



Poems  
for the Campaign

by Rogan Wolf

*Spring/Summer 2017*

## Introduction

The UK General Election of 2017 was called by the Prime Minister Theresa May straight after a walking holiday in the mountains. Away she had strode, wielding her sticks, and there was no election in sight. Days passed. Then down from the mountain mists she hove into our ken again and, suddenly, there it was.

She caught everyone by surprise with that decision and of course she intended and assumed that an election now would increase the Tory (and Brexit) majority. But she was wrong. The Tory majority was severely reduced, with Labour under Corbyn doing unexpectedly well.

Under the national headline of that result, a more local event took place which was almost as dramatic. In the constituency of Bristol West, the sitting Labour MP Thangam Debbonaire vastly increased her already large majority to 37,336.

As a constituent, I offered Thangam Debbonaire and her team a poem for each day of the election campaign, delivered by email. To encourage eager hearts and foot-soles. Poems for the campaign. Did the poems help ? Maybe a bit, in some fashion that cannot and should not be measured.

Afterwards, informally, Thangam appointed me a team member. Poetry belongs in politics, doesn't it ?

## If I am already broken

If I am already broken  
then I can  
be infinitely *light*  
and need not fear  
the loss of carapace,  
or ties, or mooring rope.

If I am already broken  
I can travel far, untraceable,  
and I'm almost impossible to stop.

If I am already broken  
I am almost unbreakable  
and like a dandelion seed  
almost impossible to stop.

*May 2011*

## Words

What are words for ?  
If to connect us  
they have to be pristine  
carriageways for truth-telling.  
We have to tend and train our words  
to be as sound and life-giving  
as the Earth.

For like God  
words stand at our mercy.  
They can be twisted  
to the vicious will,  
turned  
into mirrors of the corrupted self.

And those who would smash Creation  
and burn and dismember our children  
speak words  
of terrible skill.

*Summer 2015*

## The Magpie

People dying  
learn suddenly to sing  
rhapsodies steeped  
in grief.

But dying is what  
all of us are doing  
all our lives and the rhapsodies I mean  
seem to come in the last days  
of dying, as if only then  
do we finally wake up. So is life  
mostly for sleeping? I look out  
at bare trees this morning, the wet  
on them shining, caught aslant  
by the sun. A magpie flaps  
busily across the open green  
scattering water.

This is the magpie's moment.

So is the next.

It is early and still quiet.

*January 2016*

## Dorset in view

From above, this region is a quilt  
of all colours, covering a vast  
and restless sleeper ; each week  
the colours have shifted, wrapped  
in season. No rest here. No pause.  
The tractor driver spends all the daylight hours  
and more, lonely in his cab, changing  
a field's colour inch by inch, precisely  
row by row. A young deer, ears up and pointed,  
grazes watchfully nearby, safest  
at centre, sharply in view.

*October 2016*

## Sitting Out Riverside

A small bird holds  
forth in the yard  
this evening

clear in that bare tree,  
thrush, I think. Early March -  
not quite warm enough

for sitting out. The thrush is pouring  
all it's ever been  
into the sound it's making

now. The notes linger  
in this place. And may  
take passage home with me.

*March 2006*

## Hawk at Shoulder

I'm perch for a hawk.  
I conduct my business  
at high speed  
gripped at shoulder.  
Hawk is fighting for balance  
eyes aflame.  
Anything might happen  
if I pause.

*October 2004*



*from* Reflections upon Stone

(i)

The beach is all stones.  
None of them know  
their neighbour. Each one  
is different. Some  
I find beautiful. None  
of them know it. None of them  
know what is happening  
around them.

(ii)

What if stones dream ?

Would they dream

in colour ?

Would their dreams reach

into memory ?

Do stones remember

the Creation ?

Was the Creation

colourful ?

(iii)

I have heard a stone sing.  
Its song tore at me  
like a vulture's beak  
breaking me down  
replacing me  
with eternity.

(iv)

Stone has no conscience.  
Through millions of years  
of light and dark  
stone has done nothing  
of which to feel ashamed.

(v)

You kick stone  
you spurn it  
you skim it across flat water  
like a speed boat.  
Stone suffers  
all your maltreatment.  
It knows beyond doubt  
no stone no you.  
We are all made  
from one dust.

(VI)

Stone lives without hope.

It lives with nothing  
except slow wearing -  
infinitely slow.

Stone has  
no need of hope  
but let its wearing  
always be  
infinitely slow.

(vii)

Consider the options :  
strike down  
the tribal demon  
for at least a generation ;  
travel a few feet  
down the beach ;  
or settle a millimetre  
further into the sand.

(viii)

I have seen stone  
grow smooth.  
I am so old  
it is unbearable.

*Rogan Wolf*  
2005



*from* The Hyphen between I and Thou

(i)

Lost among glimpses  
among surfaces  
among scatterings,  
at loose within the leaping bewilderments  
of an immeasurable universe

we are the makers  
of our own safe ground  
the stillness upon which we stand  
is all ours to build.

Like a climber who negotiates  
the overhang  
I carry my footholds  
the footholds which only I can construct  
are all that preserve me.

In view of my exposure, however,  
I must also attend to the rock  
I owe it to myself  
to take care  
of the footholds I hang from.

The fact of my knowledge of you  
is far more a certainty  
than the fact of me....

(ii)

...All that matters of me  
resides *outside* my skin.

Here I am gossamer  
an eye-lid's flicker

but where we meet  
and what we make there

shall never leave the Earth.  
We have to make precious

the space between us.  
It is humanity's last hope.

Our medium is diamonds  
if only we will shape them...

(iii)

All of me that will ever count  
is what you make

of my surrender.  
I am a space of unmeaning

filling a skin  
for one shrill season ;

it is the *meeting - points*  
of my story

that will mark my value  
and affirm my actuality.

(iv)

...I believe today I almost met someone.  
For just a few moments, possibly,  
the whirring edge of me  
disturbed some surface of attention.

Perhaps in time I'll risk being still enough  
actually to meet a whole person.  
I wonder would either of us survive  
the awe and enormity of true encounter...

(v)

Riding the hyphen through chaos  
I know I am safe  
so long as my footing holds.

The hyphen flutters  
it bends  
it ripples through the storm

but it does not break.  
Only I shall break.  
I cling to the hyphen

for my dear life  
since nothing hangs together now  
that can break my fall.

Together we swirl  
I and this hyphen  
weightless through the storm.

(vi)

...If I take to surfing  
I shall learn about breakers  
  
and slide along the coil of them  
poised as a dancer  
  
on the pure edge of ruin.  
For the Earth is made raw  
  
goaded past endurance  
and none bar the surfer  
  
will survive its onslaught  
leaping the crazed beast  
  
as it rages and grieves  
in some ancient dance  
  
of despairing beauty  
for there's nothing left  
  
to follow now  
but the wild wild blue...

(vii)

I shall learn to land-surf  
to keep my feet.

All I can claim of the world  
is here, to feet.

The city heaves and buckles  
squealing and trumpeting

gathering pace.  
It hastens me

it drives me forward  
it tunnels me like a curling wave.

Let me not stumble  
let me keep my feet

let me ride it through  
let my little board

dash me  
steadily through.

(viii)

...I must learn to loiter  
lightly and with precision

poised for flight.  
If I am light enough

you cannot throw me down.  
If I laugh with sufficient joy

you cannot shame or break me  
halt or silence me...

*Rogan Wolf*  
1995



## Keeping Station

The late “Red Bishop” of Durham  
proposed to several congregations  
a new and active strategy for hope  
and creation in the 3rd millennium.  
He called it “Communities of Endurance.”  
He meant that people who keep hearts open  
in times of frenzy  
are likely to find themselves outcasts -  
a debilitating experience  
the human race can ill afford.  
The keeping station  
the holding on  
go better when you’re not alone.

1998 (revised 2016)

*This is David Jenkins, Bishop of Durham during the Thatcher years. He was a vocal and eloquent critic of Thatcher’s politics and philosophy and was often derided as the “Red Bishop” in consequence.*

## Donald Reeves of St James's Piccadilly

From the pulpit of St James' Piccadilly  
he harried old images back to life.  
Families drove for miles from the suburbs  
to place themselves in his communion.

Why blame God  
for things that go wrong for us ?  
he asked one Christmas.  
See it the other way round - day and night  
God is hanging from wrought nails  
for our sakes.

When we succeed at last in destroying Creation  
we shall relieve God of His suffering.

And Reeves called on us that Christmas –  
don't look to the main squares  
the established landmarks  
the rush of functionaries under the lights.  
The hope of the world wanders fugitive and fragile  
in shadow  
somewhere off.

Go there.  
Give to it  
all that is true in you.

*February 2009*

*After his years as vicar of St James', Donald Reeves did mediation work in the Balkans.*

## The Red Kite

The motorway north stoops  
on Oxford.

At 80 we plummet into the soft vale  
of Middle Earth.

Precisely here above the streaming lanes  
the red kite

forks and glories.

Perhaps it is watching us.

It does not know the precarious majesty  
of its stalking of the hill.

We in our lanes  
know well

our haste and high-powered littleness.

Beware the red kite

its steady eye.

It hovers with bewildering grace.

It bides its time.

*May/June 05*

## Centaur

We laid him on his side  
shining in the dim light

his vast head tipped  
towards the crown of the slope

the curved fury of his thighs  
flattening the rough gorse of the combe.

And we left him there as a memory  
of the glory of it all

the thunder and joy  
of the mornings on the downs

when the rhythm was all one  
and my eyes saw only what his eyes saw

and our ears heard nothing  
but the onward extstasy of his hooves.

*September 2011*

## The Blue Field

The swifts calmed me this evening  
shrieking their ecstasy far up against the blue

and then some chugging insect passed  
low across the same blue field

and then Flight 140  
thundered overhead, heading for Heathrow

and I wondered  
do any of these vibrant entities

these passing dots  
against the blue

register  
on the eye of their Creator ?

*August 2009*

## Tawny

I ran the round of Richmond Park  
one night - a seven mile circuit  
of unlit grassland

set in South West 14.

There were trees as lonely as I  
and deer which suddenly challenged

my blind way forward.

And then there were tawny owls  
conversing from boundary to boundary

making this acreage their parlour  
and filling it with the ecstasy  
of their deathly sound.

They packed me home -  
my ears filled with tawny  
my eyes with a million stars.

*March 2006*

## Red Squirrels on the Isle of Wight

*The American grey squirrel was introduced into Britain in the nineteenth century. Since then, it has driven Britain's native red squirrel from much of England. However, the grey has not yet crossed the short distance from the mainland to the Isle of Wight...*

Their “redness” is actually pale fox  
their ears taller, more pointed than the grey.  
“Greys don’t feature on this island,”  
he said, with a meaningful look,  
the young man serving in the fine foods shop  
with local rabbit and pheasant for sale  
(though remember “beware of shot”).

After the first scutter off the path  
their silent game got the better of them  
and they let me watch  
them sprinting up and down the various sides  
of trees just metres away. I shall soon be 60  
60 and these the first I’d ever seen.  
Praise be for their beauty and their play  
secured by the chance of a ring of tides.

*Autumn 2006*

## A place of calm waters

*“Teach us to sit still” (T.S. Eliot)*

We may yet learn to sit still  
and the ferment fall back  
and this frantic thunder of the blood  
quieten and slow

and the landscape widen  
and the walls stand away  
and this place of calm waters  
yield an echo.

*October 2011*



## Siren Sounds

When no one can be trusted  
or believed,

when language becomes  
just siren sounds

of ill intent,  
the word “honour”

rises from the dust  
and from the pools of blood

and an honourable fool  
staggers

through the empty forum.

*July 2016*

## Word Play

May words work.  
May mine  
look you in the eye  
and having found you out  
work on you right there.

Fraud and felon play  
with words, seeking  
only to deceive and buy  
and force you to their will.

I must work a cleaner way  
my words releasing you  
to where you belong.

Words must truth-tell  
sound the soul  
make us well.

*September 2013*

## Reaching for words

Reaching for words  
is like searching the Earth  
for stones  
and then shaping them  
one after another  
into a path.

*September 2016*

## The Billionaire and the Hooligan

For years we've been in thrall  
to the worshippers of "Me and Mine"  
the billionaire and the hooligan  
the lost and the malign.

And we have allowed  
their lies and their betrayal  
of the poor and frail.

And each day we've let them  
feed and stir  
our hatreds and our fear  
and shrink us and divide us  
and corrupt our language  
of trust and truth  
and steal all hope and future  
from our youth.

Let's make a new start.  
Brexit, avaunt.  
Let's take back control.  
Let's heal our nation' heart  
Let's restore our nation's soul.

*Rogan Wolf  
Spring Summer 2017*