

# “Brexit for Beginners”, or “The Young Gentlemen of Etona”

## Towards a script for Interactive Theatre with a Pantomime Final Act

Richard Ennals<sup>1</sup>

Published online: 19 October 2017  
© Springer-Verlag London Ltd. 2017

### 1 Introduction

This week I have been asked by friends around the world if I could explain what has been going on in the UK with regard to Brexit. Suddenly the future seems unpredictable. How can we cope with a changing and uncertain future? How can social science help us? It was suggested that Shakespeare would have found the issues of interest. The plots are remarkably similar to those in Shakespeare’s History plays, dealing with the Wars of the Roses, with intrigue behind the scenes, while major events continued in public.

In the spirit of work at Yale in the 1970s, simulating belief systems (Abelson 1973; Colby 1973; Ennals 1985), and Schank and Abelson’s (1977) work on scripts, there follows a draft script for use in Interactive Theatre productions, which I have called “Brexit for Beginners: or The Young Gentlemen of Etona”. This also benefited from the work of Toulmin (1995), which demonstrated that computers were not necessarily required to bring to life pictures of the world through the eyes of others. He contributed to work on Philosophical Dialogues (Göranzon and Karlqvist 1995; Ennals 1997).

In the world of modern media coverage, there is no shortage of speeches reported by our protagonists. I had no access to their private conversations. Following Toulmin

(1995, 2001), I can offer a context in which we might make sense of their speeches. It is worth noting that the protagonists spent very little time discussing European issues in any detail. As with “Fawlty Towers”, and “Don’t Mention the War”, curiously there was little mention of details of the UK departure from the European Union. Europe was somewhere else, across the Channel. I suggest that the real focus was on an older and different power struggle between ambitious individuals. Brexit, for the UK protagonists, has not been about Europe.

This draft script, written as part of real-time research, and now available to be used as a basis for detailed research and improvisation, ends just before the real final act, which can also be seen as free-standing.

### 2 Dramatis personae

I should introduce the real life dramatis personae. We know who they are. There is no shortage of reports of their public speeches. What did it all mean?

#### 2.1 The UK

*Theresa May* studied Geography at Oxford University. Her supervision partner was *Alicia Collinson*, who married *Damian Green*. *May* was an active Conservative at Oxford, and married Philip, who was younger, and was President of Oxford University Conservative Association (OUCA). She came from a grammar school, and was the daughter of a Church of England vicar. On graduation, she went into finance. She was elected MP for Maidenhead in 1997.

*Damian Green* studied Politics, Philosophy and Economics at Oxford University. He was President of OUCA and then of the Oxford Union Society. He came from a grammar school. He was ambitious and clever, but not

✉ Richard Ennals  
richard.ennals@gmail.com

<sup>1</sup> Department of Skill and Technology, Linnaeus University, 351 95 Vaxjo, Sweden

charismatic. He went into TV journalism with the BBC and Channel 4, then worked for Prime Minister *John Major*. He challenged Ken Livingstone in Brent in 1992 (he lost), and beat me in Ashford (Kent) in 1997, by about 5000 votes. His majority is now about 17,500.

*David Cameron* was below *Green* at Oxford University. He also succeeded in OUCA and the Union Society. He was an Old Etonian, and went on to work in Public Affairs with Carlton TV. He then worked for the Euro-sceptic Chancellor of the Exchequer *Norman Lamont*.

*Boris Johnson* was below *Cameron* at Oxford University, and succeeded in OUCA and the Union Society. He was a charismatic and ambitious Old Etonian, and went into newspaper journalism, before becoming Mayor of London.

*Green* served as minister for Immigration and then Police, under Prime Minister *Cameron's* Coalition Government. *Green* had backed *David Davis* in 2005, when *Cameron* was elected Leader of the Conservative Party.

*Cameron* called the EU Referendum in 2016 as a means of resolving the problem of Europe in the Conservative Party. He made no plans for a possible victory by Leave. *Green* was a leading Remain campaigner, while *May* supported Remain but kept her options open, with a lower profile during the referendum campaign.

*Johnson* wrote campaigning speeches for both Remain and Leave, before deciding to join *Davis* and *Michael Gove* in Leave. *Johnson* had a major impact on the outcome of the referendum, His campaign was controversial, and exploited popular ignorance.

*Cameron* resigned when the victory for Leave was announced. *Johnson* was at first a leadership candidate, but was stopped by *Gove*, leaving the way clear for *May*, whose campaign was run by *Green*. *Johnson* was appointed Foreign Secretary, with *Davis* at Brexit and *Liam Fox* at international trade. All three were committed Brexiters.

*May* called a General Election in 2017 to consolidate her position as Prime Minister, and strengthen her position in Brexit negotiations. Instead she lost her majority. She appointed *Green* as First Secretary of State, and de facto Deputy Prime Minister. It was a “Brexit election”, but with surprisingly little discussion of Europe: *May* argued that “Brexit means Brexit”, and that she offered strong and stable leadership.

*Green* has operated as a fixer inside government, based at the Cabinet Office. He brokered deals with the Democratic Unionist Party, giving *May* a working majority in the House of Commons, and with the Scottish government. *Green* then took control of Brexit negotiations, moving *Oliver Robbins* (senior negotiator) from the Brexit department, under *Davis*, to the Cabinet Office.

*Green* then coordinated the *May* speech in Florence, which delivered to a small specially imported audience of largely

British ministers and journalists, with one each from Germany and Italy. *Johnson* and *Davis* were seen on television in the front row, applauding. Both have pledged commitment to the Florence agenda, this was reportedly to be the basis of the *May* Leader’s speech on 4th October. *Johnson* had published a 4100 word policy position in the Daily Telegraph, just before Florence. He claimed to support *May’s* position, although the details were not clear.

In the first 2 days of the Conservative Party conference, 1st–2nd October, *May* said little about Europe and Brexit, other than asserting that the Cabinet were united. *Johnson* set out a further policy position in the Sun newspaper.

*Green* responded in two phases, using carefully placed media stories, praising *May* and critical of *Johnson*. On Monday this week the challenge to *Johnson* was direct. *Green* may have helped his former colleagues at the BBC and Channel 4 in their revelations about *Johnson* in Myanmar and Libya, where his remarks were criticised.

*Green’s* conference speech on Sunday 1st October seemed deliberately anodyne and low key. His moves in Florence and on Monday were thought to be decisive, possibly paving the way for Leave to exercise control over Brexit negotiations. Had he staged a coup behind the scenes in government, paving the way for Brexit in name only, as suggested by the new UKIP leader Henry Bolton? This might have been seen as a “miracle”, a Machiavellian achievement. Press pictures showed him with a broad smile. He also claimed that *May* has a sense of humour. This could be detected in interviews on 3rd and 4th October.

## 2.2 The Europeans

*Michel Barnier* (Chief EU Brexit negotiator) and *Jean-Claude Juncker* (President of the European Commission) say that a miracle is needed if Brexit negotiations are to succeed *Allan Larsson*, former Swedish Finance Minister, former Director-General of European Commission DG Employment and Social Affairs, and recently adviser to the President of the European Commission, asked me for an explanation of what is going on. This paper is my response.

*Green* and *May* supported “Remain”, but respect the referendum result. Florence allows for the option of leaving the EU in name only, with a new close relationship. That has not been the position from *Johnson* and *Davis*, but they are committed to Florence, whatever that may mean.

## 3 The Final Act

At this point the world waited for *May’s* Leader’s speech on 4th October. A “miracle” need not be hard to fix. Indeed, the ground might have been prepared, without this being publicly known.

*Theresa May's* closing speech at Conservative Party Conference on 4th October was instantly recognised as a “Kodak Moment” (Johnsen et al. 2018), disrupting the smooth predictable flow of events in “the real world”; a “game changer”. The speech is widely available on YouTube, in many edited forms. The words said little, and in particular there was little on Brexit.

The video lends itself to presentation as pantomime: “The Ice Queen melts down”, which can now be used for karaoke pantomime sessions, or in community productions with collapsible scenery.

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/video/2017/oct/05/everything-that-went-wrong-during-theresa-mays-speech-video>.

#### 4 Conclusion

*Allan Larsson* (2018) concluded, in almost Shakespearean terms, on his Facebook page on 6th October 2017, as translated by Google Translate.:

“Shall we laugh or cry? We should be deeply concerned. UK is divided due to Brexit, and has difficult times ahead. UK would have needed a strong government and a prime minister with great authority, who could stand for the compromises needed to avoid a free fall in the negotiations on secession. Now the ruling party is chipped, the prime minister has no authority, her challengers sharpen the knives, but there is no rallying force that can give the government and the country a new lead”.

**Curmudgeon Corner** Curmudgeon Corner is a short opinionated column on trends in technology, arts, science and society, commenting on issues of concern to the research community and wider society. Whilst the drive for super-human intelligence promotes potential benefits to wider society, it also raises deep concerns of existential risk, thereby highlighting the need for an ongoing conversation between technology and society. At the core of Curmudgeon concern is the question: What is it to be human in the age of the AI machine? -Editor.

#### References

- Abelson RP (1973) The structure of belief systems. In: Schank RC, Colby KM (eds) *Computer models of thought and language*. Freeman, New York
- Colby KM (1973) Simulations of belief systems. In: Schank RC, Colby KM (eds) *Computer models of thought and language*. Freeman, New York
- Ennals R (1985) *Artificial intelligence: applications to logical reasoning and historical research*. Ellis Horwood, Chichester
- Ennals R (1997) Art, artificial intelligence and wealth: dialogue with Adam Smith. *AI & Society* 11(3–4):247–263
- Göranzon B, Karlqvist A (1995) Beyond all certainty. In: Göranzon B (ed) *Skill, technology and enlightenment: on practical philosophy*. Springer, London, pp 129–145
- Johnsen HCG, Holtskog H, Ennals R (eds) (2018) *Coping with the future: rethinking assumptions for society, business and work*. London, Routledge
- Larsson A (2018) Facebook post, 6 Oct 2017
- Schank RC, Abelson RP (1977) *Scripts, plans, goals and understanding: an inquiry into human knowledge structures*. Lawrence Erlbaum, Hillsdale
- Toulmin S (1995) Imaginary confessions. In: Göranzon B (ed) *Skill, technology and enlightenment: on practical philosophy*. Springer, London, pp 37–55
- Toulmin S (2001) *Return to reason*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge