suggestion about women’s right to assert:

...women’s right to exercise “public authority” by preaching, prophesying and publishing was based not on any recognition that they possessed previously unnoticed qualities of leadership but, on
the contrary, on traditional beliefs in their greater receptivity to the
prophetic or spiritual message because of their irrationality and
passions. The beliefs that allowed women to speak and write within
the sects were the same as those that later restrained them. (Hinds,
223)

The traditional assumption about women’s mental weakness such as
passion or irrationality ironically helped women to speak in public. In
*Light Shining*, Hoskins also speaks about her own belief in God,
protesting against stereotypical images of women and common
assumptions about gender roles asserted in the religious discourse at
that time. Hosikins’ assertion is targeted against the male preacher’s
prejudice against women, which originates in Corinthians 14:34 in the
Bible: “Women can’t speak in church” (Act One, 201).

Hoskins opposes the views commonly preached in church. Meenakshi Ponnuswami states about Hoskins’ role in this play:

Churchill’s attempt here is clearly to suggest that counter-cultural
radicalism, at least in comparison with the Levellers or Diggers,
enabled a form of feminist discourse, but it is significant that
Hoskins's primary motivation is not so much to demand a voice
for women in the church as to democratize religion itself.
(Ponnuswami, 52)

As Ponnuswami states, Hoskins does not merely assert women’s rights.
Hoskins cannot understand why the male preacher accuses her for her
saying, “yes he [God] will cast them [people] down but he will not damn
them eternally” (Act One, 201), but he simply dismisses her words as a
woman’s view.

She doubts the basis of the male preacher's proposition that God
created the differences among human beings as well as differences
between men and women. She objects to his sermon that the saints are
the people whom God has chosen while other people are the ones to be
eternally damned. Hoskins says: “no one is damned. We can all bind the king” (Act One, 200); “He's [God’s] chosen me. He's chosen everyone” (Act One, 201); “How can God choose us from all eternity to be saved or damned when there's nothing we've done?” (Act One, 202). However, her firm belief about the inborn equality is totally rejected by the Preacher because of her female gender. Eventually, she comes to have strong suspicions about a patriarchal discourse in church. She advocates the freedom of women’s speech which is not bound by the Bible, which was, she asserts, composed by men after all. Hoskins thinks that the Bible was created on the basis of the patriarchal system of values, she tries to persuade other women at the end of the play that “It’s a man wrote the Bible” (Act Two, 236).

In this play, it is not only the male preacher who opposes Hoskins. A female character, the wife of Claxton, a working man who sympathizes with Hoskins, also has a conflict with her. When the Wife echoes the stereotypical religious discourse about women, Hoskins retorts to her sharply:

WIFE: But women can’t preach. We bear children in pain, that’s why. And they die. For our sin, Eve’s sin. That’s why we have pain. We’re not clean. We have to obey. The man, whatever he’s like. If he beat us that’s why. We have blood, we’re shameful, our bodies are worse than a man’s. All bodies are evil but ours is worst. That’s why we can’t speak.

HOSKINS: Well I can. (Act One, 204)

It should be noted that Churchill describes the basic cause which lies at the conflict between these women; Wife believes in the predominant patriarchal discourse based on the Bible, while what Hoskins believes is not the Bible, but her own democratic view about God.

However, even though these women seem to have different opinions, Wife is not portrayed as believing in the Bible blindly; she follows the patriarchal discourse in order to survive in the social
situation produced by the Civil War. When she hears that Hoskins was expelled from church and beaten by people, she declares her objection toward her husband: “I’m not going there [church] if they beat women” (Act One, 203). Wife gives up going to church partly for her self-defense, while she tries to persuade Hoskins to live easily: “We wouldn’t be punished if it wasn’t for something” (Act One, 204). Wife represents women who have families and have to live through harsh reality in the war. On the other hand, Hoskins is a woman of the younger generation freed from family constraints; she has no family, and moves around to deliver her preachings.

Thus, Wife and Hoskins both realize that women’s situation is oppressed during the war, while their ways of living are entirely different from each other. Ponnuswami states that Hoskins’ vitality depends on her position of being single:

Further, Hoskins’s feminist agit-prop is dependent upon her willingness and ability, as a single woman, to ignore the difficulties involved in overcoming generations of indoctrination and material domestic constraints. (Ponnuswami, 52)

As Ponnuswami says, Hoskins can defy the patriarchal religious thinking because she does not have a thing to protect except for her faith in God. In Light Shining, Churchill represents Hoskins as a new woman who has her own sense of judgement and a strong power to try to break down the old convention based on Christianity including the authority of the masculine.

3. Mad Forest: A Play From Romania

Fifteen years later from Light Shining, Churchill wrote in 1990 Mad Forest: A Play From Romania (hereafter Mad Forest), a play about the revolution in Romania in 1989. This play was performed by the students of the Central School of Speech and Drama in London on the 25th June 1990. Subsequently, it was staged at the National Theatre
Bucharest in Romania, from the 17th September, and at the Royal Court Theatre from the 9th October in the same year.

In such a confused situation under the revolution, it is notable that the female characters decide to go their own independent ways. Especially, Lucia, a primary school teacher and a member of the Vladu Family, determines to marry an American to make her living, though she actually loves another man, Ianos, a Hungarian political campaigner. Lucia has the abortion of the baby by Ianos. Her American fiance, Wayne, has no knowledge of how she uses the money. She realizes that an abortion is difficult to be understood in the political structure of Romania:

DOCTOR. You’re a slut. You’ve brought this on yourself. The only thing to be said in its favour is that one more child is one more worker.
LUCIA. Yes, I realise that.
DOCTOR. There is no abortion in Romania. I am shocked that you even think of it. I am appalled that you dare suggest I might commit this crime.
LUCIA. Yes, I’m sorry. (Act One, Scene Seven, 19)

In fact, in Romania at that time, many people, like the doctor in this play, thought that abortion was a “crime,” since the children are regarded as the future workers, and therefore the pregnant women should bear their babies. Cristian Mungiu, a Romanian playwright and director, also dramatized the reality of the illegal abortion in 1980s in Romania in his film, 4 Months 3 Weeks and 2 Days, which was awarded the Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival in 2007. As the article on 4 Months 3 Weeks and 2 Days of the New York Times mentions, the abortion was “not uncommon and too often fatal” (Dargis, “Friend Indeed Who Doesn’t Judge or Flinch”). However, Lucia chooses the abortion in order to have her own life.

After she married Wayne in America, she has no regrets for what
IANOS. He [Wayne] paid for the abortion.
LUCIA. But he didn’t know. It was money he gave me, it was my money. You can’t pay him back, he’d want to know what it was for.
IANOS. ...Aren’t you ashamed?
LUCIA. What of? No.
IANOS. Not the abortion.
LUCIA. What?
IANOS. I don’t know. The wedding?
LUCIA. No, why?
IANOS. I’m ashamed.
LUCIA. Why? (Act Three, Scene Four, 58)

Her audacity to use her bridegroom’s money for her abortion comes from her strong desire to get away from Romania and live in wealth in the States. In Act Three, Ianos tenderly loves an orphan, Tomma, but Lucia cannot understand her feelings. In *Top Girls*, after Marlene makes a success as a businesswoman in the capitalist world, she is described as having no tender feelings for her own child. Likewise, in *Mad Forest*, Churchill portrays Lucia, who gets rid of her child by abortion and marries for money a man whom she does not love, as a woman of little sensibility. However, such actions of Lucia are not presented entirely critically. When Ianos blames her for changing her political position after her marriage, Lucia retorts him: “I’m not your slave” (Act Three, Scene Eight, 84). Her words show the sense of identity of a woman who tries to get her own life.

Flavia, a history teacher and a member of the Antonescu family, is another female character choosing her way of life. She teaches her pupils a history of Nicolae Ceaușescu and “a life dedicated to the happiness of the people and noble ideas of socialism” (Act One, Scene Four, 16). After the Revolution in 1989 when Ceaușescu and his wife
were executed, she is distressed: “All I trying to do was teach correctly. Isn’t history what’s in the history book?” (Act Three, Scene Five, 65). As the proverb says; “new lord, new laws,” if the new social regime comes, they need new versions of history. She decides to know the truth and to write a new history book by her own hands. She changes her political position from Ceaușescu’s side to Iliescu’s side:

FLAVIA. I’m going to write a true history, Florina, so we’ll know exactly what happened. How far do you think Moscow was involved/in planning the coup?
FLORINA. I don’t know. I don’t care. I’m sorry.
FLAVIA. What did you vote? Liberal?
FLORINA. Yes of course.
FLAVIA. So did I, so did I.

She hugs FLORINA.
Mihai doesn’t know. And next time we’ll win. Jos Iliescu. (Act Three, Scene Four, 78)

She tries to figure out the true history of her country, not the one written in the text offered by the government, but the one seen by her own eyes. Flavia actively engages in politics, though Mihai, her husband, dislikes her declaring political statements. She changes her political side in order to live through the confused social situation after the Revolution. Lucia and Flavia decide to get on their own ways to survive in a chaotic society.

4. Women in David Hare’s Fanshen

It is to be noteworthy that Churchill and Hare, contemporary playwrights, both produced the plays about revolutionary wars at around the same time. About one year before Light Shining was performed, Joint Stock Theatre Group played Fanshen written by David Hare at the ICA Terrace Theatre on the 22nd April 1975. Fanshen is the play about the relation between the changing society and people during
the period of the Chinese Revolution from 1945 to 1949. “Fanshen” is a Chinese word, which literally means “to turn the body,” figuratively “to enter a new world” (Act One, 5). Hare’s play *Fanshen* is an adaptation of William Hinton’s *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* (1966). This play is set in the village, Long Bow, which is four hundred miles away from Beijing. In the stage direction at the beginning of *Fanshen*, Hare mentions that this play is an accurate historical record of what happened in the village, and that it is the story about how the peasants of Long Bow built a new world (Act one, 5).

Like Churchill’s *Light Shining*, Hare describes how people get involved in various situations in trying to change society through the revolution. To represent the situations in which people share the same kind of experience, both playwrights use a similar method of casting; while ten actors and actresses plays thirty roles in *Light Shining*; nine actors and actresses play thirty roles in *Fanshen*. The only difference is that Churchill puts more emphasis on the human situation itself rather than an individual character's inner state by avoiding assigning the same role to the same actor throughout the play.

In Hare's *Fanshen*, women are described as the most oppressed people under the patriarchal system before the revolution. At the beginning of this play, Hu Hsueh-chen, a female beggar, explains the difficulties of women’s situation under the patriarchal system in her society:

> Hu Hsueh-chen. Chinese peasant women had their marriages arranged by their parents, and were often sold as children into landlords’ households. Only when a woman became a mother-in-law in her own home did she command any power in a household. All the older women had their feet bound when they were young and could only move short distances. (Act One Section One, 6)

In the case of Hu Hsueh-chen, when she was young, she was sold by her
father to a hopelessly weak and corrupt man. Her children except the youngest one were killed by a Japanese soldier. After that, she threw her husband out of the house, and became a beggar with her surviving child. She could no longer put up with such atrocity by the hands of men. Her soliloquy quoted above emphasizes the inferior position of women in Long Bow. As Hu Hsueh-chi’en insists, all women around her, that is, Ch’ung-lai’s wife, Old Lady Wang, Hsien-e, and she herself, have been denied human rights by men. After the revolution, women think that they can express their views. However, the audience comes to know that in fact women’s freedom of expression remains utterly denied.

Hu Hsueh-chi’en represents women who come to stand on their own feet because of the change in their views of themselves and society though the revolution. Since she remarried a Communist doctor, who believes in gender equality, she has been able to live her life with confidence. When her husband explains that “fanshen” can only be achieved through struggles against the authority, Hu Hsueh-chi’en becomes more active than before, and becomes a secretary of the Women’s Association in Communist Party (Act One Section Four, 37).

Though they are not the main characters in the play, Ch’ung-lai’s wife and Old Lady Wang, who are poverty-stricken peasants, make a remarkable change after the revolution. They are portrayed as typical peasants who come to doubt the traditional values after the revolution, recognizing that they can live for themselves, not for the landlord. When the Peasants’ Association distribute grain equally to the poor peasants at the end of Section Three, Ch’ung-lai’s wife is gratified and says with satisfaction: “We are moving from hell to heaven. To live in your own house, to eat out of your own bowl, is the happiest life” (Act One Section Three, 33). However, after a while, the leaders of the Peasants’ Association begin to control the peasants. Even under the control of the Peasants’ Association, after the revolution, women keep speaking about their feelings. Old Lady Wang denounces a man in the scene of the public appraisal which takes place in Act One Section
Seven. She criticizes sharply T’ao-yuan, an immoral peasant, who used to sell not only his wife but also wives of other people in order to make money. Thus, these two female characters are portrayed as speaking openly after the revolution. Their speaking highlights the significance of the revolution in helping women to articulate their feelings. However, the social situation which denies the female subjectivity remains the same after the revolution.

In the case of Hsien-e, who is Wen-te’s wife, she asserts that she has been oppressed by her husband and the father-in-law. Wen-te, the Head of Police, and his father Yu-lai, one of the Vice-Chairmen of the Peasants’ Association of Long Bow, come to be the target of the villagers’ hatred because of their harsh attitudes. They behave outrageously to Hsien-e, beating her and calling her a “slut.” In Act Two Section Ten, Hsien-e can no longer bear with their treatments, and asks the Women’s Association for help. Although she knows that no one has been divorced in Long Bow, she dares to make petitions for her divorce, fully prepared to die if her petitions fails. Nevertheless, her demand for the divorce is not eventually allowed by Hou, a leader of the work team sent by the government. The reason is that Wen-te apologizes her for the domestic violence he and his family did to her, taking an oath never to maltreat her anymore. Hsien-e comes to be silent afterward. She makes a contrast with Hoskins in Churchill’s *Light Shining*, who keeps speaking her views throughout the play.

This unfortunate result of Hsien-e’s demand for her divorce reveals that the patriarchal value system in society has not basically changed after the revolution. The male characters in this play allow women to denounce the traditional discourse so that the revolution may take place. And yet, they cannot tolerate the female speeches which may upset the patriarchal hierarchy. Even women’s freedom of expression, which women thought they would be given after the revolution, offered mere occasion to speak up their feelings but have no power to change the social structure on the whole. Thus, the overwhelming power of patriarchy has not been disturbed by women at all in this play.
It is also to be noted that these women in *Fanshen* come to realize their human rights and try to go their own lives. However, the women in this play can assert their human-right only in the course of the revolution, which was lead by the male characters. While women in *Light Shining* try to make a new world by themselves, women in *Fanshen* merely support the male creation of a new world.

**Conclusion**

This essay has dealt with Caryl Churchill’s three plays about the revolutionary wars in the light of David Hare’s *Fanshen* in order to examine the significance of Churchill’s representations of women in revolutions. While in these plays Churchill presents some powerful women of action in the revolutions, in her most recent play which deals with the Iraq War, *Drunk Enough To Say I Love You?* (2006) (hereafter *Drunk Enough*), no woman appears; they are only talked about in the male characters’ speeches about the victimization executed during the war: “put the object in vagina,” and “play tape of women and children screaming in next room and tell prisoner it’s wife and children” (Scene Seven, 33). This play presents only two characters who are both male, Jack and Sam. Jack reminds of Tony Blair, and Sam, of George W. Bush. The main concern of *Drunk Enough* is entirely different from the one of the three plays studied in this essay. In these three plays, Churchill is most concerned about people’s inner state under the chaotic situation of the war. On the other hand, *Drunk Enough* dramatizes the relationship between two men who lead the war. This difference may come from the shift in Churchill’s concern, that is, from her concern about people situated in the revolutionary wars to the absurd human situation created by the war.

The reviews of theatre critics on the performance of *Drunk Enough* are widely. Although Michael Billington, a well-known theatre critic, rates this play quite highly on the whole, he points out the ambiguity in the way in which Churchill presents the subject matter: “While I applaud the play’s intentions, it is almost too ingeniously elliptical to
ram home its arguments” (Billington, “Drunk Enough To Say I Love You?”). As Billington says, Churchill’s presentation of her arguments in this play is too vague for the audience to understand because of the incomprehensive and obscure nature of the characters’ conversations. In The Daily Telegraph, on the 24th November 2006, Charles Spencer criticizes this play strongly: “Frankly, shows don’t come much worse than this” (Spencer, “It’s not clever, and it’s not funny”). In this review, he blames Churchill’s oversimplification in presenting of the USA as an “evil.” Although the critics’ views of this play are thus varied, they agree in that it fails to convey Churchill’s intention because of her vague dramatic presentations of the issues.

Even though the play certainly lacks dramatic power, Churchill has never tried to convey a clear political message in her plays. The main theme of Drunk Enough is, therefore, not the criticism of the USA or the UK policy against the Iraq War. She simply presents the serious but absurd human situations under the war created by the two very powerful politicians, who held the special ambiguous feelings to each other.

Thus, in this play, Churchill shows the absurd human situation formed by the world politics, by presenting two male powerful, though ineffectual, characters, who recall Tony Blair and George W. Bush. The representations of their close relationship with each other, in which public and private matters are confused, make the audience face the absurd situation of the Iraq War. She highlights the meaninglessness of the Iraq War led by these two leaders of the world, who despite their great political power, are arbitrary in their speeches and emotions, holding uncontrollable sexual feelings toward each other. Churchill dramatizes the atrocious, absurd human situation brought about by these male leaders’ irresponsible decisions. It may be said that this play resembles an absurd theatre, such Samuel Beckett’s Waiting for Godot (1955), though Beckett does not hardly describe the characters’ private matters. The vagueness of Drunk Enough, which has been criticized by various reviewers, represents its theme itself, that is, the ambiguous
absurd human situation in the Iraq Wars.

In this respect, the play is different from her other three plays which focuses on the inner human state. In these plays, Churchill describes women who powerfully try to keep their sense of selfhood despite the unusual situations of wars and the revolutions where they are placed. In *The Hospital of the Time of Revolution* (1972), as has been argued, Churchill presents “A”’s wife and Françoise, who are situated in the Algerian Revolutionary War. They are portrayed as women who struggle with the conflict between their roles and inner realities, choosing to pursue their convictions, and discarding their social roles, in the historical Fanon’s word “masks.” In *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1976), Hoskins, a female beggar, preaches freely on her doubt about the patriarchal nature of the religious discourse which has been disseminated during the English Civil War. On the other hand, in the same play, a character called Wife obeys the religious discourse promoted in society in order to survive and protect her family in this politically confusing period. Then after fifteen years, she wrote *Mad Forest: A Play From Romania* (1990), a play about the Romanian Revolution of 1989. In this play, Lucia and Flavia are portrayed as strong-minded women who change easily their former positions to get their own independent ways and to live through the chaotic period in both political and social terms. Thus, in these three plays, Churchill describes women in the revolutions who pursue their own will despite their difficulties. They try to keep their own selfhood, and take actions.

In the meanwhile, David Hare, Churchill’s contemporary male playwright, treats the Cultural Revolution in China in *Fanshen* (1975). In this play, the female characters are presented as important because they provide their views of the social system which entirely different from men’s. However, after all, their actions cannot give any influence on the Revolution activated by the male. Hu Hsueh-chen, Ch’ung-lai’s wife, Old Lady Wang and Wen-te’s wife all claim their human rights and take actions at their own discretion. Nevertheless, Hare’s women cannot influence the revolution either in the private or the public arena. In
contrast, Churchill’s women in the revolutions are portrayed as capable of giving impacts (though slightly) both privately and politically.

The comparison of Churchill’s representations of women in the revolutions with Hare’s makes it clear that Churchill’s women who take actions in the revolutions are described as politically involved eventually. She presents as meaningful the female actions to try to change the situations in the chaotic period, and thus endows with human dignity women who take actions in the revolutionary wars.

Now, revolutions and wars still continue in the world. On the 14th March 2008, the protest against Chinese control broke out at Lhasa in Tibet. The Chinese authority reported that some Tibetan women were arrested for arson to join the protest. Like women in Churchill’s plays studied in this essay, some women nowadays actually take part in the revolutionary wars in order to change the situations they are placed in. Therefore, Churchill’s plays about revolutions make us deepen our consciousness of the current situation that we are faced with in the twenty-first century.

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Keywords

Caryl Churchill, British women playwright, British contemporary drama, women in revolutions and civil wars, David Hare, The Hospital of the Time of Revolution, Light Shining in Buckinghamshire, Mad Forest: A Play From Romania, Drunk Enough To Say I Love You?