

Feb 27, my email to class, prior to discussion of *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*:

“Ranter, Diggers, and Levellers (oh my!)”

Hello,

Just thought I'd confirm that the defining silence regarding volunteers for a Tuesday report on the above named means what I think it does: that nobody wants to read Christopher Hill (even though he is one of the livelier historians around--in terms of prose style, that is...the man died last year). If I'm right, no need to reply; if, however, there was an oversight and you'd like to do that report, do let me know.

Here's one version of the simplified historical picture of the English civil war/revolution/rebellion (depending where you're sympathies lie):

Cavaliers= royalists, followers of Charles I, "wrong but romantic" (to borrow from *1066 and All That*), flowing hair and erotic love lyrics and elitist values, some closet

Catholics and some practicing (the Queen), others High Anglican (liking substantial church hierarchy, powerful bishops), still others fairly progressive but appalled when Parliamentary reform went as far as executing the Archbishop of Canterbury and the major political advisors to the King.

Roundheads= Parliamentary forces, Puritans, "right but repulsive," short-cropped bowl cuts (hence their pejorative naming) and lay ministers and the rising merchant class unhappy about over-taxation and aristocratic prerogatives, some aristocrats themselves but appalled at the King's willful disregard for institutions and practices that challenged his (imagined) absolute authority.

Having said that, the most amazing long-haired poet of the age (John Milton) was a radical supporter of the Parliamentary side, and some of the Cavaliers could be fairly repulsive too...The standard "Whig" view of history considered the defeat of the Royalists as an inevitable step in the inexorable march of "progress," steadily moving towards the ideal end of universal suffrage and constitutional democracy (via the slave trade and the British Empire--there's always a tricky bit).

Nobody in this play is really "right of center" or even "center," politically speaking, with the possible exceptions of the Vicar and the 1st Justice of the Peace. Churchill is turning her gaze upon groups ranging from the strongly reformist through the radical fringe

(when judged by seventeenth-century standards). Of course, "left" and "right" are anachronisms derived from the age of party politics--which didn't really get going until the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688, but that's another story...

----

#### Student-generated Discussion Questions on *Light Shining*:

1) Churchill says in her introduction that the audience needn't worry about continuity of character from scene to scene, because "each scene can be taken as a separate event rather than part of a story" (184). As readers, we do not have the experience of different actors playing one character. On the other hand, the audience would not have the character name in front of them. How do these experiences differ? How is our reading of the play changed by knowing the author's casting intentions? For that matter, what are her intentions? Why bother giving the same name to two parts? And does the collection of separate events work as a play for us?

2) In the sections Hoskins Interrupts the Preacher and Claxton Brings Hoskins home, much is said about the proper place for women. How much does the fact that these revolutionaries believe in the subjugation of women undermine the sympathy you feel for them? The Calvinist preacher's last comment is "Woman, you are damned." Is he speaking in the particular or the universal?

3) Why does Churchill decide to make this a play instead of a speech, short story, or something? There is almost no action to move the plot along and characters speeches can be very long.

4) There's a lot of rhetoric, in reference to both parliamentary electors and Christ's elected, about how just it is to exclude people based on their birth. What's added to this by the two conversations about dying or dead children?

5) In the end does it succeed as a play to be performed? Or is it more successful as a play to be read?

---

#### My further discussion points, for *Light Shining*:

Each scene a separate event v. part of a story: How we EXPERIENCE "history," v. the method of historiography to organize experience to fit a purpose, an end (beg.-middle-end). To what extent do we inevitably construct such a shape anyway, and see beginning

(discontent, inequity) middle (change, challenge, rebellion) and end (slight differences or radical differences, but also inequity, failure)

--What other principles of organization or structure do you discern at work in the play?  
How does the juxtaposition of specific scenes contribute?

Position of women and how it changes, what premises and what changes?

What "action" moves the play? Offstage "history" as most people might know it: the civil war, the destruction of the Levellers, the triumph of Cromwell's New Model Army, and the reassertion of (modified) hierarchies.

"election" birth (religion) and birthright (political) v. socially constructed and accepted (Anglicanism, inherited parliamentary system though without king).  
Does this tie with the children, or is that something else (economics)?  
Where is the real experience of change for the people of lower ranks?

Why did she write it as a play?

- To animate the dead
- To think and hear how positions are manipulated
- To think about speaking out in a communal setting
- To allow her actors/directors to inform others about a "lost" perspective
- To encourage comparison with her present

Use of anachronism: Walt Whitman

How would you characterize the verbal style of this play? Wally spoke of a movement towards the breakdown of language at the end. Do you discern such a trajectory, and if so what do you make of it?  
Effect of mixing fact and fiction?

Caryl Churchill's own life and times a bit. At what points does this play feel like an allegory or contemporary commentary, a political play of the late twentieth century? At what points does it not? She mentions some of her own motivations for writing this play; do you discern other motivations as well in your own interpretation of the events?

On the basis of this play, what do you infer about Churchill's kind of theater? What audience does this play address, or could/should it address?

--

My handout to give some background for *Light Shining*:

A bit of history

1517: Martin Luther tacks theses on door of Wittenberg Cathedral, arguing for extensive Reformation of the Catholic church. Leads to split and beginning of “protestant” religions (by midcentury, includes Lutherans, Calvinists, Zwinglists, Anabaptists).

1533-36: Henry VIII takes over church as Supreme Head, and dissolves monasteries and nunneries, confiscates much Church property and goods.

[Henry’s desire to divorce Spanish Catherine of Aragon and marry Anne Boleyn precipitates his split with the Roman church. Anne herself is executed by Henry when she likewise fails to provide a male heir to the throne. Henry has a son Edward by his third wife, Jane Seymour.]

1547: Henry VIII dies; son Edward VI rules under protectorship of his Seymour uncles: radical Protestant reforms, including English prayer book and Bible, initiated.

1553: At Edward’s death, Mary Tudor comes to the throne (Catholic daughter of Catherine of Aragon). Marries Philip II of Spain. Protestant martyrs.

1555: John Calvin manages, after twenty years of mixed support and resistance, to institute his form of Protestant church government in Geneva.

1558: At Mary’s death, Elizabeth inherits the throne (daughter of Protestant Anne Boleyn). Develops the Elizabeth “middle way” between Catholicism and radical Protestantism. Persecution of Jesuit priests and some practicing Catholics (and very occasionally some Puritans), especially at times of crisis during her long reign.

1570: Elizabeth excommunicated by the Pope, who licensed rebellion against her.

1572: St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre in Paris, with wholesale slaughter of French Protestants in the streets (Huguenots). Protestant refugees from France and the Spanish-controlled Netherlands seek refuge in England.

1587: Mary Queen of Scots, having been run out of Scotland nearly twenty years before and held under castle arrest by Elizabeth for the duration, tried for plotting to kill Elizabeth, and executed.

1588: failure of Spanish invasion by Armada.

1603: Elizabeth dies. James VI of Scotland becomes also James I of England.

1605: Gunpowder Plot (to blow up Parliament and James) foiled, leading to harsh restrictions on Catholics, and oath of allegiance to crown.

1611: Authorized Version of the King James Bible.

1612: James’ eldest son, Prince Henry, dies, seen as a blow for the militant Protestant cause in England (and for those who wanted England to become actively involved in religious struggles on the continent).

1617: beginning of the Thirty Years War in Europe, involving Hapsburgs, various German princes and electors (including James’ son-in-law) , Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden, and others.

1625: James I dies; his son Charles I to throne. Parliament soon demands resignation of his counselor the Duke of Buckingham; Charles dissolves Parliament.

1628: Seeking money to support war with France over fate of Huguenots, Charles demands “Forced Loans” from the people. Parliament assembles and passes Petition of Right, demanding cause for imprisonment, habeas corpus, bail, and no taxation without consent of Act of Parliament. King dismisses parliament. Buckingham assassinated.

1633: Laud becomes Archbishop of Canterbury, stresses church hierarchy and alienates most moderate Calvinist Anglicans.

1638-9: Laud's attempts to make Scots use English prayer book and Charles' attempts to control the Scots General Assembly lead to the "Bishops War" with Scotland.

1640: Charles forced to call Parliament to get funds for fighting Scotland (the Short Parliament, as their complaints soon lead to his dissolving it). After Charles defeated in second Bishops War that fall, calls Parliament again: will become the "Long Parliament," as not dissolved for years of civil war. Demands impeachment and death of Strafford, Charles' highest counselor. Laud also impeached and executed.

1641: insurrection in Ulster. Grand Remonstrance of the King by Parliament, attacking his councillors, courtiers, papists, and bishops; passed by vote of 159-148, with Cromwell voting for.

1642: Civil war begins.

1644: Battle of Marston Moor, bloodiest battle. Beginning of reforms in army.

1645: New Model Army of Sir Thomas Fairfax (and Oliver Cromwell). Charles seeks refuge with Scots.

1647: Scots turn Charles over to the English. Increasing power of Levellers leads to Cromwell quelling them.

1648: Cromwell on way to becoming virtual dictator. "Rump Parliament" of only about 60 members, allowed in by the Army, arrange trial of the King. High Court finds Charles guilty of High Treason and other crimes.

1649: January, King Charles I beheaded. England becomes a Republic.

Diggers, led by G. Winstanley, announce colony in April, petitions Parliament.

Cromwell invades Ireland. Crackdown on all dissent (Diggers, Levellers left, etc.).

1653: Cromwell's opponents in Ireland stripped of land, in Act of Settlement

1658: Cromwell dies.

1660: Charles II "restored" to throne.