

BLUE REMEMBERED HILLS

Followed by a Q&A with [Kenith Trodd](#), [John Bird](#) and [Janine Duvitski](#), hosted by [Samira Ahmed](#)



It's been twenty years since the untimely death of **Dennis Potter**, one of the greatest television playwrights of all time. We here pay tribute to Potter's truly original voice with a screening of *Blue Remembered Hills*.

RELEASE YEAR: 1979
 RUNTIME: 72 mins
 DIRECTOR: Brian Gibson
 SCREENWRITER: Dennis Potter

Dennis Potter was one of the most important creative figures in the history of British television. From 1965 until his death in 1994, he constructed a personal body of work of such remarkable depth and range that has yet to be matched in the TV 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.' *John Cook, BFI Screenonline*

In an extract from *Fight And Kick And Bite: Life And Work Of Dennis Potter*, author W Stephen Gilbert recounts Potter's vision behind *Blue Remembered Hills* and director Brian Gibson's preparation for his BAFTA-winning television drama:

"Potter had looked hard at his own and other children and remembered in the most clear-eyed way he ever achieved. This is his own boyhood he

sees 'shining plain'. The blue hills are the Malverns backdrop to the Forest of Dean. Although Housman's untitled poem, which furnishes Potter's epilogue as well as his title, posits an image of childhood as 'The happy highways where I went/ And cannot come again', Potter often revisited his own highways, both happy and anguished.

'When we dream of childhood,' he said ahead of transmission, 'we take our present selves with us. It is not the adult world writ small, childhood is the adult world writ large. We may mature with



age, but we do not change.’ And of adults playing children: ‘The adult body acts as a kind of magnifying instrument which, because it has to loosen up and let go, reminds us more of just how mobile and swift movement is in the childhood world and yet how long time is. Time is always an eternity when you’re a child and the physical movement only emphasises that sort of sheer present tenseness.’

If, in filming, you start to doubt the writing’s cohesion, want to play with it or point it, the structure will collapse. You must also trust to the informal forest idiom. Director Brian Gibson says he could take the leap with the play ‘because the thing about Dennis’s writing, unlike so many writers, is that it always plays better than it reads. Here in Hollywood, it always reads better than it plays because it’s actually written for reading. While it felt a pretty bold risk at the time, I knew from experience that it was a risk worth taking.’

‘So we met with Dennis in a Greek restaurant in Bayswater. He was drinking Retsina and gargling it like a seven year old. Ken arrived late and Dennis spat Retsina at him and Ken got very irritated. There was this silly playfulness; he was still in the space he’d taken for writing the play.’

‘The documentaries made by Michael Apted for Granada, beginning with *Seven Up* in 1963 and revisiting the same children septennially, had reached *Twenty One Up* not long before Gibson began shooting. Gibson showed the latest and then the first film to his cast. ‘I said “Don’t worry about playing a kid, you’ll get the childishness, just play the character.” That gave them specificity. Otherwise we wouldn’t have known how to get started. Concentrating on childishness, we would just have had a load of big kids running around and no character.’

Before going off to the forest location in Dorset (not Dean), the cast had ten days in a rehearsal room and, unusually, Potter appeared often. ‘He was very supportive,’ Gibson recalls. ‘I was nervous and he took me for a drink and said “You’ve got to accept your own talent.” It was very confidence giving, coming from him. I’d been a Potter fan since the Nigel

Barton plays. To try to translate his vision was a great honour. So it was a moment I treasure.’

KENITH TRODD

Kenith Trodd has a distinguished record as a producer in British films and television. As well as several theatrical movies and many series he was also responsible for in excess of 50 single dramas for the small screen, most of them made as films. He is particularly associated with Dennis Potter having produced among many others, *Pennies From Heaven* (for which he won a BAFTA Television Award for Most Original Programme/Series), *The Singing Detective*, *Blue Remembered Hills* and Potter’s final dramas *Karaoke* and *Cold Lazarus*. Currently he is in the early stages of a big screen movie to be made in Sydney and another in India. He is also trying to persuade BBC Drama to remake Potter’s first (lost) drama *The Confidence Course* and to commission an original film based on themes suggested by Dennis Potter’s life or works.

JOHN BIRD

John Bird is an award winning writer/comedian/actor and satirist. He began his television career in 1962 writing for *That Was The Week That Was* and alongside writer John Fortune, was at the centre of the boom in satire during the 1960s. John has continued acting and writing for film and television for over fifty years. John won his first BAFTA Television Award in 1967 for Best Light Entertainment and twenty years later collected another win for his television comedy with Rory Bremner and John Fortune. The trio went on to receive four more nominations.

JANINE DUVITSKI

Janine Duvitski is a film, theatre and television actress. Janine has appeared on screen for over forty years, most notably as Angela in both Mike Leigh’s theatre and television production of *Abigail’s*

Party. Other television works include *Vanity Fair* (1988), the comedy series *One Foot In The Grave* and *Waiting For God* and *Little Dorrit* (2008). Janine’s most recent appearances include the 2014 series of *Benidorm* and children’s favourite *Old Jack’s Boat* on CBeebies.

SAMIRA AHMED

Samira Ahmed is an award-winning journalist and broadcaster. Samira has worked as a television news anchor for the BBC and *Channel 4 News* and is a regular television and radio broadcaster for the BBC on culture and politics. Samira is a writer on culture, politics and social affairs and also makes radio documentaries.

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