

Boudicca – monodrama in one act

No. 1. Still. No-one moves.

Still. No-one moves.
A thousand campfires lick the sky.
Still. Still. No one moves.
A dog barks, a sleepy growl.
A sentry turns,
another still in silhouette
No moon, no stars.
An autumn cloak of low grey cloud
hangs moist and cool.
Doubt descends like damp of early dew.
I sense the passing spirit of the night,
that long slow pulse,
this hour before the sun.
And in this hour,
this dawn of battleday,
as every dawn before the fight
I come alone;
alone into this chill uncertain air
to face and greet my fear.
Ah, fear! I feel your breath
cools everyone this night.
Come! Come! for here I stand:
An open woman.
Caress beneath my robe
enwrap, entwine, explore, enjoy me now!
Taste! Drink deep!
Then with a silent gasp of joy by dawn be gone,
for all men know,
by day Boudicca has no lover
Boudicca has no fear.

No. 2. At dusk I climbed

At dusk I climbed that ridge
and looked upon the Romans
a safe three miles away.
The echo of a dry, late sun
warmed that Roman camp.
Ah! theirs a different world,
a strong, well-ordered world:
Harsh, male and dominant
that would eclipse and subjugate.
Dear Gods! Are they a test or punishment?

No. 3. I was young

I was young when first they came to stay,
a woman, yes! Tall, agile, strong.

Not yet a queen, but noticed by a king.
Noticed, Ha!

I was lusted, lusted by a king!
His maleness pulsed,
his mouth, though wide and full
spoke seldom;
his eyes gave voice,
those eyes were poet, man and king,
statesman and seducer.

I was a woman,
dear Gods! Was I a woman!
So when they came this time we thought:
So what! They've come before and gone!
We heard of Caesar in the South,
but Caesar went and never saw our tribe,
our Iceni.

But now they came and in the East of Kent
they built a fortress, a harbour, roads,
straight as the swan's neck stretched in flight
towards the Centre of this Land.

Then North and West
and by these roads small hamlets grew with soldiers.
This time, ah yes! this time they came to stay!

No.4. But still we never saw them

But still we never saw them.
My daughters came and grew,
and still we never saw them.
We heard of battles, of conquests.
And then they sent this Emmissary,
And King Prasutagas, My King
became the statesman of our tribe,
our Iceni.

Why fight if we can live our way?
Why fight if we have peace?
Prasutagas, My King,
you were not wrong.
You were not shameful.
You signed that truce.
Why fight if we have peace?
Prasutagas, my man,
I saw your thoughts,

I saw your eyes,
your truth,
your care,
your love....

No. 5. But why, in hunting

But why, in hunting,
did you choose a horse barely broken?
And did you chose the path,
or did your wild stallion choose the way?
Your cries of exultation, thrill and joy cut off.
Horse, you chose the low, low branches.
You chose the fork, that clamped my husbands neck,
that held him hanging lifeless from the tree.
You chose, horse! You chose!
You chose, horse! You chose!
I saw your eyes when riderless you returned.
You chose, horse! You chose!
Now die!

No. 6. Boudicca Queen

Boudicca Queen! Boudicca Queen!
Queen Boudicca, Boudicca Queen!
The cries are passionate and strong.
I did not know such love was there.
I had not seen it,
I had not noticed it.
Boudicca Queen! Boudicca Queen!
The heart lives in ev'ry voice.
The children smile.
No-one is silent.
They cheer and wave,
their joy a beacon,
their cries a summer greeting.
Boudicca Queen! Boudicca Queen!
Acclaimed and loved!
Queen Boudicca, Queen Boudicca!
Boudicca, Boudicca, Boudicca Queen!

No. 7. Then fate moved swiftly

Then fate moved swiftly.
My King, my good Prasutagas had made his will:
Half to the Emperor in Rome;
half to me, his family.
What greater justice could there be?
My wise Prasutagas!

What Roman would not honour such a will?
What Roman would not smile at such diplomacy?
What Roman with his love of law
would not honour such a King's bequeath?
Ah, Fate! Was it you
sent us Catus Decaius, the tax collector,
with half a thousand men?
He spoke before us all:
"Your King's will we honour.
But honour too the loan
made from our Imperial Treasury!"
I saw the man.
I saw his eyes.
I saw he knew there was no loan.
I saw a Roman vulture.
Lies. Deceit.
He saw my look and spoke again:
"Those who cannot pay their debt
are bankrupt in the eyes of Rome.
A bankrupt's lands are sold,
and he becomes but common slave
- of Royal blood or no!"
The moment hung;
a challenge poised to test
my first true act as queen.
Soldiers stood by, unhappy, shifting foot to foot.
I saw the deal: centurion's share.
One thought cried out:
Negotiate! Negotiate! Retreat!
Then I saw his eyes and knew:
No Briton sups at this hyena's feast!

No. 8. And so I spoke

And so I spoke.
In protestation. Yes!
I spoke of justice. Yes!
Of injustice. Of theft.
Of cowardice. Yes!
Of Theft. Yes!
I saw the man!
I saw his eyes!
I saw his lies.
I saw a Roman vulture.
A ruby ringed Pariah.
I saw a wet lipped bloated leech. Yes!
I saw his silent envy of my height.

I closed him, glancing down!
(I saw a smile or two from soldier and centurion...)
I spoke with passioned certainty. Yes!
I spoke before my Court.
I spoke and spoke and never saw
how still he had become.

I saw him beckon (small, quick hand...)
centurion to his side.
I saw the order whispered
so only one could hear.
Then whispered once again
for it was not well heard.
And soldiers circled close,
and we were seized and held by arms and neck
each one of us;
each one of our Iceni.

No. 9. And now this night

And now this night,
as ev'ry eve of battle,
before each fight
I come alone as now.
I greet the night.
I face and greet my fear.
And then recall aloud that day:
how we were held in pain,
with twisted limbs,
a spearpoint in the neck.
The order whispered...
until we saw the fruit of that command:
Four soldiers came
and dragged before us all
my daughters.
Ah! How telling this revives
my wit and strength for war.
I find again the passion and the will
to cleanse this land of foreign rapist scum.
Ah! Who of us forget
those brave, brave Roman men
upon that whispered word
throw off their tunics one by one
in greedy haste, for each his turn
to plunge his manly sword
into my virgin girls.

No. 10. Ah! Catus Decianus

Ah! Catus Decianus!
With one whisper did you start this avalanche.
Perhaps the Gods will grant you that affliction
of dogs and wolves
wherein they foam at mouth
and grind their teeth with pain
and from red, sore eyes
stare vicious madness at the world.
Ah! Catus Decianus. You deserve no less.

11. And now, these men

And now these men that sleep out there and there;
these fields of sleeping warriors,
these hectares of Boudicca's men,
their wives, their babes, their dogs.
They've sown no corn this year,
tilled no soil, pruned no trees.
Since early spring there's grown but war and thoughts of war.

12. And now as dawn begins

And now as dawn begins its search for sky,
Deep crimson looms,
A promise yet unseen.
Inside our camp two soldiers move and stretch.
A pale thin dog stands by...
Hopeful, poised it sniffs the air.
Boudicca's camp awakens.
Our world bestirs, and feels the awesome weight of battle day.
The night recedes, our campfires pale.
We see the trees, the hill, the ridge that separates...

No. 13. Ah! Infant day

Ah! Infant day, you cause the strangest ache within.
This cool, moist air contains a drug that dampens feeling.
A creeping numbness like a layer smothers all emotion.
My inner being suffocates.
My heartbeat's quick uncertain pulse betrays...

No. 14. Dear Gods! I see

Dear Gods! I see
a battle rages in me
so deep, so deep.
I scarcely know,

but in those depths a part of me that knows, that's wise,
in battle with a part of me...

Yet look!

My hand is firm.

My body straight and strong.

Dear Gods! this is a strange, strange day.

The sun not yet above the ridge.

And I, awash, aflame with sea, with fire.

A layer pulled away.

A glimpse within...

No. 15. Boudicca, dress!

Boudicca, dress! Boudicca dress!

Prepare for war.

Greet your captains, your chariot mount!

Ride before, between your men.

Allow your eyes sweep o'er them all.

No words. Just look, greet every man!

For they and you are bonded now.

Boudicca, dress! Boudicca, dress!

Your day has come. Your day is here.

Boudicca, now! Prepare!

Ten strong tribes await their Queen.

Greet your day!

Boudicca, dress! Boudicca, now!

Boudicca, prepare!

No. 16. The battle (instrumental)

No. 17. How many?

How many?

How many can there be?

How many? Ten? A score?

They'll not come near!

A horseman does not leave his horse.

A horseman does not go on foot into a marsh,
unless...

How much do they want Boudicca?

Ha!

A test for their nerve! How many will they send?

A legion?

How many am I worth?

Ha! Romans, am I the gristle in your stew?

The pain in your tooth?

Am I Boudicca your most accursed bitch?

Ha!

No. 18. Alone again

Alone.

Alone again.

Ah! night, night comes again.

The darkness that conceals.

The darkness that protects.

Ah, night!

The dark that saves me for another day.

The dark that gives me time

for time I need,

that offers me a pause

for pause I need.

Dear Gods! I need this pause.

Dear Celtic gods!

Did you die this day?

Were you sick?

Did fever make this day pass like a dream.

Hallucination of a frantic night?

Or had you gone on some long, long journey,

and saw and heard but nothing of this day?

Dear Celtic gods, pay heed!

For now your worshippers are few.

And those pursued, and hunted and...

alone.

No. 19. They do not move by night

They do not move by night.

They will retreat and camp.

They'll find dry land. They'll grant me none.

They'll search, they'll pause.

They'll think: This marsh, this fen is there a passage through?

For on the other side lies our land, our tribe, our Iceni.

Ah! But if...

What if I cross this ten wet miles of marsh and swamp and fen?

What if I reach our land our Iceni?

What greets me there?

What welcome for a Queen who leads ten tribes into oblivion?

No garlands greet the routed General.

General. Ha !

Last autumn I was lover to a King...

I used a sword but once a year to clear the brambles from the path...

What if I reach our land?

Our Iceni. No!

No welcome greets this vanquished Queen but Roman chains, betrayal.

No. 20. Without regret I stand alone

Alone...

Without regret I stand alone

before the night, before myself.

As if the wars, the cries,

the sweet and bloody vengeance,

the pain, these scars

were but Rites of Passage to move me on.

For moved I feel.

As if God's hand had for an instant picked me up

and used my long straight body as a brush

to paint a single line upon the face of history,

then placed aside,

no further use...

No. 21. And so I feel this night

And so I feel this night the time to take my leave.

By day live thought of how or when,

by night the certainty,

the rightness of one's place in time.

How wrong to cling to breath when one's time has gone.

All Iceni know how the wounded badger

creeps alone into its lair.

Beneath the ground its chosen night

gives comfort to its final breaths.

Enclosed, the earth reclaims.

None will find Boudicca's corpse.

None will gloat or mourn.

None will know...

I offer back my body to the ground, unseen.

I am calm.

I am clear.

I am content.

My greetings to you all.