

Section 1

Once below a time
before dawn, before memory
before the low rummage of human work
& subtle glints of a people,
the lands now known as Norfolk had no name.
Could hear nothing but a wind
whipped & screaming through grasses,
fastening their dunes to the murmuring
gurgle and belching of marshes
gloom and dank
turned over, deepening,
the million quiet forms of lichen
smothering themselves about shade-sides
of old oaks. Skeins of geese cutting runes
across an unspeaking sky and the pebble-dashing
moon-pulled push of spring tides.

The past is as imagined a place as any, as imagined a time.
In part, suspended; fixed fast, held still
by the arrogance & dreamed-for utility of now.
And in endless alteration; the projections, the lenses
through which we look, now, conditioned by shifting whims.
So how we look, how we remember the past
must take account of itself, its own bigotry.

And out of the shroud, through mist & tide
names carry; times; memory...

When we talk of Boudicca, queen of the Iceni
wielder of courage and strength...
When we talk of Robert Kett;

leader of rebels, fighting enforced enclosure...
When we talk of the Strangers, weavers,
refugees who found safety in this city,
And brought their cloth, colour, culture, canaries...
When we talk of the local contingent of Suffragettes,
who bombed the pier at Yarmouth,
their leaflets and pamphlets dancing with ashes
to ground, on breeze, all a-flutter,
the blast shuddering through time...
Whenever we claim Boudicca, Kett,
the welcoming of Strangers, the Suffragettes
as the pride of Norfolk, nursery to rebels and leaders –
we remember their legends are a fiction,
idolised, romanticised, utilised.

It's also enlivening to remember their names:
it's energising; it galvanises.
So how to remember them right?
To remember that Boudicca razed London to the ground?
That Kett's body was hung from the castle walls?
That the Strangers were welcomed, yes, and embraced,
and racism and hatred live on.

Before moving here, I imagined Norwich suspended
in the distance, middling, in and for its own existence.
I called it backwater; parochial; sleepy; full of sheep.
So I, once, too was a kind of stranger; or imposter.
I, once, too was welcomed and made a home.
Within hours I knew my neighbours by name.
Was spirited to the dunes on sad days. Tumbling
through grasses, rain showers frisked me, then smatters

of sun, sea-glinting, star-bright, bustled me forward
embalmed. A hundred turbines whirled
their hope, their fins reaping light; sea wind.
I came for the poetry and stayed for more everything:
another dance, another feast, another play.
Magdalen Street; walking the old city walls;
glimpsing castle through brickwork; brutalist
visionary Anglia Square; the casual upcycling
of churches; Tombland: thousands
of years of sheer living still moving.
Mornings at Whittlingham, birds,
the birds. Grey seal colony. Otters
in the valley. This lost corner: home
to wild things. The breathing is easier; elongated
ways in the bones; taut muscles lax; tight chest
relents; stiff neck opens; the eye gets stretched.

Yes I, once, too was a kind of stranger; or imposter.
I, once, too was welcomed and made a home.
Here at the end of the road. At the end
of the sea. At the end of the sky.

Section 2

And inside the shroud, on mist & tide,
names carry; time; memory...

Boudicca's spirit living on in the name
of the academy trust whose teachers,
undervalued, overworked and ignored
so long forced to strike for what's theirs by right.

Boudicca's spirit living on in the name
of Wetherspoons at Riverside
whose *Queen of the Iceni* sign speaks now
less of revolt against the powerful
and more of cheap booze & the owner's fortune
well spent on Vote Leave,
that bitter statuette to Englishness.

Kett's legacy living on in fiction, in label and plaque.

The deep heart's belief in common land for the common good lost
to creeping centuries of the enclosure of all life.

Riverbank and inner world fair game
to those who think everything's to broker.

The Strangers, refugees who cut their cloth
into the fabric of Norwich, living on in emblem and museum.

The powerful now spinning yarns from the stuff
of post-truth, where people fleeing war, violence, destitution,
who've travelled thousands of miles through trauma on trauma
just to get here, are then insulted with the label asylum shoppers;
where small boats in trouble are wilfully ignored and left to sink;
where those who do make it have what remains of their liberty
forcefully removed, corralled into floating prisons or disused barracks.

The legacy of the Suffragettes living in an image
on plastic hoarding outside Yarmouth's Winter Gardens.

Here, now, entire police forces are deemed sexist;

our own government undermining laws to protect
workers from harassment, less out of a sense of justice,
but more to avoid embarrassment.

A real circus.

All these legacies speak of the same systems and structures.

An approach to the world that will take striking nurses to court
is the same as that which allows water companies to poison rivers with impunity;
the same as that which refuses to regulate algorithms
that sell self-harm to children;
the same as that which leaves gender equity to market forces;
and the same as that which deports refugees to Rwanda.

Our moment hears only whispers of the revolt,
courage, militancy and strength of Boudicca, Kett & the Suffragettes,
while sung from the rooftops are forces of apathy; acquisition; isolation; and compliance.
Forces that harden hearts; that make an everyday experience of fear and loneliness.

To speak of a “we”, then, or to speak for it, feels impossible.

When I myself am so tangled with inner conflict.

When my closest relationships are infinitely complex.

When my own small family’s a million abreast.

Impossible to speak of a “we”.

When I walk a tightrope of sanity & swing from the rafters.

When my beliefs shift from minute to minute and hour to hour,
from dismal resignation to burn it all down.

Section 3

Rather than speaking for an imagined “we”,
maybe the lost word is solidarity.
A word that goes largely unspoken.
I remember the strength and speed
with which people responded to the racist police murder of George Floyd
with chants of *black lives matter* at the Forum,
and the vigils held in his memory at Yarmouth market;
I remember how XR took hold of the city to demand an end to the gaslighting,
greenwashing of governments and energy companies,
I remember their tactics of collaboration & creativity;
I remember trans rights protests outside City Hall, voices clarion across the marketplace;
I remember my students planning their first Pride March outfits,
pinning badges to rucksacks and their makeshift flags;
I remember the demos for Kurdistan, bumping into an acquaintance in the rain and us
looking at each other,
baffled for a moment, then the warmth shared between faces.
What unifies these moments is not cause;
not methods nor tactics; not message; not identity nor status.
It is solidarity between people standing up to the powerful;
the demand for and taking of a platform, of making space.
This place doesn't magically grant these things,
but the people grant it to themselves.

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And wow - to think of a future.
In fear, I shiver and cringe; in solidarity I imagine and hope;.
If there was ever a felt solidity
it was a false god by the name of England.
Take Happisburgh: nothing stays the same.
Skies widen, new arrivals,
living souls are with the tide.

And as the marshes drain, the tides rise
and wash away the dunes.

The landscape's changed, been changing,
will change; watch.

Skeins of geese write the sky
a new language of runes
from wind farms of Yarmouth
to wild places imagined out west, far off.

It's in the synagogue, temple, mosque, church,
each and every place we search.

Come all ye faithless, faithful, witches, pagans,
heathens; human gods without names.

About the shroud, about mist & tide,
names carry; times; imaginings...

In this lost corner of England
maybe a space occurs to find again

Boudicca's refusal to capitulate,
to find again the commitment of Kett's rebels
to common good and common land.

To find again the steadfast hold to immutable justice
of the Suffragette vision.

To find again this city's history of welcoming Strangers;
the collective rejection of xenophobia and racism.

But it's a scary journey, turning inwards,
to examine our falling away from these causes;
to make known and to disclose
the parts of us which are frightened and harsh,
judgemental, hardened, and cruel.

There's also pride in that endeavour
as the new sky's language runs fluent.

Come all ye faithless, faithful, strangers, neighbours,

salary men, vagrants, wasters, wage slavers,
labourers, japesters, makers, mick takers,
the raving, aliens, gamers, least favourites,
claimants, sugar babies, failures, saints,
saviours, the veiled, locked bin raiders.

I want the heart to say this city makes space
for the lost, the finders of place,
for all those in the mist seeking safety.

Haven't you heard?

The future's dim. The future's bright.

The future's infinite waves of light.

Let I, and we, want what we want:
strong back, soft front, wild heart.