

Harold Pinter

Half a Century of Enigmatic and Menacing Comedy

Walid Nabhan

Rebellious and a dangerous comedian, sturdy opponent of militarism and the pathology of power, playwright and dramatist Harold Pinter, this year's Nobel Prize winner in literature never spared his brave courage and profound intellect to illuminate the dark corners of human consciousness.

From the metaphoric to the concrete, and from the concrete to the uncomfortable truth, inexplicable and contemptuous, stubborn and ruthless enemy of the greediness of capital and a mammoth outspoken critic of the world deafness to the fatigued cries of the victims and the poor. Has been long considered a thorn in the side of the establishment for most of his life. The author of inscrutable and truculent plays such as *The Room*, *The Birthday Party*, *The Caretaker*, *Homecoming*, *New World Order* and *Ashes to Ashes* has been awarded Nobel Prize in literature.

The news of Pinter winning the world's most prestigious prize in literature certainly did not fall nicely on the ears of *Mr Pontila* (Bush) and his man *Matti* (Blair) and those who have cultivated theories such as the *End of History*, the *Neo-Liberalism* and the *Clash of Civilizations* and those who are dancing around the fire of wars which they lit.

In the footsteps of Beckett, his writings rarely leave the room. Beckett, who along side Eugene Ionesco and others, established the *Theatre of the Absurd* which emerged as an angry reaction to World War II and its atrocities. Absurd Theatre rejects the known elements of the traditional play; there's no logical episodic structure; no beginning no end, scenery is often unrecognizable, characters are mysterious, appear and leave unexpectedly, or at least that is how one would think. Dialogue among them, if there is any, is futile and rarely makes any sense. Place is insignificant, and very limited; it is a tree in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, and a chair in Ionesco's *The Chairs* and it is a room in Pinter's masterpiece and the cornerstone of his later works *The Room*. Absurdism discarded Aristotelian traditional theatre and instead it combined existential philosophy with dramatic elements to create a style of theatre which presented a world which can not be logically explained because life is simply very difficult to understand, in one word, ABSURD!

Born on October 10, 1930 in East London to a scurfy working - class Jewish family, Harold Pinter has written 29 plays, 29 screen plays including *The Servant*, *The Go-Between*, and *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. He has directed 27 theatre productions including James Joyce's *Exiles*, seven plays by Simon Gray and many of his own plays including his latest, *Celebration*.

The general mood in Harold Pinter plays is metaphoric but strongly invoking reality, and that is what really distinguishes him from his mentor Beckett. Characters sometimes horribly caricaturic, often experiencing a profound failure to communicate with each other; dialogue therefore, shrunken, sometimes reaching a complete silence, but the unsaid in a typical "Pinteresque" play is even more expressive than words, the echo of his silence, exposes the viewer and pushes him almost near nakedness. Pinter's modern and post-modern man has survived the scourge of two global wars, only to find himself succumbing to a more brutal beast; the Consumerist Society. Today's man

is terribly alone and always in a continuous race to accumulate more and more goods which will in the result, cut him off and isolate him even more and make him in no need at all to communicate with the other.

Harold Pinter uses his virulent cartoonish characters conscientiously to express his rage and objection and at the same time, he tries to dig deep in the sands of memory, searching for evidence that life has existed on a tiny planet called the earth...and that this life deserves more appreciation and more reflection.

Pinter's interest in politics grew publicly in recent years and became very well known for his fierce opposition to U.S. and Britain's so-called "War on Terror". The master of the "dramatic pause" became a rebel without a pause, taking almost every public platform to make moral pronouncements on current affairs. As "*citizen of the world in which I live*" he wrote, "*I insist upon taking responsibility.*"

In 1958 Harold Pinter wrote: "*There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false.*"

Today, after nearly half a century he wrote again: "*I believe that these assertions still make sense and do still apply to the exploration of reality through art. So as a writer I stand by them but as a citizen I cannot. As a citizen I must ask: What is true? What is false?*"

Whether people agree or disagree with Pinter's political views and whether the huge critique that Absurd Theatre in general has received throughout the years was justified, no one can dare to deny Pinter's unique contribution in bringing poetic beauty and sensibility back to British and world theatre. One ought not to forget the role of David Hare, Tom Stoppard and Peter Shaffer and others in this regard.

By calling things with their names... Harold Pinter never hid himself behind vagueness and elusiveness of words towards what is happening in our world...unlike many others, he never targeted the Nobel Prize, and declined top British honours and refused Knighthood and the title of Sir on several occasions, instead, he chose to put his finger on the wound and march with dignity, and certainly that is why, he deserved to be among the giants.

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