



# Parrot Addenda

by Rogan Wolf

A short series of reflections on truth, honour and Brexit.

The series refers back to a long poem and satire called “Speak, Parrot” by the poet John Skelton. Skelton lived in the reign of Henry 8th, a time 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  
becomes more meet than kindness for a mind  
in charge of 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 made of chaos and the lie.

*Rogan Wolf*  
*August 2018*

# Notes and References

(i)

The verse-form used for this short series of poems is Rhyme Royal. Most of John Skelton's long satirical poem "Speak, Parrot" uses the same form.

**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*