



Fields and fields and fields

by Jonathan Hall

A play for secondary school students focusing on Agro Biodiversity - The variety of different types of agricultural produce found on earth and what this means for human health.

Cast

Flexibility is the key word. The parts are left deliberately vague (apart from Mary and Harvir who should be played by the same people throughout without doubling up); the piece is designed to work with groups of different sizes from about eight to thirty.

Setting and Style

Set in India and Ireland in the present and the past. Moves are a suggestion only; any stage directions should be seen as a guideline, not a straightjacket.

Sound and Movement

Alex Parson's original music and sound effects are provided for your use. It is clearly marked in the script where to use the music or sound cues; however, feel free to add your own spin on things or incorporate the pupils' own live sound effects.

Take a look at Movement Director Robin Guiver's movement videos for ideas and starting points.

A note on Agro Biodiversity: the variety of different types of agricultural produce found on earth - in the context of this piece this refers to different types of food.



Indian style music

MUSIC: BASMATI DRONE.MP3

(Cast come in and plant rice) (Harvir is showing this to Mary who looks on in awe)

Mary: So **many** fields - as far as the eye can see!

Harvir: We plant the rice twice a year
Some places have machines
Here we do it by hand-

Mary: Flat wet fields
Stretching away to meet the mountains -
The heat! *(She basks in the warmth; it's great)*

Harvir: It's not like that where you're from?

SFX: RAIN AND WIND.WAV

Mary: Rain
Rain, rain and more rain
Skies the colour of wet ink -
(Puts her hand out)

Harvir: We get the rains too -
But not at the moment
(Putting out his hand in introduction)
Harvir-
This is Haryana-
Northern India, 2015

Mary: Mary-
From Westport, County Mayo, Ireland
1848 *(a pause)*

Harvir: You've come a long way. *(She nods)*
Why have you come? *(But she doesn't answer)*

Mary: So is it just this rice you're all growing?

Harvir: Just rice-

Mary: And just the one type?

Harvir: It didn't used to be-

(The movement behind becomes dominant and syncopated with the speech as the names of the different types of rice are recited)



MUSIC: SOWING AND TILLING.MP3

Worker: Jarah-

Worker: Langi-

Worker: Khato Pajam

Worker: Khato Dosh-

Harvir: When I was a child -

(He conjures up the memory of a noisy market)

The rice market -

Mary: The where?

Harvir: Where we sold all the rice-

(The workers become traders selling in the market)

(Mary watches in wonder; she's never seen anything like this)

Worker: Jarah!

Worker: Langi!

Worker: Khato Pajam!

Worker: Khato Dosh!

Mary: So many different types of rice-

Harvir: Sacks and sacks of rice

Mary: All the different colours-

Worker: Blood red

Worker: Yellow like sunshine

Worker: Brown like chocolate -

Mary: Like a paint box?

Harvir: Like a huge big paint box -
That's how it was -
And now -

(The market fades into people tilling the fields)

Fields and fields - of just one rice - basmati

Mary: Just (*says the unfamiliar word carefully*) basmati rice?



Harvir: Just basmati -

Mary: That's how it was with us
Not rice
Though it was as wet as your paddy fields -

(She conjures up Ireland, 1858)
(The light goes from warm to cold)
(Irish music plays, the workers become the Irish peasants)
MUSIC: AWAKENING MEMORIES.MP3

Mary: One type of potato - that's what we grow

Peasant: The Irish lumper

*(The peasants step forward, as Irish music plays.
They do a 'one potato, two potato' movement in an approximation of an Irish jig style)*

Peasant: The Irish lumper -

Peasant: Boiled

Peasant: Mashed

Peasant: With butter

Peasant: Salt

Peasant: Onion

Peasant: Bacon on a Sunday

Peasant: Potato cakes

Peasant: Potato cakes

Peasant: Potato, potato, potato-

Harvir: Just potatoes?

Mary: Fields and fields, all the same -

Harvir: Is that all they grew?

Mary: There was the corn and the wheat of course -

Peasant: But that's grown by the gentry, for the gentry

Peasant: Shipped off to England -

Peasant: Too expensive for the likes of us anyway

Mary: That was all we had -

(The picture freezes, becomes neutral)



But what I don't understand -
Why did you change?

(Some of the group snap into life as Supermarket Buyers with mobile phones and ipads)

Buyer: Market forces (*shakes her hand*)
Mary: Who are you?
Buyer: Buyers
Buyer: We buy
Mary: Buy what?
Buyer: Rice – lots of rice -
Buyer: Customer demand
Buyer: It's a hungry old world out there -
Buyer: A hungry old world that knows what it wants -
Buyer: If we may show you -

(And they introduce and choreograph three short, snappy scenarios)

(1) (TV cookery show)

TV Cook: ...so we gently steam the rice in the fish broth...
Presenter: This is basmati rice of course?
TV Cook: Absolutely- just look at that lovely firm white grain -
None of that mushy texture

(2) (A Parent on the phone shopping)

Parent: No darling-
I'm doing Thai-
Chicken probably
So if you could pick up some basmati
Make sure it is basmati
You know it's all Theo will touch

(3) (A late night curry house)

Customer: Chicken vindaloo extra hot, and a half of lager
Customer: Beef Madras extra extra hot and a **pint** of lager
Customer: Prawn biryani **radioactive**, **two** pints of lager and a fire extinguisher
All: And don't forget the basmati rice!

(The Buyers freeze and dismiss the picture)



Buyer: You get the picture?
Buyer: (*showing ipad*) See these demand figures?
Buyer: Our hands are tied

MUSIC: CROP DECIMATION.MP3

Harvir: (*to Mary*)
 So now-
 all the fields are the same
 and the rice souk is just a memory

Mary: It's just like it was with us

Harvir: In what way?

Mary: One crop-
 Fields and fields and fields of just one crop-

(Irish music starts again and we're back in Ireland here the peasants talk in worried groups)

SUGGESTED MUSIC: POTATO BLIGHT.MP3

Peasant: I don't believe you

Peasant: Potatoes are always going to grow here

Mary: (*Remembering as she watches*) It started as a rumour

Peasant: I tell not one word of a lie -

Peasant: I heard it too -

Peasant: All the crop
 Just... black slime

Peasant: The whole crop?

Peasant: Everything

Peasant: This was in Cork?

Peasant: Tralee I heard -

Peasant: Just beyond the hills

Mary: And then it as our turn

(Music, movement representing blight and famine)

SFX: RAIN AND WIND.WAV

*Again and again and again
Year upon year upon year
(The one potato, two potato is repeated)
All that was left -
Little bags of black slime
(The Food Scientist steps forward as the picture freezes)*

NB: How The Food Scientist(s) is/are represented is up to the director but it is important to move away from the obvious stereotype of bespectacled nerds in white coats... these are people used to working out in the field - maybe wearing combats - carrying their tools of their trade, notebooks, ipads, cameras...)

Food Scientist: It was a truly terrible time

(Using her ipad to show Mary and Harvir)

- these maps show the extent of the blight
- this graph - the death toll

Harvir: So many

Food Scientist: Some million plus they reckon

Mary: - those... charts -
That was my village
My family

Food Scientist: Phytophthora Infestans (*Pronounced Fight- off- thora in-fest-ans*)
Known as the potato blight
Thought to have originated in South America
Attacking only certain types of root vegetables
And because there was only one type of potato -
It cut through the most of that year's crop
The next year - the same thing
Pretty much all the crop was wiped out

Mary: Fields and fields and fields of decay

(The memories start to awaken)
SUGGEST MUSIC PHYTOPHTHORA.MP3

Peasant: For the love of God help us

Commentator: I saw people like human skeletons

Peasant: Help my baby

Commentator: When they fell down
They were too weak to get up
And of course with the malnutrition...
Disease was rife



Mary: My Mammy, my Da
My two sisters
My baby brother

Harvir: Did no one do something?

Commentator: This was the nineteenth century -
There was no organized aid effort, not as such
Not like nowadays

(The memories fade into neutrality)

Harvir: What about the wheat and the corn?

Mary: That wasn't for the likes of us -

Buyer: *(19th century - but could so easily be the 20th century counterpart)*
All bought and paid for I'm afraid

Buyer: By the English markets

Buyers: Our hands are tied

Harvir: *(to Mary)* Is **this** why you've come?

Mary: You must be careful -
Fields and fields and fields of one crop

Harvir: But we have pesticides - herbicides-
Things that can wipe out these blights

Food scientist: Er-
No pesticide or herbicide is totally 100% effective
There's always the chance **some** strain of blight could prove resistant.

Mary: And if all your basmati rice was hit by the blight -
I'm looking at your fields and fields and fields
I'm remembering how it was - for us

(The cast become general population now, worried at what they're hearing)

Harvir: Times have changed -

Villager: We don't only eat rice -

Villager: It's not like we'll starve -

Mary: You will if you don't get to sell your rice, surely?
And anyway - what about the people you're selling your rice to?

Harvir: They don't rely on just one crop -
No one does these days

Cast: There's bread and biscuits and pasta



Cast: Ketchup - cooking oil - cornflakes

Cast: Noodles

Food Scientist: Er-
Those foodstuffs you mention
They're derived from just **three** foodstuffs -
Rice, wheat and corn
Together they account for about 60% of the world's calories

Mary: Calories?

Food Scientist: What we need to make us go -
The fuel in our engine if you like
And with so many of the world's calories coming from just a few places
It'd just take one blight to attack one of them
You can see -
We'd be in serious trouble

*(The cast look worried - what can they do?
except what they've always done?
Carry on tilling and tending their fields
As they always have and hopefully always will)*

Harvir: You came to warn us

Mary: I'm thinking of your paint box colours in the rice souk
Different is - **good**

(Harvir nods)

Maybe - the lessons of the past...what we went through- could change the future

(Her purpose is achieved - she's done all she can. She goes)

(Harvir looks after her)

(Freeze)

MUSIC: SOWING AND TILLING.MP3

The End