

Three Acres and a Cow- Folkestone Quarterhouse

In sitting to watch 'Three Acres and a Cow' performed by Robin Grey and Rachel Rose Reid at Folkestone's Quarterhouse, I first and foremost, felt a curious anticipation of what this titling would figure into; standing as a slogan accepted by British land reform campaigners of the 1880's to later be revived by distributors of the 1920's, to then be recycled in its song version as part of this very show. In initially thinking about the singular referential quality of the phrase, led me to continuously notice the fundamentally urgent process of adopting and delivering *words*, as they re-became meaningfully topical when contextually measured in time and space. It felt a necessary incentive for this performance to happen due to this. And through the relationship now obvious between the use of words and the borrowing of physical space, such a complex opened a field of self-consciousness across both performer and audience- a responsibility of what the theatre was doing with these words in folk-songs and stories which paid tribute to injustice and even at times the universally untold- are we owning, mimicking, re-telling or passing on?

To play this out, the disposable set of which the duo simply used a washing line to visually depict their historic timeline, created a pop-up/street performance-like ease. This further cemented their spotlighted stage presence whereby if they made a mistake, it was simply laughed off. The space became an evolving open art source, creating a unique partnership between performer and listener through an acute reliability of audience correspondence and reciprocation as our own individual song-books guided us chronologically through a shared vocalisation in time. Such an approach allowed for a playfulness with the narrative which followed a radical history of the U.K through folk song; starting after the Norman's conquest, covering subjects like food permaculture, land privatisation and the housing crisis. We travelled across parallels through the English Civil War, the Irish Land League and the Industrial Revolution for example, as well as between the ever-changing perceptions and sovereignties of those who either work on or own this earth (quite literally). What particularly struck me was how they approached such instances in history, and re-taught them from how I like to think- 'inside out'. In starting from the very physicalities of land sanctions and the rights and regulations which were lifted through, gave rise to an embodied baseline of how human resources join as a tripartite mechanism and lifeline- shelter, food and work. In becoming its very own social commentary as part TED-talk and satirical lecture, Robin and Rachel played with meta-theatrical devices and characterisation to demonstrate and transcend this power play.

And it is through these qualities that the performers inevitably became story-tellers, adding a quasi-medieval touch in looking back with authentic awe or fright to before technology-game of thrones style. Yet through their telling, the line 'egalitarian stories are not just something to be swallowed' stood out from the rest. In reiterating this responsibility through history's stories either fact or tale, responsibility comes from upholding the egalitarian by simply re-telling lessons of what it takes to literally survive as mortal equals through the progression of economic models. There is power and right to orally pass on what has already been told. And through this, there was always a neutrality in aligning human subjectivity with the land by not fully romancing its earthiness, escapism or its sublime- whether city or country. In other words, to not allow the predominantly male 'hero's tale'-Robin Hood or Beowulf for example- dominate morals completely. In reminding me of the 17th cent.

romantic poet or the city walker in modernist literature venturing into new territory where the world would seem infinite in its possibilities, free walking as quest was presented as the vehicle for the sort of happenstances, conjunctions, affinities and juxtapositions. They indeed localised this idea, encouraging us all to join them on a mass trespass across a Lord's land, to attend a fracking protest, or to sustain our own plot of organic farming. And it was at this point, through the search in returning to times of struggle by following the trickling down of the economy that left me wondering, how would history remember me if I wasn't listening now- as an activist or a loud wife in need to be sold at market? To reiterate, 'Three Acres and a Cow' predominantly therefore correlated words with a sense of place/space. I realised it was a privilege for me to sit here and openly listen to this, and to find harmony between both as the show closed. In 2018, one shouldn't pass on stories in search of a possession of a national identity in oblivion to its origin, yet, pass on stories of fluctuation through which ideas of 'homeland' are being destroyed or transfigured on the spectrum of refugee migration to the consequences of Brexit. Every story should be considered as part of an intricate web of multiple oral shouts and whispers through time, so we all have a choice to listen to this palimpsest... 'the great adventurer wouldn't be so great without the possibility of the stories I choose to eat' - Rachel Rose Reid.

"Stories are the secret reservoir of values: change the stories individuals and nations live by and tell themselves and you change the individuals and nations. Nations and peoples are largely the stories they feed themselves. If they tell themselves stories that are lies, they will suffer the future consequences of those lies. If they tell themselves stories that face their own truths, they will free their histories for future flowerings."

- Ben Okri

- By Olivia Franklin