

# Caryl Churchill

(1938-)

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Caryl Churchill was born in 1938 and spent most of her childhood years in London and Montreal. In 1957 she entered the prestigious Oxford University to study English Literature, and it was there that she first developed her strong interest in drama. Before receiving her degree in 1960, Churchill had already published and produced three plays. Soon after, she became well known as a radio dramatist. Churchill wrote many scripts for BBC radio drama until the early 1970s.



Meanwhile, Churchill married a man named David Harter and gave birth to three children between 1963 and 1969. Her career as a radio dramatist proved very successful and between 1962 and 1973 she produced eight plays that actively enabled the listener to see and imagine the drama that Churchill so aptly displayed through a good choice of dialogue, music, and sound effects.

In 1972 Churchill made the transition to theater and television, contributing six new plays to BBC by 1981. However, Churchill soon came to the conclusion that television work was very unsatisfactory compared to theater work, where she was free to write without the pressures of politics and society. In 1972 she got her chance to work with the Royal Court Theatre, which helped bring her into the sphere of the politically daring and artistically committed theatre of "The Court". In 1975 Churchill became the first woman to hold the position of resident dramatist, where she was able to constantly test the limits and vitality of traditional and orthodox theatre.

With her continuous impulse toward theatrical experimentation, Churchill was able to incorporate expression of feminist insights into contemporary views, all the while encouraging audiences to actively criticize institutions and ideologies that had been previously taken for granted, both in theater and society itself. This helped to develop Churchill into a feminist-socialist critique of society. In plays such as *Top Girls*, Churchill links personal change of a character with large-scale society change. This underlines her belief in the ordinary person's ability to produce significant changes in themselves and their environment.

The works generated by Churchill have had a lasting effect on theatrical practices, traditions, gender stereotypes, and social-economical ideals throughout the past two decades, and until the present day.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Caryl Churchill", **The Guardian**, [www.guardian.co.uk/stage/theatreblog+carylchurchill](http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/theatreblog+carylchurchill)

<sup>2</sup> "Who is Caryl Churchill?", **Washington State University. Home Page for Christina Marie Maier**, <http://public.wsu.edu/~cmaier/TopGirls/page2.htm>

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