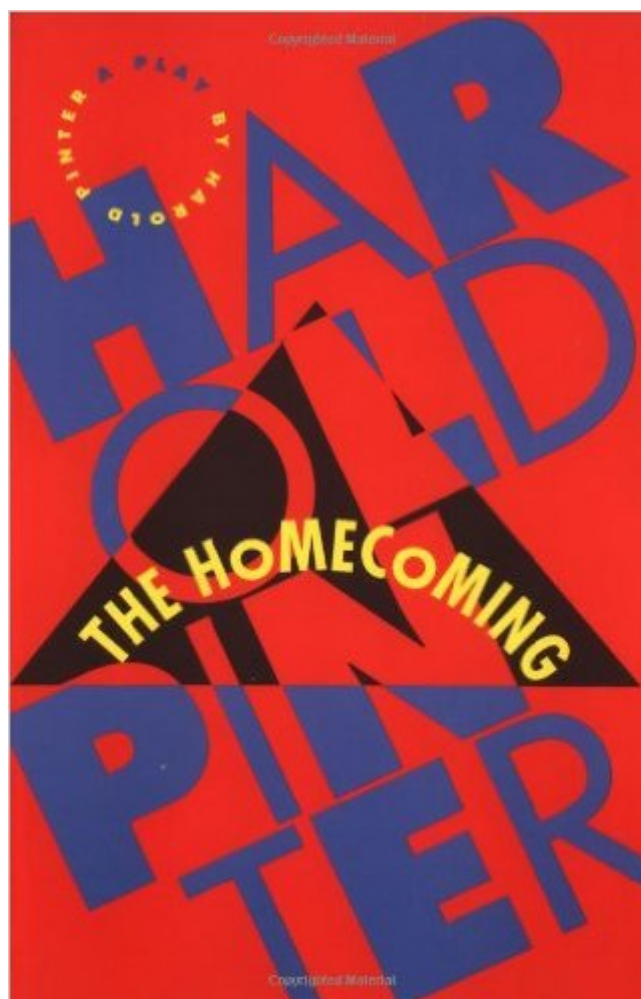


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The Homecoming



Synopsis

In an old and slightly seedy house in North London there lives a family of men: Max, the aging but still aggressive patriarch; his younger, ineffectual brother Sam; and two of Max's three sons, neither of whom is married -- Lenny, a small-time pimp, and Joey, who dreams of success as a boxer. Into this sinister abode comes the eldest son, Teddy, who, having spent the past six years teaching philosophy in America, is now bringing his wife, Ruth, home to visit the family she has never met. As the play progresses, the younger brothers make increasingly outrageous passes at their sister-in-law until they are practically making love to her in front of her stunned but strangely aloof husband.

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Customer Reviews

Pinter at his darkest and most experimental. This play's first and second acts are of equal length down to the line. Sexual deviance, abuse, name calling, assault and torture: these are the norm. These people make the rest of our families seem pretty good. The play is twisted and as much a psychological journey as anything else. Pinter lives up the claim that his plays were like, "Beckett in doors," with this one. Though most of Pinter's plays have a dark edge to them, this one may even cross over the line, if you are paying close attention to what is really going on. Worth reading at least twice, after the shock from the first time through, the second read (if read closely), becomes even darker and more forbidding. Wonderfully written, and further proof that Pinter is one of the masters of modern British drama.

Harold Pinter, *The Homecoming* (Grove, 1965) I spent the first act of this effort from our most recent Nobel Prize winner for literature thinking "my, this is all well and good, but what is it about this play that had everyone telling me this needs to be the first Pinter I read?" Then came act two, and I understood it. *The Homecoming* starts off (as you might expect given that first paragraph) unassumingly enough; a man and his wife of six years return to his ancestral home. His brothers, uncle, and father live there, and are meeting his wife for the first time; the brothers, roustabouts both of them, act a bit oddly (well, actually, a bit naturally) around the wife at first, but there's nothing terribly out of the ordinary. In fact, there's a surprising lack of family tension; the normally prickly father welcomes his wayward son home with open arms. Then, of course, everything goes to pot in the most entertaining manner possible. I have spent years reading thousands of volumes wondering why it is that everyone has to over-emote; *The Homecoming* is the absolute, perfect antithesis, and I spent the entire second act wishing that these characters inhabited at least half the novels I've read in the past decade. They're deliciously perverse, and so very deadpan about it. Now, while Pinter is busy creating these characters and putting them into interesting situations (and the situations are interesting enough that the entire play can take place in a single room), he's offering some excellent satire on the family dynamic, but Pinter is talented enough to let the satire speak for itself while he concentrates on the story at hand, the mark of a man who knows how to write. This is very good stuff, and I'll definitely be diving farther into Pinter in the coming years. *** Æ Æ

So THIS is Pinter? I have finally, for the first time, gotten around to reading the lauded Harold Pinter. What an introduction. For those unfamiliar with *The Homecoming* it's an extremely strange tale of a highly dysfunctional family, a widowed father and his grown male sons, all but one of whom still live in the family home. The bickering and petty rivalries are familiar enough, even the insults and disrespect they show each other are no worse than might be seen in other conflicted families. But... when the "prodigal" son returns with his new wife for a visit and his father and brothers, within a few days, easily take ownership of her, sexually and otherwise, one realizes this is not just another tale of family tensions or idiosyncrasies. I'm still unsure exactly what this play is about - beyond the shock value there's some message or cautionary tale or social commentary here, but in all honesty, I have yet to put my finger on it. In some ways this play seems entirely modern, ahead of its time, and in others it reeks of a primitive sensibility. My only advice is to read it yourself... and ponder.

"*The Homecoming*" was labeled by one early critic as a "comedy of menace", and I feel that sums it

up better than anything else I have heard. This is a dark, deeply ambiguous, and funny play. I first read this play in college, and then again recently, soon after seeing an excellent production of it at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival in Ontario Canada starring Brian Dennehy. Being older and more experienced, I feel much better about the play then I did when I first encountered it years ago. I am hesitant to say what the play is about, because even after seeing a very good production, and reading the text closely, there are a myriad of possibilities about how to interpret the script, and the nuances therein. The play certainly is about family relationships, sexual jealousy, gender power dynamics, and many other things to boot. And yet, Pinter never gives us an insight into what he really thinks about these things, and at times I am not even sure the characters do. And it works! A strength of the play are the characters Max and Lenny. In Lenny especially Pinter has created a daunting and very intriguing character that can make the audience squirm in their seats. He is dark, funny, smart, and a pimp. A wonderful role for a talented performer to sink his teeth into. In fact, all of the roles have wonderful possibilities in performance. However, the greatest power in the play lies not in what is said, but rather in what is NOT said. It is there that the reader is stimulated into following up on hints in the text, and making up most of the story for themselves in their head. The infamous "Pinter pause" is certainly on display in this work. I can imagine many interesting conversations to be had while arguing about what the play is really saying. Some readers hate that ambiguity, I love it. It is a personal preference so be warned, if you pick up "The Homecoming" you will be left with more questions than answers.

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