



The experience, unsurprisingly, was to have a profound effect on Dennis Potter, and this was to manifest itself not only in his character, his perceived attitude to sex and his relationships with other people, but also in his dramatic writing. He noted that the great bulk of his work was:

. . . about the victim, someone who cannot explain, cannot put into the right words, or even cannot speak at all.<sup>9</sup>

Such victims (of all types) are indeed seen time after time in his plays and serials.

Following his 2 year National Service, which saw him at the Intelligence Corps and the War Office in Whitehall, Potter came up to New College in 1955 via a scholarship to study Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE). While at Oxford he took an active role at the Oxford Union and the Oxford Labour Club, as well as the college and university Drama Societies, and became editor of *The Isis* magazine.

Despite this activity, Potter found life at Oxford difficult owing to the fact he felt as though he were caught between two worlds – the poor, rural one of his youth and upbringing, and that of privilege and status in which he suddenly found himself. He referred to this struggle in a television documentary, *Does Class Matter?* made while he was at Oxford in 1958. In 1978 he described how, during that interview, he had commented that his father now asked him questions through his

The spires of Oxford had been not so much dreaming as calculating.<sup>16</sup> On the back of articles he wrote for *The Isis* and *New Statesman* and believing it was a field in which he would be effective, he decided to enter politics in an indecently short time.<sup>16</sup> He eventually graduated from New College in 1959 with a second class degree and married his long-term girlfriend Margaret, who was also from the Forest of Dean, the same year.

His first encounter with the BBC came in 1959, when he joined the Television Talks Department, worked on the current affairs programme *Panorama* and became fascinated by the process by which programmes were made.<sup>17</sup> Potter published his first book, *The Glittering Coffin* in 1960, a study of the changing state of British culture since the end of World War II, which he had actually written while still at Oxford. Also that year he made a documentary for the BBC about life in the Forest of Dean, *Between Two Rivers*

His chosen method of achieving these very personal goals was to be via the creation of fictional worlds and people



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III. Potter and: God



Dennis Potter

#### IV. Potter and: The Media

It has already been seen how Dennis Potter fell out of love with politics and journalism, and consequently embraced his chosen outlet of television in the early 1960s. A growing dislike of the increasing level of consumerism and commercialism he saw in British culture also began to manifest itself in 1968. In *The Bonegrinder*, embodied by brash American Sam. In his introduction to the published script of *Follow the Yellow Brick Road* in 1973, he noted that:

. . . the commercials are made with more skill and more resources than the majority of the programmes. . . during the programmes and aerosoled deodorants in between.<sup>67</sup>

In that same play, Jack Black can only find joy in the unreal world of those commercials – the real world is soiled.

In 1993 Potter delivered the James MacTaggart Memorial Lecture. He pondered what lies at the heart of British society, what it means to be a citizen (or do I mean a consumer?) in the United Kingdom. He took the opportunity to describe how, in his childhood, the BBC (here, radio) had been an important part of his life and, indeed, British life:

. . . it was the voices out of the air which, as though by magic, pushed out those constricting boundaries . . . at a crucial period of my life it threw open the magic casement. . . sources of mind-scape at a time when books were hard to come by, and when I had never stepped into a theatre or a concert hall . . .

He went on to deliver, to use his own word, a polemic against what he saw as the then-current state of both the BBC and the British media in general. He had just finished making his BBC Films co-production of *Midnight Movie* and, miserably demeaning condition in terms of the way it was now controlled, owned and organized, he laid the blame squarely at the feet of the then Director General John Birt and Chairman Marmaduke (t)-eed, Britout





Childhood: ~~Alice~~ ~~Stand Up, Nigel Barton~~ ~~Blue Remembered Hills~~ ~~The Singing Detective~~

Illness, both physical and mental: ~~Emergency 1 Ward 9~~ ~~Where the Buffalo Roam~~ ~~Moonlight on the Highway~~ ~~Brimstone and Treacle~~ ~~The Singing Detective~~ ~~Karaoke~~

Memory and memories: ~~Stand Up, Nigel Barton~~ ~~Moonlight on the Highway~~ ~~Casanova~~ ~~The Singing Detective~~

The entrance of the disruptive stranger: ~~The Bonegrinder~~ ~~Angels are so Few~~ ~~Schmoedipus~~ ~~Brimstone and Treacle~~ ~~Blade on my Feather~~ ~~Rain on the Roof~~

The blending of reality/truth and fantasy/illusion: ~~Where the Buffalo Roam~~ ~~Double Dare~~ ~~Pennies from Heaven~~ ~~The Singing Detective~~ ~~Blackeyes~~ ~~Karaoke~~

Other favourite themes include political disillusionment and wariness of consumerism and commercialization.

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