

**9th Preview of *Ox in Metal*, an upcoming 2022 Quemar Press collection of new poems by the author Jennifer Maiden:**

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Whilst this first poem, 'Murder, He Worried', is not graphic about violence, it refers to the hero Malcolm Turnbull's public doubts about the death of a possible assault victim, and his imagined discussion of this with his relative Angela Lansbury, shown as playing one of her famous roles: a woman detective and mystery writer. We therefore give a trigger warning for this poem.

### **Murder, He Worried**

Malcolm Turnbull woke up on Lady Martins Beach again. Behind him, his house towered handsome. The beach was eerily empty, but on a rug



next to him sat his cousin Angela with a typewriter and a cold long glass of something sparkling. She was playing that role he always loved: the lady author who herself solves murders. He also wanted to hug her because he loved the Lansbury soul. Sometimes he wished he had been even more like the great George, although he knew there was still hope, especially married to his Lucy. The inlet gleamed aquamarine, perhaps because it was so small, and the boats were like toy decorations on a cake for which Sydney was the plate, so storied and surrounding. The mystery writer character, however, seemed to be concentrating only on his evident concern. She was indeed too much a subtle part of the scenery to be distracted by it. She said directly, 'She was a great loss, the woman who died last year in a way you have described as "counter-intuitive" to being suicide. You said she was to complain formally to police the next day, and had always had recollection clear as this crystal water of being raped appallingly by someone you had originally appointed to the cabinet.' He nodded, 'Yes. by some sudden email she retracted the accusation, and no one questioned the retraction. Next day she was found dead.' Angela began typing. He hadn't seen a typewriter since their last



picnic at this beach. It was a reassuring, busy noise. She remarked, 'The woman had a keen and useful intellect, and she had written a published history of a school and many academic observations on how to sustain urban living through ecology, including for the old. Lucy would have respected that, and you as a born lawyer would have also been anxious about timing. It is always handy for assassins if the victim has tried suicide before. You are as interested in espionage as I am, and indeed your advocacy of the Peter Wright book made it legal. There are so many ways to facilitate a death if a government decides to save its own.' He said, ' I think perhaps they did, or some loyal network of friends went into action. I have never been one of those people, and I have never known how to play them, except now I am certain that you cannot control them by appointing them. ' The typewriter tapped with a sudden hollow note of exasperation, and he added, 'Simple, yes, but being Prime Minister over-simplifies everything. You live your own requiem. I am more myself again.' She said, 'You wouldn't have summoned me to you when you slept, if you were not so worried, both by the murder, and the method.



I can write you a plausible plot, but is the coroner a solution?'

'I have raised the indelible doubt', he insisted,' and in a court of law that is sufficient.' But she typed once more and laughed:

'We are on an expensive beach, not a tennis court, let alone a law court. You've called it counter-intuitive for you to assume a suicide, and the possibilities that you open are almost too enormous for one sly and corrupt crime in isolation.'

He said, ' Of course, beyond this beach there is an ocean.

But what haunts is just that one smiling woman's face.'

She said, 'If it's just *cui bono* - although I've heard that phrase is now used to label things a conspiracy theory - then you can rest uneasy.' She gave him the manuscript. In the harbour breeze, he sat and read a clever plot for murder. The dapper boats avoided each other gracefully at his sight's edge. Clear light dazzled on the wave-crests as they sighed.

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## **It can't be easy, being Tabaqui**

*'.. we see what is happening in real life. As I said, every now and then they are abusing Russia, for no reason. And of course, all sorts of petty Tabaquis are running around them like Tabaqui [the jackal]ran around Shere Khan[the tiger] – everything is like in Kipling's [Jungle]book – howling along in order to make their sovereign happy. Kipling was a great writer.'*  
*Putin's annual address to the Federal Assembly, 2021*

An Australian biographer of Robeson innocently undermined him

with a bulging pocketful of CIA pathologies, summed it up:

‘It can't have been easy, being Paul Robeson’ but as an

alternative to coming up like thunder

how easy is it to be a jackal? Pity jackals. All children have been

Tabaqui, lying for scraps from any father or mother,

living off scraps allowed him by Shere Khan, or the wolves

of the Seonee Pack, and at last killed by Grey Brother.

It can't be easy, being Tabaqui. Putin was perhaps

thinking foremost of the Ukraine's build-up of troops,

or the put-down violent putsch in Belarus,

but jackals are prone to rabies and zigzag insane

in a way even feared by the Beloved King: Shere Khan

might in Australia have wanted famished Morrison



to cancel a couple of contracts with China, and academic  
agreements with Syria or Iran, in puzzled Victoria,  
but one is compelled to look in shadows and be sorry  
for mottled bundles of bravado and ingrained hunger  
alternately huddling and howling. All children have been  
Tabaqui, lying for scraps from any father or mother,  
and it isn't for the tiger the wolves come.

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## Doctor Donne and the Country Women

If Donne were concocting a synthesis from last night's news, he might say that the Israelis using Trump to assassinate General Soleimani killed the civilised top predator they could talk to, the one dedicated to fighting Isis, and therefore they left a plague of Arab resentment which when they provoked it rose in misery beyond words, and that his metaphor was completed by the mice the NSW Government, having killed top predators like the dingo, fox, and the cat, wants to use banned poison to destroy, risking native animals, water, pets and wheat.

A conceit as used for unusual metaphor by the metaphysical poets is an accuracy not an irony and Doctor Donne would have frowned on the annihilating ironies of the Country Women's Association, they unable to sustain a concept and its binary horizon, voting always to eliminate every threat.

But no doubt they would still enjoy a lively sermon.

We can transport him, older and un-Donne without Anne, to address one of their meetings, taste a stolid scone,



and drink the tea of hell, not Paradise's milk. He'd say  
that Israeli Intelligence - Mossad or the Army -  
is like these ladies too temporal not to betray  
itself and its desperate assets - his theme  
might example Ghislaine Maxwell, with whom  
they'd be shocked to compare themselves. They again  
would deflect his metaphor with knowing mirth,  
although he watches his watch and exits politely.  
Across a slow meadow that writhes with corpses, he  
must travel to remind Mossad of Heaven.

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## **There seems an easiness**

There seems an easiness now about such oppositions,  
forgetting the ruthlessness in the lie: forgetting that  
Menzies made up a South Vietnamese invitation,  
a Threat To This Country, or that in 1958,  
according to Ellsberg, America almost  
nuked China over Taiwan, then thought to use  
Vietnam against China and all the convincing  
lies behind the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution,  
dreamed up by Jim Morrison's father, the Admiral.  
There seems an easiness now in not being lulled  
by CIA opium, the deadly concerts. Now Stewart Copeland  
from the band The Police talks openly and proudly about  
his own father, the famous CIA asset, and asserts that all  
ethics should be relative, post-modern. There seems  
an easiness too in that, like surviving almost intact  
in prison. When Nadia Wheatley gave me her book  
*Radicals* written with Meredith Burgmann, on Sixties



protests in at-ease Australia, I responded rightly

'It's an impressive, insightful, inspiring and continuously

fascinating and really informative compilation and I'm

hoping to write a poem about it soon.' So the hope

is here, but how? A recent *ABR* review of my last book says

I avoid buttonholing the reader by using experienced

techniques. I thought: I learned them over half a century,

more to make fear bearable for both of us,

you and I,

not buttonholing, clutching the cliff-edge,

turquoise sharp mountains in mist beneath,

but anyway the written word inevitably

eases, makes it seem possible, safe in air, to outwit

each old assassin's easiness, that death old ease to lie.

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## **Tritium the Mascot**

Japan has decided not to use its little mascot

Tritium-kun (little Mr. Tritium) to promote

the release of Fukushima water to the ocean.

Tritium is the only radioactive atom that remains

in the wastewater and the small jade-pale guy

with the larger grass green nose and slightly crossed eye

- cute enough for couplets - and the headgear of atomic

symbols - two yellow orbs and a green cross, was comic

in an endearing way they thought too unserious. He's gone.

China and Korea and some neighbours are still grim

about the vast, long release of the real atom, but Japan's

Reconstruction Agency said the little mascot 'means

friendliness. We aimed for an intermediate feeling

that is neither "good" or "evil". Well, yes, that meaning

with its innocence of inverted commas, suave neutrality,

again makes me miss the little creature. In the jade sea,

he seemed so free, and happy, so morally



unencumbered. He was retired too young to have any adventures, but my own little Brookings gave him serious attention and is disappointed, being sort of adolescent now and into anime. I guess they - pombats (wombat and possum cross) - are anime in a way, themselves. Named after the Brookings Institution, which he thinks was named for him, Brookings tried to win the Compatible Left (another pombat) over but she rejected his flowers, at least temporarily, and he took refuge in literature and manga. He still loves me to read to him, still has his joey fur, feels like plush, when he cuddles to see the book better. I suppose 'Tritium' is still copyright, if retired, but I can always invent stories for Brookings about Tritium in his element. Sea. We will follow him in the water. He will make friends but not too easily and some will try to eat him. He will flip away at the last, though, and know more adventure. Brookings likes Tritium's greenness now and his roundness. Like Pierre in Brookings' favourite *War*



*and Peace*, he survives by innocence, luck and wisdom.

I console now that you can't retire an atom.

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## **Fifty Years Gone**

Gore Vidal woke up in Belmarsh Prison, having just missed Julian Assange's 50th birthday on purpose, as Vidal detested his own inadvertent tears, any sentiment, and Assange had just been visited by Stella and the little boys for the first time in eight months. The kids were mini-Julians, like something out of a Victorian artwork, and their father would have greeted them as if unastonished, appropriate: no trace of depression's holocaust. Vidal admired all self-control, even if he'd rather have discussed another fifty years gone with the prisoner: the publication by the *New York Times* in 1971 of Ellsberg's *Pentagon Papers*. Vidal looked at his own phantom image in Belmarsh's metal mirror: his lips still had a rare vagueness as pliant as a woman's, although the Roman Senator unsmilingness was also there. Fifty years gone, Norman Mailer had hit him in a TV studio for describing him as a violent part of a sexist trajectory: Miller, Mailer, Manson. Did he miss



Norman? Sometimes, and not just as a target.

Assange was asleep, obviously relieved that the babies were okay, if normally affectionate and restless. Stella Moris had called his suffering 'grotesque', and indeed Vidal judged it grotesque to be kept in prison for no reason, no current charge, to wait for the outcome of a prejudiced appeal. Ellsberg himself had protested it. And no doubt Mailer would have, too, an impeccable soldier in the Armies of the Night against Vietnam, U.S. violence, even if compelled to be 'macho' -such a 70s word - to exorcise a Jewish mother, laughed Vidal. He wanted to wake up Julian just to amuse him with a full fifty years of stories. Assange slept near Vidal's *History of the National Security State*, which he had gripped when dragged by practised police grotesquely from the Embassy. Not to desert his reader, was why Vidal still visited: perhaps, he thought, I constitute myself a state of security now: I opposed Washington's horror



to the last and am made impeccable by death. The prisoner  
woke up with a smile like his children. Smiles, decided  
Vidal are always an act of remembering. Five decades  
and Ellsberg still smiled. Anticipating truth, Vidal grew eager.  
Assange had seen him in the steel mirror.

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## Death-Wish Moths

To amuse Katharine, I called the small grey moths that try to drown in coffee cups and computer screens 'Death-Wish Moths', explain that they are a form of Death's-Head moth, but much less common. Rescuing yet another one from a keyboard, opening its wings with a fingernail and breathing on it until it flutters away to repeat another try at self-annihilation later, I am reminded of how assets of Intelligence agencies are habitually betrayed by them: the latest the President of Haiti gunned down in his home, by English-speaking mercenaries who pretended to be from Drug enforcement, even if he had served his U.S. masters he thought well. One is thinking of the pathetic Stephen Ward again, or le Mesurier of White Helmets, or Witness K who was advised in his truth-telling by an Australian boss who retired and pegged him hanging on the line. Do they never expect what will become of them? Afghani interpreters without proof the CIA ever paid them? Editors of magazines whose darlings no longer win crazily confected prizes, fake cream arid cherry on top, and the funds dry up? The dictators in a hundred states advised



by a hundred April Glaspies it is good to take Kuwait. Perhaps  
they always saw in dreams the final Embassy roof  
as the pitching helicopter left them? Or were they chosen  
because mad and addicted to death, as the manuel instructed?  
Rhodes scholars in refrain to heart's Rhodesias again?  
They seem the last word in loyalty, die inexplicitly in love.  
There is no tragic satisfaction in it, only numb pity, dread  
at the willingness with which they chose to fall, the trust  
until beyond the end that they were exceptions, known,  
as if just to be obsolete it must be just. The moth  
left some flying-dust on my fingers but can watch  
me type this from the ceiling, taking some brief  
respite from the light, the downward summons, but  
in Port-au-Prince the states of siege don't stop.

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## **Pegasus**

(Pegasus is hacking software – spyware – developed in Israel and marketed and licensed to governments around the world)

Lovely as a galaxy, the horse banners out its wings.

It is made of an elegant scattering of planets. Who

could afford not to buy it, even more resist a ride

on its fog-fluid back but clean contours? A pony

with wings is what we all want, want to be. When

my daughter was a baby, the orthodox brand

of toy ponies offered either a Pegasus or unicorn,

not both. The voluptuous and often better

fakies could be unicorns and fly. The winged firm

of ex-intelligence officers - did you ever

hear of any intelligence not ex? - selling Pegasus

spyware to whatever tyranny or strategy

it chooses - gifts itself the final power. Again,

we are surprised at the surprise of acid assets

like editors, prism-maned oppositions who find



themselves worthy of power's treachery. To this  
metal ox, the furrows firm in lines, but the horse  
that flies and flows has no limits: there  
are never enough enemies, and twinkling milky wars  
spillover on its own unbounded stars.

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## The Metal Ox and Proof of Life

The morning drifts to the right in liquid spirals, clockwise. The ox has settled down outside the window, folding up on bent knees much more easily than I could. It still wears its golden metal coat, but sleek as canola margarine, not static. Still I ask, 'Are you sure you are organic?' Not so much to aid classification, but to expand the dewy discourse. It answers all questions with exquisite courtesy: 'If you need proof, you can see my homochirality test, you know.' Its tact is too great to ask if I know what homochirality is, but fortunately I do, and confirm: 'So a spectropolarimeter in a helicopter above you detected polarised light?' 'Yes, as you know, all molecules exhibit chirality, are either right or left handed and can mirror, but never replace each other. Amino acids are sinistral, or left-handed, to build proteins, but most of the sugars - like RNA or DNA - are right-handed or dextral. Sides can't replace each other, so that when light reflects off biological matter, it is either clockwise or anti-clockwise spirals. If I was abiotic, there would be no such circular polarisation. But, to tell the truth, I was more nervous that a helicopter was flying up above me.' I nod: 'But it's gone now. I doubt if they were specifically assessing us: just measuring trees. But, as you say, you passed the test for being organic, despite the impressive armour.' The topic should lead easily to RNA technology, such as that used



for vaccines, I realise, and wonder what the ancient ox, appointed totem of this lunar year, might know about such futures. I ease in: 'I've been worried that Jon Stewart who was so powerful in comedy to oppose the war in Iraq, Guantanamo Bay, has appeared on the Colbert show supporting the theory that the Corona virus escaped from a lab in Wuhan.' The ox shrugs its whole vertabrae like a train on a mountain track: 'It seems to date earlier, to before the bio warfare experiments in Fort Detrich, Maryland, were shut. And those too had something to do with anthrax. But the Chinese don't do much tit for tat, unless you kidnap a Huawei princess, accuse her of breaking your own unilateral laws. That can make them rather vicious. But I think I've met a bat who may have harboured the virus near Wuhan, quite a vivacious lady, but not quite discreet, nor discrete ever. Didn't you think Jon Stewart was strange to give a voice - before he retired and promoted animal welfare - to John McCain's whole senile deep state?' It's a seductive digression, but I maintain the course: 'I agree with you. My bet is on the bat. But what do you know about RNA vaccines? I was upset I was too old to be worth one yet, but we can discuss the technology wistfully, anyway.' The ox looks up frightened by droning in the sky, but it is just a helicopter flying to Emergency. The ox agrees:



'The RNA technology is snappy. It uses no once-active organisms but it works on code to produce a disease-specific antigen which rises to the surface of the cell to stimulate immunity.' 'But is it too disease-specific to fight strains?' I ask, with the critical liberty of those denied easy rescue. 'It has more versatility than you might expect', the ox rumbles, but adds reassuringly, 'So do you.' I concur: 'There is a diversity only produced by isolation. I still agree with Tolstoy that if he could wish one thing for mankind it would be they could detach themselves from their hard life long enough to reflect.' The helicopter leaves above us clockwise, emptied for another place. The ox relaxes and drowns like a calf. Its great head sways. When one spiral sleeps, the other has to guard. I rest my hand upon its massive face.

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## **Clare, George and Abdul Ghani Baradar Akhund**

George Jeffreys woke up in Mt Druitt in late August, 2021.

Close to him in bed in Clare's Mother's house, Clare on

skype was chatting to the Deputy Leader of Taliban,

Abdul Ghani Baradar Akhund, who was often,

George remembered, inclined to chat for long

sessions, the Taliban being quite usually given

to explaining themselves, and keeping their own

records of everything copiously, like everyone

who can maintain a successful revolution.

George waved in his coffee-transit to Baradar, a man

George thought, who still carried brotherly warm

vibes of the best Pushtoon tribal elders. Julian

Assange was the current topic of conversation,

with Clare affirming Assange's 2011 opinion:

'The goal is to use Afghanistan to wash money' from

'tax bases of the US and Europe through Afghanistan,'

she quoted him concisely, 'and back into the hands





of a transnational security elite. The goal is an endless war, not a successful war.' Baradi - which means 'brother' - his name a gift from the Leader of Taliban, Mohammed Omar - seemed to find this a contradiction: 'But when CIA helped us be founded by Pakistan, they should have known we'd want some completion, some civilised political solution.' Clare nodded: 'There's no religion - even the Pentecostals, like Morrison - could shift \$300 million daily for two decades as did Nato and the Americans in your country without a qualm about losing Heaven, surely. They should have guessed how every soul has grown.' George sat beside her with his black coffee. 'Dear old man, said Baradi warmly, since George had visited him in prison, when the Pakistanis and CIA mysteriously arrested him - in a prevention associated with his peace negotiations - for eight years - ' you were right that we are sanctified by change.' George said, ' I still find the Western hypocrisy an irritation. They have been aflame again with righteous indignation and strategic feminism about the plight of women,



when a few weeks ago USAF dropped their bombs  
near Kandahar and killed twenty women and children,  
after all the death-weddings of Obama's drones,  
with no complaint from Hillary Clinton's clones.'

Clare demurred demurely since her courtesy would remain  
- George admired - one of her own special insurrections-  
and she said: 'But of course you will now arrange promotion  
of women to powerful roles.' It was not a question.

Baradi did not look as if it caused him any problem.

'Compromise is a part of any religion's passion',  
aphorised George as old prisoners served new time.

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