

The Birthday Party

-Harold Pinter

- Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* (1957), was the playwright's first commercially-produced, full-length play.
- He began writing the work after acting in a theatrical tour, during which, in Eastbourne, England, he had lived in "filthy insane digs."
- This became the model for the rundown boarding house of the play and the woman and her tenant the models, respectively, for the characters of Meg Boles and Stanley Webber.
- The major themes are the failure of language to serve as an adequate tool of communication, the use of place as a sanctum that is violated by menacing intruders, and the surrealistic confusions that obscure or distort fact.
- In the setting of a rundown seaside boarding house, a little birthday party is turned into a nightmare when two sinister strangers arrive unexpectedly.
- The play has been classified as a comedy of menace, characterised by elements such as ambiguous identity, confusions of time and place, and dark political symbolism.
- An example of the Theatre of the Absurd. It includes such features as the fluidity and ambiguity of time, place, and identity and the disintegration of language.
- Like many of Pinter's other plays, very little of the expository information in *The Birthday Party* is verifiable; it is contradicted by the characters and otherwise ambiguous, and, therefore, one cannot take what they say at face value.
- According to John Russell Brown, "Falsehoods are important for Pinter's dialogue, not least when they can be detected only by careful reference from one scene to another.... Some of the more blatant lies are so casually delivered that the audience is encouraged to look for more than is going to be disclosed. This is a part of Pinter's two-pronged tactic of awakening the audience's desire for verification and repeatedly disappointing this desire".