

What kind of Brit shall I be?
Kalypso Nicolaidis

Kalypso Nicolaidis is one of hundreds of European citizens becoming British every week in this country. She has just published an exploration of Brexit through Biblical and Greek Mythology ("Exodus, Reckoning, Sacrifice: Three Meanings of Brexit", London: Unbound).

On Monday, I will pledge:

"I solemnly, sincerely and truly
Declare and affirm
That on becoming
A British Citizen,
I will be faithful and bear true
allegiance
To Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth
the Second,
Her Heirs and Successors,
According to law."

But truly, what kind of Brit shall I
be?

Brit-with-a-top-hat
or Brit-with-a-rat?
Pathetic, apathetic,
anti-magic Brit?
Or queueing, cooing,
tweeting Brit?

Solemn, me, hardly
Sincere, yes, absolutely
As plainly, I will say:
A British Citizen I shall be.

Never British enough, evidently
Too British already, *assurément*

Just-right-Brit, hopefully
Eternal racer to my cupper
And for country lanes a sucker
Never grew out of the fab four
On the bright side of Mordor
That's how British I shall be!

How British indeed I have been
Oxfordshirian more than keen
In my home fabric of Brit teens.

How easy wouldn't it be
To remain just quietly
British by habituation.

But a Brit by invitation
I shall be

The first citizenship by choice
For me.

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Yet I may never *simply* be
As becoming is not being
Not about place or tribe
But about pace and time.

Becoming is daring
Daring the contradiction
To be
And not quite to be.

To be, say, cosmopolitan
But a rooted one, proudly.
Proud of my four new countries,
United, still, may they be.
Proud of my birth-countries too
As where else could I have sown
Trees, now all-mighty.
And proud of all the alien asters
I will only ever encounter
In other dreams of becoming.

Since a Brit I shall become,
Winner-takes-all
Quirks, perks and all,
And still the other I will be.

As the battle for Europe
Rages,
And Brits ask 'how they view us',
I say as both 'they' and 'us':
Why should we call this a mess?
Life's frenzy likeness,
Tragic dilemma, yes!
But where else has anyone seen
A greater democratic scene?
And who said it would be easy
To exit this Community?

Nouveau citizen
I may be
Naïve pride
This may be
Stayers, leavers and *indécis*
I embrace your cacophony
As European Brit I shall be.

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And so, on Monday I will be
A Brit-almost-to-be
Recalling her shall I dare.
Shall I dare to be
And not quite be?
Shall I dare to swear?

How hard could it be
To swear not to swear
Not to swear at the other
On the other side of the House
On the other side of the Square
But to swear alongside others
Each with a tale of becoming.

How hard could it be?
At school I did not give a hoot
For the Francois' and the Louis'
Why shall I now care to toot
For the Georges or the Henrys?
But our Queen, my Queen-to-be,
I salute you
Bringer-together,
Smiler-in-chief,
To your eloquent silence,
(And to your heirs
if that must be)
I pledge.

Yet still I must confess.
I will remain.
I will remain free to bear
my ambivalence
on my sleeve
remain free
to swear
alone
under the stars
against contempt
and being defined
by a ballot,
a moment,
a word I or you will say,
by the detours not taken,
a prize undeserved,
by people I don't like
or by people I do,
by pieces of paper
or the blades of scissors,
by this or that Oath
and unchartered I do's.
Remain free of thee.

With past selves
under siege
Without net
I will swear.

For in truth,
We shall see
What kind of Brit
I shall be.