



Parrot Addenda

(distilled version)



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

John Skelton 1463 - 1529



Introduction

This series of fifty three rhyming stanzas has been selected from a collection of well over three times that number, which I wrote through 2018 and 2019. The larger collection was a kind of running record of developments in the UK, as the country, its political representatives and the various estates, struggled with the implications and consequences of the 2016 referendum vote to leave the EU. I stopped adding to the collection at the point when Prime Minister Boris Johnson won the general election of December 2019, in effect ending the struggle between “Leave” and Remain,” in “Leave’s” favour. You can find it here : <https://roganwolf.com/wp-content/uploads/Parrot-Addenda-1.pdf>

For this distilled version, I have excised, or boiled away, most of the story element. At the time, the various events and stages seemed to matter greatly, but of course, now that the story is over and the result known, they count for far less. What remains is a series of reflections on some of the implications of it all, the questions thrown up. What is “democracy,” really ? What has truthfulness got to do with it, if anything ? What is the meaning and relevance of accountability, honour, good faith, due process ? What is nation ? What, really, is “Brexit” ? In truth, who and what is it for ? In truth, who and what is “taking back control” ?

The verse form I’ve used is called “rhyme royal.” It was introduced to English literature in the fourteenth century by the great poet Geoffrey Chaucer. And it was used again in the fifteenth century by the poet John Skelton, in his poem “Speak, Parrot.”

“Parrot Addenda” makes close reference to Skelton’s extraordinary poem in various ways, not just its form and title. Phrases, even whole lines, are co-opted but, above all, I have borrowed its central image. For us, perhaps, the parrot is associated with copy-cat. But for Skelton, the parrot was just exotic and glamorous, a bird found in a distant paradise only recently discovered, who “speaks all languages aptly.” And the parrot is caged as our hearts are caged, and both need feeding and cossetting and maybe even protecting. The parrot speaks our hearts’ Truth. “I pray you, let Parrot have Liberty to Speak.”

The series ends at the top of the Tyndale Monument, built by the Victorians on the edge of the Cotswolds. The view from up there is wonderful, even while the rusty bars can make this place too seem like a kind of cage. John Skelton and William Tyndale were contemporaries. Their world was turbulent and in transition and both their lives were given over to seeking English words that might be fit. Tyndale suffered for his pains, dying much younger than Skelton, at the stake.

Some brief background and footnotes are supplied at the end.



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..."



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.



Parrot Speaks of Youth and Hope

Like Parrot, the Truth is caged. Outside in the street
the Lie and all its creatures chant 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.



Parrot speaks of the Brexit Agon (2)

Off stalked the captain (he'd said he never would)
and now what a shipwreck we behold. That 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..."



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.

June 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."

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.

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.



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.



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.



The Parrot Peers

The parrot peers from the shadow of his cage
and sees the ruin wrought by dishonest 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 ?

September 2018

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.”

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."

October 2018



Parrot Writes a Letter

Dear Britons, sharing my tongue, 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.

November 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.”

December 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.

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.”



The Parrot on Planting

The parrot doesn't miss a trick. He sees
the rot in our living wood, how it has spread
and spreads ; he understands that the glory of trees
in leaf and bough needs *tree-trunks* not to be dead.
He sees our leaders, dwarfed and ill-qualified,
clinging to old splinters and sterile dreams.
And parrot speaks plainly : “plant anew, it seems.”

The Parrot Weeps for the Lost

Now Parrot peers beyond the bars and weeps
at how we rage, how little see to respect
and so few leaders fit to fire our hopes
and guide us through to health. For the lost select
losers for their chiefs, shadows, direct
reflections of our shame. We've lost hold
of our good, our footing in the grace of the world.



An English Word of Apology to Europe

A bird of paradise ensnared in times
of turmoil here - with Europe shunned, while yet
belonging in our blood - must seek out rhymes,
however forked and garbled now, to let
this nation's shame be told. We've fallen short.
Split, ill-led, ungracious, we betray
ourselves, our young, and you. Forgive us, we pray.

The Parrot Looks at Leadership

Everything we see before our eyes,
said parrot, is transforming in fast motion.
Take leaders, for instance. Responsibilities
no longer, now they carry for their nation
its dementia, distress and hate : and station
themselves at the head of our bewildered stampede -
to preen and pose and pervert - the blind lead...



Safe Passage

The parrot keeps accosting me. He's like
Socrates, that noble pest. He smiles
and says it's muddled rage that's "taken back
control" and therefore *un-control* that rules.
And not "Far-left" and not "Far-Right" but schools
of fixed dictation, idol-worship, retreats
from Truth. Give Truth safe passage through your streets.

He Speaks of the Rapidity of Change

He speaks of change, that it runs everywhere
and rushes at you and through you, at all times
and in all shapes, and ever faster. And there
it comes as flood, roaring, and here it comes
as thief on tip-toe, stealing into the rooms
of the city, while great buildings reel. Let all
familiar dreams, assumptions, pillars, fall.



The Parrot Meets the Grotesque

Grotesque our leaders' inadequacy. They place
their heads inside great helmets of self-praise
and delusion, tough as steel, and proceed to chase
a mirage, hunting for old certainties.
And just doing right, or building accord, or ways
that work, no longer appeal. My gang and I
must win, that's all. And let our children fry.

The Parrot on Cages, Truth and Leadership

He claims to hate, but mostly loves, his cage.
Its bars keep safe his truth which no one hears,
his wings which beat, but cannot fly. And rage
is his familiar and raking fears
hover round his head. And daily he peers
at the flotsam of our time, our "leaders" therein,
equipped in nothing but thickness of skin.



The Parrot shakes the Bars

The parrot shakes the bars of his own mind :
what is the real division here ? What wall
can be so vital it must split, unbind
a nation ? Where has belonging gone, which all
can share ? Blame is irresistible
to those whose standing is unsure. The Word
is Truth. Truth can be trusted. But can it be heard ?

The Parrot Shakes Again

The parrot goes further : in each of us a war
is being waged between God and Mammon, truth and lie,
meeting and retreating, holding the door
open or hiding in self and fantasy.

This global war of our gods looks set to destroy
the Earth, for fixed constructions of the mind,
old pillars, are false gods. Reach outward, beyond.



Still the Parrot Paces

And still the parrot ponders, that wanton eye
probing, those little leggès pacing up
and down. “Look at the way you humans destroy
our world. It’s plain you’d rather die and keep
your lies intact than turn to truth and leap
into shapes untried. Brexit’s just an excuse
to hit out, a displacing of pain. It’s self-abuse.”

April 2019

He Speaks of Brexit as a Raging Fever

Brexit is a raging fever. It grips
and convulses. Brains boil with it. Eyes glare
at sick room walls, seeing nothing beyond. All types
of lie and wickedness pollute the air
where Brexit takes hold. We watch it field and then tear
down a string of unworthy leaders, our nation fall
into ruin. And it is pure nonsense, chaos, a black hole.

May 2019



The Parrot Brings us Up to Date

The minotaur departed the other day
reeling from hole to black hole. Maybot sank
without trace and Jez retired with his friends to play
and re-play their favourite songs. And now from the sink
of our shame and chaos, see what emerges, rank
with power-lust, steeped in lies ! This gaggle of fools,
each venomous, this black market of black holes.

The Parrot Falls Off His Perch

Flotsam Johnson, Bojo for short, cannot
be trusted to wipe your floor - yet you propose
to vote him leader ? Bojo lies. *Twice* caught
lying, *twice* sacked for it. So who employs
a liar - for *leader* ? Lost, fanatic Tories.
Good faith holds no appeal for this crazed nation.
We lurch from shame to utter degradation.



The Parrot Returns to Talk of False Gods

The parrot understands so little. He tries again. Why do our systems now enthrone such contemptible leaders ? Do we despise ourselves that much ? Let only the best take on so vital a burden - why the worst ? We return to paganism, and raise false gods on high - of chaos, oblivion, the self, the lie.

June 2019

The Parrot Glimpses Mr Toad

What toad is this that's bounding into town, swollen with lies and treachery ? Why, it's an Etonian toad, a species known for forked tongue and foul delivery of venom, the kind a billionaire will buy for favours. Our nation assents to being led by a toad to speed us, hopping, to the end of our road.

July 2019



The Caged Parrot Watches the Demons Dance

Now through the bars, he watches the flames advance.
There's no escape, no refuge, no rescue. And words
are ash, as soon he'll be. And only the dance
of demons will be left, whose use for words
is not for truth, or light, or beauty. Where bides
mercy ? he shrieks, as the demons dance and yards
become feet and now flames scorch him far past words.

The Parrot Keeps Asking

The parrot asked me, why say "Left," why "Right" –
with "Centre" in between, somewhere ? That line's
pure fiction, ruled on paper. In plain sight,
just two castles spoil my view, both in ruins,
both lingering backwards. Now an outlaw who just pines
for power, a throne, a castle, climbs inside.
Spurn him. Seek present sanity, instead.



The Parrot Studies the Human Brain

The Parrot, still bewildered, studies the brain we humans carry, shaping the world. Is this our window to the stars, its viewpoints twain split down the middle ? Creation gave to this species both power to serve Truth, and to replace it with false fantasy. A choice. We choose replace. We hide in division. We abuse.

July 2019

Mr Toad Leapfrogs the Stars

Our cheery Mr Toad at centre stage just knows we love his lies. The Law might take exception, but for Toad the truth's a cage which needlessly constrains him. You parrots like to shake the bars, he sneers, but I shall make away with all that binds me. I'll juggle frontiers, defy facts, ignore laws. I'll leapfrog the stars !

August 2019



The Parrot on Sanctuary

Sanctuary in Westminster meant words
delivered from those precincts were heard as truth,
their author safe to speak, though caged. The lords
of misrule now on the rampage, pouring forth
through street and screen and brain cell, see no worth
in language except for indoctrination and lies.
The unhinged and vicious steal control. Truth dies.

The Parrot Repetitive

John Skelton called his parrot in its cage
his “own dear heart,” his truth, his paradise,
his *anima*. And the truth must speak. Where rage
and lie command the streets and cowardice
allows the criminal free play, where vice
is called a virtue and the vacuous and weak
pretend to be the good, the truth must speak.



The Toad Speaks of Truth as a Cage

The Toad's first instinct is to lie. The truth provokes him, it lacks his imprint, it calls on him to twist it to his comfort. My path to greatness was the lie, cries Toad. What else? The truth enslaves you. You serve. But the lie calls imagination into play. I'm free. I dance to the music of gods. The gods are me.

The Parrot Cries Out

The parrot is forced, hearing us humans, to speak the worst of us. This morning I heard him cry : your kind has overwhelmed the Earth. Just look at our plight. In dread of truth, encased in lie, you befoul what is sacred. And your own children you sentence to pay for your crimes. You follow hate and mirage, tyrant and idol, felon, cheat...



The Lying Toad Our Leader

This nation knows our “leader” does not know
or care what truth is. He and we both turn
to lies as if untruth can cast a glow
on life, which truth may not. “And I was born
and schooled to lie. I can do no other. Please fawn
on all I say - not for its truth, but for me,
the joy of my moment, the all-ness of me.”

The Parrot Views the Earth from Afar

The Parrot’s cage succumbs at last. Its bars
spring open like a flower. And he flies free
leaving the Lie in flood behind him. The stars
see true, he finds. Humans would rather die
than realise their destiny. They pray
to gods of darkness – to greed, delusion, hate -
betraying this wonder of connectedness and light.



The Toad Negotiates with the Underworld

The American Minotaur is back in town. He escaped the underworld three years ago and Toad is in a quandary. The two are kin he knows, both creatures of Chaos and the Lie, but what performance should he give ? To show us Toad of Toad Hall, at home, leading the bull to market ? Or Toadie at call, in awe, in thrall ?



Photograph: Reuters



Parrot's in His Tower - and that's all, Folks !

So many words unheard. Enough for now.
A whole nation, afflicted by dark dream,
dire lie, now turns its face to the wall. Allow
the Toad this rope, and watch the dreadful harm
his bull will do to our children. The parrot has come
to rest in a tower, sentinel on high.
He'll watch for an end to this era of the Lie.



The Tyndale Monument. Picture by Derek Harper



P.S. Where the Hoodlums Are

“At least you can take pride,” the parrot said,
“in William Tyndale, in whose memory
I now reside, high up above the flood
of lies in which you swim on this sad day,
led by a Toad. ‘A new dawn,’ he says. More lie.
Tyndale knew what truth is. You too, before
you flounced away to where the hoodlums are.”



The Tyndale Monument. Picture by Derek Harper

January 31st 2020



Background

When the “Parrot Addenda” series begins, Theresa May was still UK Prime Minister, Jeremy Corbyn was Leader of the Labour Party in opposition and Boris Johnson was Foreign Secretary. The previous year, May had called a snap election and lost the Tories’ overall majority. She was now in the throes of negotiating with the EU over a Brexit withdrawal agreement, which meant first securing her own Party’s assent and that of the Commons as a whole.

In July 2018, Johnson resigned as Foreign Secretary, in protest at May’s proposals. May announced her own resignation in May 2019, having failed repeatedly and now finally to win her Party’s and the Commons’ support. She left her post in June, just after Mr Trump’s State visit to the UK. Soon afterwards, Johnson won the contest for the Tory Leadership and in July 2019 became Prime Minister, though still without an overall majority. He achieved that in December, having called another General election. Corbyn resigned soon afterwards, Labour having lost heavily. The House of Commons now ratified a new EU withdrawal agreement and the UK left the European Union at 11 p.m. GMT on 31 January 2020.

Footnotes

Parrot Speaks of a Pit Bull (page 1) : Lord Rothermere owns the Daily Mail. His “pit bull” in this opening stanza is a reference to Paul Dacre, the Mail’s long time editor. Roy Greenslade has this to say about Dacre’s 26 years in that role : “Dacre has shamelessly played to, and fortified, the worst aspects of an intolerant and isolationist fraction of the British population.” Along with a number of other writers, Greenslade refutes Dacre’s claim to “speak for Middle England” and describes him instead as “the epitome of a grumpy old man, with the added advantage of having a platform to proselytise his Blimpish views to a vast audience.” He sees Dacre as having done much to prepare and cultivate the Brexit vote. See : <https://www.theguardian.com/media/media-blog/2018/jun/10/daily-mail-editor-dacre-rothermere-geordie-greig>

Parrot speaks of the Brexit Agon (1) (page 3) : “Dave” is David Cameron, in 2016 still the UK Tory Prime Minister.

Parrot Speaks True and Plain (page 5) : The last couplet of this stanza is a direct and unforgettable quote from “Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot” by Alexander Pope.

Paradise Destroy (page 6) : “Humankind cannot bear/very much reality” is a quote from “Burnt Norton,” the first of the “Four Quartets” by TS Eliot.

Parrot Speaks to the 2-Bit Mobsters (page 8) : A headline in The Sun (run by Rupert Murdoch, billionaire) September 20th 2018 : “**EU DIRTY RATS** The Sun Says we can’t wait to free ourselves of the two-bit mobsters who run the European Union.”



The Parrot Brings us Up to Date (page 18) : Theresa May was about to vacate her position as Prime Minister. In her last days in that role, Trump paid a state visit (The “American Minotaur”) and the various candidates to replace her were conducting their respective campaigns. Soon afterwards, Boris Johnson (“The Toad”) was declared the winner.

The title “Toad” is suggested by the preening and thoroughly unappealing Mr Toad of “Wind in the Willows,” that long established children’s book. But of course, there’s also the standard phrase “Lying Toad” (Mr Johnson has been sacked twice for lying and, in any occupation besides politics and crime would be considered unemployable). And there again, there’s “Toadie.”

The Caged Parrot Watches the Demons Dance (page 20) : This stanza is ultimately part of a long reflection on the use of language, or of the limits and maybe uselessness of language. It commemorates the death of Muath Safi Yousef al-Kasasbeh, the young Jordanian air-force pilot first captured and then publically burned to death in a cage by Isil or Isis, in January 2015, for propaganda effect, providing us with one of the more appalling images of our era. What words are sufficient for that act, that purpose, that caged human dolor ?

The Parrot Studies the Human Brain (page 21) : I was thinking here of an important book by Iain McGilchrist called “The Master and his Emissary.” The book begins as a study of our human brain, the two brain hemispheres, unequal and in complex and frictional relationship. Against its own interests, the left hand side (the “emissary”) would like to function as if the right were unnecessary and even non-existent. Their struggle continues through the generations, and the world we create around us during one era or another will always reflect which of the two hemispheres is in the ascendant at that time.

The Toad negotiates with the Underworld (page 25) : “The American Minotaur is back in town.” refers to the fact that, in December 2019, just over a week before the UK General Election, a NATO meeting took place in Watford, north London, with Trump taking part. That picture of Johnson with the bull was taken at much the same time, an election stunt, a carefully stage-managed and shit-censored “mastering of the beast”. (I love that man on the left, with his leg sticking out). But how many beasts do we see in that picture ? And which really was master ? And what strange and tousled beast did we have now, slouching towards Westminster to be born ?