

NORLAND LEAR

A country which has been at peace for two hundred and fifty years finds itself at war. A settled society is transformed. Every resource is mobilised. Sleepy backwaters become hubs of industry. Distant provinces are brought closer to the centre. Vast areas are being mapped and settled for the first time. People are put to work as never before. Quite quickly undreamed of wealth is being created. But not everyone is happy. The change is too rapid and the outcome unknown. In Norland the people have lived quietly with one generation building gradually upon the modest achievements of the previous. Suddenly the forests are full of strangers from the south. The people fear that they will lose everything. They are determined to hold on to what they have. Now the war is close to home. Too close, the people say, and the enemy could be the man standing next to you.

The forests of Norland belong to the King. For the sake of the nation at such a desperate time he decides that they will be divided into three estates, each one managed by one of his three daughters.

King Lear is old and has no appetite for war. He sees the division of the forest as a way of passing on his kingdom to one of his daughters and to this end he sets them a test: they must prove their love and loyalty to him or they will inherit nothing, neither forest estate nor Kingdom. In his mind Lear must be confident that whoever succeeds him will ensure the survival of Norland even though he knows it is a risky strategy.

The Kings councillors, Keiss and Thurdistoft, warn him against this impulsive action. For such advice Keiss is banished and Thurdistoft is blinded.

The result of the division of Norland and its forests is tragic for both the King and the country. Instead of enjoying his retirement Lear is pitched to the very ends of madness and the country is exposed to needless bloody conflict.

The exterior pressures of war, the conflicting personalities, greed and ambitions of the King's daughters, the scheming of petty landowners and the genuine desire of the common people to retain their ancient and lawful rights, all conspire to make NORLAND LEAR a play with a powerful resonance for today, even though it is set in a not-too-far-distant future in

which all hydro-carbon reserves have run out. The issues raised in the play - of power, history, psychology, gender, economics, environment and language are of concern to all societies at all times.

NORLAND LEAR, although drawing its inspiration from Shakespeare's "King Lear", is a modern European play for a continent which is undergoing radical social, economic and topographical change. If it is the job of the theatre to dream the future into being then NORLAND LEAR will act as both a challenge and a warning that in our desire to create new structures is sown the seeds of our potential destruction.

NORLAND LEAR is a large cast play requiring a versatile and energetic ensemble, a commissioned musical score, a choreographer and a community chorus.

The play is set in the future, in Norland, in a forest beside the sea.

Characters

King Lear

Queen Ran

Goneril/Frigg, the eldest daughter

Regan/ Freya, the middle daughter

Cordelia/Gefion, the youngest daughter

Alba, husband to Goneril/Frigg

Kernow, husband to Regan/Freya

Keiss, a timber baron

Thurdistoft, a timber baron

Eirik, son of Thurdistoft

Eymund, illegitimate son of Thurdistoft

Moon or Mani, Lear's fool

Gleamer or Gjalp, the fool's wife

Thrall, a poor farmer

Thir, Thrall's wife

A Chorus of trees

(A Sample Scene from the beginning of the play)

A clearing in the forest

Enter THURDISTOFT AND KEISS

KEISS: Do you think their will be a war?

THURDISTOFT: Wars always come
Why should this one
be any different?

KEISS: Then the King will need our timber

THURDISTOFT: Need is not the same as supply

KEISS: And giving is not the same as taking
but
they are capable of the latter

THURDISTOFT: Selling is not giving either

KEISS: Will we sell?

THURDISTOFT: That depends

KEISS: Upon what?

THURDISTOFT: Upon need

KEISS: This land is barely populated
yet what people there are
will demand their say

THURDISTOFT: Then there is your war

KEISS: The timber belongs to them

they say

THURDISTOFT: And they belong to us
 we say

KEISS: And who do we belong to?

THURDISTOFT: The Company
 as you well know

KEISS: And the Company
 is owned by the King

THURDISTOFT: The King
 I believe
 has an idea

KEISS: Each time the King has an idea
 we lose money

THURDISTOFT: This time
 I fear
 we may lose more than money

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