

ABOUT CARYL CHURCHILL

Caryl Churchill was born in London in 1938, and grew up partly in the UK and in Montreal, Canada. She studied at Oxford University where she studied English. Her first play, *Downstairs*, was written and staged in 1958 while she was still at university, and won her an award at the Sunday Times National Union of Students Drama Festival. She was spotted by the literary agent Peggy Ramsay who carefully nurtured Churchill's writing talent. It was a slow progress - by the time her first play, *Owners*, was professionally produced in 1972 Churchill had been working on her unique style for ten years. In that time she had married and produced three sons and had written a number of plays.

Churchill was encouraged by drama producers at the BBC who produced her short radio plays, *The Ants*, *Lovesick*, and *Abortive*. Radio was traditionally more accommodating to female playwrights and the BBC also televised her play *The Judge's Wife* in 1972. She moved to theatre in the early 1970s, where, initially working on her own, she soon collaborated with such collective companies as Joint Stock and Monstrous Regiment. Churchill was also resident dramatist at the Royal Court Theatre Company from 1974-75.

Every full-length play Churchill has written contains a full-scale innovation in the form - something that questions what the idea of a play is. For example, in her play *Light Shining on Buckinghamshire* the parts are rotated round the actors so that no one character is performed by the same actor. In *Moving Clocks Go Slow* time runs backwards as well as forwards.

Cloud Nine, Churchill's first big popular success came out of a Joint Stock workshop based on sexuality. A play which exposes the links between patriarchy and colonialism, it includes gay and straight characters in a timeline spanning half a century during which the characters age only twenty years. *Top Girls* is perhaps Churchill's most famous play and defies, again, the rules for formal coherence. Each act seems to have come out of a different box. The first act is a conversation-piece between women of history and myth, the second a city comedy, and act three is set in a social-realist style and is the most sustained emotional scene Churchill has ever written. *Serious Money*, written in the late 80s is concerned with the money markets of the Thatcher era and the male cast speak in verse. Churchill offers no criticism of the characters and city traders who attended the play often cheered it. Much of the play's success was owed to the very people it satirized.

Caryl Churchill is recognized as Britain's leading woman dramatist. Her plays are politically radical with strong views on feminism, money, and exploitation. Her own life experience as a middle class wife and mother has put her in an ideal position to write about feminism and the impact of it on women like her. Churchill's plays deal with sexual politics, social and political oppression, and exploitation, but they are also plays where a clear and fierce intelligence meets a sense of mystery to reveal, as Churchill herself stated in a manifesto about writing for theatre, "new worlds beyond and beneath the surface of ordinary life."

Most recently she has published a new translation of Seneca's *Thyestes* and has written a play which deals with the subject of human cloning: *A Number*. Her latest play is a new version of August Strindberg's *A Dream Play*, premiered at the National Theatre in 2005.