

# Via Dolorosa

## David Hare (1998)

In 1997 David Hare visited Israel and the Palestinian territory. *Via Dolorosa*, the play he wrote about his journey, offers a remarkable insight into the prejudices, passions and mutual suspicions that lie beneath the recent eruption of violence in the region. Three years later he revisited the Holy Land. These are his reflections.

### **Backcover**

*'People always say that in England we lead shallow lives. Our lives must be shallow because we live in a country where nobody believes in anything any more. My whole life I've been told, "Western civilization? An old bitch gone in the teeth." And so people say, go to Israel. Because in Israel they're fighting for something they believe in.'*

In 1997, after many invitations, the fifty-year-old British playwright resolved finally to visit the fifty-year-old state of Israel. The resulting play, written to be performed by the author himself, offers a meditation on an extraordinary trip to both Israel and the Palestinian territory, which leaves Hare questioning his own values as searchingly as the powerful beliefs of those he met.

Accompanying *Via Dolorosa* is the 1996 lecture *When Shall We live?*, which also addresses questions of art and faith. Originally given in Westminster Abbey as the Eric Symes Memorial Lecture, it attracted huge correspondence when an abridged version was published in the *Daily Telegraph*.

Fairly full text at:

Y <http://www.stoa.org.uk/topics//israel-palestine/via-dolorosa-by-david-hare.pdf>

Y <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2000/oct/28/books.israelandthepalestinians>

**Reviews at** <http://www.complete-review.com/reviews/hared/viadolo.htm>

*Consensus:*

Very positive, an earnest, clever, well-done job, almost no real criticism of his approach. Kid glove treatment. (Hare's actual performance (and the productions) came in for more criticism; this has been parsed out of our summaries as much as possible.)

*From the Reviews:*

"Though written for the stage, the piece can also profitably be read, much like a long magazine article, as a record of his encounters and reactions." - The Economist

"Inside David Hare the playwright there has always been a journalist struggling to get out. But the two merge perfectly in this one-man play, which is both a brilliant piece of reportage about Hare's journey to the Middle East and a cunningly shaped work of art." - Michael Billington, The Guardian

"Radio may well be the script's natural home." - Don Shirley, The Los Angeles Times (Note: this review refers to the radio broadcast of the performance)

"Hare deals eloquently, compassionately, and feelingly with most of the issues currently roiling this stormy area. (...) Given the enormity of his subject, Hare does a sound if synoptic job with his material." - Robert Brustein, The New Republic

"Hare elegantly includes himself, Hampstead and Christianity in the piece so that he is moored within it and its arguments. The result is an exceptionally moving evening: passionate, thought-provoking and individual." - Kate Kellaway, New Statesman

"So Hare is made to take the Middle East personally. That's what gives *Via Dolorosa* such a powerful edge. (...) It is 90 minutes of exacerbation and unraveling, of a mind at the end of its tether." - John Leonard, New York

"It's as if Hare can't quite bring himself to believe in his own lack of conviction. Confusion also surrounds *Via Dolorosa* itself. It's unclear in what sense it is drama, and if so, who's performing it. Up on stage, it's certainly Sir David himself. But is he himself, or just impersonating himself?" - Glen Newey, Times Literary Supplement

"Always, (Hare) offers offbeat humor amid contradictions, poignancy in moments of terror, and squalor plus humanity behind the political convictions." - David Patrick Stearns, USA Today

"(W)hatever the flaws in *Via Dolorosa*, Hare has not written a faked-up, pretentious, pseudo-religious work, but a well-meaning and honest piece of journalism." - Michael Feingold, The Village Voice

"Mr. Hare does not so much take sides between Israeli and Arab, orthodox or secular Jew, as he illuminates the maddening complexity of the situation, the seemingly insoluble contradictions of faith, hope and suspicion. No picture can convey better than Mr. Hare the range between legitimate fear and paranoia, the precise calibrations of what it means to be Jewish." - Henry Grunwald, Wall Street Journal

"*Via Dolorosa* is stuffed to bursting with memorable accounts of characters of every political stripe and mood. And yes, they are great material." - Amy Gamerman, Wall Street Journal