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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. 9

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 IsisÑmagazine.

Despite this activity, Potter found life at Oxford difficult owing to the fact he felt as though he were caught between two worlds i 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? Namede 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 D ot so much dreaming as calculating.  $\textcircled{N}^{c}$  On the back of articles he wrote for D he Isis N and D hew Statesman N and believing it was a field in which he would be effective, he decided to enter politics in D indecently short time.  $\textcircled{N}^{c}$  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 PanoramaÑand became fascinated by the process by which programmes were made. Potter published his first book, The Glittering CoffinÑ 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 RiversÑ

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

himself, a victim of childhood sexual abuse. Peters uses his obsession feelings he cannot express himself and, at the end of the play, high on a mixture of alcohol and prescription drugs and surrounded by members of the Bowlly appreciation society, his friends, he reveals his dark secret: that he has slept with 136 prostitutes. Having kept the secret for so long, he is relieved to have finally made his confession ( ).

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reverential, Christ is a passionate, almost wild, and decidedly human figure, racked by self-doubt and fears, certainly not a man of miracles, a carpenter who recognizes the quality of the wood used to construct his own cross, and desperate to get over his message of universal love. Certainly the stark ending, with no sign of resurrection, was revisionist in the extreme for the time.

LAY DOWN YOUR ARMS (LWT 1970)

National Service as a Russian language clerk at the War Office, the play tells of Robert Hawk, mocked for his working-class background and pretending to be people he is not. Potter would rework this play into Lipstick on your Collar 23 years later.

ANGELS ARE SO FEW (BBC 1970)

Returning to the visitation device

Michael (Tom Bell) who

# BRIMSTONE AND TREACLE (BBC 1976)

The notoriety of this

### BLADE ON MY FEATHER (LWT 1980)

A deal -created independent production company, Pennies From Heaven Ltd, and

(cut down from the originally planned six). The first is a further visitation play involving espionage, betrayal and political disillusionment, with Tom Conti as the stranger arriving at author Donald Denholm Eliott won the

BAFTA for Best Actor as butler Mr Hill.

### RAIN ON THE ROOF (LWT 1980)

Another visitation piece, this play features more unhappily married couples, with one husband involved in an affair with the other wife, the tensions in both marriages revealed by the stranger in their midst.

## CREAM IN MY COFFEE (LWT 1980) Winner of the Prix Italia

A study of a relationship between a couple, flashing between their youth in the 1930s and the present day. Favourite themes feature once more, of betrayal (infidelity), illness and memory, set again to contemporary music.

III. Potter and: God

### 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 ] by Z] b \g k cf\_, dYf\\dg Z]fgh]b 1968\text{N} \text{ The Bonegrinder}\text{N} embodied by brash American Sam. In his introduction to the published script of \text{Pollow the Yellow Brick Road}\text{N} n noted that:

... the commercials are made with more skill and more resources than the majority of the programmeg LbX  $h\$ Ym Yj Yb  $g\$ Lm a cfY Lg  $k\$ Y` Å [h\'Yj ]g]cb]  $g\$ Y`g LYfcgc`YX fYLggi fUbW during the programmes and aerosoled deodorants in between.

In that same play, Jack Black can only find joy in the unreal world of those commercials i 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 plc.NHe 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 Đnagic casementÑon great 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 Nagainst 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 Nand, syy]b[ h\y Ccfdcfuncholy miserably demeaning condition in terms of the way it was how controlled, owned and organized in he laid the blame squarely at the feet of the then Director General John Birt and Chairman Marmaduke(t)-eed, Britout

Dennis Potter

Childhood: Alice Stand Up, Nigel Barton Stude Remembered Hills The Singing Detective Stand Up, Nigel Barton Students Remembered Hills Stand Up, Nigel Barton Stand Up, N

Illness, both physical and mental: Emergency Ì Ward 9Ñ Where the Buffalo RoamÑ Moonlight on the HighwayÑ Brimstone and TreacleÑ The Singing DetectiveÑ KaraokeÑ Memory and memories: Stand Up, Nigel BartonÑ Moonlight on the HighwayÑ CasanovaÑ The Singing DetectiveÑ

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

The blending of reality/truth and fantasy/illusion: Where the Buffalo RoamÑ Double DareÑ Pennies from HeavenÑ The Singing DetectiveÑ BlackeyesÑ KaraokeÑ

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

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