



Parrot Addenda

by Rogan Wolf

A series of reflections on truth, honour and Brexit, in rhyming verse stanzas.

Both verse form and parrot reference are borrowed from the wonderful satire “Speak, Parrot” by John Skelton. Skelton lived in the reign of Henry 8th, when another form of Brexit took place and speaking out was dangerous.

*“Parrot is my own dear heart and my dear darling...
I pray you, let Parrot have liberty to speak !”*



Parrot Speaks of a Pit bull

A keen environmentalist, Lord Rothermere admitted to the judge he should not have let his pit bull befoul the park each morning. A fear that tax havens were under increasing threat from global warming etc made him forget the black plastic bag he was supposed to use to spare our children from his pit bull's poohs.

Parrot Speaks of the People's Will

Plug Maybot into the mains. She needs re-charging with "The People's Will." It's done. Again she stands tall. "Stuff parliament," she says. "I am enlarging the People's role and only I and mine can tell what half of them meant when they said go to hell. We serve them, I and my gang of billionaires, hoodlums and fanatics, dregs and liars..."

Rogan Wolf
June 2018



Parrot speaks of the Law and Dust

The sky is cloudy, the coast is nothing clear.
Truth has put away her tresses of fine gold.
Selling and Spinning infest with their foul air
all the languages of our fractured world.
Creatures of the Lie have become so bold
they want Law and Justice as well as all trust
under their sway. Our cities turn to dust.

Parrot speaks of Community and Dust

And it's busy, busy, busy, and busying again !
Que pensez-vous, Parrot ? How sane is our state ?
Deceit in Parliament deranges the brain,
but Truth and Honour just add to the hoodlums' hate ;
to secure control they'll tear our world apart.
Their trappings of greed, envy and worldly lust,
parrot says plainly, lead nowhere except to dust.

Rogan Wolf
June 2018



Parrot Speaks of Youth and Hope

Like Parrot, the Truth is caged. Outside in the street
the Lie and all its creatures roar a glad song.
Up and down upon pampered horses they strut
kicking the poor aside as they canter along.
Much money, we know, is spent for wrong
purposes, for poor to stay poor, and pit bull on top
and caged is Truth, and Love, and Youth, and Hope.

Parrot speaks of the Brexit Agon (I)

Remember the start of this Agon ? Enter stage right
the Tories – their *Austerity*, their *Striver/Skiver*,
their *harry the Poor*, all that. And their family fight,
banging on about Europe. So Dave, being clever,
said, “You know wot, the good of my Nation was never
my thought. This referendum meets my *Party’s* need” -
but he lost it. So Tory dysfunction spread Europe wide.

Rogan Wolf
June 2018



Parrot speaks of the Brexit Agon (2)

Off stalked the captain (he'd said he never would)
and now what a shipwreck we behold. A pit bull
pushed Maybot onto the bridge. "Full steam ahead!"
she cried in glee. "Red White and Blue! The People
have Spoken! Bring Fox Hunting back! And Grammar School!"
Then Flotsam Johnson and Jetsam Gove floated
into view - and Maybot was hastily rebooted.

Parrot speaks of Dividends and Dishonour

And Maybot was hastily rebooted. "Depend
on me and my rabid old pit bulls to reach the best deal
for Britain..." And "Let's pretend a Brexit Dividend
and if that doesn't work, let's lie one..." And "Let me steal
into your hearts with my doggedness and iron will
in pursuing the wrong course the wrong way, through day
after day after dishonourable day - Mayday, Mayday..."

Rogan Wolf
June 2018



Parrot Speaks True and Plain

Truth weighs heavy, says Parrot, but here I'll speak plain :
the EU referendum was neither true
nor honest democracy. Bare lies and criminals "won"
and the result means nothing except that we
are a nation split, mis-led and lost at sea.
Brexit's a lie, a bug with gilded wings,
a painted spawn of dirt, that stinks and stings.

Rogan Wolf
June 2018



These are the Hands

These are the hands
That touch us first
Feel your head
Find the pulse
And make your bed.

These are the hands
That tap your back
Test the skin
Hold your arm
Wheel the bin

Change the bulb
Fix the drip
Pour the jug
Replace your hip.

These are the hands
That fill the bath
Mop the floor

Flick the switch
Soothe the sore

Burn the swabs
Give us a jab
Throw out sharps
Design the lab.

And these are the hands
That stop the leaks
Empty the pan
Wipe the pipes
Carry the can

Clamp the veins
Make the cast
Log the dose
And touch us last.

Michael Rosen

Michael Rosen wrote this poem for the 60th birthday of the NHS in 2008. He gave permission for the "Poems for the wall" project to reproduce it.

Poems for...one world

<https://poemsforthewall.org>



John Lewis Partnership





T-Bone Trump

T-Bone Trump is not the President :
he's America's Minotaur and prowls and befouls
that nation's halls and heart of government.
The White House has been devoured by its shadow. Howls,
tweets and tantrums have replaced the calls
for sense and resolution a great nation makes.
Humanity heads beast-ward and the heart breaks.

Rogan Wolf
July 2018

The Parrot Ails

The parrot ails and grieves within his cage
of slender vaulting and cries : "Those who deceive
a nation's people for their own advantage
commit the crime of High Treason. They thief
capacity from the sovereign power and leave
us eyeless, deprived of reality, trust and heart.
Eyeless we wander a burning waste of hurt."

Rogan Wolf
July 2018



Jes in Yearn Land

Corbyn woke and found himself new-made.
No longer : “On a point of order, Chair” -
from today, that Chair was *Jes*, *Jes* magnified
by negation, for not being sleek like “the others” were.
“Chaos called me from my committees, far
into the yearn-lands of the young. But I am small
and tired and lean on wormy crutches. I fail.”

Rogan Wolf
July 2018

Parrot Spots an Old Defence Line

Parrot’s out patrolling above the North Downs
and peers in wonder at the sight below
where little Maybot plays with her toy clowns
and Jez goes pushing fantasies to and fro.
And each has built toy castles there, a row
of defences spun of mind. Both have seen
their names writ large along this thin red line.

Rogan Wolf
July 2018



Going Nowhere to Mean Nothing

My dear friend Pete and I went cycling once,
along a raised track through flatness, a sort of cause-
way going nowhere to mean nothing, a chance
scar between fields, foothold for nettles. And what *was*
this great work ? asked Pete. It was the frontier between Us
of East Anglia and Them of Mercia. Troops stood there
and glared. Look at their skulls, how the eye-holes glare.

Rogan Wolf
July 2018

Paradise Destroy

The bird of paradise crouches in its cage
knowing that time is short. Humankind
cannot bear very much reality and rage
soon displaces kindness in a mind
faced with a world it fails to understand
and keeps abusing, our dwelling. It is the lie
we worship that shall our paradise destroy.

Rogan Wolf
August 2018



...And Smash the Butterfly

The lie we worship shall our paradise
destroy. Our leaders make it good to hate
and smash the butterfly. “It is my lies
that offer peace, my friends. It is Self in spite
of all you love I bid you venerate.

Look to my spite, my greed, look to Me...”

The Self and its Lies our paradise destroy.

*Rogan Wolf
August 2018*

The Crier Frets

The crier frets and beats the bars in rage :

“Our politics hangs empty - a tarantula
has sucked it dry. And Parliament’s a stage
just for cheats and Punch and Judy. The Law
lumbers behind the liar and the air
we breathe means less to us than our screens in hand
where the lies glitter, shared like contraband.

*Rogan Wolf
August 2018*



In Despite of White Horses

May and Johnson, Gove and Jez are one
and the same thing : discards, flotsam on
the beach, suddenly by chaos thrown
into the air to where white horses scorn
old harbours ; yet despite these storms, they remain
moles, chasing worms along tunnels they've known
since youth, around and around and up and down.

*Rogan Wolf
August 2018*

The Parrot Seeks a Cage

The parrot seeks a cage wherein to lay
his head, and shield his blood-line from a world
torn from its bearings. But not even court of law,
no construction born of history, can hold
or shelter us from the furies we have hurled
into our own house. True leader now gives way
to creature spawned of chaos and the lie.

*Rogan Wolf
August 2018*



Satan at Meat

Satan sees a continent complete.
“I can’t eat *that*,” he says. Let’s split some off.”
So with his claws he rips Britain apart
from its union. But then he pauses : “Might half
cook quicker ?” He divides our country, half against half.
Again he pauses : “Break Labour now, split Tory...”
Satan warms to his work. He’s famished. It’s scary.

Rogan Wolf
September 2018

Poems for...Between-times

Notes and References

(i)

The verse-form used here is a traditional seven-line rhyming stanza called Rhyme Royal. It was introduced by Geoffrey Chaucer. John Skelton used it for his satirical poem "Speak, Parrot."

Parrot Speaks of a Pit Bull refers to the announcement during June 2018 that Paul Dacre, long-standing editor of *The Daily Mail*, would be stepping down later in the year. In considering the news, some writers suggested that, under Dacre, *The Mail's* strident propaganda against the EU and immigration etc had had a major influence over the Brexit vote. *The Mail's* owner is Lord Rothermere whose affairs are reliably reported to depend quite heavily on tax havens such as Jersey and Bermuda.

Parrot speaks of the People's Will. Theresa May (and others) keeps using phrases like "The People have spoken" or "The People's Will," as if these in themselves will lend authority and credence to the words' speaker, battling on the "People's" behalf. And somehow that phrase "The People," repeated many times, begins to imply "everybody," or everybody that matters. But 52% of a mere percentage is neither "everybody" nor everybody that matters and the validity and integrity of that 52% figure is itself ever increasingly in question. And Theresa May's government does not even have a working majority with which to "deliver Brexit" and she has had to buy it unilaterally by paying the DUP a billion pounds (of tax-payers' money, including - presumably - the money of those who voted "Remain") for their support - the DUP's own Brexit Dividend. So *not* the "People" Will" - rather a dodgy and disreputable series of manipulations and abuses.

The three poems **Parrot Speaks of Law and Dust, ...of Community and Dust** and **...of Youth and Hope** all borrow phrases from Skelton's "Speak, Parrot." For an illustrated reading of some of my translation of that poem into modern English and England, [see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lm41lU5QIGk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lm41lU5QIGk) The setting for the reading was the top of the Tyndale Monument, on the edge of the Cotwolds, north of Bristol. William Tyndale lived at much the same time as John Skelton and took even greater risks. He was executed in Belgium by public strangulation and burning. He translated the New and much of the Old Testament of the Bible into English.

Parrot Speaks of Dividends and Dishonour refers to Theresa May's public commitment in June 2018 to finding ways to increase funding to the NHS, and her claim that the money to do so would come from the "Brexit Dividend." This was a hollow, hapless and disreputable attempt to give credence to the promise writ large on the red-painted Brexit campaign bus and, since then, conclusively exposed as a deliberate lie. It is clear that there will be no Brexit Dividend.

Parrot Speaks True and Plain makes reference to the ending of "Speak, Parrot" and in a small way follows it. Skelton's poem has the parrot being finally persuaded to come out from behind his hints and sophisms and name his matter, "true and plain." Finally he names (a bit) more clearly the wrongs and chief wrong-doer of his time, as Skelton saw it.

The last couplet of this stanza is beholden to the work of Alexander Pope - perhaps Britain's greatest poet of satire. It includes a quote - almost exact - from Pope's "Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot."

Notes and References

(ii)

These are the Hands. I have included this wonderful public poem as a kind of midway interval and refreshment. It is on a very different subject and is by Michael Rosen. He was commissioned to write it in 2008, in celebration of the NHS's 60th anniversary of that year. Michael Rosen gave me permission to reproduce his poem on the website of a project I run called "Poems for...the wall." Ten years later, in 2018, in the middle of writing these stanzas about Brexit, I reformatted Michael Rosen's poem in portrait and rather wryly uploaded it on my facebook page. The response was a flood of *likes*, *loves* and *shares*, whereas my poems about Brexit hardly attract any response at all ! We can come together in our love for the NHS. Can we, on Brexit ? What did some of "The People" really mean when they voted to leave the EU, knowing so very little about it, or our nation's deep and intricate relationship with it ? Might this whole huge and self-destructive split and upheaval really be the "People's" attempt to protect/subsidise our own NHS ? Can a flagrant lie and fantasy change a nation's history ?

Parrot Spots an Old Defence Line. Suddenly, parrot seems to have escaped his cage. And what he has spotted is a row of Second World War pill boxes that can still be found along a stretch of the north downs, in Surrey. They were built to delay a possible Nazi invasion and have been left standing as a reminder.

Going Nowhere to Mean Nothing. And here's another dividing line from the past, much older than that line of pill-boxes on the north downs. My friend Pete and I rode along it one week-end, dodging the skeletons of the Anglo-Saxon warriors who once stood sentry there, holding spears. It is near Cambridge and faces east, built to keep out the East Anglians. Or was it to keep in the Mercians ? Nowadays, this old and once fraught frontier is popular with families out walking on a Sunday afternoon, after a good lunch.

Paradise Destroy. This stanza contains a direct quote from the work of the poet TS Eliot. The words occur near the beginning of *Burnt Norton*, the first of Eliot's *Four Quartets*, written during the Second World War. In full, the couplet runs as follows : "Go, go, go, said the bird : human kind/ Cannot bear very much reality." If humanity is ever to be buried in a graveyard, that quote should be writ large on our gravestone. Perhaps it already is.

The Crier Frets. The tarantula mentioned in the second line is a reference to Gavin Williamson who until recently was Theresa May's Chief Whip. He kept a tarantula on his desk, apparently to intimidate Tory MP's into toeing the party line. He has since been promoted and is now Secretary of State for Defence. I have it on good authority that in his new role, he is training a whole vast army of tarantulas to act as a global market force after Brexit. And he marches them up to the top of the hill and he marches them down again.

Rogan Wolf
September 2018



Afterword

True and plain at last the parrot spake.
But I must needs be true
and plain just one step further back
and put this question - why
did Skelton appoint a *parrot*
to be the voice of truth, the poet
who seeks words unsullied and speaks
from the pure soul's point of view ?
For Truth cannot be imitated.
Truth is at all times new.

But Skelton's answer would surely have been
plain astonishment at the question.
“Our ships have ventured forth
and at the far end of the world their crews
found paradise. And they stole
a bird which was sitting there in a tree
and is thus truly a bird of paradise.
And it has gathered unto itself all tongues
and speaks them aptly. It is
for this cause, now, that we
keep the parrot safe in sanctuary
and feed him dates
and spice and all things nice
and treasure the words he prates –
dangerous words from paradise.

Rogan Wolf
September 2018