

17th 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.



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.



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.



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.



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.



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.



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.



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.



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.



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.



Panic

'As you would expect', Clare sighed and said,

'most of the almost two hundred dead

at the airport in Kabul were shot

by naive young American soldiers

who were in panic at the suicide bomber.'

'They'd have expected', George felt numb-old,

'it to be an exercise, some practised rescue.

Isn't the old aphorism in Games Theory true:

that once the game is deemed to be soon over,

no game rules still apply? And no one told them.

No one said who the new enemies were

or if there was one.' 'So the enemy was everyone

suddenly' agreed Clare. George's nose

seemed to hallucinate the stench from explosions,

but in this room the actual air

had dawn's blue cold sanity, the window a rose

smooth still with all its own regulations.



George Jeffreys woke up with old grief returned

George Jeffreys woke up with old grief returned.

That sane dawn azure turned translucent the heathered

blue of Clare's Mothers's Blue Moon roses. George remembered

his wife Heather - a rose-crisp woman - who had once been murdered,

and who was reassuringly real to him whenever here he lived

in Clare's Mother's House in the Mt Druitt where he had been married

and a Probation Officer when the decades were not dead.

Clare intuited his mourning, as always, and she said:

'I miss her, too. There is a need for power but she wasn't killed

by either of us. The grief is neither made unsure or cleansed

by guilt. Any guilt we feel she would have ridiculed,

but she would have known it would be always suffered.

The guilt I feel about the sisters and brother I smothered

has wobbled about since I was nine and never settled:

I follow it one step behind like a ghost that's always led

a way through quicksand.' Then she added - as if she reflected

that he needed to be distracted, and that, when she angered



with her Mt Druitt girl-child pedantic ire, he attended -

'I was really angry when you couldn't be Covid-vaccinated by an mRNA vaccine like I was : it's so bloodily ageist, and so stupid since you're more likely than some kid to suffer the disease badly, and in Darwin or Adelaide you could have mRNA inoculation.' 'Being labelled old', he acknowledged,'Did make me feel gnarled and ended: more than I actually would have expected. There opened between us some sort of divide. But we can be comforted by all the conservative attacks now on that Tolstoy concept that isolation might have led to independent insight.

The glib stance now is that the middle-class just hid while the workers brought them items they had ordered. There'll be stuff about stopping-to-smell-roses sneered.

The cross-class revival of the self-sense I've observed, despite impending opening to death, however, does seem mightier than that'.

Clare agreed, 'It's been shown being still is a human right.'

Outside the window, their son Corbyn carefully gathered



blue roses with his grandmother. Clare explained,
'Blue Moons are hard to keep and Mum's are always replanted,
but they have really good long stems to put in vases. You'd
buy them at a florist and their smell is real, if soft.'
Indeed, they could smell it from their bed. The child
saw them, laughed, waved eager flowers like flags, excited
to show them such things abiding and unexpected.



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 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.



Pandora and her Sisters

Perhaps soon to become a romcom on witch-siblings,

Pandora, Panama and Paradise are all leaks, a CIA self-amusing

parody of Wikileaks, exposing corruption and the off-shoring

investment by people the Empire is discarding or warning:

Jordan too warm to Syria, Blair just too revolting.

The best they could get on Putin was an apartment

bought off-shore by an early alleged girlfriend,

but the Mockingbirds made his picture a main emblem,

and no corruption was North American,

or threatened any rival U.S. tax haven:

Delaware, Nevada, Alaska. But Pandora,

dangerous anciently with myth, does linger

because of its name, as if it might backfire.

Indeed, the classic Pandora written by Hesiod

assembled as a vengeance by the gods

against the gift of fire Prometheus bestowed

on mankind was in itself contradicted



by earlier versions of Pandora as an earthen
good gift giver. And the box was an urn,
of course, but due to Erasmus' mistranslation
of *pithos* we have some fine representations
of dangerous boxes and delicious women
in art, including the Louise Brooks movie.
Louise's small smile sneaks slowly
in the back of the mind disingenuously,
but the idea of evil scattering wildly
about the world from one human accidentally
backed by divine conspiracy-theory
from a Hesiodic Athenian patriarchy
is one any Intelligence Agency would own
as a safe sure hierarchy -
last gods in laughing loyalty return
lost evils leaked betrayed from a rich urn.
In the romcom perhaps Pandora would have to be
the oldest and loveliest of them.
She would have dark eyes like Louise from within



which kind light disperses out as sin.

There is some exhaustion in her imagination,

but the other two have another problem:

they have been written as a clear emotion.

Corruption leaks its power in the open.



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 Phillipinx 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.



Eleanor Roosevelt Staggered Out of the Bardo

Eleanor Roosevelt staggered out of the Bardo, vowed not to read any more novels by George Saunders.

The Bardo indeed had been a grim limbo, but allowed her to come to terms with the multiple natures of her love for her illusive Hillary. The image in ice of Hillary crowing ‘We came, we saw, he died!’ about the bayonet-raped Gadaffi had left Eleanor blue to the bone, and then the fate of Libya now a slave-market of Africans and in chaos where Russians and Turks collided and France which had plotted the whole thing with the CIA in return for a third of the oil seemed at least out of the picture, and Sarkozy in house arrest for some lesser corruption. Corruption is not a small thing in the Bardo, where bits keep falling off you. Another image frozen on to her in the Bardo had been the disintegrating corpse of Lincoln on his funeral train, since of course the novel was called *Lincoln in the Bardo*, if



about Lincoln and his mourned son, but
her Bardo was like a dream and dreams are obvious,
like that. Like Franklin, she both feared and used
the plain. There was something seductive again,
though, in Hillary's simplicity as her hands like
Persephone's doled out disasters. Now they had
arrested Igor Danchenko, the primary 'researcher'
for the Steele Dossier, a bit of candy floss
spun out by the Democrats against Trump,
not meant for anything but blackmail to distract
from Hillary's cavalier security with servers.
Indeed Eleanor had always lacked ease
about how little respect Intelligence assets
always seemed to have for intelligence aspects
like security - hence Monica Lewinsky, perhaps.
But she didn't think Hillary, despite
the military father, had ever been as deep
or high as her husband in the Company's power.
She was not as needy, never a Rhodes Scholar,
like Bill or now the image-iced Buttigieg, left
to hold the can for the crumbling supply chain.



Eleanor winced and shrugged off dissolution.
Right now all she wanted was just to see again
Hillary in the intact flesh, doing something
cute and ceremonial. That would seem sane.
So Eleanor stood quietly in the crowd
at St Andrews University in Scotland, where
Hillary in full outfit - cap and gown - just received
an honorary degree. Hillary praised long
eclectic research, Scotland's tradition
in the Enlightenment. Too, at Queen's
in Northern Ireland, a small girl held her train
up and both had the winning dimpled cheek
of winners, as she was appointed Chancellor,
ignoring anti-war cries on the pavement. Inside,
Eleanor decided to sit in the front row, but
was patient now that she guessed
it might be like death for Hillary to see her.



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.



