

# British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

## Brimstone and Treacle

Dennis Potter  
Bridewell Theatre  
(2004)

When Dennis Potter chose to write a play about the nature of good and evil, it was inevitable that he would address his subject head-on. Even 28 years later in the aftermath of the In-Yer-Face theatre, *Brimstone and Treacle* has the power to shock.

This is on two levels. First, its horrific portrayal of a young woman, Pattie, in the throes of a two-year long spastic attack is stomach-churning. This is all to the credit of director Alistair Green and superb young actress Maria Carson.

Add to this, the evil brought onto stage by the seemingly angelic charm of Chris Hastings' Martin, and this is a most unsettling evening. Hastings who has something of the look of original star, Sting (but not the singing voice), shines as a devilish man who is happy to feed off the unfortunate and to do far, far worse.

Potter also has fun satirising Pattie's straight-laced parents. This is helped by George Gold's living room design that is exactly right, all drab greens and browns. This epitomises a shamed father who has recently joined the National Front and a suffering mother who has sacrificed all to nurse her baby-like daughter.

There are strong underlying political messages that still come through, despite the miscasting of the too-young and insufficiently serious Peter Sundby, as the buttoned-up father who cannot address his daughter's affliction.

The moral questions that Potter raises will always be relevant. Is there a God or a devil; and are miracles possible? He does not believe in absolutes and, ultimately, in his world a reincarnated Lucifer can still be a force for good.

This new stage version of a film originally banned by the BBC almost thirty years ago is a mixed blessing. It is, however, worth seeing for the performances by Maria Carson and Chris Hastings, and for a reminder of the work of an interesting and controversial figure.

Reviewer: [Philip Fisher](#)