

Vaclav Havel (1936-2011)

President of Czechoslovakia, President of Czech Republic, Nominee for Nobel Peace Prize by Nobel Foundation, Honorary Member of CoR

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Truth & Love Must Prevail over Lies & Hate

"Beauty, Truth and Goodness," Socrates said these three. Vaclav Havel embodied them all. He wrote and spoke beautifully. He fought for all. He lived his goodness. In telling the truth, though it led to years in jail, he helped to free his country and the Eastern Block and to inspire the world. Goodness, Truth, and Beauty. Truth was the beacon that guided his life. The poet John Keats famously said, "Truth is Beauty and Beauty is Truth." Vaclav Havel taught us that Truth to be Beautiful must also be Brave.

Vaclav Havel found himself at the center of what became known as the "Velvet Revolution" as leader of the Civic Forum, meeting in a theatre in November 1989 as the Czech people were in the streets. Five weeks later on December 29, 1989, he became the 10th and last president of the Czechoslovakia (1989-1993) by unanimous vote of the Federal Assembly (Parliament) and for three-plus-years later presided over the "peaceful divorce" of the Czech and Slovak Republics, becoming the first president of the Czech Republic (1993-2003). He came to leadership reluctantly, but of necessity, acting for the times and from his patriotism. A man of words, he saw it was time for action. His comprehension and vision of the role Czechoslovakia could play as Eastern Europe gained democracy drove him to act. He was the right man at a tipping-point in history. He was the man at the center of the maelstrom of revolution. His words rang true to the many who followed. In his book *To the Castle and Back* (2007), Havel said his leadership was an accident of history.

He believed in the truth and created a positive moral vision for the future. The power of indifference was what he comprehended. *The Power of the Powerless* was his great essay in 1978, when he signed the Charter of 77. In 2007, he told a group of international dissidents gathered in Prague, "The big danger in the world today is obsession. An even bigger danger is indifference." Havel said that freedom requires "the general willingness of consumption-oriented people to sacrifice some material certainties for the sake of their own spiritual and moral integrity." Havel's greatest fear was that indifference to the freedom of others would lead to the loss of one's own freedom. He

Dr. Anitra Thorhaug, a member of the Club of Rome, contributed the following condolence remarks with Andrew Oerke and Pavel Novacek on the death of Vaclav Havel, former president of Czechoslovakia.

said that free people need to actively resist tyranny and political extremism. In his writings, this concept included a constant spiritual belligerency to not accept tyrannical regimes as beyond the reach of moral examination.

Vaclav Havel had a lifelong love affair with truth and a lifelong love affair with the theater. He began in the theater as a young apprentice; he ended in 2011 writing plays for the theater. In his last seven years as a private citizen (after stepping down from being president) Havel wrote plays and opened plays, receiving visitors from the world of the theater. In his life, he married two actresses. He wrote 19 plays and several books. He needed to withdraw into solitude to write. He would retreat to his country house or to Portugal to write by the sea. We last saw him in December 2006 when he had just come back from writing in Portugal. "I am attempting to reenter the world of writing. The world's demands interfere with me, which is not good for the time needed for writing. I would like to be more active in the Club of Rome, but responsibilities can only take so much of my time from my writing." Havel held the Forum 2000 meetings for a number of years in Prague to examine visions and concepts for the future of governance. He continued to be a futurist until the end.

Festivals of his plays occurred at Yale in Connecticut, in New York City at a series of venues, in London. Tom Stoppard was his usual translator, and his friend. Joseph Papps invited a young Havel during the "Prague Spring" to the US opening of *The Memorandum*, Havel's second play.

Vaclav is a very ancient name of former kings of several kingly fiefdoms over a millennium, preceding in history the Czech Republic. Born in 1936 to a privileged family prior to the German entrance into Sudetenland, while Hitler was coming to power, he witnessed a series of critical events in his youth and young adulthood: invasion, appeasement, war, Russian hegemony in Czechoslovakia, the Cold War, prison for his ideas. He was ready to change when the new vision emerged in 1989. "It is necessary to tell the truth."

Havel formulated in words, and in his works for the theater, the hopes of his countrymen. He saw a way forward when many had given up hope. He believed strongly in examining the future, and his meetings on the future were made up of visions and of actionable future plans. He encouraged dissidents who told the truth. The Dalai Lama was his friend.

He was greatly applauded in Western Europe and the Western Hemisphere, perhaps more so abroad than in his beloved Czech Republic.

**He was bold. He was courageous.
He was visionary.**

Awards that have been bestowed on Vaclav Havel make a long list, including the following: Nominee for Nobel Peace Prize, the United States Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Philadelphia Liberty Medal, the Order of Canada, the freedom medal of the Four Freedoms Award, the Ambassador of Conscience Award, the Gandhi Peace Prize, and several honorary doctorates, as well as other distinctions such as the Royal Society's Honorary Fellow for Literature award. (Please see the Havel web page for a full list of awards.)

Havel's Literary Works

Collections of poetry	<i>Čtyři rané básně</i> (Four Early Poems)
	<i>Záchvěvy I & II</i> , 1954 (<i>Quivers I & II</i>)
	<i>První úpisy</i> , 1955 (<i>First Promissory Notes</i>)
	<i>Prostory a časy</i> , 1956 (<i>Spaces and Times</i> , poetry)
	<i>Na okraji jara</i> (Cyklus Básní), 1956 (<i>At the Edge of Spring</i> (poetry cycle))
	<i>Antikódy</i> , 1964 (<i>Anticodes</i>)
Plays	<i>Motormorphosis</i> 1960
	<i>Hitchhiking Here</i> (<i>Autostop</i>) 1960
	<i>An Evening with the Family</i> , 1960 (<i>Rodinný Večer</i>)
	<i>The Garden Party</i> (<i>Zahradní Slavnost</i>), 1963
	<i>The Memorandum</i> , 1965 (<i>Vyrozumění</i>)
	<i>The Increased Difficulty of Concentration</i> , 1968 (<i>Ztížená Možnost Soustředění</i>)
	<i>Butterfly on the Antenna</i> , 1968 (<i>Motýl na Anténě</i>)
	<i>Guardian Angel</i> , 1968 (<i>Strážný Anděl</i>)
	<i>Conspirators</i> , 1971 (<i>Spiklenci</i>)
	<i>The Beggar's Opera</i> , 1975 (<i>Žebrácká opera</i>)
	<i>Unveiling</i> , 1975 (<i>Vernisáž</i>)
	<i>Audience</i> , 1975 (<i>Audience</i>) – a Vaněk play
	<i>Mountain Hotel</i> , 1976 (<i>Horský Hotel</i>)
	<i>Protest</i> , 1978 (<i>Protest</i>) – a Vaněk play
	<i>Mistake</i> , 1983 (<i>Chyba</i>) – a Vaněk play
	<i>Largo Desolato</i> 1984 (<i>Largo desolato</i>)
	<i>Temptation</i> , 1985 (<i>Pokoušení</i>)
	<i>Redevelopment</i> , 1987 (<i>Asanace</i>)
	<i>Tomorrow</i> , 1988 (<i>Zítřka to Spustíme</i>)
	<i>Leaving</i> (<i>Odházení</i>), 2007
Non-fiction	<i>Dozens of Cousins</i> (<i>Pět Tet</i>), 2009 – a short sketch/sequel to <i>Unveiling</i>
	<i>The Pig, or Václav Havel's Hunt for a Pig</i> (<i>Prase</i>), 2009 – based on a text from 1987, adapted by Vladimír Morávek in 2009
	<i>The Power of the Powerless</i> (1985) (Includes 1978 titular essay; online)
	<i>Living in Truth</i> (1986)
	<i>Letters to Olga</i> (<i>Dopisy Olze</i>) (1988)
	<i>Disturbing the Peace</i> (1991)
	<i>Open Letters</i> (1991)
	<i>Summer Meditations</i> (<i>Letní Premítání</i>) (1992/93)
Fiction	<i>Towards a Civil Society</i> (1994)
	<i>The Art of the Impossible</i> (1998)
	<i>To the Castle and Back</i> (2007)
	<i>Pizh'duks</i>
	<i>Films</i> <i>Odházení</i> , 2011

Please see the Vaclav Havel web page for more details of his literary works, literary events, futurist activities, life history, and political activities.

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Photo: CTK/PANA



Czechoslovakia President Vaclav Havel waves from a balcony at Prague Castle after being elected by the Czechoslovakia parliament in Prague, Czechoslovakia on Dec. 29, 1989. (CTK photo)

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