

I. Context & Genre (AO3)

- Playwright:** Jez Butterworth (b. 1969), an English playwright and screenwriter. He is known for blending realism with mythology and creating rich, poetic language.
- Historical Setting:** First performed in 2009, set on St. George's Day in a Wiltshire forest. It reflects the anxieties of early 21st-century Britain, including gentrification, loss of rural traditions, and social unease surrounding "anti-social behaviour" and traveller communities.
- Genre: Mythic Realism.** The play is grounded in the reality of contemporary rural England but elevates its characters and events to a mythic, timeless status through storytelling and symbolism.
- Intertextuality:** The title evokes William Blake's poem, which questions whether England's "green and pleasant land" has been corrupted by the "dark Satanic Mills" of industrialisation. Butterworth's play updates this tension for a modern audience, with the "Satanic Mills" replaced by housing developments and bureaucracy.

II. Character Overview

Character	Role & Significance	Key Traits
Johnny "Rooster" Byron	A former daredevil, drug dealer, and local outcast living in a mobile home. He is a charismatic storyteller and mythic figure to the local youth.	Anarchic, charismatic, defiantly individualistic, complex (both likable and flawed).
The Professor	An eccentric, elderly friend of Rooster's, representing a fading intellectual and folkloric tradition.	A figure of esoteric knowledge and old-world wisdom.
Ginger	A friend of Rooster, a would-be DJ, and one of his followers. He is caught between loyalty to Rooster and a desire for social acceptance.	Longing, conflicted, an example of the disenchanting youth drawn to Rooster.
Phaedra Cox	A young girl who mysteriously disappears and is a romantic interest for Rooster. Her	A symbol of lost innocence and a catalyst for the play's climax.

	purity and disappearance fuel the play's mythic undertones.	
Troy Whitworth	The aggressive local bully, whose anger towards Rooster is a key driver of the plot. He is a more sinister version of modern English masculinity.	Threatening, violent, embodies the "new" social order that opposes Rooster.
Dawn	Rooster's estranged partner and the mother of his son, Marky. She provides a voice of conventional morality and responsibility.	Grounded, maternal, tired of Rooster's destructive lifestyle.
The Council Officers (Fawcett and Parsons)	Bureaucratic figures who enforce the eviction notice against Rooster. They represent the impersonal authority of the state and modern "progress".	Orderly, procedural, a symbol of the institutional forces that threaten Rooster's way of life.

III. Plot Summary (Over one day, Act I and II)

- Act One:** Introduces Rooster in his rural caravan in Wiltshire on St. George's Day. He is a larger-than-life character holding court with local teenagers and misfits. The arrival of council officers signals his impending eviction. The play establishes the clash between Rooster's anarchic freedom and the encroaching forces of conformity.
- Act Two:** The events escalate as the deadline for Rooster's eviction approaches. His stories become more mythic and intense. The play explores the fates of the youth who follow him, particularly the disappearance of Phaedra.
- Climax and Resolution:** The final confrontation between Rooster and the authorities takes place. He makes a final, impassioned stand, beating a giant's drum and summoning mythical forces. The play ends on an ambiguous note, with Rooster facing an uncertain future, but his spirit and myths are left to linger.

IV. Key Themes (AO1/AO2)

- **Freedom vs. Authority:** The central conflict pits Rooster's radical individualism against the forces of social control (the council, police). The play explores the cost of freedom and conformity.
- **Myth, Storytelling, and English Identity:** Rooster uses storytelling to keep alive a mythic, pre-industrial version of England, complete with giants, ancient rituals, and spiritual forces. The play contrasts this with a bland, homogenous modern Englishness.
- **Past vs. Present:** The play examines the tension between nostalgia for a wilder, more traditional England and the reality of a modern, regulated one.
- **Community and Exclusion:** Rooster's encampment is a refuge for outsiders and outcasts, forming an alternative community based on rebellion and mutual need, in contrast to the judgemental village.
- **Nature vs. Civilization:** The woodland setting represents a space of wildness, freedom, and instinct, contrasting with the controlled, sterile suburban environment of the village.

- **The Mythic Hero:** Critics see Rooster as a modern-day mythic hero—a blend of figures like Robin Hood, Falstaff, or the Green Man—who challenges authority and preserves folklore.
- **Post-Imperial England:** The play can be read as an exploration of English national identity in a post-imperial, post-industrial age. Rooster represents a lost masculinity and sense of purpose.
- **Capitalism and Gentrification:** The play implicitly critiques the encroachment of capitalism and middle-class gentrification on rural working-class communities.
- **Mark Rylance's Performance:** Many critics believe the play's power is inseparable from Mark Rylance's original portrayal of Rooster, suggesting his performance elevated Butterworth's text to a higher level of significance.
- **Tim Crouch:** The playwright suggested the play's significance lies in its "theatricality" and the sheer force of its writing, making it a major cultural event.

V. Symbolism & Stagecraft (AO2)

- **The Caravan:** Rooster's trailer is a symbolic space of freedom, nonconformity, and decay. It is both a home and a representation of social failure.
- **The Woods:** The setting in the woods on the outskirts of the village represents a liminal space, a sanctuary for outcasts and a connection to England's mythic past.
- **The Drum:** The drum that Rooster beats is a symbol of mythical power, tradition, and rebellion. In the climax, it represents his desperate, last-ditch attempt to summon the mythical spirit of England.
- **The St. George's Day Setting:** This date is significant, representing traditional English identity and patriotism. Setting the play on this day heightens the contrast between Rooster's mythic Englishness and the modern state.
- **Monologues:** Rooster's long, meandering monologues are not just stories; they are acts of creation and preservation, asserting his reality in a world that denies it.

VI. Critical Viewpoints (AO5)