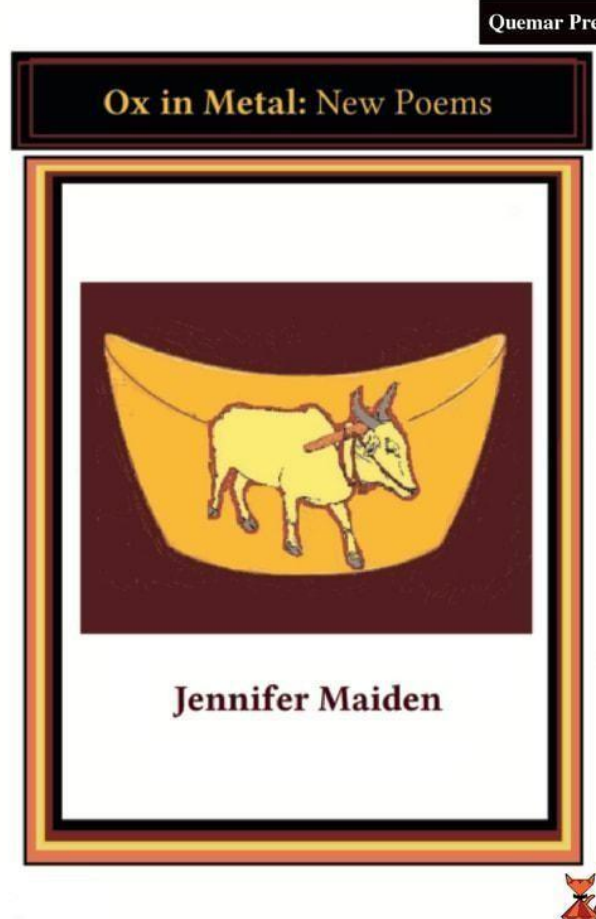




Jennifer Maiden
Ox in Metal: New Poems
Quemar Press



Sampler from *Ox in Metal* Jennifer Maiden

Quemar Press

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Ox in metal

I woke up and an ox was at the window, gold and silver
like the dawn's dapple around it, and I asked it:
'Are you the ox of this Lunar New Year, whose element
is metal? I once wrote a long poem, *The Year
of the Ox*, but that ox was earthen. I said that
I was an old slow ox, and my element was earth.
Nevertheless, have you come to greet your brethren?'
The vapour from its nostrils was like that of an engine.
The vapour from its nostrils smelt of grassy warmth
and vegetables. It was clearly organic, no meltable totem.
The dawn behind it was pure ruby in the paperbarks,
then the dawn behind it eased to precious metal.
The ox's eyes were meditative, helpful,
with the enhanced perceptions of a beast of burden,
or indeed of all fated quadrupeds.
It answered, socratically, my question with a question:
'Do you invest in crypto currency at all?'
I said, 'I know your being metal is traditional this year,
as romantic as all else from ancient China,
but I also wondered if it might be fortuitous
from the point of view of the rumoured Great Reset,
in which Europeans have withdrawn their gold from America,
anticipating the landslide of the stock exchange and dollar,
and plan to return to the Gold Standard and silver?'
With a hedge in crypto, as you say, although to answer
your question I assumed Musk's recent crypto binge was
some ploy of Israeli Intelligence, whether the Army or Mossad



to shake up the Americans: sort of economic Epsteinism.
But no, I wouldn't trust the stuff myself. I admire
your lustrous metal, though. You are like the sleek gold boats,
which were the first Chinese currency. Surely you are not
in any way composed of crypto?' It pondered: 'No, I seem
to be entirely alive. The metal in me moves as flesh and bone,
not ornament, artefact or abstract.' I agreed, 'Yes, the earth
of which I am made is also incarnate. The furrows I deepen
cough back my straining breath.' The ox tilted its huge horn -
almost too large for a modern species, more like those worn
by an extinct aurochs in a gold and silver glade - as if
it were in restless meditation. It lowed like a whole abattoir
in guttural desperation, but then seemed to brace itself.
It allowed itself to be petted, and I rubbed its forehead
with my forehead, a medicinal gesture soothing pain,
accustomed in our breed. I tried: 'Of course, as well as return
to metals as currency, the suggested conspiracy in the Reset
is to de-industrialise and reduce the population, so that
it is controlled by reserve-owning Davos-style elites: hence
attacking Russia, China, your new moon's silk road, but not power
of the Military-Industrial Complex?' But the ox's shrug was simpler:
'You are yoked to trudge your stumbling furrows longer.
Your skin like mine will turn to golden armour.'



[Whilst this 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.



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.



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.



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.



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 manual 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.



Brookings Becomes a Nuclear Sub

The little pombat cross between wombat and possum
still wants to hear new stories about Tritium
the nuclear ex-mascot of Japan, and his adventures
in the incandescent ocean, full of teeth and dangers.

I tell the best stories. He focuses on me with a concentration
special to the young and cuddlesome. I tell him that the atom
in his trinity headgear has learned to ride a submarine,
the unrealised one ordered recently by Australia
from either the U.S. or Britain, but not the French one
which never existed either, but was going to render
itself non-nuclear as diesel was the first order.

I explain that diesel is quieter, stealthier
but that the new nuclear subs are meant to last longer
and travel farther, if you want to attack China.

Brookings doesn't want to attack anyone
but was never given to stealth or discretion,
especially when he plays. I tell him Tritium-kun
- little mister Tritium - is riding a sub like a stallion
chased by sharks and stingrays through a barrier
of twinkling coral reefs. Brookings becomes a submarine:
definitely not Collins-class diesel, but a noise machine
roaring and squeaking through the bush and flowers.

Later, he snoozes at my knee, since the storyteller
must be the one to whom you return with your own
new versions of the legend, its exhaustion.



The Human Toboggan

On the Kings Cross Road above Mount Selwyn,
there is no snow.

In fact, there are probably not many live snow gums
after the fires a couple of years ago.

I was never into skiing, as it put
too many barriers, psychological, real, whatever
between one and the landscape, but
would return to the landscape an enthralled lover
and just looked at the livecam now.

Relevant to enjoying being an ox -
the doer of the job, not just the master -
when Katharine was a baby I remember
the plastic toboggan we'd brought was split
and didn't slide well so I sat on the hilltop
in my too-large grey plastic dollar shop boots
my legs in their waterproofs straight out together
and she sat on my lap as I slid to the gully floor.
There was too much snow for impeding friction.
We called it 'the human toboggan'.

I think I went faster than would the real one
and was always much easier to steer.

Also the plastic would not have taken pleasure
in the way the hilltops and clouds met each other
as they do now in the livecam from new height
an archipelago of branches too shadowed to be ghosts
and still the close clouds fierce with looming light.



The peace prize

Gore Vidal woke again in Belmarsh Prison,
pessimistic from life,
hopeful from death, in a plastic grey chair beside Assange,
who was as usual in limbo but steely with concentration,
if brittle with despair. Vidal was more disappointed
than he had expected to be by the Nobel Peace Prize
not mentioning Julian, although the recipients again
were the Empire's minions: a Russian funded
by oligarchs, a Filipinx MSM advocate who had
already attacked Assange for not being governed
by her bosses. It wasn't as outrageous a choice,
of course, as Kissinger. Vidal recalled Tom Lehrer
retiring and declaring satire possible no longer
after Kissinger won the Peace Prize. Vidal introspected:
'I am more preoccupied by this than the confirmation
that Pompeo and some other CIA cut-throats planned
to murder Julian in the Embassy. When have they never
planned the murder, even if the White House
lawyers decided the act should be more cautious?
And so too decided Biden, dreamy with dementia.'
The idea of Julian being sawed into small pieces
by a doctor with a walkman, suitcased out
like Khashoggi was always a possibility
each time Vidal arrived. Vidal still winced
whenever the cell was empty. But Assange
was always returned to it, seemingly forever.
The final appeal was soon, in October. The verdict



gave a promise of peace, some painful recuperation
or the Empire's last numb spasm towards decay.

The Biden Administration had already promised
Assange could serve his 175 year sentence
for revealing their war crimes and corruption
in Australia if convicted, but Vidal did not expect
to see much of the scenery there that Julian
described as if it were a wistful planet.

Vidal could guess
however he would attend even that place
if necessary, wry that the last emotion he
had expected to experience after a century
in nimble scepticism was this last emotion that
he felt now in resignation: faithfulness.



snipers

On the roof are always gunmen.

Victoria Nuland's cropping up in Lebanon at the same time as demonstrations and snipers reminds one of her Maidan coup in which the demonstration was fired on by organised rooftop snipers, not only a Gene Sharp Colour Revolution but the other half in addition. She travels on to Russia in case diplomacy might endanger what Madeleine Albright has once again just called, in *Foreign Policy*, American democracy-creating future. Remember Madeleine Albright: the starving children who were 'worth it'? Apparently still are.

On the roof are always gunmen.

And do you remember the Foreign Relations Council Wikileaks said was forever indeed as 'ubique' as its motto, had more power than anything else in the world? They still run *Foreign Policy*. It is interesting that they seem to love mottoes, such organisations.

On the roof are always gunmen.

Ubique's unique expected gentlemen, with their transcendent prised precision, have nothing to win but heaven, nothing to lose but low slow starvation.

On the roof, nothing is real but the stars, and on the roof are too many other gunmen.



George Jeffreys: 34:

George Jeffreys Woke Up Skyping with Joe Biden

George Jeffreys woke up Skyping with Joe Biden.

It was still daylight in Washington but midnight
rained indigo in Mt Druitt, Australia, the light
from the window in Clare's mother's house sodden
and Sydney a carbon rose glow on the horizon.

Clare was pacing the carpet with her fists tight
on each of her wrists to show opposition
to his talking with Biden at all after Iraq
and other examples of his Council on Foreign
Relations rationalised aggression,
but Biden had rung suddenly, contrite
at not having called George when Trump
had said he would find him a good critic:
someone who'd help clear your head.

George said: 'I thought you might
phone me when you called Trump 'George'
before you took office - that I was a subject
of discussion.' 'Is this phone safe?'
asked Biden. 'Tell him it's CIA', said
Clare. George said, 'It's CIA, but
the guys on the other end don't listen
much, as they're a Langley faction
both anti-anti Chinese and anti-anti Russian
these days, though they're still into economic
Imperialism.' Biden sounded wistful: 'I'd like
to meet them. My Borg guys have still got



an obsession with Russia. My CIA Head
and I have to talk to Putin on a phone
secured by Russian Intelligence in case
the Foreign Relations people eavesdrop
and use it against me if they think I'm soft:
like Vindman used that stuff on Trump.
Are you CIA yourself?' Clare gave a snort
of derision. 'No', said George, 'but I like
a phone that works and the contacts
are useful for my Prisoner of Conscience outfit.'
'Yes, Trump said yours is the only one left
not run by some Intelligence division, bad jokes
like the White Helmets. Would you please
tell your lady that I was never part of Rumsfeld's
plan to turn the Middle East to chaos'...
'Iraq, Iraq' muttered Clare again...
'and don't want to de-stabilise other places
in order to rule them now. Obama set me down
on the chessboard to counter Hillary. I did.
Even though Victoria Nuland and things
like her were left behind to continue aggression.
I'm an old man, George, with a bad succession.'
'You must,' considered Jeffreys, 'hold your brain
together as long as you can. I believe things complex
about the Democratic Party: it doesn't just function
as a false Left to subvert the real one, but
The New Deal is a long time gone.' Biden
said 'I just got Congress to pass my new trillion
dollar Build Back Better plan. That's something



FDR would have liked. But the brain, the brain.

I bombed a whole family - not the first -
to death in Afghanistan to make our airport
massacre look better and maybe I did think
those babies there were terrorists. George,
the brain. How much should I really let
myself sleep, how much can I still trust
any of my rebelling bodily functions?'

Clare saw that the old man with the slight
tremor and stiff, instructed, absent face
was a walking metaphor for his nation.

She sat with George on the night-deep bed.

He explained to both her and Biden:

'He is Roosevelt now before any war: and a man
for whom crippling from each failure, grief,
can in the drug of dementia be forgotten.'

Clare said, now also in the conversation,

'But still they want other countries de-stabilised,
having failed to dement Syria, and the lies, lies,
lies of propaganda must surely confuse an old man
genuinely?' She added clearly and more gently then:

'They are not good for him.' As the Washington
vision showed a face smoothed out and open,

'No. They are not good for me', said Biden.



Gas-stripping in Virgo

The Honourable Carina Monckton was fashioned in the Carina Galaxy by a committee devoted to the works of Fred Hoyle, especially the Andromeda books about that lovely lady created on earth by the Andromeda Galaxy.

They knew they could do it, similarly.

Carina was rich and devoutly committed to saving all animals, indigenous or whatever, and to any airborne adventure. She lived on her own mountain in Patagonia, where she had just transported many mink she had carried off from Canada and Denmark, where they were to be culled because of Covid. Now they roamed in twitchy sleekness, came to her fingers snuffling for food and security.

The Danes in particular, thought Carina, were addicted to public animal butchery, had previously legal bestial sex-parlours and shot and dismembered a zoo-bred giraffe in Copenhagen, its red jigsaw smearing their kill-tranced faces. Carina had seen the photos of the limp mink dead shovelled up like furry road-blocks and decided she'd nab as many as she could instead.

Now these were safe, she began however to want to visit her favourite observatory - the Atacama Large Telescopes in Chile - where she could view the Galaxy close by that had made her. She now realised



that this was not just homesickness but rather
hunger for proportional accuracy.
Anyway, there were other matters
of interest now in the horizons of Atacama.
Hundreds of barren galaxies in Virgo clusters
were not creating gas fuel to make stars
7 5 because colder molecules were being stripped
away by the clustered heat and velocity.
It was a visible process and deadly,
called 'gas-stripping' by the astronomers.
She took some high-res Atacama pictures
back with her to the Patagonian refuge.
She explained to a few interested not-fur
coats-now-not-ever, as they nestled on her:
'There is a softness needed when things are created,
a peace and proportion, a steadiness like that here
from the coolness in the twilight-mingled air.
The furrows balance in the earth like geometry,
muddy enough for the plough to enter,
and they balance like that in the sky.'
She ran her fingers protectively
through their breathing coats, had wondered
if they would be as soft as the mink in a store,
or that in some woman's musky wardrobe,
but alive they were infinitely softer.
Her hands were caressing water, and she
wondered if the Carinans might one day
call her at last to save a galaxy.

