

finger in the pie presents



**VOTE!**  
**VOTE!**  
For Nigel **VOTE!**  
**Barton!**

**A Play by Dennis Potter**



**UPSTAIRS AT THE GATEHOUSE**  
4 - 8 OCT 2005



Like Orson Welles, Dennis Potter (1935-94) all but started at the top, acclaimed as one of television's greatest writers from his first year in the business. A BBC initiative, aimed at developing new writers, saw four of his plays transmitted in 1965. These included the two Nigel Barton plays: Stand Up Nigel Barton, and VOTE VOTE VOTE For Nigel Barton.

The screenplay for VOTE VOTE VOTE was heavily influenced by Potter's own experience as a Labour party candidate in the 1964 election. Standing in the safe Tory heartland of rural Hertfordshire, Potter didn't stand a chance of winning. Yet his total revulsion at the experience seems to have been caused by something much deeper than the simple prospect of political defeat. "To be a candidate is to submit to a personally humiliating experience, in which the set smile freezes on your face like a grin on a corpse", Nigel comments at one point in the show. In the event Potter was so disgusted by the electoral charade that he refused to even cast a vote for himself.

In the age of Blair and Campbell, the relationship between Nigel Barton and his cynical electoral agent Jack Hay seems all too familiar, while the apathy which greeted politics 40 years ago – the paralysing feeling that for all the establishment's faults there simply was no other way – could be the subject of a contemporary Panorama. Yet less than five years after the piece was first screened, The Human Be-In and Woodstock Festivals would have kick-started the Summer of Love, the Paris revolution of 1968 would have shaken the political establishment to its core - removing the reactionary French Premier Pompidou and eventually leading to the fall of the Nationalist and Conservative Presidency of DeGaulle - Czechoslovakia would be celebrating the political, cultural and artistic renaissance of the Prague Spring, while the Anti-Vietnam movement would be marching across every major city and campus in the world.

There is no clear moral to VOTE VOTE VOTE, by the last scene Nigel appears to have given up on electoral politics, much as Potter himself did. In his recent after-dinner gaff, John Humphrys was quoted out of context as having accused all politicians of dishonesty. In fact, he made a far more interesting point: that the nature of the political game is such that dishonesty is sometimes called for. Be it in their assessment of the current economic situation or their attempts to influence the national mood, it is sometimes necessary for politicians to lie, and a

politician who doesn't would be negligent. This is a position which I suspect would find favor with Jack Hay, yet for most of us this doesn't seem a particularly desirable state of affairs. Could we ever trust a person who has spent their entire career bending the truth for what they believe? It is surely a very slippery psychological slope – you might even end up believing in WMD.

Yet, as Barton realizes, this is not the fault of individuals. In his final tirade it is not individual politicians he criticizes, but the structural demands of politics itself. It is the process of standing as a candidate which is corrupting, irrespective of the individual. There is none of the salvation we expect from the narrative of commercial cinema. No honest man makes good in the face of a corrupt world. When faced with the realities of the political machine, the honest man realizes that he must necessarily be corrupted if he is to take part. When so much of our culture is based on the modernist ideal of the heroic male individual standing up to a hostile world and changing it in his own image, this alternative narrative is an uncomfortable one.

It is much easier is to attach our criticisms to an individual rather than blame the system itself for the failings of our politicians. To suggest that the way the system is structured is the main influence on human agency does not do a great deal for our belief in free will. Yet when individuals from every shade of politics, every conceivable background and across every era in history display the same characteristics when put in the same systems, perhaps it is time we started questioning the institutions and not blaming the individuals. Yet 40 years on we are once again confronted with the paralysing feeling that this is the only way. Perhaps it is.

- Alexander Parsonage



Private Eye  
Date 30 April 1965



Dennis Potter is arguably the most important creative figure in the history of British television. From 1965 until his death in 1994, he constructed a personal oeuvre of such remarkable character and consistency that it will probably never be

equalled in the medium. The most prolific yet also most controversial of television playwrights, he remains the undisputed figurehead of that peculiarly British phenomenon of writers who expend much of their working lives and passions attempting to show that television can be just as powerful a vehicle for artistic expression as cinema or theatre.

Born on 17 May 1935, Potter was raised in what he later described as the "tight, enclosed, backward" world of the Forest of Dean; a remote rural idyll nestling between two rivers, the Severn and the Wye, on the aggressively English side of the border with Wales. The product of a remote God-fearing community, he attended chapel at least twice every Sunday and the vividness of its language and metaphors formed a powerful influence on his writing.

He came to prominence in 1965, when, after an earlier career in journalism and politics, his first four plays were all transmitted by the BBC within the space of a year, as part of The Wednesday Play slot's ground-breaking policy of introducing radical new writers to television. Of these, the most successful were *The Nigel Barton Plays* - a pair of semi - autobiographical dramas which expertly dissected the effects of social class upon the psyche of its eponymous hero, winning awards and helping to seal Potter's reputation as a major new playwright of passion and ideas. Only as the 1960s wore on and he continued to write for The Wednesday Play and its successor Play for Today, did it gradually become clear that underlying the broadly political attacks of his earlier work was an older chapel sensibility: the personality moulded by Biblical teaching and imagery, yet one now in desperate search of answers in the face of acute spiritual crisis.

In 1969, *Son of Man* was transmitted; a Gospel Play in which Potter audaciously created the Messiah in his own image: a human, suffering Christ, racked by doubts over his own mission and plagued by the fear that he has been forsaken by God. With this and other titles that followed such as *Angels Are So Few* (1970), *Where Adam Stood* (1976) and most controversially of all, *Brimstone and Treacle*--originally intended for transmission in 1976 but banned by the BBC for eleven years on account of a scene where the Devil rapes a mentally handicapped girl-- it became clear that Potter had discovered his true vocation as a dramatist of religious or spiritual

themes, albeit one highly unorthodox and sometimes offensive to the political and moral establishment.

Central to Potter's quest for spiritual answers was his own personal affliction of psoriatic arthropathy: a painful combination of psoriasis enflaming the skin and arthritis crippling the joints which he had suffered from since the age of 26 and which had necessitated his withdrawal from the public worlds of politics and current affairs into the more private realm of life as a television playwright. This inwardness was also manifested in Potter's famous non-naturalistic style: his determination to challenge the dominant British television drama tradition of "dreary" naturalism, through an alternative emphasis on inner, psychological reality. He successfully customised a whole series of non-naturalistic devices--including flashback and fantasy sequences; direct-to-camera address by characters; the use of adult actors to play children--all of which he believed represented more truthfully "what goes on inside people's heads".

In 1978, Potter showcased what became his most famous technique when Bob Hoskins burst into song, miming to an old 78 RPM recording in the BBC TV serial, *Pennies from Heaven*. The international success of *Pennies* transformed Potter's career, leading to a lucrative spell as a Hollywood screenwriter which included a disastrous movie remake of the serial in 1981. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, however, Potter continued to produce original work for television, though serials now rather than one-off plays: nowhere perhaps more decisively than with *The Singing Detective* (1986), in which his famous device of characters miming to popular song was used to punctuate a narrative as complex and layered as any work of serious literature; one that will undoubtedly endure as Potter's monument to the creative possibilities of the medium.

The rapturous plaudits which greeted *The Singing Detective* in Britain and the United States may have elevated him to the rare status of genuine TV auteur but the period after 1986 was not an easy one for Potter. In 1989, after a falling out with his erstwhile producer Kenith Trodd, Potter decided to direct a television adaptation of his "feminist" novel, *Blackeyes*. The result was a critical bloodbath in the United Kingdom, with the director accused of precisely the misogyny and exploitation he claimed he had been trying to expose on screen. Nor was *Lipstick on Your Collar* (1993)--a six part "drama with songs" set in the 1950s--the resounding popular success he had hoped for.

In February 1994, Potter was diagnosed with terminal cancer of the pancreas and died four months later but not before an extraordinary television interview in which he talked movingly about his imminent death, revealing his plans to complete two final television serials to be uniquely co-produced by rival national channels, BBC-1 and Channel Four. Defying the medical odds, he succeeded in completing the works, *Karaoke* and *Cold Lazarus* and in accordance with his wishes, these were transmitted posthumously by both channels in the spring of 1996. Though critical reaction in Britain was somewhat mixed, the very fact of the joint production seemed to confirm Potter's creative legacy as the practitioner who, above all others, aspired to raise television to an art form and whose pioneering non-naturalism had indeed been successful in opening up its drama to the landscape of the mind.

-John Cook



### THE GATEHOUSE – A SHORT HISTORY

Of all the inns and pubs in Highgate, The Gatehouse is probably the oldest. Its nineteenth century owners claimed that there had been a licensed building on the site since 1337, although nothing can be proven as licensing by justices did not commence until 1552 when there were five inns licensed in Highgate although none of them were actually named. The earliest mention of The Gatehouse, in the licensing records, is 1670 when an Edward Cutler made an application to the borough of St. Pancras.

One curious fact about The Gatehouse was that the borough boundary between Middlesex and London ran through the building. When the hall was used as a courtroom, a rope divided the sessions to make sure prisoners didn't escape to another authority's area. The boundary problem continued as the names changed, most recently with Camden and Haringey sharing the building. In 1993 the border was moved a few feet to allow one licensing authority overall control and The Gatehouse is now the most northerly pub in Camden.

From its days next to the toll gate, through its use as a meeting house. The Gatehouse has had a chequered history. Byron, Cruikshank and Dickens all used its services and the Highgate Literary and Scientific Institution's inaugural meeting took place in the pub on 16th January, 1839. At the turn of the last century, The Gatehouse was famous all over London for its "shilling ordinaries", gigantic lunches which filled many a Victorian stomach. In 1905 the building was renovated in the mock Tudor style that remains today.

The auditorium that now houses the theatre was opened in 1895 as "a place suitable for Balls, Cinderellas and Concerts" and its various uses have included a Music Hall, a Cinema, Masonic Lodge and a venue for amateur dramatics. In the sixties a jazz and folk club featured amongst others, the Crouch End All Stars and, on one famous occasion, Paul Simon (of Simon and Garfunkel fame).

It took over a hundred years to turn the Highgate Hall (as it was called in 1895) into the Village's first theatrical auditorium. We hope the Victorian residents would have approved.

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### Philip Buck

Philip trained at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. Recent theatre credits include Rumpelstiltskin (Horla Theatre Company / Wimbledon Studio); Sticks And Stones

(Reveal Theatre Company / Tour); Proteus, The Two Gentlemen of Verona; Silvius, As You Like It (Oxford Shakespeare Company); Bad Blood (Ambassador Theatre Group / National Tour); Our Song (Wonderland Productions / Edinburgh Fringe); Beauty and the Beast (Tour); Rope, Doctor in the House, Boeing Boeing (CV Productions); The Hunting of the Snark (Stephen Joseph Theatre). Television, Film and Radio credits include The Lost Decade-Little Kinsey (BBC) Romeo, Romeo and Juliet (Theatre Tadwick); Shadow of the Vampire (Saturn Productions) and various corporate videos. Philip is a winner of the Cameron Mackintosh Prize for Music in Theatre and recently directed The Turn of the Screw for the Edinburgh Fringe 2004.

### Lucy Corbally

Before being cast in Vote! Vote! Vote! For Nigel Barton, Lucy made her professional London fringe debut as Ariel in Tossed! an adaptation of The Tempest she helped to devise following six months' training with the Pants on Fire Theatre Company physical theatre project. She graduated in English Literature from Lancaster University where she was an active member of the acclaimed LU Theatre Group. Credits include Candy Starr (One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest), Hermia (A Mid-Summer Night's Dream), Lady Anne (Richard III), Cecily (Importance of Being Earnest), Sophie (Hanif Kureishi's Sleep With Me), Her film credits include Englebert & Buzzby II (Licker Productions) and Down to an Ace (Trixtor Films).



Private Eye  
Date 6 March 1964



### Tim Crowther

Tim trained at Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts. His stage credits include national tours of Picture of Dorian Gray and A Woman of No Importance. He will also be appearing in the forthcoming

Broadway Studio Theatre production of A Clockwork Orange. Screen credits include Shades of Time (Veness Productions).



### Nina Hatchwell

Nina trained at Italia Conti and went on to Webber Douglas from where she has recently graduated. At Webber Douglas her theatrical roles included Maggie, Hobson's Choice; Beth, A Lie of the Mind; Lady Stuttfeld/ Hester, A

Woman Of No Importance; Leonardo's Wife, Blood Wedding. She has also performed with the ENO in Street Scene and Carmen at the Coliseum. Her TV credits include Grange Hill and the recent Volkswagen advert for the Berlin Cinema. She has just finished filming Pieces with 24/30 cinema playing the part of Mary and appeared in the short film A Perfect Evening with 'A TAD Too Far Productions' as Kate.

### Olaf Mathar

Olaf graduated from University of Winchester in 2003 with a BA (hons) in Drama Studies. His theatre credits include: The Queen Who Would Be King; Room 101; The Scheizerhousen Trio; Othellophobia; No Man's Land; The Misanthrope; A Comedy of Errors; The Hunting of the Snark; The Last Days of Don Juan. Film experience includes The Children (Feature); Getting High With Leo (Feature); The Turned (Feature)



### Heather Snaitth

Heather studied performing arts for two years at The Henley College Oxfordshire before attending Rose Bruford College. She graduated this summer with a BA (hons) in Actor-Musicianship. There, her theatrical roles included

Helene, Sweet Charity ; Alithea, The Country Wife; Nurse, Romeo and Juliet; Mother, Machinal; Celia, As You Like It; Varia, The Cherry Orchard.

## Cast.....

<b>Nigel Barton</b>	Philip Buck
<b>Anne Barton</b>	Nina Hatchwell
<b>Jack Hay</b>	Tim Crowther

## Ensemble.....

<b>First Hunting Woman</b>	Lucy Corbally
<b>Second Hunting Woman</b>	Nina Hatchwell
<b>First Hunting Man</b>	Olaf Mather
<b>News Reader</b>	Heather Snaith
<b>Lady Chairman</b>	Heather Snaith
<b>Lady Secretary</b>	Olaf Mather
<b>Mrs Thompson</b>	Lucy Corbally
<b>First Questioner</b>	Heather Snaith
<b>Second Questioner</b>	Lucy Corbally
<b>Pedestrian</b>	Olaf Mather
<b>Woman</b>	Heather Snaith
<b>Mrs Phillips</b>	Lucy Corbally
<b>Mrs Morris</b>	Olaf Mather
<b>Mr Smith</b>	Heather Snaith
<b>Nurse</b>	Lucy Corbally
<b>Mr Harrison</b>	Olaf Mather
<b>Toast Master</b>	Olaf Mather
<b>Archibold Lake</b>	Heather Snaith
<b>Nye Bevan</b>	Olaf Mather
<b>Sir Oswald Mosely</b>	Olaf Mather

## Crew.....

<b>Director / Designer:</b>	Alex Parsonage
<b>Choreographer:</b>	Veronique Spiteri
<b>Producer:</b>	Nick Sherrard Tom Pullen
<b>Production Overseer:</b>	Jayne Dickinson
<b>Production Coordinator:</b>	Steph Hay
<b>Sales and Marketing:</b>	Steve Pretty
<b>Lighting Design:</b>	Sara Audley
<b>Technical Operator:</b>	Chris Howcraft
<b>Costume design:</b>	Sophie Archer
<b>Volunteers Coordinator:</b>	Lois Bright

## Thanks

Anthony Cleary, Every one Upstairs at the Gatehouse, Olly Aylott, Dan Akers and Russel Hope, Daniel McCabe and everyone at Peter Qwen , Tom Perrin, Kit Maude, Evih Efue, Jess Crisp and the Jesuit language School in Highgat, T o everyone at 109 Harbington Road

**Special Thanks to Dunn's Bakery in crouch end for all the pies. And Absolute Print for printing the program.**

This production is dedicated to the memory of  
Brenda Parsonage (1943 - 2004)

## finger in the pie

'Finger in the Pie' describes a philosophy of broad based arts practice covering everything from fine art, web design, video and theatre. In the bun fight of contemporary culture we've got our finger in the pie.

It might sound obvious but what one can learn designing a website or editing a film can directly apply to how one could direct for the stage. Because we apply the lessons and experiences learned in one project to the next the quality of our work is increasing with every new step. In addition, in a market as unpredictable as the arts, our wide skills' base offers greater security for the company as a whole.

## what we do

Right now we're focusing our energies on stage practice. Here, devising and ensemble work have formed the cornerstones of our performance and as such we have created and sustained a reputation for powerful and innovative stagecraft. Vote! Vote! For Nigel Barton arrives as the latest in a line of consistently fast paced and visually dynamic productions adding caricature and satire to our repertoire.

Previously we have staged four pieces of professional theatre, with source material and devising influences ranging from aboriginal creation myths to Goncourt prize winning novels. In addition we've organised two festivals, published a collection of short stories and a quarterly arts magazine, established a web based Theatre Network and designed the printed publicity for numerous organizations and events. Not bad for three years work? Yet all the while the most important thing to us is the people that we work with. All collaborations start with a conversation: so if you're interested in what we do and want to get involved let's talk.

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