

# FANSHEN



by David Hare

*"There is a crack in history one inch wide.  
We fought for it and we must use it."*

– A Playgoer's Guide –

**David Hare** was born in Bexhill, East Sussex, England on 5 June 1947, and was educated at Lancing College and Jesus College, Cambridge. He co-founded Portable Theatre Company, acting, directing and writing plays. *Slag* was first produced in London in 1970 at the Hampstead Theatre Club. He was Resident Dramatist at the Royal Court Theatre in London in 1970-1 and Resident Dramatist at the Nottingham Playhouse in 1973. He co-founded Joint Stock Theatre Group with David Aukin and Max Stafford-Clark in 1975, and held a US/UK Bicentennial Fellowship in 1977. He has been Associate Director of the National Theatre since 1984. He was knighted in 1998 and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.



His plays include *Knuckle* (1974), winner of the Mail on Sunday/John Llewellyn Rhys Prize; *Fanshen* (1975), based on the book by William Hinton; *Plenty* (1978), a portrait of disillusionment in post-war Britain, first staged at the National Theatre in London; *Pravda: A Fleet Street Comedy* (1985), an attack on the English press written with Howard Brenton; and many others. In 1998 (and again in 2002) he performed his own play, *Via Dolorosa*, a monologue about a visit he made to Israel and the Palestinian Territories for the Royal Court Theatre. His experiences of acting and writing the play are further explored in a diary, *Acting Up: A Diary*, published in 1999. His play *Stuff Happens* was premiered at the Royal National Theatre in 2005, and is about the invasion of Iraq. – adapted from the British Council Contemporary Writers Web site

“Over a period of thirty years Hare's plays naturally reveal changes of tone and style. What is utterly consistent, however, is his belief in the power of theatre as a medium and his unshakeable conviction that part of a writer's duty is to interpret the society in which he lives.” – *Michael Billington*

*“The ultimate tendency of civilization is towards barbarism.” – David Hare*

## Fanshen



Every revolution creates new words. In the village of Long Bow, that word is “fanshen.” As the shells of the retreating army fall in the distant hills, Long Bow finds itself at the heart of China Year Zero. During the Chinese revolution “fanshen” meant to turn the body or to turn over. This slogan promised a new dawn would break upon the people if they worked hard and strove to better themselves.

The play is based on William Hinton’s historical account of what happened to Long Bow, a small village 200 km southwest of Beijing. The play is set in agrarian China during the period of China’s Land Reform between 1945 and 1949.

The story shows how the peasants of Long Bow built a new world. For the poverty-stricken villagers of Long Bow, “fanshen” meant to stand up and to throw off the landlord's yoke and to gain land, stocks, implements and houses. Believing that China's problems could be solved by a correct distribution of land and the people's undiluted hard work, campaigns were carried out with the slogan “fanshen.” As the ideals of equality and freedom collapse under the weight of corruption and vengeance, *Fanshen* reveals the dark heart that lies beneath the utopian dream.

The play examines what it means and takes to create a just system where freedom is at the fore. *Fanshen* continues to be a relevant play that contrives not to make judgments, but to invite the audience to be part of a changeable world. – *adapted from the theatredelicatessen Web site and inkpot.com*

David Hare: “the play *Fanshen* is very different from the book *Fanshen*; for both its aims, and the play’s selection of episodes (from the book), make it a very different kind of project.” The play, he says, focuses on “the question of how any democracy knows it’s a good democracy.”

“What long-run impact does revolution really have on class structure and equality of opportunity? Do prior elites manage to prosper despite radically new political and economic circumstances? Do major political and social changes do little more than allow new elites to rise and consolidate their own positions? What is the actual long-run impact of revolution and reform?” --Andrew G. Walder and Songhua Hu, “Revolution, Reform, and Status Inheritance: Urban China, 1949 - 1996.” *American Journal of Sociology* (2009)

*“Sudden resolutions, like the sudden rise of mercury in a barometer, indicate little else than the variability of the weather” – David Hare*

This document was researched by  
**The members of the *Fanshen* Task Force**  
**Nigel Bone, Kirsten Graham, Emily Cochrane**  
**and Elyse Bernais**

and assembled and edited by  
**Juliana Duque, Katie Dow, Josie Blackmore,**  
**Sara Garrett and Russ Hunt**

**English 2223: The Page and the Stage**  
**St. Thomas University**  
visit our Web site, at  
<http://people.stu.ca/~hunt/22231011>