

## **HAROLD PINTER**

**1930 – 2008**

### **Actor, director, writer**

Harold said to me once of Arthur Miller that he was "a hell of a fellow". So was Harold.

It's hard to imagine our cultural anatomy without his work in the bloodstream. In the theatre he gave us *The Birthday Party*, *The Caretaker*, *The Homecoming*, *No Man's Land* and *Betrayal*; in the cinema, *The Servant*, *Accident*, *The Go-Between* and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* – all work of rare power and originality. He became adjectival, part of who and what we are: hearing a threat-laden silence in domestic life described as "Pinteresque" is now as familiar as hearing an encounter with bureaucracy as "Kafkaesque".

Harold readily admitted that he had learnt much from Kafka – and for that matter Beckett and Joyce – but the truth was that the voice in his writing was entirely his own: immediately recognisable and yet alien, like a familiar object viewed from an unusual angle. His plays and screenplays don't glut you with exposition, things just happen without their significance being spelled out, portraying a world in which the meaning of things is at best opaque and the most normal condition of life is uncertainty. Feelings – particularly of men – are articulated obliquely or mutely, mostly remaining trapped like water under an icecap.

He distills normal speech – the kind you'd hear on a bus or in a pub – into a language that's syncopated with hard wit and percussive poetry and, by using silence as a dramatic tool, he demonstrates that the best theatre is as much about the spaces between the words as the words themselves.

He was sometimes pugnacious and occasionally splenetic, but was just as often droll and generous – particularly to actors, directors and other writers. Sometimes grandiose and occasionally intolerant he could be disarmingly modest, unostentatious and comradely. And he was never, ever, afraid to speak his mind, particularly on political matters.

He was a constant fighter for the oppressed, a passionate polemicist, a fair cricketer, an authoritative director, a good actor and a great playwright.

Richard Eyre