

The Coronation Of Harold Pinter

by Charles Marowitz

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"The Collection," recently performed in English by "That Theatre Company" in Copenhagen, is a good example of a mystery that remains disturbingly unsolved. It is as if Agatha Christie, having woven a harrowing plot filled with crimes and deceptions, decides to withhold the final scene in which the deductive Inspector from Scotland Yard reveals neither the perpetrator nor the motivation of the guilty party. It is a mystery play which is strangely redolent of the Mystery Plays of medieval Europe, except for the fact that it is secular rather than religious, but still inhabited by a sense of "other worldliness."

The play in Copenhagen should be sought out if for no other reason than because it possesses a perfectly balanced central performance by a mysterious and beguiling Danish/British actress named Sira Stampe, which is redolent of the kind of work Vivien Merchant used to turn out in the early Pinter plays. (Merchant was the first Mrs. Harold Pinter.) Stampe, a recent graduate of the Webber-Douglas Academy in London, casts a palpable aura over "The Collection" producing precisely that kind of enigmatic allure that deeply-rooted Pinterian female characters must have if their ambiguity is to be both spellbinding and perplexing.

The play itself concerns a one-night stand that may or may not have taken place between a wife and a rough-hewn, bisexual lover who cohabits with an overprotective male dress-designer. After all its slithery permutations, it ends on a deceptive cadence with the husband believing that no assignation actually took place while Sira Stampe's Mona Lisa smile nudges us to determine whether she is lying or not. A typical Pinterian shadow play in which everything is implied but nothing concrete supplied. The audience leaves with a disquieting suspicion that, in personal relationships, nothing is ever conclusively knowable."