Levin, Hanoch (1943-1999) Israeli playwright and short story writer. Born in the southern quarters of Tel Aviv to lower middle-class Polish immigrants Levin’s background has provided the inspiration for many of his plays and stories.

Until the advent of Levin’s unique voice Israeli drama had been devoted almost entirely to the reality of life in the country. Levin’s work scorned all the accepted social dogma and resisted all ideology, while still referring to the Jewish diaspora past and life in present-day Israel. His plays can be divided loosely into three categories: satire, usually in the form of cabarets, grotesque domestic comedies, and elaborate dramas presenting universal messages based on myth, biblical stories and world literature.

Levin’s first work for the stage was a political cabaret: *At ve-ani ve-hamilhamah haba’ah* (1968; You and I and the next war). It was followed by two further satirical reviews in the same vein: *Ketchup* (1969), and *Malkat ha-ambatya* ( Queen of the bathtub), 1970. The main target of his satire, which always caused a furore, was Israeli society of the 1960s in its post-war euphoria, smugness and materialism. *Queen of the Bathtub* caused a national uproar and the play was closed after 18 performances.

Of the domestic dramas *Hefetz*, produced in 1972, was critically acclaimed, although unpopular with the majority of the public. It dealt with a family’s ritual humiliation and murder of a relative, Hefetz. A more successful play was *Ya’akobi veleidental* (Jacoby and Leidental). First staged in 1972 it enjoyed several revivals, in Israel and abroad: in Britain in 1974 under the name *Dominoes* (directed by Topol), at the Edinburgh Fringe in (1980), with the original Israeli cast, and at the Young Vic Studio in 1981. Levin was indebted to the Theatre of the Absurd in these early dramas, with stylized acting and minimal décor.

In 1982 Levin returned to the direct political arena where he had begun, with *Hapatriot* (The patriot), which demonstrated his concern about the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. He went further in *Retzah* (Murder), 1998, where he has a graphic scene of slow torture and the sadistic murder and castration of a Palestinian youth by three Israeli soldiers who laugh and joke while doing it. It was both acclaimed, because of its perceived political courage, and detested because of its violence.

Levin became preoccupied with ideas concerning the meaning of human existence and he continued to view humiliation and torture as major factors within human relationships. Violence and a kind of disgust with humanity’s capacity for self-delusion became the major characteristics of plays in his later years, notably in his doom-ridden *Yisurei Iyov* (The Passion of Job), 1981. In this play the naked Job is skewered by a stake through his anus, a spectacle that attracted the ire of the Israeli Ministry for Education and Culture. Yet he was also capable of poetic lyricism, as in the fantasy, *Ha-yeled holem* (A child dreams), (1993) which related to the Holocaust, and *Ashkavah* (Requiem), 1998, based on three stories by Checkhov, which seemed to signal the playwright’s acceptance of his own impending death.

In 1988 Levin became Israel’s Cameri Theater’s house playwright. He wrote and directed at least one play each year until his death from cancer in 1999. Despite the controversy that had dogged him throughout his writing career his death was mourned by the state’s official cultural arbiters and by his audiences who appreciated his ability to question the nation’s entrenched ideology and popular beliefs.

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