

PAPER DETAILS

TITLE: David Hare's Proposal of an Alternative Religion to Object to the Commercial Religion of Thatcherism

AUTHORS: Tuba AGKAS ÖZCAN

PAGES: 107-118

ORIGINAL PDF URL: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/2828992>



David Hare's Proposal of an Alternative Religion to Object to the Commercial Religion of Thatcherism¹

Tuba Ağkaş Özcan* 

* Dr.

tuubaagkas@gmail.com

Ankara / TÜRKİYE

Abstract

British political drama of the 1980s was heavily under the influence of Margaret Thatcher's government and its policies which were introduced to the economy and which diffused into every domain of public life. Political dramatists could not respond immediately to the abrupt changes that occurred in social and political life at the beginning of the decade. They got prolific only in the second half of the decade and dared to display the influence of Thatcher's government not only on the state institutions but also on the private lives of the people. One of the foregoing political dramatists, David Hare, in the 1980s, looked back on his dramaturgy and revised it in tune with the requirements of this new decade. As a result, in *The Secret Rapture*, staged in 1988, Hare dwells upon the state politics as insinuated into people's private lives rather than directly criticise it. Moreover, Hare contrasts, in the play, the dominant values of the present decade, in social and private terms, with those embraced in the previous decade. Then, he creates a new moral-religious alternative by the help of the protagonist Isobel in clash with the economical-religious attitude endorsed by Thatcher's Britain.

Keywords: British political drama, Margaret Thatcher, David Hare, *The Secret Rapture*, moral-religious alternative.

Received:

26.12.2021

Accepted:

14.09.2022

Field Editor:

Hüseyin Altındış

David Hare'in Thatcher Döneminin Ticari Dini Karşısında Alternatif Din Önerisi²

Öz

1980'lerin İngiliz politik tiyatrosu, Margaret Thatcher hükümetinden ve bu hükümetin önce ekonomiye sonra toplumsal hayatın her alanına nüfuz eden politikalarından yoğun biçimde etkilenmiştir. Politik tiyatro yazarları, söz konusu on yılın başlarında, toplumsal ve politik hayatta meydana gelen ani değişikliklere hemen yanıt verememişlerdir. Dönemin ancak ikinci yarısında çok sayıda eser üretmeye başlamışlar ve Thatcher hükümetinin sadece devlet kurumları değil insanların özel hayatları üzerinde de etkisi olduğunu gösterme cesareti bulabilmişlerdir. Politik tiyatronun öncülerinden birisi olan David Hare, 1980'lere geldiğinde, kendi politik tiyatro yazarlığını gözden geçirmiş ve bu yeni dönemin gerekleriyle uyumlu olacak şekilde yenilemiştir. Sonuç olarak, 1988 yılında sahnelenen *The Secret Rapture* (Sessiz Ölüm) adlı eserinde politikayı, insanların özel hayatlarına sızmış şekilde resmetmiş ve doğrudan devlet politikalarını eleştirme yoluna girmemiştir. Dahası, Hare

¹ A different version of this study was already produced by the author in her "doctoral" dissertation entitled as *The Evolution of David Hare's Political Drama as Observed in Fanshen, The Secret Rapture and The Absence of War*, which was written under the supervision of Prof. Dr. A. Deniz Bozer.

² Bu çalışmanın farklı bir sürümü yazarın *David Hare'in Politik Tiyatrosu'nun Fanshen (Devrim), The Secret Rapture (Sessiz Ölüm) ve The Absence of War (Savaşın Yokluğunda) Oyunlarında Örneklendiği üzere Evrimi* başlıklı ve Prof. Dr. A. Deniz Bozer'in danışmanlığında yazılmış "doktora" tezinde yer almaktadır.

söz konusu oyunda mevcut dönemin toplumsal ve özel hayat bağlamında geçerli olan değerleriyle bir önceki on yılda benimsenen değerleri karşı karşıya getirmiştir. Sonrasında da, Thatcher'ın ülkesinde uygun görülen ekonomik-dini yaklaşım karşısına, ana karakteri Isobel vasıtasıyla yeni bir ahlaki-dini alternatif çıkarmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İngiliz politik tiyatrosu, Margaret Thatcher, David Hare, *The Secret Rapture* (Sessiz Ölüm), ahlaki-dini alternatif.

INTRODUCTION

British political drama was born in the late 1960s and flourished with a number of playwrights in the 1970s. It was so perplexed with the coming of Margaret Thatcher's government at the turn of the 1980s that it could not respond immediately to what was becoming of Britain (Peacock, 1999, p. 65; Taylor, 2007, p. 49). This study will first examine briefly the state of Britain and of British political drama in the 1980s; then, it will focus on one of the leading dramatists, David Hare and his political playwriting in this decade. The primary concern of this study is to what extent and in what way Hare represents the society in Thatcher's Britain specifically in *The Secret Rapture* (1988) by drawing attention to the clashes between the present and the previous states of Britain in terms of business, family, and morals. It asserts that Hare, in *The Secret Rapture*, in addition to these clashes, brings forward a new conflict between the Christian practice in the Thatcherite world and the moral values which belong to the earlier generation. These values are represented in the play by Isobel, the Saviour for the new and reputedly corrupt age.

British Political Drama in the 1980s

In the 1970s, Britain experienced a number of economic problems and union strikes under the rule of a Labour government, as a result of which the public gave up hope that Labour policies or any socialist principles would be capable of dealing with economic matters. Thereupon, Conservative Party with Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979, with whom right-wing values were imposed on social, economic and political life (Milling, 2012, p. 68). Thatcher's government policies such as monetarism and privatisation did not remain limited to economy since these policies infused into every corner of life and turned almost every individual into an investor or an entrepreneur by the end of the decade.

Hence, political drama in this decade dealt mostly with money as well as with people's lives that money shaped. While it was one of the primary aims of political drama in the 1970s to illustrate "the state of the nation" by using domestic, foreign, or historical setting, political dramatists in the 1980s did not know how to deal with Thatcher's Britain or "how to critique dramatically the values of the Thatcherite ideology" (Peacock, 1999, p. 65). Politically conscious playwrights were in total bewilderment and uncertainty about how to tackle the disputations over the present state of Britain as well as British theatre (Taylor, 2007, p. 49). They were forced to decide whether or not they would put aside their Marxist points of view and ideals and to be concerned with the personal rather than the public (Peacock, 1999, p. 65).

Political dramatists' confusion resulted in production of fewer plays which directly dealt with the state of Britain, especially in the first half of the 1980s. This meant, for Michael Billington, the death of political drama which was expected to respond to contemporary politics (2007, p. 304). However, the art of political drama did not come to an end in the 1980s (Milling, 2012, p. 69) because "[i]t's an art form" and it could not end with the change of politics in the state organisation (Hare, 2005, p. 139). The debate whether political drama died or continued in the 1980s went on throughout the decade. Actually, during the 1980s, political drama remained in existence but its scope widened:

Indeed the perception of the death of the political play during the 1980s is very closely related to a trammelled idea of an appropriate political stylistic, and a proscribed idea of what counts as political – one

which chooses not to note the outdated gendered and racial limitations of many earlier plays dubbed state-of-the-nation. Such a limited perspective on the political serves neither the established playwrights, nor those who, during the 1980s, wrote explicitly political plays about the nation, the global, and the personal as interlocking (Milling, 2012, p. 70).

Jane Milling explains that political drama was not limited to the state of the nation plays and that the plays in the 1980s were "explicitly political," dealing with both national and global issues (2012, p. 70). Moreover, there were also plays in this period which treated personal matters and which could be considered political as far as the motto "personal is political" is concerned (p. 70). These works were political since they proposed alternative views and ways of living to mainstream politics and social life. Besides, they represented the dissident voices of various political and social groups like those of women, gay/lesbian, Asian, Afro-Caribbean, black and black women. All in all, although Michael Billington claims that "the theatre . . . recovered its capacity for dissent" only in the late 1980s (2007, p. 283), political plays were written by both the established and the new playwrights from the very beginning of the decade though fewer in number compared to the works in the second half.

David Hare's Political Playwriting in the 1980s and *The Secret Rapture*

One of the leading dramatists David Hare did not write plays in the first half of the 1980s which directly dealt with contemporary British politics. He treats global matters using faraway settings in plays like *A Map of the World* (1982), *The Bay at Nice* (1986) and *Wrecked Eggs* (1986). Other than his collaborative work with Howard Brenton, *Pravda* (1985), his first straightforward attack on contemporary politics reveals itself in *The Secret Rapture*, a play which closely examines the society in Thatcher's Britain.

The Secret Rapture was produced at the National Theatre in London while David Hare, as the director, put it on stage at Broadway in New York. A number of newspaper articles reviewed the play: while it was criticised in New York reviews, it was received in London mostly as a successful play. Frank Rich, the editor of *New York Times*, presents negative views on *The Secret Rapture* in his review entitled "Bad Sister vs. Good Sister in Hare's 'Secret Rapture'" (1989). According to Rich, although the play is a criticism of capitalism, it is produced at Broadway, a commercial theatre. Another author in *New York Times*, Benedict Nightingale, in "David Hare Captures His Muse on Stage," cynically foregrounds Hare's writing the play for the actress Blair Brown rather than the play's political content (1989). On the other hand, in Britain, Michael Billington, in "The Midas Touch," celebrates Hare's "gift" in *The Secret Rapture* to "relat[e] private despair to the public world," to make political criticism with the help of a private tragedy (1988, p. 25). Billington reviewed the play once more when it was revived with a different cast in 2001. In his "Welcome Hare Revival on the Thatcherite Psyche," Billington mainly deals with the play as a criticism of the Thatcherite world (2001, p. 19). The varying approaches to the production of the play is what draws Judy Lee Oliva's attention in "Directing David Hare's *The Secret Rapture*: Issues Toward a New Aesthetic Praxis." In this work, she concentrates on the performative aspect and the reception of the play as a piece of transatlantic theatre by audiences from different cultural backgrounds (1992, p. 101).

It is not only in the reviews but also in a number of books and articles that *The Secret Rapture* is considered to be a critical representation of the politics and of the society during Thatcherite years. Carol Homden in *The Plays of David Hare*, Judy Lee Oliva in *David Hare: Theatricalizing Politics*, Joan FitzPatrick Dean in *David Hare*, and Lib Taylor in "In Opposition: Hare's Response to Thatcherism" analyse the play in detail and underline the fact that it presents clearly how Thatcherite politics infused into private lives of the individuals. Jane Milling, in her *Modern British Playwriting: The 1980s*, also draws attention to the political context of the play while Duncan Wu in *Six Contemporary Dramatists*, emphasises the

need to explore the political and social background of the play rather than consider it only a commercial theatrical production. Robert Scott Fraser, in his work *A Politic Theatre: The Drama of David Hare*, diagnoses the ambivalent nature of the ideologies represented in *The Secret Rapture*. The political implications in *The Secret Rapture* has engaged the attention of many other critics such as Richard Hornby in "Political Drama" and Monique Prunet in "The Outrageous 80s: Conservative Policies and the Church of England under Fire in Steven Berkoff's *Sink the Belgrano* and David Hare's *The Secret Rapture* and *Racing Demon*."

Albeit aware of the political suggestions of the play, Finlay Donesky in David

Hare: Moral and Historical Perspectives and John J. Su in "Nostalgic Rapture: Interpreting Moral Commitments in David Hare's Drama" appear to be more concerned with the moral arguments in the play. The articles in Hersh Zeifman's *David Hare: A Casebook* encompass a broad range of approaches while dealing with Hare's plays. For instance, Robert L. King is interested in linguistic and moral representations of *The Secret Rapture* in "Language and Values in Hare's Plays" when Anne Nothof discusses the idea of "goodness" more in the foreground in the article, "Virtuous Women: Portraits of Goodness in *The Secret Rapture*, *Racing Demon*, and *Strapless*." Another critic who examines the play in terms of women characters is Geraldine Cousin as manifested in her work, *Women in Dramatic Place and Time: Contemporary Female Characters on Stage*.

As for the formal aspects of *The Secret Rapture*, Liorah Anne Golomb handles the play as a Christian allegory in "Saint Isobel: David Hare's *The Secret Rapture* as Christian Allegory." Other than as an allegory, the play is also examined as a tragedy and its tragic characteristics are scrutinised by Sean Carney in *The Politics and Poetics of Contemporary English Tragedy*. The distinctive form of *The Secret Rapture* attracted the attention of many other critics such as James Gindin as seen in his article, "Freedom and Form in David Hare's Drama." John Russell Brown and Stephen Lacey focus on how Hare employs devices peculiar to cinema in their articles, "Playing with Place: Some Filmic Techniques in the Plays of David Hare" and "Public Spaces and Private Narratives – the Plays and Films of David Hare," respectively.

The Secret Rapture is also meticulously inspected in dissertations as an important piece in David Hare's career. The play is analysed comprehensively in doctoral thesis by Lane A. Glenn, who explores Hare's career between 1979 and 1993 in *David Hare: Britain's Playwright of Popular Dissent*. P. W. Siemers handles the play as a tragicomedy and spotlights sexuality in its cultural context in the doctorate thesis, *Theatre of Constraint: Culture and Sexuality in Select Plays Of David Hare, Snoo Wilson and Stephen Poliakoff*. Jurg van Ginkel is also interested in the changes in Hare's dramaturgy between the years 1975 and 1993, reserving a place for *The Secret Rapture* in his master's thesis, *A Complex Explanation: The Evolution of David Hare's Work from 1975 to 1993*. In another thesis, this time of bachelor's, *Zobrazení vlády Margaret Thatcherové v divadelních hrách v 80*, Helena Krsková deals with *The Secret Rapture* along with *A Small Family Business* by Alan Ayckbourn and *Thatcher's Children* by Trevor Griffiths in the political context of the 1980s' Britain. In addition to the theses by students, the play is also analysed for students by Cengage Learning Gale in *A Study Guide for David Hare's "The Secret Rapture"*.

This present study aims to define the place of *The Secret Rapture* in its social and political context so as to underline the characteristics of the play as a piece of political drama, a fact proclaimed in many of the abovementioned studies. While portraying the British society under the influence of Thatcherite politics, according to Oliva, Hare unveils the clashes in society which are not only between the characters, "sisters, lovers, and friends," but also "between ideas: social, political, and religious" (1990, p. 138). This study closely analyses the clashes in *The Secret Rapture* and specifically concentrates on the one related to religion. Different from Oliva, it puts forward that Hare, in the play, does not solely reflect

upon the clashes already present in society but he also provides a novel moral-religious alternative to the religious approach adopted by the Thatcherite ideology. Accordingly, in addition to Golomb's, Su's, Nothof's and Donesky's arguments which mostly go around the Christian allusions or moral statements made in the play, this study aims to draw attention to the playwright's political concerns in coming up with an alternative religion in *The Secret Rapture*.

Political, Social and Religious Clashes in *The Secret Rapture*

As Lib Taylor states, *The Secret Rapture* is "Hare's most direct theatrical response to Thatcherism to date" (2007, p. 57). While Hare was observed in the 1970s to be revealing his political views and revolutionary ideals using social and political institutions, he preferred in the 1980s to present his political views within the framework of domestic settings and through the private lives of his characters. Since Thatcherism infused into every corner of life in Britain, it made it hard for Hare to imagine a revolutionary political change. Hence, he dealt with what is political by means of what is personal (Dean, 1990, p. 111; Billington, 2001, p. 19). He believes that

[The Secret Rapture] is political in the sense that it's set in the present day, and into the room, I hope, comes the atmosphere of what it is like to live in Britain at the moment. To me that has to be the political atmosphere, because one of the effects of Thatcherism has been to introduce politics into every aspect of people's lives. And I don't know how you can write truthfully about what it's like to be alive in Britain today without some reflection of what the political atmosphere is and how ethical attitudes, moral attitudes, and even, I would say, emotional attitudes have been changed by a very polarizing government (Hare, 1993, p. 224).

Hare's main target in *The Secret Rapture* is to render the politics of the time, to explore the human condition within the context of British politics, and to make his moral arguments on the relation between public and politics. In order to disclose his moral concerns, Hare constructs certain clashes in the private lives of the characters each one of whom embodies an important feature of the present or the past decades' values and politics. He lays bare the clashes between such values as monetarism and goodness or competitiveness and thriftiness. Apart from these clashes, Hare contrives a new conflict in the play between the religious attitudes of the Thatcherite world and the morals of the previous generation represented by Isobel as the Saviour for the new corrupt age.

The first and the foremost clash of the play takes place between the sisters, Isobel and Marion in terms of their approaches to life and politics. In fact, the disaccord between the sisters originates from the disaccord between the values of the past and those of the present. While Marion is the most significant representative of the corrupt characters that belong to the age of Thatcherism, Isobel and their father Robert embody the values of the previous age. In *The Secret Rapture*, by means of the dead father, "nostalgia [is used] as an interpretive matrix," that is, the past is presented so that the present can be illustrated and interpreted as well as the contrast between them can be pointed out clearly (Su, 1997, p. 27). The play starts with Robert's death, which implies the death of the values belonging to the previous generation and the start of a new decade. Robert was neither a rich man nor a religious person: he was only "[a] small-town bookseller" (Hare, 1997b, p. 373, 1.1); "[h]e had no investments, he didn't approve of them" (p. 406, 1.3), and he "never spoke to a priest in his life" (p. 379, 1.2). Isobel, like her father, attaches little importance to money as seen in her satisfaction with her small business and she is not devoted to religion as indicated in her dialogues with Tom on Jesus (p. 376, 1.1; p. 419, 1.4; p. 460, 2.6). Marion, on the other hand, is fond of making money as a follower of the contemporary Conservative Party politics, and although her own religious views are not revealed, she has a harmonious relationship with her pious husband, Tom.

On the one hand, Isobel, the daughter who most resembles the father, is unfit for the society she lives in and does not belong to this new decade, as a consequence of which she "can't . . . live, like other

people,” and she will die at the end of the play (Hare, 1997b, p. 461, 2.6). While the play starts with her father’s death, it ends with Isobel’s; in this way, “the play comes full circle” (Oliva, 1990, p. 144), which may hint the fact that the older values have vanished completely. Hare, through Isobel and her father, depicts his longing for a decent society that was alive a generation before but is almost lost with their death (Hare, 1993, p. 224). However, though dead, Robert continues to haunt the lives of the living characters, especially of his daughters, which is a kind of hope implied by the playwright. That is why, the five scenes out of eight take place in his house which the three women, two daughters and a wife, cannot leave after his death.

In an age which is seriously under the effect of monetarism, Isobel favours the idea of small business rather than expanding, and in an age of individualism, she devotes herself to her father’s alcoholic widow, Katherine. She insistently and blindly helps Katherine saying that “I want to bury my head in the sand” (Hare, 1997b, p. 409, 1.3). This statement shows how Isobel is too well-intentioned and too loyal to the memory of her father in spite of what her reason tells her to do. According to the Christian reading of the play, Isobel “forsake[s] her own well-being by taking upon herself a burden, a cross to bear: specifically a soul to save,” Katherine (Golomb, 1990, p. 565). However, she will save Katherine only in material terms by providing a house and a job for her, but in literal terms, she will not be able to save Katherine since the latter will continue using alcohol and behaving recklessly.

On the other hand, Marion as well as her deeds which lack emotion are governed by her concern for money and business. For her, family is one of the responsibilities a businessman or woman needs to deal with as scheduled in his/her weekly programme. She says, “[f]amily things actually belong at weekend. A drink on Sunday is lovely. Or lunch. Or walking after lunch. That’s the right time for the family. It’s crazy when it starts infecting your weekend” (Hare, 1997b, p. 446, 2.6). She esteems that business affairs override familial relations. To illustrate, when her husband is about to close down her sister Isobel’s firm, she considers it “simply an administrative decision[, w]hich makes total economic sense” (p. 446, 2.6). Or, when her sister is desperate after her failures in business and in love, what Marion suggests is that the former should get “professional help” (p. 451, 2.6). She reduces human psychology, more importantly her own sister’s psychology, to something mechanical or material which can be repaired when it is damaged, saying, “Get someone in who’s experienced. These days there’s no stigma attached. As far as I’m concerned, it’s like fixing a car. If it breaks, just mend it. It’s all avoidable. Nowadays they have brilliant people” (p. 451, 2.6). In fact, the way Marion acts and talks is an exposition of the social and economic conditions of the 1980s more than her own character.

Marion is mostly observed “to be easily frustrated and angered” throughout the play (Carney, 2013, p. 42). However, in her own daily life, she is expected to be at ease and to feel comfortable since “she’s got everything she wants. Her party’s in power. For ever. She’s in office. She’s an absolute cert for the Cabinet,” as Tom indicates (Hare, 1997b, p. 375, 1.1). No matter how successful they are, the Conservatives of the Thatcherite times are observed to be very competitive, which brings out continuous tension. According to the philosophy of this period, the more people earn, the more they wish to earn. Hence, it is not surprising that the Conservative government in the 1980s is, as Marion boasts, “quite a different world [w]ith extremely high standards of intellect and conduct” where “[c]ivil servants have an extremely competitive and highly ordered career structure” (p. 390, 1.2). It is their pride and materialism that not only makes them stressful but also brings them in opposition to the rest of the society. Therefore, what causes Marion to be uncomfortable in the play is the voice and the existence of this ‘other,’ this dissident part of the society, which is depicted through Isobel’s goodness, through “[her] self-possession and lack of interest in the ideology of the 1980s” (Carney, 2013, p. 42). David Hare says that he is enchanted by this conflict between good and evil, the self and the other:

once I began to write, it was as if my whole spirit had been taken over. I knew I had stumbled on this magnificent theme: that good people bring out the worst in all of us. As I have said before, God does not have to do anything in Paradise Lost. It is his very existence which drives the Devil crazy. Once I had hit on this idea, I just couldn't get the words down fast enough (1997a, p. xiv).

Out of these clashes between good and evil, monetarism and decency, and family and business, Hare presents another conflict, which is between Thatcherite religion and the pure goodness. Thatcherite ideology founded a kind of religious basis for its politics, which is represented in the play by no one other than Marion's husband, Tom. He comes forward in the play mostly with his devotion to Lord Jesus, "his God of commerce and coincidence" (Dean, 1990, p. 107). When asked the reason for his always being at ease, Tom answers that he does never feel angry "since [he] made Jesus [his] friend," who he believes makes things easier in his life (Hare, 1997b, p. 376, 1.1). He is a good Christian, more precisely, "a born-again Christian" of the 1980s (Homden, 1995, p. 173). Tom believes that his life is encircled by the presence of Jesus, who amazingly helps the former when he is desperately in need and who brings success in his business affairs.

There is an important factor that brings Tom together with Marion, which is deliberately constructed by the playwright for a political implication. The husband and wife are presented as parts and servants of the same capitalistic world of the 1980s. Tom is both a businessman and a pious man; moreover, he successfully unites these two in his personality. Marion, before a business contract is signed, introduces Tom's position to Isobel as an evidence of his trustworthiness in business life: "Tom is President of Christians in Business," which, for her, "makes it pretty clear he's a man [Isobel] can trust" and also "[h]e's a Chairman of his church's Ethical Committee" (Hare, 1997b, p. 419, 1.4). Just as his beliefs intrude into his business affairs, Tom's business and economic benefits also intrude into the religion he believes in and practices. In this respect, it can be considered that "Tom's God is, to say the very least, distinctly modern – one driven by the profit motive" and this God is a component of the business world (Dean, 1990, p. 109). Hence, this specific 'God' addresses a certain kind of society which is affluent. For instance, Tom and Marion build a swimming pool in their garden for "[Tom's] conversions" but it will be used not for all the people he baptises since "the Lord expects a certain level of decency" (Hare 1997b, p. 400, 1.3). The "level of decency" here is completely related to the "decent" material conditions, which means that people without a "decent" amount of wealth are denied the religious service provided by Tom. His religion alienates and others people who do not have any economic power while his wife's politics alienates and others less successful people, especially in terms of making a profit. Their family, in fact, is a kind of representation of the family structure which is idealised in Thatcher's Britain with its Victorian and capitalistic values. For Marion and Tom, not only is it essential to be married and to have children, but it is crucial to work hard, to earn a lot and to be pious.

In conflict with the religion and the lifestyle epitomised by Tom and Marion, the one who is put forward by the playwright is the goodness and basic human values embodied by Isobel. It is a controversial issue whether Isobel embodies the principles of a certain political faction or she appears with her own personal values. Carol Homden argues that, in spite of her dislike of the capitalistic world, "[Isobel] is not aligned with the Greens, the Left or nuclear disarmament" (1995, p. 173). For Lib Taylor, too, Isobel's goodness and morals have nothing to do with any religious or ideological form of thought (2007, p. 59). Finlay Donesky, similar to Homden and Taylor, asserts that Isobel represents goodness and her inherent goodness does not need any ideological basis to depend on (1996, p. 114). However, although Isobel does not give voice to certain political or ideological thoughts in an explicit manner, her construction as the representative of goodness has to do with the playwright's political concerns. In

The Secret Rapture, Hare, by means of Isobel, builds his own religious-moral epitome and produces a god-like figure as a reaction and as an alternative to the monetarist god of Thatcherism.

Most of the critics assert that Hare portrays the protagonist Isobel like a “martyr[]” (Oliva, 1990, p. 138; Nothof, 1994, p. 188) or like “a saint” (p. 188) or even like “Christ[]” (Dean, 1990, p. 114). It is, in fact, more tenable to agree with the idea of Isobel’s appearing more like a Saviour than only a saint or a martyr. Her Christ-like attributes are considered to be absurd, to a certain extent, in the age she lives in. To illustrate, Isobel genuinely mourns for her father, Robert, in contrast to the characters who are more interested in what he has handed down to them. She takes care of her alcoholic step-mother Katherine only because her father once loved her. Further, Isobel gives Katherine a position in her office at the cost of her own downfall in business. As for her relations with her sister, Isobel is always forgiving towards Marion, who continuously aggravates the former in their material and familial affairs. As to her love life, Isobel is betrayed by her lover Irwin only for the sake of money though she herself attaches little importance to material gain. Associated as with goodness, love and compassion, Isobel is betrayed and killed, like Christ, by the one she loves dearly, Irwin. Still, she does not judge or punish the people who hurt her, in a way, “she turns the other cheek” (Dean, 1990, p. 114).

The scene in which Isobel meets for business purposes with Tom, Marion, Katherine and Irwin, is reminiscent of the Last Supper. It is a significant scene which portrays Irwin’s betrayal to the Christ-like protagonist. During this meeting, Isobel is persuaded to expand her firm, which incites her ruin in business. Irwin, Isobel’s lover and business partner, is the last person who joins the meeting. He is also the last one who speaks about the contract but the only one who frustrates Isobel. Irwin, just like Judas, has had a secret talk and alliance with Marion and Tom before attending the meeting. It is Marion, who reveals the details of their alliance:

MARION: . . . we are proposing to double Irwin’s salary.

ISOBEL: Double it?

MARION: Yes. We did tell Irwin that.

ISOBEL: Irwin, is it true?

Irwin shrugs and smiles, boyishly.

IRWIN: They said it.

TOM: We rate him very highly.

ISOBEL: Yes. So do I (Her voice is very faint now. She seems dazed.) (Hare, 1997b, p. 425, 1.4).

Isobel really “rate[d]” Irwin “very highly” though uncertain it seems whether she will continue to do so. Isobel already knows what kind of people Marion, Tom and Katherine are. She has also witnessed what kind of an idea of family they have especially when Marion comes in a hurry to retrieve the expensive ring from her dead father and when Katherine attempts to sell Robert’s house immediately after his death. In short, as Irwin states, after “[Isobel’s] father’s dead,” the idea of family is gone and “[t]here is no family” but Isobel is “the only person who’s still hung up on it” (Hare, 1997b, pp. 406-407, 1.3). In the midst of all these unfortunate disillusionments, Irwin was the only one Isobel was sure that she could rely on even when everybody spoke against her. Furthermore, it was with Irwin she was planning, albeit without passion, to found a family and have a future. Contrary to her expectations, Irwin backstabs Isobel and leaves her by herself, which makes her an outcast once more not only in business or in social life but also in love. Hare puts Isobel’s love, “as a political intervention,” as well as a moral intervention, in opposition to the capitalistic hunger of the other characters (Carney, 2013, p. 40), who betray and who disclaim love considering the latter a kind of loss. Irwin, unlike Isobel, cannot take the risk of loss, the loss of money, and he prefers to lose Isobel’s affection.

Just as the betrayal scene evokes the Last Supper, Isobel's travel to an unknown land and her trans-like experience there accentuates her Christ-like image. Following her separation from her lover Irwin, Isobel, fearful of his obsessive love and of what he might do, needs to take a leave so she goes to Lanzarote, the only place for which she can find an immediate flight at the airport. The reason for her trip is to flee from all her problems but it is of no avail; her sense of duty to her father and her honesty to Irwin forces her to return. She says:

Paradise. I took all my clothes off and walked along the beach. Lanzarote was paradise. But unfortunately no use to me. (She laughs.) You can't get away. You think you can. You think you'll fly out. Just leave. Damn the lot of you, and go. Then you think, here I am, stark naked, sky-blue sea, miles of sand – I've done it! I'm free! Then you think, yes, just remind me, what am I meant to do now? (She stands, a mile away in a world of her own.) In my case there's only one answer. (She looks absently at them, as if they were not even present.) I must do what Dad would have wished. (She turns, as if this were self-evident.) That's it (Hare, 1997b, pp. 461-462, 2.6).

She understands that she could not break out of the problems in her life and she should do what her father would have wished her to do, which is to face and to deal with these problems. In Lanzarote, Isobel gets into a spiritual contact with her dead father; also, she experiences a "spiritual union with her own soul," which may be considered a kind of rapture (Donesky, 1996, p. 112). The title of the play, "the secret rapture," is actually a term used in Catholic theology, and it refers to "the moment when the nuns meet Christ" (Hare, 2015). Sean Carney, in his explanation of the 'secret rapture,' implies that in order to experience this rapture, one does not have to be a nun since it is "a moment of utter privacy and transport" through which anyone can get into contact with God (2013, p. 41). On the other hand, the concept of rapture also implies Christ's "Second Coming" when "Jesus would return to redeem all members of the church" (Stefon, 2018). In the play, the one who is associated with Christ is Isobel because as Flora Haines Loughhead states, her name is "a variant of Elizabeth," one of whose meanings is being "consecrated to God" (as cited in Golomb, 1990, p. 563). Out of these implications suggested by the term "rapture," it can be stated that the playwright leaves it obscure whether Isobel has an image of a nun, or a martyr, or a saint, or Christ. Due to this obscurity, it is not certain to say that Isobel, through her rapture, has been saved by Christ and ascended to the Heaven, or she herself is the one to save the souls through her death. However, considering what she experiences after the rapture, Isobel comes out more like Christ. Following the "mystical trance" she undergoes in Lanzarote, Isobel feels to have the "spiritual power within her" to combat all the problems and the people in her life (Donesky, 1996, p. 112). Hence, from this time on, she is able to battle the perversion in her age. As is apparent, her Christ-like image is what the playwright uses to oppose the politics and the society of the age.

The spiritual power Isobel has attained is illustrated in the play as her being "changed" after her return from the trip of rapture since she "appears tense, thin, but also strangely cheerful" (Hare, 1997b, p. 454, 2.6). She is now determined to make her own decisions rather than live according to what other people expect from her. After suffering a lot, Isobel is resolved to end her relationship with Irwin, to work no longer in her 'expanded' office, and to look after only what her father left her, his house and his wife. In short, she has made up her mind "to cut through the complexities of feelings with which she cannot cope and adopt a more monastic way of life [only] with Katherine" (Nothof, 1994, p. 190). Isobel's decisions after the trip are very radical ones in that they are in contrast to what is expected from her character as portrayed at the beginning of the play. She decides to yield no longer to other people's enforcements, which means that her silent goodness will make itself more visible and assertive. If this travel is considered Isobel's "rapture," it also prognosticates her imminent death, which is the inevitable element of the rapture. It is because the contact or "reunion" with Christ can be achieved only through death (Oliva, 1990, p. 138) and "the secret rapture," as Hare asserts, "means death, or love of death, or

death under life" (1990, p. 75). Hence, it is not a coincidence that the decisions she has made during this trip are the kind of decisions that will expedite her death.

According to Liorah Anne Golomb, who reads *The Secret Rapture* as a Christian allegory, the cross and the ideal virtues associated with it are represented by Isobel (1990, p. 570). Irwin, on the other hand, is incapable of "bear[ing]" this cross, that is, of "liv[ing] up to Isobel's standards"; therefore, by killing Isobel, he disposes of the burden of the cross (p. 570). In fact, he has never intended to bear that cross, which is the embodiment of Isobel's values so he first betrays and then kills her. In the scene she dies, the stage direction says that Isobel is in a blue raincoat "– blue being the iconographic colour for Hope and for the Virgin Mary" (Nothof, 1994, p. 188). It is also indicated in the same scene that Isobel has no shoes on her feet, which brings to mind the widespread "belief that Jesus walked to his crucifixion without shoes, although not specified in the gospels" (Golomb, 1990, p. 570). Furthermore, after her death, the other characters seem to have reformed and understood the true value of her goodness just as in the case of Christ's death. Isobel's emulation of Christ is augmented by the director Howard Davies in its original production at the National Theatre. In this performance, after she is shot, Isobel is shown to have died with her "arms akimbo as if to confirm her secret rapture in death" (Dean, 1990, p. 114). Moreover, the director resurrects Hare's Christ-like heroine at the end of the play by presenting Marion and Isobel "hav[ing] their arms outstretched and moving towards one another" (Golomb, 1990, p. 572). In this way, the director intends to give the impression that Isobel has really experienced her secret rapture and underlines her Christ-like image who has become a Saviour for her sister.

In spite of the Christian association of the secret rapture with suffering and death, some of the critics claim that Isobel's sufferings in the play have nothing to do with any religious thought since she does not enjoy suffering or quest for death, unlike the nuns. Although James Gindin asserts that Isobel has an "impulse toward self-destruction" and she suffers deliberately (1993, p. 172), Homden and Carney claim that Isobel does not want to suffer for the other characters (1995, p. 178; 2013, p. 2). It is also put forward by Carney and by the playwright that Isobel's goodness is "stoic" rather than religious (2013, p. 41; as cited in Homden 1995, p. 178). In fact, as it is disclosed in the play, Isobel does not suffer deliberately or willingly. She tells Irwin how she is tired of suffering: "I'm being turned into a person whose only function is to suffer. And believe me, it bores me just as much as it bores you" (Hare, 1997b, p. 439, 2.5). Therefore, after the Lanzarote trip, Isobel decides to end the sufferings she has undergone so far: "I've done a great deal of suffering. But that's over. I'm ready to move on" (p. 441, 2.5).

Isobel's grievances come to an end only through death. For Joan FitzPatrick Dean, her death is only an "escape from a world too brutal to tolerate her goodness" rather than a salvation (1990, p. 105). However, as the playwright creates a kind of religion as an alternative to that of the age, it is better to state that Isobel brings salvation, by means of her death, maybe not to that whole world but at least to some characters in that world. In the last act, for instance, since Isobel's goodness has brought peace to Tom and Marion, Marion asks her sister, though dead, to join them. She calls out to Isobel: "Isobel. We're just beginning. Isobel, where are you? (*She waits a moment.*) Isobel, why don't you come home?" (Hare, 1997b, p. 479; 2.8). Marion, a very successful Conservative politician, experiences "loss" for the first time with Isobel's death, which makes her vulnerable in emotional terms. Her grief and mourning allow her to be renovated spiritually (Donesky, 1996, p. 113) and to be transformed phenomenologically (Carney, 2013, p. 43). Marion, after Isobel's death, realises that she, like anybody else, can lose something or someone she loves dearly; in addition, she sees that she has emotions and is capable of mourning for one. Hence, through dying, Isobel redeems Marion and provides the playwright as well as the reader/audience with "a positive model of hope" for the future (Nothof, 1994, p. 192). The playwright here makes his political statement and points out that his alternative moral-religious system embodied

by Isobel, though seemingly dead, can reform a spirit who is shaped to a great extent under the influence of the politics of the age.

CONCLUSION

In consequence, *The Secret Rapture*, which is endowed with such universal issues as death or goodness, is an explicit end-product of the political and social conditions of the 1980s' Britain. The government's promotion of the free-market economy and individual enterprise made many British people businesspersons. The principal goal of the people in the business world of the 1980s was always to win just like the politicians of the decade who battle exorbitantly in order to win. This society shaped by Conservative politics is contrasted in *The Secret Rapture* with the previous generation along with their values such as goodness, honesty and decency. Hare makes up a new religion with the representation of these universal values and with the help of his Christ-like protagonist, Isobel, in contrast with the mercantile god of the Thatcherite world. Although he favours the values represented by the previous generation, he is aware of the fact that those values are dead as represented through the deaths of Isobel and her father. Nonetheless, Hare also believes in the idea of salvation, which the Saviour Isobel brings to the lives of the other characters with her death. In other words, Hare does not totally undermine the present society shaped by Conservative ideology, he cherishes the hope that it could be rehabilitated.

Article Information

Ethics Committee Approval:	It is exempt from the Ethics Committee Approval.
Informed Consent:	There is no participant in the study to explain the purpose or to ask for consent.
Financial Support:	The study received no financial support from any institution or project.
Conflict of Interest:	The author declares no conflict of interest.
Copyrights:	No material subject to copyright is included.

Ethical Statement: It is declared that scientific and ethical principles have been followed while carrying out and writing this study and that all the sources used have been properly cited. (Tuğba Ağkaş Özcan)

Copyright&License: Authors publishing with the journal retain the copyright to their work licensed under the CC BY-NC 4.0.

Cited as: Ağkaş Özcan, T. (2022). David Hare's Proposal of an Alternative Religion to Object to the Commercial Religion of Thatcherism. *Selçuk Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, (48), 107-118. DOI: 10.21497/sefad.1218394

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ağkaş Özcan, T. (2017). *The evolution of David Hare's political drama as observed in Fanshen, the secret rapture, and the absence of war* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Hacettepe University, Ankara.
- Billington, M. (1988, 6 October). The Midas touch. *Arts Guardian*, p. 25. Retrieved from <https://theguardian.newspapers.com/image/260346923/?terms=%22michael%20billington%22&match=1>.
- Billington, M. (2001, 29 January). Welcome Hare revival on the Thatcherite psyche. *The Guardian*, p. 19. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2001/jan/29/theatre.artsfeatures1>.
- Billington, M. (2007). *State of the nation: British theatre since 1945*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Carney, S. (2013). *The politics and poetics of contemporary English tragedy*. Toronto: University of Toronto.
- Dean, J. F. (1990). *David Hare*. Boston: Twayne.

- Donesky, F. (1996). *David Hare: Moral and historical perspectives*. Westport: Greenwood.
- Gindin, J. (1993). Freedom and form in David Hare's drama. J. Acheson (Ed.), in *British and Irish drama since 1960* (pp. 162-175). New York: St. Martin's.
- Golomb, L. A. (1990). Saint Isobel: David Hare's *the secret rapture* as Christian allegory. *Modern Drama*, 33(4), 563-574.
- Hare, D. (1990). Love, death and Edwina. M. Page (Comp.), S. Trussler (Ed.), in *File on Hare* (pp. 74-75). London: Methuen.
- Hare, D. (1993). Interview by Georg Gaston. *Theatre Journal*, 45, 213-225.
- Hare, D. (1997a). Introduction: Interview by editors at Faber and Faber. In *The secret rapture and other plays* (pp. i-xvii). New York: Grove.
- Hare, D. (1997b). *The secret rapture*. In *Plays 2* (pp. 361-479). London: Faber and Faber.
- Hare, D. (2005). *Obedience, struggle & revolt: Lectures on theatre*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Hare, D. (2015, 29 April). Dramatically speaking: Interview by Kathleen Tynan. *Printing new again: David Hare interview magazine*. <https://www.interviewmagazine.com/culture/new-again-david-hare>. Retrieved on 29.12.2021.
- Homden, C. (1995). *The plays of David Hare*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Milling, J. (2012). *Modern British playwriting: The 1980s, voices, documents, new interpretations*. London: Methuen.
- Nightingale, B. (1989, 22 October). David Hare captures his muse on stage. *The New York Times*, p. 5. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/10/22/theater/david-hare-captures-his-muse-on-stage.html>.
- Nothof, A. (1994). Virtuous women: Portraits of goodness in *the secret rapture*, *racing demon*, and *strapless*. H. Zeifman (Ed.), in *David Hare: A casebook* (pp. 185-200). New York: Garland.
- Oliva, J. L. (1990). *David Hare: Theatricalizing politics*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research.
- Oliva, J. L. (1997). Directing David Hare's *the secret rapture*: Issues toward a new aesthetic praxis. *Archives*, 11(2), 101-114.
- Peacock, D. K. (1999). *Thatcher's theatre: British theatre and drama in the eighties*. Westport: Greenwood.
- Rich, F. (1989, 27 October). Bad sister vs. good sister in Hare's 'secret rapture'. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/10/27/theater/review-theater-bad-sister-vs-good-sister-in-hare-s-secret-rapture.html>.
- Stefon, M. (2018, 26 October). the rapture. *Encyclopedia britannica*. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Rapture-the>.
- Su, J. J. (1997). Nostalgic rapture: Interpreting moral commitments in David Hare's drama. *Modern Drama*, 40(1), 23-37.
- Taylor, L. (2007). In opposition: Hare's response to Thatcherism. R. Boon (Ed.), in *The Cambridge companion to David Hare* (pp. 49-63). Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP.