

Terra Loam Encounters Erosion, A Puppet Play by Francis D. Hole

15
mins.

The Setting:

The setting is the state of Wisconsin, USA. This play may be rewritten to make the scene fit another area.

Cast of Characters:

Terra Loam. This is the puppeteer who wears a cap with the label "Terra Loam" on the front. The cap is decorated with soil jewelry. (Soil jewelry is an arrangement of bits of soil in a pleasing way to be worn as an ornament. An acorn cup or other natural receptacle can be used for the soil arrangement. Clear adhesives may be used. Pins and string anchor the ornaments to one's clothing.)

Maple Tree. This puppet rides on the right hand of the puppeteer and carries a small umbrella over its shoulder, representing a canopy of leaves.

Bucky Badger. This puppet rides on the left hand of the puppeteer.

Erosion. This puppet replaces the maple tree on the puppeteer's right hand. Erosion is the process that destroys unprotected soil by action of wind, water and gravity.

Scene 1

Terra Loam: Who are you?

Maple Tree: I am the maple tree.

TL: Maple Tree?

MT: Yes, I am the sugar maple tree.

TL: You must be the state tree of the state of Wisconsin and several other states.

MT: That I am. And proud of it.

TL: And we are proud of you, Maple Tree. By the way, Maple Tree...

MT: Yes, Terra Loam?

TL: I see your leaves are all folded down. It is the growing season. Why don't you open up your canopy of leaves?

MT: Oh, yes. I forgot. (Maple Tree allows Terra Loam to raise the little umbrella.)

TL: There, now. That looks more like a tree in summer time. How old are you, Maple Tree?

MT: I am about 200 years old, Terry. (In some places trees are much older and so are the soils. The script may be changed to suit.)

TL: Two hundred years! (To audience, aside) Folks, I am spokesloam for the soil. I am 10,000 years old. So to me 200 years seems like nothing. But when I put myself in my imagination in the roots of a maple tree, I realize that this is a ripe old age for it. (To MT)

Congratulations on attaining such a great age, Maple Tree. Have you taken any interesting trips during your long life?

MT: Trips? What is a trip?

TL: A trip is leaving your place of residence, going somewhere else and coming back.

MT: Oh, no. I've not taken any trips.

TL: You mean you have stood right here in the same place for two centuries?

MT: That's right. I am rooted here. It is where I belong. I sprouted in the best place for me. Why should I evict myself and go wandering to less suitable places?

TL: What a contented tree you are. Anyway, you do go to the grocery every week.

MT: Grocery? What is a grocery?

TL: A grocery is a store with food on tables and shelves for sale.

MT: I do not need a grocery. I just spread my leaves in the sunshine and make my own food.

TL: I wish I could do that. If I were green, I could just bask in the sun and feed myself. Maple Tree!

MT: Yes, Terry.

TL: As you look back over your long life, what is the greatest satisfaction you have enjoyed?

MT: My greatest pleasure has been to carry out the covenant between us plants and the rocks of the lands of this planet.

TL: Covenant? What covenant?

MT: Well, about 300 million years ago the gods of this planet were inventing us plants, and they needed to make a lot of soil from the hard rocks, like granite, so the roots could be in the soil.

TL: Soil is made from rock by breaking up the rock somehow?

MT: Soil is loosened-up rock with plant parts added and humus, which is rotted plant and animal material. But 300 million years ago the rock was bare.

TL: If the rocky land was bare, then when rains came, the water just ran off into the sea.

MT: Right. So the gods asked the rocks to loosen up to make room for roots. But the rocks refused.

TL: The rocks refused to loosen up to make soil? Why?

MT: Because the rocks were afraid that wind and water would just take any soil away into the sea. The rocks did not wish to be eroded. That is where the covenant came in. A covenant is an agreement, you know.

TL: What was the covenant like?

MT: The plants made a promise to the rocks that if the

rocks would loosen up to become soil on top, the plants would protect the soil from erosion. Protection is important!

lecture about soil. I was just going to tell you and Maple Tree there are just two kinds of soil in the world.

- TL: How could the plants protect the loose soils from being washed or blown away?
- MT: The plants can bind soil together with roots, and the plants can shield the soil from rain drops by spreading a canopy of leaves over the soil. . . the way a mother hen covers her chicks with her wings. A well protected soil gives good production of food crops, timber and pasture & range.
- TL: Did the rocks, like granite, agree to become loose soil?
- MT: Yes, the rocks took the risk, and loosened up. So I have enjoyed carrying out my part of the bargain. I have been binding the soil together with my roots, and shielding the soil with my canopy.
- TL: What a happy life you and the soil have had together for two centuries, Maple Tree.
- MT: There is one thing I worry about, though.
- TL: What is that, Maple Tree. Tell Terry.
- MT: Terry, I wake up at night with nightmares about being eroded.
- TL: Eroded? I thought it was soil that was afraid of erosion. But how could a tree be eroded?
- MT: If the soil is eroded, then plant roots are exposed and even a tree like me can be swept away in a flood. After all, I did sprout near the banks of a stream. During a rain storm that stream could flood; and soil and tree could both be swept away.
- TL: Well, Maple Tree, if you have been worrying for 200 years about something that never happened, could you find it in your heart to stop worrying?
- MT: I'll try.

Scene 2

(Bucky Badger slips onto the puppeteer's left hand)

- TL: Who are you?
- Bucky Badger:
I'm Bucky Badger, official state beast.
I'm neither the greatest nor am I the least.
The animal kingdom is represented by me;
I speak for the moose as well as the flea.
- TL: Good speech, Bucky.
- BB: Thank you, Terry. Now it is your turn.
- TL: You mean it is my turn to give my speech?
- BB: Sure, go ahead.
- TL: Well, first I have something to say to you, Bucky Badger, and to you, Maple Tree. I have something to say about soil.
- BB: Oh, here we go with a long, boring lecture!
- TL: Oh, Bucky! How rude! What you just said in front of everybody! I was not going to give a long and boring

- BB: Oh, I'm sorry. I guess I just lost control of myself.
- MT: What is one kind of soil in the world, Terry?
- TL: The first kind of soil is the Wild Soil.
- MT: Wild soil?
- BB: Could the wild soil bite me?
- TL: Bucky! Just because you bite things, you need not assume everything bites everything. No. The soil never bit anybody.
- BB: I'm sorry. I guess I just goofed again.
- TL: Listen now, Bucky. The wild soil is the soil of the wilderness. It is the soil that supports all the wild things.
- MT: Like me, a maple tree, Terry?
- TL: Yes, indeed, Maple Tree. You are a wild tree. And the soil that supports you is a wild soil.
- BB: How about me, Terry. I am a wild animal. Do wild soils support me?
- TL: Yes, Bucky. You are one of the wild animals that wild soils support. Just think, if we could make a list of all the wild plants and wild animals supported by wild soils, the list would be as big as a telephone book. Wild soils are so busy doing all that support work.
- MT: What is the other kind of soil in the world, besides the wild soil?
- TL: The other kind of soil is the Tame Soil.
- BB: What is the tame soil?
- TL: A tame soil is a soil that was once wild, but then people came across the ocean to settle in these wild lands. So they cut down the trees.
- MT: Cut down the trees!? What for?
- TL: Well, the pioneers wished to eat corn and oats, so they made fields by cutting down trees.
- MT: I don't like tame soils!
- TL: (Aside to audience) I think I'm in trouble here. I didn't realize this would be so controversial a subject.
- BB: What happened to the wild animals, Terry? What happened to the wild animals? Did the settlers treat the wild animals as badly as they treated the native peoples?
- TL: I have to admit, Bucky, that the wild animals had to go somewhere else.
- BB: I don't like tame soils!
- MT: I don't like tame soils!
- BB: Stop talking about tame soils. Say your speech!
- MT: Say your speech!

TL: OKI OKI
 Terra Loma here: a general voice
 For the Kingdom of Soils.
 The state made one choice:
 Out of 500 soils, Antigo was named
 To represent all of me, both wild part and tamed.

BB: Good speech, Terra Loam.

TL: Thank you. Now it is your turn, Maple Tree.

MT: I am the maple tree, graceful and tall,
 With sweet sap in spring and bright leaves in fall;
 My branches make for birds a home-site and school;
 In summer I offer a shade that is cool.

TL: Thank you Maple Tree. I have one more request of you.

MT: What is that?

TL: Would you be willing to go take a nap. Another
 character is coming on stage, so I need to excuse you.
 I have only two hands, you know.

MT: Oh, sure, I'll be glad to do that.

TL: Thank you, and goodbye. (To audience) What a
 cooperative maple tree it is! Not everyone is willing to
 go take a nap on command.

Scene 3

(Erosion slips on to the puppeteer's right hand, and is held
 out of sight behind the puppeteer.)

TL: (To audience) Folks, there is one more character ready
 to come on stage. Its name is EROSION, which is the
 process of destruction of unprotected soil by action of
 wind, water and gravity. But perhaps you do not wish
 to have Erosion appear. You have a choice. Why should
 you have to hear and see Erosion rant and rave? Is
 there anyone who wishes Erosion to appear? (Several
 hands go up.) Well, freedom of speech is practiced
 around here. Let's see what Erosion has to say.

Erosion:

I am Erosion, ugly as dirt
 Which is what I eat most. I'm an expert
 At gully formation and destruction of land;
 I convert mountains and plains to sea sand.
 Soil is icing on continent cake:
 Give me some more for goodness' sake!

TL: (Boiling with anger) Erosion!

ER: Yes, Terra Loam.

TL: Do you realize what you just said about me. So I'm
 what you eat most! (Turning to Bucky Badger) Oh,
 Bucky Badger, I am so angry with Erosion that I can't
 even talk about it. Would you please tell Erosion off
 for me?!

BB: Gladly. (Bucky Badger advances by jerks toward
 Erosion, who whimpers at each advance.) Now look
 here, Erosion. We don't want you anywhere in this
 state of Wisconsin. I've got news for you. We are
 going to send you into exile!

ER: Exile?! That means you don't like me!

TL: That is an understatement!

ER: If you are going to send me away into exile, where will
 you send me?

BB: Erosion! We are going to dump you in the Grand
 Canyon in Arizona!

ER: Grand Canyon in Arizona! Why, I made the Grand
 Canyon myself. It is beautiful. I am proud of it.

TL: Well, go there!

ER: I won't go until you hear my side of the story!

BB: Your side of the story?! We've already heard your
 side. You said: "I am Erosion, ugly as dirt. . ." That
 awful speech!

ER: That was not my speech.

TL: That was not your speech. Whose speech was it?

ER: That was written by a speech writer. Even ^{our} ~~the~~ **Preside**
 gives speeches that are not his. So I memorized a
 familiar speech written for general audiences. I hated
 every word I said. But I thought that is what you
 wanted.

TL: If you have a speech from your own heart, let's hear it.

BB: Yes! Yes! We are tolerant. We will be glad to hear
 your own speech before we send you into exile.

ER: Well, here goes:
 I am Erosion, forced by mankind
 To damage the soil.
 I'm unjustly maligned.
 I'm as much a victim as the soil I erode.
 It makes my blood boil
 When people blame me...put me on trial.
 Let them reform, or go into exile!

BB: Erosion!

ER: Yes, Bucky.

BB: That was a great speech.

TL: Erosion!

ER: Yes, Terry.

TL: I never thought that I would ever have a good word for
 you, but I do. It was a great speech. I see. You are
 forced by mankind to damage the soil. The real culprit
 is the human race. Let's join now, we of this cast of
 characters, to hold workshops on soil and water
 conservation. Let's start with the audience here.

ER: Not me.

BB: Not you? But you are the most convincing speaker
 we have.

ER: You hurt my feelings. You told me to get out. Well
 I'm going on vacation (you call it exile). Goodbye.
 I'm off to the Grand Canyon.

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