

A3: The Plot

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For a stage measuring 130 metres by 40 metres.

Prologue

The stage is bare except for an old fence post lying in the middle somewhere.

Two men enter: one is in his 30s, the other in his 40s and walks with the aid of a stick.

They are carrying land surveying equipment: a tripod, a theodolite, a laser rod etc.

They start to make measurements.

The line of the laser falls across the fence post and causes some discussion.

- Move it on to our side.
- Then we'll be liable for its upkeep. And damages should any harm come to a member of the public as a result of its disrepair. Look ... it's just rubbish.
- That's an antique of the future.
- Half of it belongs to our neighbour.
- Can you see any neighbours?

They move the fence post on to one side of the laser line and continue measuring an oblong 8 metres by 10 metres, marking the boundary with paint.

- That's the first time I've seen you paint in years.

Once they've finished they spread out a blanket and lie back to enjoy the sun, the blue sky, and ruminates on the nature of land ownership.

As the light goes down they drift off to sleep and dream.

ACT 1

Scene 1 - Covering roughly a thousand years.

As the lights go up we can see the stage is covered with oak trees.

The sound of an invading Roman Army marches by in the distance.

Two Peasants are dozing as wild pigs sniff around them.

Deer wander across the stage.

We hear a reduced Roman Army march by in the opposite direction and as the Vikings settle the Peasants wake.

- Did you hear that?
- I was dreaming then. A nice fire. Mead. Some epic storytelling.

The sound of horses galloping and a hunting horn.

The Peasants leap to their feet and the pigs scatter.

One Peasant is shot in the back with an arrow and falls dead to the floor.

A Norman Duke enters followed by two servants carrying dead piglets suspended on a stick between them.

- Faites attentions. C'est ma terre et vous êtes à moi. Coupez cettres arbres. Vite, vite.

The Duke and his retinue exit.

The remaining Peasant sets about cutting down the trees.

Lights down.

Scene 2 - Covering only about 500 years.

In the background we can see a Manor House and wooded copses with small plots of cultivated land and rough homesteads dotted between them.

A harrow bisects the stage vertically and different food crops are planted either side of it.

Two Serfs tend the plots.

A Templar Knight rides a horse on to the stage.

- Your toil will be rewarded with the riches of Heaven everlasting. In the meantime, I need more funds to fight so get to work.

The Serfs bow and continue working as the Knight passes on his way to die in the Crusades.

As the Serfs begin to speculate on the nature of the meal they'll receive once the harvest is in, one Serf starts to cough then falls down dead of the Plague.

The remaining Serf buries his neighbour and now has to work on both sides of the harrow.

A Monk enters and takes produce from the Serf handing him a few coins in return.

The sounds of peasant protest rise from the countryside.

- Peasants have rights.
- The King will protect our rights.
- God save the King.

The Serf and the Monk are negotiating a copyhold tenancy contract when we hear sounds of the Reformation sweeping the land.

Followers of King Henry VIII ride on to the stage and the Monk protests.

- Abire. Terra est ecclesia.

Henry VIII's Squires erect a fence post centre stage, tie the Monk to it and light firewood at his feet.

As the flames rise to consume the Monk, one of the Squires steps forward to take ownership of the estate and the Free Peasant's contract.

As the flames fade we can see the woods in the distance being cleared and Free Peasants being evicted from their homes.

Lights down.

Scene 3 - Beginning some time in the 17th century and ending some time in the 20th century.

The stage is planted with a single cereal crop. A few geese wander about.

As the lights go up we can see a Furnace in the distance, smoke rising from its chimney.

The Ironmaster stands facing upstage with his arms raised and holds forth on the liberties of Man and manufacturing as his Tenant Farmer and a Labourer tend the crop.

- The English will always fight for truth and it'll be my cannon balls they'll be firing. This is the future.

A Vagrant enters begging for alms but the Tenant Farmer and the Labourer jump on him.

- Oi. Vagrant. Trespasser. You're not from round here.

They are about to tie him to the fence post to flog him but the Ironmaster intervenes because he needs more labour for his Ironworks.

The Vagrant is released and exits with the Labourer towards the Furnace.

The sounds of Parliamentary protest can be heard.

- An Englishman has rights and liberties.
- Give us a Parliamentary democracy.

The Ironmaster is attempting to explain the meaning of Constitutional Monarchy to the Tenant Farmer when gunshots are heard and both fall down dead.

The sounds of The English Civil Wars 1, 2 and 3 rise from the countryside around.

- Off with the King's head.
- Restore the monarchy.
- God save the King.

As the Ironworks burns to the ground, the dead farmer's family and a few labourers enter to bury the bodies.

The new Landowner, a Member of the Landed Gentry, enters accompanied by his new Tenant Farmer.

The Tenant Farmer shoos the homeless labourers off the stage and sets to work as the Landowner speculates on the nature of his responsibilities.

- This is what matters. This is what endures. The Empire extends east and west across barbarous lands but here I remain ...

As he speaks the Tenant Farmer's lease expires and he leaves the stage with his family and is replaced by a new Tenant Farmer.

Here I remain to keep England, its traditions, its very being, safe at the centre of it.

The sound of the South Sea Bubble expanding and bursting in the distance.

This land and its safe stewardship are the only guarantee of civilisation. Of continuity. Of order. It's my duty ...

The sound of a horn. A fox runs across the stage followed by pack of hounds and then a group of riders dressed in hunting pink.

It's my duty to maintain this order. I keep the land farmed, I keep its children schooled, its poor relieved. I keep its local institutions strong and hearty. By God, I am its local institutions. I serve the nation ...

As the next two hundred years pass, ownership of the land passes from generation to generation of the Landowner's family and a succession of Tenant Farmers and their families leave for the city or the workhouse as their leases expire.

I serve the nation and our Sovereign by keeping the land in my family, and keeping my place in Parliament and English values at its heart.

The sound of the Industrial Revolution and de-population of the countryside can be heard in the distance.

As the cesspits of industry and mercantilism pollute this green land, ferment dissent, it is imperative ...

The Landowner has been joined by his Young Son.

- It is imperative we preserve England and the obedience of its subjects or ...

It is now some time in the early 1900s and the stage is covered in grass.

- Or we are lost.

The Gentleman and his son survey their somewhat depleted estate.

A Dairymaid crosses the stage with a cow.

- Morning Sir. Morning Young Master.

They nod as she passes.

- Her future is in our hands.

Shouting. A Suffragette runs on to the stage chased by a Policeman.

- Oi. This is private land.
- Liberty ... equality ... universal suffrage.
- Sorry Squire, I'll have her apprehended, don't you worry.

They exit.

- We are the caretakers of centuries of tradition, and eternal values ...

A stream of young men in army uniform march across the stage gathering up the Young Son with them.

The Landowner is left alone as the sound of the Great War rises from over the Channel.

A few maimed survivors straggle back across the stage.

The Landowner nails a 'For Sale' sign on to the fencepost and exits.

Lights down.

ACT 2

Scene 1 - The late 1980s.

The stage is covered in grass, and a hedgerow runs across it at the back.

Some delapidated farm buildings are visible in the background.

The sound of a horn, dogs, and protest.

- No to animal cruelty.
- Fuck off, you oiks.
- Class war.

A fox runs across the stage followed by a pack of dogs, a hunt, and some hunt saboteurs.

Two of the hunt saboteurs stop, out of breath.

- This is what matters. Saving the English Countryside from itself.
- Saving it for mankind.

They look about them, enjoy the sun, the blue sky. They begin to speculate about a dream life in the country.

- Imagine our own subsistence farm here.
- Totally organic.
- Rearing chickens. Rare breed sheep. Children.
- And it's so close to London.

An aeroplane flies overhead. They watch it pass.

A voice off-stage.

- Oi. You.

The couple look at each other.

- Yes, you. Piss off. Piss off my land. Or I'll put the bloody bull on you.

The couple exit.

A Farmer in his 60s enters herding a cow ahead of him.

He stops centre stage and straightens a fallen fence post with a battered sign attached to it which reads 'Beware of the Bull'.

- There's no future here no more. Not for my children. Nor yours, Daisy.

A few goats wander on to the stage but the Farmer shoos them away.

Diversification and grant applications at my age. What do I want with specialist cheeses? When there's no money to fix your barn. Or my roof.

The Farmer takes a sign from his pocket and hammers it on to the post: it now reads 'For Sale'.

He exits with his cow.

Lights down.

Scene 2 - the mid 1990s.

As the light comes up on our stage, we can see in the background the ramshackle farm buildings transform, one by one, into detached red-brick family homes in the Tudor style.

The sound of birdsong, the hum of planes overhead, the soft crunch of high performance cars on private gravel driveways.

The faded 'For Sale' sign now has a fresh 'Sold' pasted across it.

A couple of goats graze around the post.

Voices off-stage.

- Oi. This is private. Bugger off.

The goats leap and run off stage as a couple in their 40s enter.

- This is our land. Who thinks they can graze their goats on our land?
- Without our permission.
- We own this land. All we want is to build our dream home on land that belongs to us. A home for our children. And our children's children.

The sounds of polite protest have begun to rise from beyond the hedgerows and walled gardens.

- No to development.
- No to the destruction of our countryside idyll.
- I have a right to graze.
- I have right of access.
- We have a right to privacy.
- London has a right to breathe.
- Our civic institutions will protect us.

By now house prices in the surrounding area have rocketed and a number of ponies and goats have wandered on to the stage and started to graze.

The couple's attempts to shoo them away are ineffectual.

A 4x4 drives on to the stage scattering the horses and goats.

- Oi. Get off our land. This is private land. You are trespassing.

The 4x4 stops and a Land Trader jumps out.

- Look at this beautiful field ... noble and enduring. Whoever said you'd be able to build here?

Things change, it's true. Maybe fifty, maybe a hundred years from now, planning laws will allow development here but ... I hope you won't mind me saying ... you'll be dead by then.

I'm a Land Trader and i'm here to help.

He pulls some notes from his wallet and offers it to the couple. They refuse.

- Well, I suppose it might be worth more when you're dead.

The couple take the money and exit.

The Land Trader straightens the sign and slaps a new 'For Sale' over 'Sold'.

- Roll up, roll up.

He waits.

Lights down.

Scene 3 - the Twenty-First Century.

The fence post stands at an angle. There are a number of layers of 'For Sale' and 'Sold' signs stuck to it.

The Land Entrepreneur (formerly known as the Land Trader) strides about the stage.

A few goats and ponies graze as he maps out his field of dreams and offers up a prayer to the power of imagination and escalating demands on real estate.

- Come on people. Grow veg. Keep bees or something. Use your imaginations.

Buy for your children. They'll have their name on a little bit of England. They can pass it on to their children.

It's real. It's tangible. It's low maintenance.

He points to a goat.

It's well attended.

Come on people. Think big.

Freehold landownership is forever. Not like stocks, not like shares. England isn't going to disappear over-night.

Think of the future.

Think of city overspill and rural homelessness. Think of housing shortages and immigration. Think of a flagging economy and Government led initiatives and the relaxation of planning laws.

Buy now for next to nothing and think what it might be worth one day ...

A plane flies overhead.

He points to the sky.

There. That's someone with imagination. The International Speculator.

He's on his mobile phone.

Let me show you how this works.

He takes a spray can from a pocket.

You buy this entire field.

He starts to walk back and forth across the stage.

Of course, it's cheap. It has no planning permission.

As he talks he sprays lines up and down the stage dividing it into sections.

Who do the ponies belong to? Who cares? Listen ...

You divide this field into 40 smaller plots. And sell them one by one.

What will they do with it? What can they do with it? Listen ...

They'll go like hot cakes. A little piece of England for a bargain sum.
Who wouldn't?

And you, International Speculator, you get forty times that bargain sum. Minus my commission.

Another plane flies overhead. A bundle of cash drops out of the sky.

Sold to the man in the sky. Now just sit back and watch the cash roll in.

They'll come.

The fools will come.

He ends the call and exits avoiding the ponies as he goes.

A procession of people and animals cross the stage:

Ramblers.

Dog walkers.

Mountain bikers.

Amateur historians.

Country runners.

Horse riders.

Metal detectorists.

School kids with bottles of cider.

Badgers, foxes, deer, field mice, voles, sundry birds.

Ponies.

A squatter/horse-breeder attends the ponies.

Drone enthusiasts.

A local resident shoots a drone down.

A van backs onto the field and its driver dumps waste building material.

None of them take any notice of the plots or their changing ownership.

As the years pass the plot markings fade and the fence post sinks to the ground.

Lights down.

Epilogue

The stage is bare except for an oblong of turf measuring 8 metres by 10 metres.

The two men, who we met in the Prologue, are putting the finishing touches to a sign attached to the now upright fence post.

It is beautifully designed and reads 'For Sale'.

The two men unfold stools and sit down either side of the sign.

They wait.

Lights down.

The End.