



# 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 long satire “Speak, Parrot” by John Skelton. Skelton lived in the reign of Henry 8th, a time when European sailors were beginning to range out and parrots were discovered. Also, another form of Brexit took place at that time 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.

## 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*





## Jez in Yearn Land

Corbyn woke and found himself new-made.  
No longer : “On a point of order, Chair.”  
From today, that Chair was Jez, Jez 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.”

## 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.

## 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,  
a show-case 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.

## 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.

## Parrot Speaks to the 2-Bit Mobsters

What more can the truthful parrot say, what is  
there left to say ? The “two-bit mobsters” *The Sun*  
describes belong not in Salzburg, but with us.  
Ours the red bus, the billionaires’ gravy train,  
the inflammatory scares, that media con.  
Maybot has been nothing for our time  
but accessory to a massive, two-bit crime.

Rogan Wolf  
September 2018



## The Parrot Peers

The parrot peers from the echoes of his cage  
and sees the ruin wrought by unworthy leaders.  
They have no answers to our lostness and rage,  
our disconnection. They invest in borders,  
division, avoidance, deceit. They are providers  
only of what destroys. The forces of true worth  
languish in shadow. What word might call them forth ?

## Parrot's Cage

I beseech you, brave parrot, ponder the meaning of cages.  
The cage is your pulpit and your public guise.  
It constrains you but also protects and it enlarges  
the statement you make, you take strength from its bars  
which curve like ribs round where the soft heart lies.  
But I beg you, in these times amok, prefer not  
the refuge of bars to the ferment of true heart.

*Rogan Wolf*  
*September 2018*



## The Parrot finds Honour Lying Forgotten

*among our ruins and knows that honour must  
be the foundation of any future we might have.*

The parrot in parliament on that last day  
heard a tearful man, who'd been betrayed  
by fellow Tories, allies of his way  
of life and thinking, declare that though they'd played  
him for a fool, he yet kept his honour and he'd  
rather be an honourable fool than clever as they  
were, expert at ambush, lies and treachery.

## Demos Highjacked

And the parrot asked a hoodlum, what *is* this holy  
word to which the people bow and pray ?  
“Democracy,” he said. “Demos.” “But surely  
a People lied to is God outraged ?” “Their Say  
is Final,” the hoodlum hissed. “No need that they  
should see emerging truth, no need to re-  
consider. Deceived and misled, the People Spoke.  
Demos highjacked is what we hoodlums like.”

Rogan Wolf  
October 2018



## Parrot Counts the Cost of Youth

(i)

The parrot heard a fishmonger rich in youth  
rejoice in the glory of the ocean's yield  
which daily slithered silvery beneath  
his hand. And yet these riches also told  
of change, extinctions, a real chance he'll not grow old.  
A "catastrophic event" did for the dinosaurs.  
A second has now started, we the cause.

(ii)

The young fishmonger enlarged upon his theme.  
"The event of our disaster is a wave  
already breaking. It will flood my dreams, my home,  
and all my life. Yet the nations rush to "save"  
themselves by enthroning rogue leaders, who rave  
and strut, or ape the robot, acting the part  
of our worst nature. The minotaur is out."

*Rogan Wolf*  
*October 2018*





## The Parrot on the People's March

John Skelton's Parrot still has much to say to us, this bird of paradise we've caged - our anima, our heart. He said today (he speaks all languages aptly) : "Our nation's enraged and split in two ill-guided halves. The half who staged this protest have lost the Britain they thought they knew. But, look you, the *other* lacks a Britain, too."

Rogan Wolf  
October 20th 2018

## That Jez

That Jez is not the man they thought he was. Or put it another way : just "not being like the others are," is not enough. He prefers going tie-less - fine. But it's not enough. He'll bike to work - that's cool. But Jez will never strike me as properly awake to the present hour or vivid and inspired enough, to inspire.

Rogan Wolf  
November 2018



## Parrot Writes a Letter

Dear Britons, my close neighbours, you who placed your faith in “Leave” could not have known till now what “Leave” would mean – that you’ve been cheated, fleeced, by false leaders. It’s their fantastical, low lies and slogans that drew us here to plough this stony furrow. So neighbours, what now ? Control and licence for the lawless. For *most* of us, gall.

*Rogan Wolf*  
*November 2018*

## May Dance

May continues inch by dogged inch to lead “The People” the wrong way. And she has brought a sad new status to these islands : to clinch and to “deliver” her dud “deal”, in despite of “The People’s” interests, has made us not just a wonder to the world, but a joke. Maybot is dancing Great Britain into the dark.

*Rogan Wolf*  
*November 2018*



## The Parrot, the Cage and the Pulpit



Tyndale died that English plough-boy might hear for himself the ring of Truth. He was tied to a stake, strangled and then burnt. A crowd stood there and watched his flesh reduce. But then, with a shake and to vast amazement, wings spread forth and he took to the air and flew far west to the top of his tower - that cage and pulpit - to chaunt his Truth by the hour !

Rogan Wolf  
November 2018





## The Dreadful Achievement of Cameron and May

In asking us to choose between liars and cheats  
he mocked both voters and the subject in hand.  
Maybot, following him, repeats and repeats  
her brain-dead phrases, dogged to the end  
however dire the depths she must descend  
dragging the nation with her. Let none hearken  
ever again to that lie – “The People have spoken.”

*Rogan Wolf*  
4th December 2018

## The Bird of Paradise Danced Last Night

The parrot danced last night in his cage, spraying  
his dates all round the room. “What’s up with you ?”  
cried Galathea. “My spirits. And I am praying  
that honour will persist. An assembly true  
and properly informed has done what it knew  
was right. The House redeemed itself last night.  
May prayers be answered. May minotaur retreat.”

*Rogan Wolf*  
5th December 2018



## Jez Hoeing

When genial Jez disturbed a ghoul in error  
while scratching about along familiar lines,  
he didn't challenge it or share our terror ;  
he frowned, changed the subject, played with the coins  
in his pocket, whispered various ancient runes,  
all contradictory... We heard of him next  
at a cosy chat-show, quoting some old text...

*Rogan Wolf  
December 2018*

## Parrot Peers at Democracy

The parrot asked of Democracy : “They keep  
going on about it - what does it mean ?” Well,  
I think it means counting. If you see more sheep  
in that field than in this, then you should sell  
all you have and move to that one. “I smell  
tyranny there - of numbers and of lies.  
I'd hoped it meant the true, the just, the wise.”

*Rogan Wolf  
December 2018*



## Maybot Jumps Ship

Maybot found her “deal” came much too close to rocks and shallows for those to left and right of her to stomach. She jumped as they let loose appalling sounds of upset. “And we shall fight on the beaches day and night, so great is our hate of facts bare-faced - our Brexit’s just a breeze,” they cried. “A dreamy, geriatric cruise.”

*Rogan Wolf  
December 10<sup>th</sup> 2018*

## Brexit Reviewed

Today’s democracy deprives us of right and obligation in a community of true exchange. Instead, it’s all deceit, mirages that sell, false unity between plotters, mask and duplicity. Let Brexit at least have taught us this : we need word we can trust, democracy renewed.

*Rogan Wolf  
December 10<sup>th</sup> 2018*



## Jez and the New Jerusalem

And I saw the parrot, grieving behind his bars  
and in my hurry and confusion, I called :  
“Where’s Jez, our champion ? He’s waited years  
for days like this, his chance.” “Well, he told  
me he’s off to the allotment and to let the world  
hang on a bit, for he must fill his head  
with a brand New Jerusalem, before bed.”

*Rogan Wolf*  
*December 10<sup>th</sup> 2018*

## Maybot with the Adults

Maybot keeps skipping over the water. But why ?  
The parrot preened and said, “Maybot likes breaks  
with the adults. Adults *this* side are in short supply.”  
“Oh Angela,” she says. “Whatever it takes  
to be Head Girl, I’ll do. Give me top marks.”  
But Angela says : “On *our* side, Maybot, a vote  
means taking decisions. Not loser flouncing out.”

*Rogan Wolf*  
*December 10<sup>th</sup> 2018*



## Self Maiming

“Que pensez-vous, parrot ? What will it mean, this Brexit business ? There seems no end to its power to harm, its rending, its reeling on and on, to no good destination.” “Your kind,” said parrot, “faced with hard reality, tend for relief to seek something soft to blame, something close by. It is yourselves you maim.”

Rogan Wolf  
December 12<sup>th</sup> 2018

## The Parrot Calls for Order

“Now pay attention !” the People’s Parrot roared at the warring children of the lie. “Choose truth - not opinion, not desire. We can’t *afford* our small and fragile union to stagger forth, severed from our larger bindings. In truth, none anywhere can continue as before, but change *together* might save us from the fire.

Rogan Wolf  
December 15<sup>th</sup> 2018





## The Parrot, the Maybot and No Deal

So Maybot calls the army out. “The way to force this mayhem over the line is find a foe,” she cries. “*Tee hee*. Emergency ! Emergency ! Grave danger lies all round us, made by *moi* ! But thin red lines will stand and deliver me !” “What is there left to say ?” grieves Parrot. “Maybot’s costly. We shall pay.”

*Rogan Wolf*  
*December 19th 2018*

## Jez and the Worship of Self

Jez is happy that the young admire how indistinct he is. It means that all that fetid certainty from yesteryear to which he clings, can now, against their will, be dusted down. They thought that he meant well by their futures. But Jez holds tight instead to the graven images in his own grey head.

*Rogan Wolf*  
*December 2018*



## Mid-Winter 2018

Thoughts from the cage this Christmas : Brexit is a national calamity from first to last. Not “The Sovereign Will,” not “Voice of the People.” Just a spasm of disgust, a cry for help by the unheeded. The worst of felons gave us Maybot, Corbyn came from the dust : our leaders complete our nation’s shame.

*Rogan Wolf  
December 31st 2018*

## Westminster is Empty

The parrot woke and found himself alone.  
Westminster was empty. Oh Lord, where are leaders fit for our doubts and tumults, why Throne broken, Court in shambles, House stripped bare of the honour and truth which humanity dare not forsake ? I see dust and dung and dung beetles feasting. Dung beetles glory in dung.

*Rogan Wolf  
January 2019*

# 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 Cotswolds, 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 with (a degree) more clarity 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 fine public poem as a kind of interval and refreshment. It is by Michael Rosen and its subject is very different. The year 2008 was the NHS's 60th anniversary and Rosen was commissioned to write the poem in celebration of it. He gave permission for me 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 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 (half) "The People" 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 split and upheaval really be the "People's" attempt to save 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 second line's mention of a tarantula refers to Gavin Williamson who, until quite 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.

**Parrot Speaks to the 2-Bit Mobsters** refers to Theresa May's encounter with the EU leaders in Salzburg and "The Sun's" headline which appeared within hours afterwards. It said : "EU DIRTY RATS - The SUN SAYS we can't wait to free ourselves of the two-bit mobsters who run the European Union."

"The Sun" is owned by the far right billionaire Rupert Murdoch, owner of Fox News, friend - apparently - of Mr Donald Trump, America's Minotaur. Murdoch's gutter press had much to do with the UK hacking scandals and other criminal press abuses both of individuals and of the law. "The humblest day of my life" and all that two-bit jazz.

# Notes and References

(iii)

**The Parrot finds Honour Lying Forgotten Among our Ruins** refers to a short, impassioned and powerful speech delivered in the UK House of Commons in March 2015, in which the word “honour” emerged as something that might matter, after all.

For a video of an excerpt from the speech, see : <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-32073791>

For an article published soon afterwards see : <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/11497116/Who-is-Charles-Walker-Tearful-Tory-MP-played-as-a-fool-over-botched-Bercow-plot.html>

The speech was delivered on the last day of the Coalition government headed by David Cameron.

The speech concerns an ignoble little Tory plot aiming at the eventual unseating of John Bercow, still the Speaker of the House of Commons. John Bercow is another Tory, but is unpopular with some of his colleagues, presumably because he insists on keeping them as much in order as those awful Labour people on the other side of the House.

The plotters’ aim was to spring a Commons vote concerning the election of the Speaker, on this last day, when a significant number of the Labour opposition would already have left to return to their constituencies, and would therefore not be available to oppose the motion. But Labour got wind of it and alerted its MP’s. Also a number of Tories objected, enough to combine with Labour in voting the government motion down.

The distressed “honourable fool” who made the speech was Charles Walker, Tory MP for Broxbourne in Hertfordshire, and Chair of the Commons Procedure Select Committee. As a postholder, a colleague and a fellow-citizen, the plotters had treated him as if he did not exist.

The “clever men” involved in the plot included the Right Hon. Michael Gove, Chief Tory Whip at the time, the Right Hon. William Hague Leader of the House of Commons on this his birthday, as well as his last day in the Commons, and the Right Hon. David Cameron, Prime Minister, who was hurrying back from a meeting in Coventry in order to take part in the vote.

**Demos Hijacked** This piece suggests that Brexit is not the product of a democratic decision at all but the result of a high-jacking and manipulation of due process by a criminal and/or pathological element, in times of widespread confusion and disenchantment. If there was not a true “decision”, there can be no “respecting it”, or the individuals and parties who seek to capitalise from it.

**Parrot and the Price of Youth** was written following a conversation with a young fishmonger vividly aware of environmental issues, as they are reflected in the oceans’ daily yield and as they will affect the rest of his life.

**The Parrot on the People’s March** was written immediately after the vast and entirely peaceful demonstration against Brexit in London on October 20th 2018. Leaders of both the Conservative and Labour parties were conspicuous by their absence. The crowds therefore represented a constituency without a major political party speaking for them in parliament, without - in fact - a country in which it can now feel itself at ease and at home. But the parrot notes that the Brexit “constituency” must feel something similar, in order to have voted the way it did. So there is common ground here. Our country, even as it fragments, has left all of us behind. What leadership might be capable of bringing the nation back to itself and its unity, back to its own best interests and good nature ?

# Notes and References

(iv)

**The Parrot, the Cage and the Pulpit** This whole series of stanza-poems about Brexit is a reference to John Skelton's extraordinary satirical poem called "Speak, Parrot." Skelton lived under King Henry 8<sup>th</sup>. His poem, with its glamorous, learned, mock-nervous "bird of paradise" strutting about in its cage, eventually speaking "true and plain," was written in rhyme royal stanzas. So here the parrot has returned, along with his rhyme royal, still taking liberties. Why the link to William Tyndale? He was a contemporary of Skelton and translated much of the bible from Latin, Greek and Hebrew into contemporary English to ensure that the whole population could have access to the Word. He was executed for it in Belgium. Later his work formed the backbone of the King James bible. There is a wonderful memorial tower built in his honour by the Victorians, just north of Bristol. At the top is a look-out, with metal bars, a sort of cage. I liken it to the parrot's cage. Both these men risked their lives in giving their witness on behalf of truth. One of them paid the price.

Above the text, top right, is a photograph of a tower. This is the William Tyndale Monument, situated right on the edge of the Cotswolds, above the village of North Nibley and overlooking the Severn Estuary. The photograph is by Matt Bigwood. Reproduced by permission. The illustration beneath the text is an etching depicting Tyndale's death and his reputed last words.

**The Bird of Paradise Danced Last Night** This piece is referring to the evening of December 4<sup>th</sup> 2018, when the House of Commons defeated the government over three separate items. As a result the government was required to publish the full version of its legal advice on Brexit, rather than just its edited version; and must refer to parliament again in the event of the deal being rejected, making a "no deal" exit from the EU less likely. In effect, it seemed that parliament had taken back control, that evening.

**Jez Hoeing** Three days later, on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> December, Jeremy Corbyn spoke at an international conference of socialists in Lisbon. On the Tuesday following, Theresa May was due to present her "deal" with the EU to the Commons, facing almost certain defeat. Her party was in ferment. At the week-end, two major demonstrations took place in London, representing conflicting positions. We all knew that we were close to one of the major climaxes of the Brexit story, with momentous consequences ahead of us. And here was the Leader of the Opposition, Prime Minister presumptive, taking leave of absence, almost as if Brexit did not exist for him. It was hard to avoid the conclusion that Jez is long overdue to head off in the direction of his allotment to spend more time with his radishes.

# Notes and References

(v)

**Maybot and the Adults** In the event, no vote took place on the 11th. May withdrew it at the last moment, having insisted previously that it would go ahead. She had been advised that she was certain to lose. She used her executive power to avoid a democratic challenge and defeat. She then hurried off to Europe in order to persuade leaders (“the adults”) there to change their agreement with her, in case that might make the children back here in Westminster change their minds. But the adults wouldn’t shift. So she came back to us again, yet further humiliated, having yet further humiliated this nation in the eyes of the world.

**The Parrot, the Maybot and No Deal** This poem was written on the 19th December. The “meaningful vote” had now been put off until well into the New Year and on the 18th, May had announced full preparations would start being made for a “No Deal” withdrawal from the EU. This would include the expenditure of a great deal of public money and the army would be called out for support duties. The fantasy of Little England is not just mischievous and regressive, but is also proving expensive.

**Jez and the Worship of Self, Mid-winter 2018** Both stanzas were written during the Christmas season and were written partly in consideration of a statement Corbyn made during that time, still suggesting that - despite the expressed preferences of the vast majority of its membership - Labour would “respect” the Brexit referendum “result.” *Jez and the Worhip of Self* is also a brief exploration of the nature of fundamentalism.



## 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 beyond all reckoning  
and at the edge 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