

Pinter Nobel Acceptance Speech
By Dennis Corcoran

[Empty theatre, except for light, sound and video tech who is in the booth, out of sight but audible and a stagehand, off stage right. We first hear then see the stagehand and PINTER as stagehand wheels PINTER onto the set to begin the day's recording of Pinter's Nobel Award "Lecture" or acceptance speech. PINTER, weak from cancer, is in a wheelchair with a lap robe covering his legs. As the dialogue begins, PINTER, wearing a lavalier mic, is wheeled to center stage. The mic is off.]

PINTER

I apologize for the shortness of yesterday's session ...

JOHN/LYDIA

Not at all, Mr. Pinter ...

PINTER

It's just that I tire so quickly these days ... the cancer, and all.

JOHN/LYDIA

No bother here. Were you able to rest last evening?

PINTER

Yes, thank you. I had a very good rest ... and I intend to finish this today, come hell or high water. *[pause, looking around theatre]* Is Luc/Emma here?

JOHN/LYDIA

Yes, he/she's here somewhere. Hold on a moment. *[yelling into theatre]* Luc/Emma, you here? *[pause, nothing, then louder]* Luc/Emma?

LUC/EMMA

[yelling from behind booth where s/he was patching cables] Yeah ... up here. What's up?

JOHN/LYDIA

Mr. Pinter is here to finish recording the Nobel Lecture. You ready for him?

LUC/EMMA

Yeah ... hi, Mr. Pinter ...

PINTER

Hello, Luc/Emma ...

LUC/EMMA

... just give me a moment ... we'll run sound and video checks, then be on our way.

JOHN/LYDIA

Can I get you anything, Mr. Pinter?

PINTER

Water would be wonderful, yes, thank you.

JOHN/LYDIA

Sure enough ... *[he exits to get a bottle of water leaving **PINTER** on stage.]*

LUC/EMMA

I thought what you said yesterday about how you write your plays ... the use of language and all, was really interesting, Mr. Pinter.

PINTER

Thank you, Luc/Emma. *[**JOHN/LYDIA** returns with water, gives it to **PINTER**].*
Thank you, John/Lydia.

JOHN/LYDIA

No problem ... *[looking up toward booth - pause]* Are you ready?

LUC/EMMA

Just about ... are the spike marks still in place from yesterday?

JOHN/LYDIA

Let me check ... *[s/he checks floors then yells back]* Yeah, they're here.

LUC/EMMA

Cool. I saved the light cues, so we're just about ready. Move Mr. Pinter onto the spike marks, will ya?

[JOHN/LYDIA move PINTER's chair]

JOHN/LYDIA

Got it.

LUC/EMMA

Ok, Mr. Pinter. I'm going to bring up the lights. John/Lydia, would you make sure Mr. Pinter's mic is on.

JOHN/LYDIA

[s/he checks] It is.

LUC/EMMA

Great. *[pause – adjusting some settings]* Ok, Mr. Pinter – how about you starting into your speech ...

PINTER

I prefer to call it a lecture, if you don't mind ...

LUC/EMMA

Fine ... how about a few lines of your lecture ... just so I can do sound and video checks.

PINTER

Should I start where I left off yesterday?

LUC/EMMA

[Thinking a moment] Sure. I can add a transition frame. Are you dressed the same as yesterday?

PINTER

Yes, I think so.

LUC/EMMA

Can you be sure ... If so, we can just pick up where we left off ...

PINTER

[PINTER checks himself out then says] Yes, precisely the same.

LUC/EMMA

Great I'm rolling here – whenever you want to start ...

PINTER

[Clears his throat, straightens his posture, then begins] ... Language in art remains a highly ambiguous transaction, a quicksand, a trampoline, a frozen pool which might give way under you, the author ...

LUC/EMMA

... That's good, Mr. Pinter. We're ready ... you can stay on stage, John/Lydia, if you want, but move off left just a bit, please ... [*JOHN/LYDIA moves stage left*] Yeah, that's good. Ok ... I'll slate it, Mr. Pinter, then you take it from there. ... [*pause*] ...
PINTER - NOBEL SPEECH 2005 - TAKE TWO.

PINTER

Nobel Lecture, if you don't mind, please ...

LUC/EMMA

[*A bit put out*] Sorry. Right – [*pause*] – PINTER – NOBEL LECTURE 2005 – TAKE TWO.

PINTER

[*clears his throat again, sips some water, puts the bottle under his lap robe, then begins.*]

... Language in art remains a highly ambiguous transaction, a quicksand, a trampoline, a frozen pool which might give way under you, the author, at any time. But as I have said, the search for the truth can never stop. It cannot be adjourned, it cannot be postponed. It has to be faced, right there, on the spot.

Political language ... however ... does not venture into any of this territory ... Politicians ... are interested not in truth but in power ... and ... To maintain that power, it is essential that people remain in ignorance ... live in ignorance of the truth ... What surrounds us therefore is a vast tapestry of lies, upon which we feed.

As every single person here knows, the justification for the invasion of Iraq was that Saddam Hussein possessed a highly dangerous body of weapons of mass destruction ... We were assured that was true. It was not true. We were told ... Iraq had a relationship with Al Qaeda and shared responsibility for the atrocity of ... 9-11. We were assured ... this was true. It was not true. We were told ... Iraq threatened the security of the world. We were assured it was true. It was not true.

The truth is something entirely different. I was present ...

LUC/EMMA

Excuse me, Mr. Pinter ... Is this still your Nobel speech ...? Seriously?

PINTER

Yes, my Nobel “lecture” – yes, it is. Why do you ask?

LUC/EMMA

It just sounds like a huge slam on the US ... *[pause]* I thought Nobel speeches were supposed to be about ... you know, whatever you got the award for. Like the stuff you were saying yesterday ... how you right plays ... all that ...

PINTER

They are, Luc/Emma ... or so I suppose them to be. Mr. Engdahl, chairman of the academy, said in his award letter my plays “force open oppression’s closed rooms”. His words, not mine. That’s why I titled this lecture: Art, Truth and Politics. I am trying to expose the truth of United States foreign policy – force open one of the nation’s many closed rooms, if you will. ... Do you take issue?

LUC/EMMA

[wanting to speak but recognizing s/he is just a techie doing a job] I ... well ... it doesn’t matter, I guess. *[pause]* ... We’re still rolling, Mr. P ... let’s move along.

PINTER

[a bit agitated, sips water and returns it under robe, clears his throat, then resumes]

I was present at a meeting at the US embassy in London in the late 1980s. The United States Congress was about to decide whether to give more money to the Contras in their campaign against the state of Nicaragua. I was a member of a delegation speaking on behalf of Nicaragua but the most important member of this delegation was a Father John Metcalf. The leader of the US body was Raymond Seitz (then number two to the ambassador, later ambassador himself).

Father Metcalf said: ‘Sir, I am in charge of a parish in the north of Nicaragua. My parishioners built a school, a health centre, a cultural centre. We have lived in peace. A few months ago a Contra force attacked the parish. They destroyed everything: the school, the health centre, the cultural centre. They raped nurses and teachers, slaughtered doctors, in the most brutal manner. They behaved like savages. Please demand that the US government withdraw its support from this shocking terrorist activity.’

PINTER (contd)

Raymond Seitz ... was greatly respected in diplomatic circles. He listened, paused and then spoke with some gravity. 'Father,' he said, 'let me tell you something. In war, innocent people always suffer.'

There was a frozen silence. We stared at him. He did not flinch.

Innocent people, indeed, always suffer.

As we were leaving ... a US aide told me that he enjoyed my plays. I did not reply.

The United States supported the brutal Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua for over 40 years. The Nicaraguan people, led by the Sandinistas, overthrew this regime in 1979, a breathtaking popular revolution.

The Sandinistas weren't perfect (But) They set out to establish a stable, decent, pluralistic society. The death penalty was abolished. ... Over 100,000 families were given title to land. Two thousand schools were built. ... illiteracy () was reduced () to less than one seventh. Free education was established and a free health service. Infant mortality was reduced by a third. Polio was eradicated.

The United States denounced these achievements as Marxist/Leninist subversion (and commonly described Nicaragua as a 'totalitarian dungeon' () But there was in fact no record of death squads under the Sandinista government () no record of torture () no record of systematic () brutality. ...

The United States finally brought down the Sandinista government ... The casinos moved back in (), Free health and free education were over. Big business returned ().

'Democracy' had prevailed.

The United States supported and in many cases engendered every right wing military dictatorship in the world after the end of the Second World War. I refer to Indonesia, Greece, Uruguay, Brazil, Paraguay, Haiti, Turkey, the Philippines, Guatemala, El Salvador, and, of course, Chile. The horror the United States inflicted upon Chile in 1973 can never be purged and can never be forgiven.

I put to you that the United States is without doubt the greatest show on the road. Brutal, indifferent, scornful and ruthless ...

LUC/EMMA

Excuse me, Mr. Pinter, but this ... this kind-of pisses me off. I mean, where do you get off, sitting there, criticizing my country like this? I know I'm just here to do a job but,

LUC/EMMA (contd)

hell ... you're doing a job on my country and ... what? ... I'm supposed to sit here and say nothing ...?

PINTER

Authors pen thoughts, Luc/Emma. The truth. Their own truths ... as they see them. As they believe them to be. I am merely

LUC/EMMA

[said disgustedly] ... yeah, okay ... let's just get this done ...

PINTER

Have I offended you ...?

LUC/EMMA

True that ...!

PINTER

I'm sorry. I don't mean to offend ... *[pause]* ... or, perhaps, I do. You see, it is vitally important, in my view, that I ...someone ... pierce this mist ... this ... this ... veil or canopy of lies which ...

[pauses, senses he must finish before strength fails, continues with renewed clarity]

... Let me continue ... while I have the energy for it. *[clears his throat]*

Listen to all American presidents on television say the words, 'the American people' ... Language is ... used ... to keep thought at bay. The words 'the American people' - ... truly (a) voluptuous cushion of reassurance. You don't need to think. Just lie back on the cushion. The cushion may be suffocating your intelligence ... but it's very comfortable. This does not apply of course to the 40 million people living below the poverty line and the 2 million men and women imprisoned in the vast gulag of prisons, which extends across the US ...

[pauses, gets more comfortable in chair obviously feeling more pain]

PINTER (contd)

The invasion of Iraq was a bandit act ... demonstrating absolute contempt for ... international law ... an arbitrary military action inspired by a series of lies ... and ... responsible for the death and mutilation of thousands ... of innocent people.

How many people do you have to kill ... to be described as a mass murderer ... a war criminal ... At least 100,000 Iraqis were killed by American bombs and missiles (yet) These people are of no moment. Their deaths don't exist. Even ... The American dead () don't exist. They are transported to their graves in the dark. Funerals are unobtrusive ()

[he pauses ... gathers strength] ...

Here is an extract from a poem by Pablo Neruda entitled: "I'm Explaining a Few Things"

And one morning, all that was burning,
one morning the bonfires leapt out of the earth
devouring human beings
and from then on fire,
gunpowder from then on,
and from then on blood.

Bandits with planes and Moors,
bandits with finger-rings and duchesses,
bandits with black friars spattering blessings came through the sky to kill children
and the blood of children ran through the streets without fuss, like children's blood.

Jackals that the jackals would despise
stones that the dry thistle would bite on and spit out,
vipers that the vipers would abominate.

Face to face with you I have seen the blood of Spain tower like a tide
to drown you in one wave of pride and knives.

Treacherous generals:
see my dead house, look at broken Spain:
 from every house, burning metal flows instead of flowers
 from every socket of Spain, Spain emerges
 and from every dead child, a rifle with eyes
 and from every crime, bullets are born
which will one day find the bull's eye of your hearts.

And you will ask: why doesn't his poetry speak of dreams and leaves
and the great volcanoes of his native land.

PINTER (contd)

Come and see the blood in the streets.
Come and see - the blood in the streets.
Come and see the blood - in the streets!

[he pauses again ... weakening quickly]

The United States now occupies 702 military installations () in 132 (separate) countries ()
Many thousands, if not millions, of (Americans) are demonstrably sickened, shamed and
angered by their government's actions ()

I know ... President Bush has many (fine) speech writers but I would like to volunteer for
the job myself. I propose the following short (televised) address. I see him grave
(serious, sincere, employing a wry smile), curiously attractive, a man's man.

God is good. God is great. God is good. My God is good. Bin Laden's God is bad. His is
a bad God. Saddam's God was bad, except he didn't have one. He was a barbarian. We
are not barbarians. We don't chop people's heads off. We believe in freedom. So does
God. I am not a barbarian. I am the democratically elected leader of a freedom-loving
democracy. We are a compassionate society. We give compassionate electrocution ...

LUC/EMMA

[Shouting, angry] I'm done ... NO MORE! I'M NOT GOING TO LISTEN TO ANY
MORE OF THIS!

PINTER

[Shouting back] ... and compassionate lethal injection. We are a great nation. I am not a
dictator. He is. I am not a barbarian. He is. And he is. They all are. I possess moral
authority.

*[LUC/EMMA shuts down the lights
but PINTER continues in darkness]*

You see this fist? This is my moral authority. And don't you forget it.'

I believe that despite the enormous odds which exist, () fierce intellectual determination,
as citizens, to define the *real* truth of our lives and our societies ...

*[JOHN/LYDIA begins wheeling PINTER off stage left.
PINTER continues, shouting]*

PINTER (contd)

... is a crucial obligation ... If such a determination is not embodied in our political vision, we have no hope of restoring what is so nearly lost to us ...

[a fierce shout from out of sight in the wing)

... the dignity of man.

EOP