



**Mark Damazer – Dinner with Enoch**

The point about informal Enoch was you never quite knew. He would still be wearing the standard Powell uniform – striped suits, sober shirts, tie (small knot preferred). He was not a man for pastel shades, Lacoste t-shirts or indeed any known form of sartorial 'smart casual.'

It was 1976. I was a Cambridge undergraduate – stunned for any number of reasons to be seated around the table (he had constructed some of it). I did not agree with most of the politics – particularly on race and immigration – a fact that was understood and that neither of us ever mentioned. Everything pointed to difficulty. I had not been brought up to know much about the social norms and codes of those at the centre of the political, intellectual and journalistic worlds around Westminster. And the Powell guests around the house were all very well turned out – while I was utterly unkempt.

But somehow Enoch contrived to make it work. He had some clever techniques. He would introduce me with elaborate – almost ornate – formality as a university friend of his daughter who was reliably well informed about all sorts of worthwhile things (Gladstone, Disraeli, Queen Victoria). Very early on he would pitch a question in the right zone – easy enough to answer – but just hard enough to impress anyone who had not given 19<sup>th</sup> century politics the time he thought it deserved. Thus my credentials were happily inflated but I was established with the other guests. He did it easily – and knowingly.

There were times when he sought to ask my opinion as a representative of a generation. ("Let us have a different perspective on the matter at hand"). He normally did this hoping, if not for insurrection, for at least mild provocation. This was conveyed by a wink of sorts. But the invitation to opine on, say, the value of a written constitution, was delivered deadpan – without any suggestion that I was there for light relief or to add a dollop of contrariness.

He despaired on occasion at my inability to pick up literary references, particularly to Shakespeare – but his admonitions were gentle enough not to sap my morale and he would mutter something supportive about having the rest of my life to grapple with King Lear.

He laughed, somewhat exaggeratedly I thought – but never in a way that undermined anybody's contribution. But much more importantly – there was a large (and initially totally unexpected) set of twinkles and smiles. I always thought these had editorial meanings. A smile for agreement (small smile) was different from a smile for a good point (big smile) which was different from a smile for a happy recollection (biggest smile). These would increase as the evening progressed.

You never felt anyone else was steering proceedings. He liked to be in charge. But he used his formal politeness to ensure that nobody got left out – he had a sharp eye and a good ear. It was all fascinating – and very surprising.