

Treatment: “LORD OF THE MANOR”

A sitcom

Created & written by Brian Lee

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Logline

A young, spoiled, British Lord with an overly-sophisticated palate is desperate to rise up the ranks of the new British ruling class in rural 19th century Ireland but his plans are thwarted when his parents — the Earl and Countess of Gloster — are sent to prison for “swinging”. Stripped of his title and privileges, he is forced to move in with a family of Irish peasants and rebuild his life, one soggy potato at a time.

Possible taglines

- *“There’s more than one way to skin a potato.”*
- *“A disgraced British Lord is forced to move in with a family of Irish peasants in rural 19th century Ireland. What’s the worst that can happen?”*
- *“Ireland and Great Britain. A checkered past. An uncertain future. Too soon for an Anglo-Irish comedy series about land ownership in Ireland during the period leading up to The Great Famine?”*

Synopsis

The first season will introduce us to the world of Lord Dickie Smith (34) — early 19th century rural Ireland — a time of social upheaval and growing tension between the British and the Irish. The story is told from Dickie’s perspective; a neutral perspective in the sense that he is way too self-centred to notice what’s going on in the “real” world, i.e. outside his five-star residence (Gloster Manor). Dickie is motivated by social status, material goods (fashion), and the next gastronomic trend. He has frequent discussions with his father (Roger), the Earl of Gloster, about succession and what it’s really like to be an Earl. Dickie has spent his life in the shadows of his parents, becoming the man that *they* want him to be — a stuffy, spoiled, aristocratic ponce.

Gloster Manor is Dickie’s home but it’s also the scene of many extravagant parties thrown by his aggressively social parents. Dickie has never questioned his parents’ behaviour because it has always been the norm. But when the police show up and lock them away for bringing the Crown into disrepute, i.e. “swinging”, Dickie loses his title and

his privileges. All the things that he associates with happiness are gone and he is left with a skewed view of how life should be.

Enter the O'Connor family (Cáit, Dermot, Biddy, Rory) — the Irish “peasants” who live at the end of the estate — who put aside their differences and offer Dickie a place to stay in his hour of need. The O'Connor's are the emotional backbone of the series. The decision to help Dickie is driven by Cáit — the leader of the family — someone who has experienced hardship in the past but she refuses to let this hardship dictate her outlook. The O'Connor's are in stark contrast to Dickie's own family (the Smiths) and the time spent away forces Dickie to question the true meaning of “family”.

Episode Breakdown

Each week, Dickie's mental models are challenged by new, quirky circumstances that force him to rethink his views. The driving force of the show is the interplay between Dickie's unreasonably high expectations vs. the harsh realities of life, which he is now exposed to on a daily basis. As season one progresses, Dickie is forced to take a long, hard look at himself in the river (the O'Connor's don't own a mirror), and discover who he really is and what he wants from life. At the same time, his incarcerated parents plot their escape from prison by persuading Dickie to testify in court that his parents are pillars of the community, that he is “*high maintenance*”, and that this was a factor in his parents deciding to engage in a life of “crime”, i.e. becoming swingers.

To mention just a few of the stories we'll see:

- Dickie is invited to a fireside *chéile* (dance) with the O'Connor's, and ends up setting the dance floor alight, literally. He has a little too much *poitín* and his favorite leopardskin overcoat catches fire. The following day, Dickie buries his charred leopardskin overcoat and vows never to dance again.
- In an effort to highlight the poor bathing conditions in his new home (outdoor, bucket, no soap), Dickie engages in a “dirty” protest. This unfortunately coincides with a visit from an old American exchange student (Chuck) who doesn't recognize Dickie (covered in mud) and so Dickie's potential ticket out of squalor slips away.
- The O'Connor's are visited by an old friend (“Mad Barry”), who has some pretty extreme views on English people. Dickie decides the best way to avoid conflict is to pretend that he's Irish for the entire weekend, and he unwittingly signs up for a march on Dublin Castle to protest the current landowning regime. On the march, Dickie attempts to correct the English on his flag (“fuk da english”), which immediately raises suspicion.

- Dickie and his new brother, Rory (17), both fall in love with a mysterious woman bathing in a nearby river. They become infatuated with this mysterious woman and return to the riverside day-after-day to spy on her. Competition ensues between the pair and in a show of confused masculinity they decide to hide in a bush and masturbate — the winner of “the race” gets to proceed with the mysterious woman, i.e. pluck up the courage to actually go and talk to her. Rory “wins the race” by finishing first, only to realize that the mysterious woman is indeed his sister, Biddy.
- With his parents' court case right around the corner, Dickie wakes up one morning and decides that he wants to be a judge. He visits his family solicitor, Dick Strawbridge, for career advice but ends up reading his parents final will & testament. Dickie doesn't feature — he's not even mentioned in the will — and so he returns home (the O'Connor's) disillusioned, having decided that he absolutely does not want a career in law.
- The season culminates in a courtroom drama-type scenario, where Dickie must decide whether to testify and save his parents, or defend the O'Connor's who have been thrown under the bus by them. Dickie also finds out that he's no longer a Lord and ends up burning all his clothes in a bonfire — only to immediately regret his decision.

Dickie's journey and why it matters

People are born with certain fundamental characteristics and these fundamental characteristics rarely change in life. Instead of trying to change who we are, real growth comes from an acceptance of our inadequacies. From this point, we can then seek to understand and accept others. Dickie's journey reflects these two interweaving thoughts. It's a journey from the spoiled, self-entitled, monstrosity in the pilot episode, to the spoiled, self-entitled, monstrosity with a better understanding/acceptance of himself and others. This is a journey that we can all relate to (or hopefully aspire to). We live in a divisive age, dominated by misinformation, fear, and paranoia. “Lord of the Manor” is about embracing differences — uniting as human beings — regardless of nationality. In the end, Dickie doesn't fundamentally change but he does learn a bit about himself and he learns to be more accepting of others. He embraces the differences, whereas previously he would have a run a mile (or at least arranged for a carriage to collect him and drop him a mile away).

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Godspeed.

Brian Lee