

An introduction to dread

TRIBUTE TO DRAMATIST PINTER
AT STANFORD SEEKS PERSPECTIVE
ON HIS ENIGMATIC WRITINGS

"Apart from the known and the unknown,
what else is there?"

BY KAREN D'SOUZA, MERCURY NEWS | That cryptic quote from Act 2 of "The Homecoming," a feral family reunion as depicted by Harold Pinter, hints at the puzzling mind of one of the world's greatest living playwrights and screenwriters. Indeed, his enigmatic body of work has given rise to the term Pinteresque, which means writing that can fill us with dread, or that we don't quite understand, and usually both. Suspense courses through Pinter's plays and screenplays like venom. And he is legendary for his deadly use of the pause . . . when explosive fragments of dialogue burst into lethal silence. Early critics opined that his plays actually defied total comprehension, like a Hitchcock movie with the last scene missing. But even if we never fully know where the nightmares are coming from, or how to combat them, there's no denying that Pinter's steely stories and language stab us where we live. In honor of his 75th birthday, the Stanford Summer Theater is celebrating the master of the comedy of menace today through Aug. 8 with a Harold Pinter Festival, including performances of "The Lover," "Night," "The Collection" and "Applicant" and screenings of some of his major films. There also will be a symposium on his life and work. Meanwhile, here, with partial lists of his writings, is a primer on the mysterious Mr. Pinter.

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The plays



JOSEF TOUPO

Rush Rehm and Kay Kostopoulos perform in Stanford Summer Theater's production of "The Lover."

"The Lover" (1964): A very proper middle-class husband and wife engage in bedroom fantasy fun and games.

"Night" (1969): Darkness falls as a long-married couple look back on their past and lose themselves in the unknowability of memory.

"The Lover" and "Night" will be staged at 8 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays and 7 p.m. Sundays through Aug. 7, with a matinee at 2 p.m. Aug. 6, at the Pigott Theater at Memorial Auditorium on Memorial Way on the Stanford campus. \$15 (\$12 for students and seniors).

"The Applicant" (1959): A young man applies for a job but remains in the dark about the woman conducting the torture, uh, interview. And you thought today's job market was harsh.

"The Collection" (1961): Yours, mine and ours can get messy. Adultery brings two couples together to wage a battle for who belongs to whom.

"The Applicant" and "The Collection" will be staged Fridays and Saturdays through Aug. 6 at 10 p.m. at the Eleanor Prosser Studio above the Pigott Theater. \$10 (\$5 for students and seniors).

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JONATHAN PLAYER — NEW YORK TIMES

More works of Harold Pinter

THE PLAYS

"The Room" (1957): Pinter's first play. A working class couple languishes in a grubby one-room abode until strange visitors intrude.

"The Dumb Waiter" (1957): Think "Waiting for Godot" with guns. Two hit men sit and stew in a Birmingham basement, waiting for orders about their next job. As brutal as it is obscure, this play can be read as a metaphor for state-sanctioned terrorism or for corporate lackeys run amok. (Director Robert Altman made a movie version of "The Room" and "The Dumb Waiter" called "Basements" in 1987.)

"The Birthday Party" (1957): Cake and ice cream meet Kafka in this ominous boardinghouse drama where, once again, outsiders upset the domestic peace. Dismissed by many critics at the time for its unremitting lack of clarity, the play has earned an esteemed place in the theater of the absurd.

"The Caretaker" (1960): Home is where the hostility is. Pinter perfects his home-invasion plot in this masterpiece about a man who invites an irascible tramp in to get a leg up, only to realize he can't get him out. A coolly bleak film version directed by Clive Donner in 1963 starred Donald Pleasence and Alan Bates.

"The Homecoming" (1964): A harrowing tale of a man bringing the wife home to meet the folks. The family reunion erupts in depravity and despair.

"Old Times" (1970): It's like Proust and that madeleine, only not so sweet. Remembrance of things past undermines another long-held marriage when the wife's college chum appears on the scene with a very dif-

ferent take on who she is and who she was.

"Betrayal" (1978): Be unkind, rewind. Pinter tracks a broken marriage in reverse, starting from the last gasp and rewinding all the way to the first bloom of romance. Made into a film by David Hugh Jones in 1983 with Jeremy Irons and Ben Kingsley.

"A Kind of Alaska" (1982): A look into a catatonic mind suddenly coming awake to the world. Based on Oliver Sacks' "Awakenings."

"Celebration" (1999): A biting comedy of bad manners set at a posh restaurant frequented by nouveau riche social climbers who not only don't know what's happening in the world but also don't really care. As long as the cash flows.

THE ACTING ROLES

"The Servant" (1963): Another Pinter-Losey-Bogarde collaboration, this diabolical deconstruction of class in '60s Britain features Pinter in a cameo as the Society Man.

"Mansfield Park" (1999): Class matters in this adaptation of a Jane Austen novel, the story of a poor, young girl whose mother married for love and who now is forced to survive on the whims of her wealthy relatives. Pinter does a turn as the smugly superior Sir Thomas.

"The Tailor of Panama" (2001): Pinter plays Uncle Benny in this new world (dis)order spy thriller starring Pierce Brosnan, Geoffrey Rush, Jamie Lee Curtis and Brendan Gleeson.

— Karen D'Souza

The films

To be shown at 7:30 p.m. Mondays in Room 002 of Building 200 in the History Corner on Stanford's Main Quad. Admission is free.

Tonight

"Accident" (1967): A married Oxford professor (Dirk Bogarde) has a midlife crisis that ends in tragedy. Directed by Joseph Losey.

July 18

"The Go-Between" (1970): In 1900, a woman (Julie Christie) is about to be engaged to a viscount (Edward Fox) but uses a 13-year-old boy to carry messages to and from a neighbor (Alan Bates). Soon the boy realizes there's betrayal in the wind. Directed by Joseph Losey.

July 25

"The French Lieutenant's Woman" (1981): Ooh, la la. Pinter's intoxicating adaptation of John Fowles' novel spins a story-within-a-story between 19th-century

lovers and 20th-century actors portraying them. Crackling chemistry between Meryl Streep and Jeremy Irons helps the film seduce us with the ambiguous nature of identity. Directed by Karel Reisz.

Aug. 1

"Turtle Diary" (1985): A man and a woman (Ben Kingsley and Glenda Jackson) plan to steal turtles from the London Zoo to set them free. Directed by John Irvin.

Aug. 8

"The Handmaid's Tale" (1990): Welcome to a near-future nightmare society where environmental toxins have rendered most women infertile and martial law forces the rest to service the rich. So, like, recycle already! With Faye Dunaway, Robert Duvall and Natasha Richardson, directed by Volker Schlöndorff.

The beginnings

Born in 1930, a tailor's son in Hackey, a blue-collar neighborhood London's East End, he lived through the Blitz as a boy. His grandparents were Ashkenazi Jews who had fled the pogroms in Eastern Europe.

The politics

Frequently outspoken about human rights violations over the years, Pinter recently has targeted U.S. foreign policy.



JOHN GARDEY — CINECOM

Natasha Richardson and Robert Duvall in "The Handmaid's Tale," a film from a Pinter screenplay.

The symposium

Readings, short performances and a discussion of Pinter's plays and politics. Participants will include playwright Amy Freed, Stanford drama professor Alice Rayner, directors Jeffrey Bihl and Ed Iskandar and Stanford Summer Theater veterans Rush Rehm and Kay Kostopoulos. 7 to 9:30 p.m. July 20 at the Pigott Theater. \$20.

For tickets

To the plays: (650) 725-ARTS; (650) 725-5838 (after hours); www.stanford.edu/group/summertheater
To the symposium: <http://continuingstudies.stanford.edu>
(no tickets needed for admission to the films)

On the Web

To check out Pinter on Pinter, click onto the playwright's official Web site at www.haroldpinter.org