

Sample

Appalachian Fall: Poems About Poverty in Power

Jennifer Maiden

Includes 24 Sample Poems and Preface.

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Preface

This collection creates a space where everything has the action and vigilance of poverty or power in an uncertain and sublime wilderness.

In November 2016, Quemar Press released Jennifer Maiden's 21st poetry collection, *The Metronome*. Since that time, she has written two vibrant novels in juxtaposed prose and verse, *Play With Knives: Three* and *Four* (which introduced George and Clare's baby, Corbyn, named after the U.K. Labour leader), and this major new poetry collection, focusing on poverty, power and the ways in which they are interconnected and intrinsic to each other.

The theme of '*Appalachian Fall: Poems About Poverty in Power*' was inspired partly by the situation in last year's American Presidential Campaign, in which President Trump's victory was dependent on voters from impoverished and threatened regions, such as Appalachia.

The 'fall' in the title, the American autumn season, is a metaphoric setting surrounding these poems. Here, 'fall' can be also a technical fall, a drop in poll numbers, a spiritual decline or a dancer leaping from a *pas de deux*.

The cover was created using a sketch by Jennifer Maiden, with silhouettes inspired by dancers from Martha Graham's relational ballet, *Appalachian Spring*, in tones that suggest resilient life-blood or deep autumn.

In analysing the impoverished aspects of power, Maiden recommends the equal perspective allowed by poetry. While writing this collection, she was able to clarify her position:

'The difference between what I do and other things called political poetry or satire is that they consist of commentary or caricature, both of which place the writer in a superior or inferior position. My work is



imaginatively empathetic from an equal basis, which is a more fluid and internal position politically and, therefore, much more insurrectionary. It isn't a traditional Marxist philosophy that discounts the individual in favour of historic events. It's more like A.J.P. Taylor's belief that history depends on the peculiar traits of individuals - hence his interpolation that, of course, in politics the impossible always happens. My work is not conservative in that I don't believe my characters are inevitably in power or will inevitably retain it, or that the reader and I have no right to inhabit them. By personality, of course, I don't mean public persona but, rather, the inner individual and also the effect their persona has or doesn't have on that individual. Also, the equal positioning allows one to examine a much wider range of politicians, not just those safe to hate in left or right wing terms.'

In light of Jennifer Maiden's Hierarchical Theory, this equality in poetry could balance some effects of trauma. Here, for example, she also uses poetry's equal position to address a recent traumatic professional destabilisation of her own. Her Hierarchical Theory is that trauma results in the sufferer moving up and down precariously in the power structure, something central to the issues of poverty, power, their similarity and polarity. The poems in this collection act as a platform between the heights and depths of hierarchy, letting the reader, poet and characters look power in the eyes with a level gaze.

Katharine Margot Toohey

Quemar Press



Sample Poems:

Into the bodies of poor men

Eric Milner-White, army Padre and the King's College
chaplain in WW1,
wrote back to his colleagues: 'A continuous firework
of light balls goes up from the German trenches. But
most
awesome is the noise. We feel powerless against those
splitting cracks and roars, and dream of the metal
tearing its way into the bodies of poor men.' Back home
at Cambridge and shaken, he stopped the regulation
of compulsory chapel attendance, brought in fragrant,
flagrant ceremony like the Christmas Carols, anything
to give the horror justice, seeing the incense of comfort
as *being* a viable justice, offering something different
to those empowered numb, and dumbled by agony.

They
attended at the first treble, were promised no sermon,
a scattering of lessons falling like fire on the wind,
the bidding
prayer of the chaplain: 'all those who rejoice with us,
but



on another shore - that multitude no man can
remember',
reminding now of Slessor's 'enlisted on the other front',
but
even gaunter: the horror not of the last poem, but
the first.

The little treble, shrill as a shell, lit exquisite in
a silence
as tremulous as his tears sways down the aisle, bidding
the apostates in to pray, on him the unjust weight
of every
man's salvation, calling to him in his diamond cry
now even
the multitudinous hordes of the dead, and he can
see them.

A 'continuous firework', the munitions, but the very
building
here by the most profligate of kings, is an incandescent
catherine wheel in continuity: the arches rise
vaginal in their
feathery spinal grace, a fortified trench, a structure that
a lord
knows will not hold by itself forever. The other



choristers close in
on the treble, like long echoing dying voices. There
was a music in the human cries above the 'splitting
cracks
and roars', there was a music to entice back any victim,
thought Eric Milner-White
as he witnessed the first stumbling treble
tremble towards his lesson like a song.



Jimmy Carter: 1:

Pretty Saro

Sara Carter Bayes woke up at the 2017 Presidential
Inauguration, next
to her 92-year-old distant cousin, Jimmy Carter, the
the oldest
Ex-President to attend such an event. If he had to be
accompanied
by some stranger from the afterlife, he thought, he'd
have preferred Dylan Thomas,
whose poetry he cherished. So why wasn't this woman
Dylan Thomas? She was here for a purpose, no doubt.
His wife, Miss Rosalynn,
smiled in spite of the tension that had to be inherent
in a Trump Inauguration. Outside, women prepared
to march in fluffy pink
pussy ears. Miss Rosalynn wore a lot of black
and white, a smart



spotted scarf and smiled the smile of she who has sat
through peculiar ceremonies in Africa. He knew why
he loved her. She smiled interestedly at Sara,
who might have been anyone, but dressed in
splendour
in silken jazz age drapery, one step ahead, Miss
Rosalynn supposed, of Carolina Herrera.
Sara said, 'When you're from West Virginia, you dress
as best as you can when you make a bit of money,
you show that they can do that where you came from.
They like that where you came from, in the little shops
and farms.' Jimmy nodded, 'It was the same in
Georgia,
where we came from.' He remembered now this
woman
singing songs on the radio, in nights smelling
indelibly
of peanuts and exhaustion. The singing Carter
Family
who found songs anywhere, made them respectable,



gave a voice to poverty so fatal
it could only express itself in music. I won't be hungry
in heaven. I won't have lost you, love, in heaven.

You'll be sorry when they find me
in the river, the cold rushes. I'm a thin boy selling
papers

because mother says my father is a drunkard.

Starved.

Miss Rosalynn was talking to someone beside her. He

said, 'You were lead singer, Sara, I
always liked your voice, and that loud guitar behind
you. Was that played by

your sister?' 'Sister-in-law. My cousin Maybelle. She
was better, you know, than Robert Johnson. That old
question, "Who's playing the second guitar?", when
there wasn't one, was appropriate to her, as well, but
no one said she'd done a deal with the Master

of the Crossroads. She was a pretty little lady,

at first wore glasses. I was



more classic in appearance.' He said, 'You still are',
not lying. She
had the dark distant expression of a painting: strong
bones, mountain eyes. Singing, her voice was deep
and harsh but soothed, uncannily,
like a cross between a violin and buzzsaw. He
recalled: 'Wasn't there a scandal?' Miss Rosalynn
smiled at them, encouraging vaguely.
She and her companion were discussing the blue
dress
being worn here by Melania Trump. Already it was
said it resembled the outfits
worn by the French Team in *Harry Potter*, but in fact
it was Ralph Lauren cashmere, wrapped
in crossovers, the blue not French but
unprovocatively
childlike and pale. He had thought once Melania
was a sleeper, since her father was a Slovenian
Communist, but now she just seemed frail.



For some reason, he was touched by the matching
high heels. Sara was puzzled by the
dress: it did not
have the straight filmy lacy
flow she thought was luxury, but she continued: 'There
was no scandal:
there was only me... A.P. was away quite often and I
had to run the farm,
the crops and the three children. I found new songs,
too, sometimes in churches, but not so
peripatetically.
He could come home with one-legged black men,
not that they didn't know good music. I didn't learn
to read music, but when I first recorded my voice was
as high as a train
going into a tunnel. I dropped the pitch to move
the sound around. I did it
by smoking cigarettes. Once I was doing that, I wore
trousers,



too, and went out hunting. Didn't kill much, but

it soothed me, firing off
that rifle. Then I fell in love.' 'I'm not

surprised', said Carter, 'I once annoyed
people by referring to "Adultery in the heart".

I can see why I was
an annoying President. That was the closest that I
ever came to the obligatory satyriasis.' He seemed

amused, however. She said,
'This wasn't in the heart. It was Coy Bayes, A.P.'s
cousin. So we went around like lovers, until his
family discussed it, all moved together
to California, took him with them. A.P. already
had the devil's temper, shook all the time
from some infirmity, but he did love me.

I went on singing the songs
to get the children money, but I lit out back
to my own
people, on the other side of the mountain, and then



I only came back and slept there at Maybelle's, or if
the children were unwell.' Sometimes,
she still had poverty's formal diction: 'Anyway, at last
there was a happy ending. Six years later, I'd divorced
A.P., and we were all singing
on this really widely broadcast radio - quite the new
invention. Coy hadn't answered
my letters (his Ma hid them), but I thought
he might still have ears to listen, so I introduced
a song "To my friend, Coy Bayes, in California".
No one could believe it.' Carter thought Dylan
Thomas might have been less entertaining. He
asked, 'What was the song?' *'I'm thinking tonight
of my blue eyes.'* He knew that one, recited:
*"'Would been better for us both if we'd never/in
this wide and wicked world had never met/for
the pleasure we've both seen together/I'm sure,
love, I'll never forget..."* That must have got him?
'Sure did. He said to his Ma, "I'm going to get her."



She said, "I think maybe you'd better." He drove
all night to Tennessee to find me.

We were married three weeks later. He was truly
still the prettiest young man. We went back
to California, without ever me singing unless I
wanted, or ever learning
music. God was good', she added, with one
of piety's graceful addenda. He thought
she had once been the preacher of a vast
vulgate bible, had grated to America its soul. He
thought: we knew ourselves when we heard it:

the low gut-scream of hunger,
for some food, some pride, for any sort of
civilising action, answered passion, and if all
these people were Trump voters, maybe that in fact
was why he couldn't despise their desperation. And
who but Trump or Bernie Sanders would dare
to prevent the TPP? No one cartels like a rich man,
but Carter



thought if Trump were a drug he'd be generic. His
attempts at copyright were always too legal
clumsily and he had the truculent passivity
of an old man less bewildered by the small. Sara
was becoming distracted by the strangeness
of the dresses.

He refocused her wistfully: 'Did you ever
shoot a swamp rabbit?' She considered, alertly:
'Why, no, but I've seen them. Big things with big teeth
and very unpredictable, especially in the water.'
She giggled, her face's dignity rippling into arch

Appalachia: 'Why,
Jimmy, did one chase you?' She was Saro now, not
Sara. He could recall that the other Dylan (Bob)
tried numerous times to record the old song, from
the Appalachians, '*Pretty Saro*', didn't succeed. You
had to accept it was all about money: '*My love
she won't have me/And I understand./She wants
a freeholder/And I have no land./I cannot*



maintain her/I've no silver and gold/Can't give her
the fine things/That a big house will hold' was
the version he'd heard himself. He said, 'Yes,
a swamp rabbit chased me. I was in a boat
and I was President, fishing. It swam over, tried
to jump in. I think that hounds
were chasing it. I splashed it and it left. The press
made a big joke of it, but it was feral. I don't know
what so alarmed me, Saro.' He thought: if she
understands this, she will understand Iran, and that
I did better with Egypt and Israel, that my prestige
has gone up since I left office. She said, 'Well, you
could have shot it, but they don't eat well.' Still
she continued to watch intently
as he spoke, with an Appalachian
earnestness now: in photos, her face when she sang.
She thought: he follows strange roads - so did I, after
all. He's talking about lands,
of course, not rabbits in the river. Some of these coats



on the women looked like something A.P. would wear
in winter. They obviously don't need
to make their homes seem tasteful. They must have been
rich for centuries, or something. She herself liked fine
silks that flowed shiny, cut crisply. Why did Cousin
Jimmy
think some embassy in Tehran was so crucial? She said,
'So, they tricked you - sold you out for arms
and money, while you tried to outwait them
and outwit them, like a fool, and then your use
of force blew up against you, and you tried at last
to introduce
college conscription, lost the only vote you had.
But that treaty between Israel and Egypt sounds
straight out of the Bible. If I were you I'd stick
with that. And nobody likes poverty, and everyone
likes people who build homes.' 'It depends where
they do it', he corrected: 'The downside of this
Inauguration is Trump Towers in Jordan Valley,



less immigration, Demon Mexico, maybe

torture, more even than under Obama.'

But in her company the most languishing, dire
anguish had a backnote of the cheerful, as if

Maybelle still strummed

and scratched along, self-taught on the guitar.



Jimmy Carter: 2:

Dylan Thomas

Dylan Thomas woke up in Plains, Georgia, at
the close-to-earth, lyrical little house
of Jimmy Carter. It whispered all over with trees,
country sun caressed its constant windows,
where the thirty-ninth President smiled like
a leafy sun, himself a waiting window. As Thomas
came in, 'I sang in my chains like the sea',
murmured Carter, half-haunted again by that
poem. 'There's no sea here', grinned Thomas, 'And
I wonder if the slaves sang in their chains here?'
His own work made him nervous. America still
made him nervous. College girls made him nervous
expecting you to fuck on a beer and sandwich after
some breathy reading that sucked your gut out.
Their terrible politeness for what Caitlin called
his 'sexual autograph' made him nervous. Was that



what murdered Dickens, too? He, Thomas, had
made being rude to these people another art form,
writhing and scratching on floors
not always metaphoric when they offered some
interpretation
of a poem once written in seventeen drafts
and now forever shut away by booze from any
prospect of memory or explanation. Carter said,
kindly, 'You're nervous', helped his jacket off,
explaining, 'This means very much, Mr. Thomas,
to me. I have read your work in every sort of
crisis, and have found it a key to staying sane, to
knowing that "after the first death, there is no
other", in all its hope and horror. And I did not
confine the meaning, of course, to Jesus.
'The meaning,' Thomas agreed, more softly,
'was not confined to Jesus.' Carter had opened
the blue and fawn drapes and afternoon-easy breezes
of Georgia honeyed in. The couch was hard



and straight, the room was easy, but
built on firm edges. Carter poured coffee like midnight
in white thin mother-china. As if in a Swansea parlour,
Thomas said with courtesy: 'It's you I have to thank for
that memorial to me in Poet's Corner in Westminster
Abbey. You suggested it on a state visit, I've been
told. By Caitlin, actually, but she was sneering. We'd
just had another row, of course. Can you believe that
after her second marriage, she told everyone she'd never
had an orgasm with me?' He heard his own voice
summoning 'Cait!' down the ages, waiting for her in
every
lost pub and lecture hall in Christendom, until her form
in all its curly sea-eyed blundeness Irished up, as
enraged
as if she wasn't used to him by then. Carter was
prepared for some bitterness about women from
a poet, but discerned the way here was to praise
and not condemn. He ventured, 'I thought her



autobiography, the *Leftover Life to Kill* one,
was very finely written, very vivid, indeed quite
wild but brilliant in its overview of grief.' 'It's
underview, you mean', amended Thomas, but
the coffee was so strong it might have been
a shot of whiskey, and he remembered the
death-numbness from morphine
like a Welsh graveyard in a joke or funeral,
like something from *The Doctor and the Devils*.
When he took the medical mistake that killed
him, she was watching: his American mistress,
not Caitlin. He would say they were all the same,
just meant for bed or kitchen, but they seemed
so different to each other, and it wasn't them
in either room, that he at last remembered,
only their desperate voices
flying, flying at him in the blackness. He said,
'At the hospital, Caitlin came in, demanding,
"Is the bloody man dead yet?" But I *was*, in



roaring snake-tubing, and she just had to admit
that she'd lost another child. She says in *Leftover
Life* that she frets for me like an old cow for its calf:
the thing is so badly physical. What she didn't admit
in it yet, though, was that she was forced to have
an abortion to do the American visit. It was late
for one, and the child came out in pieces. When
her prose breaks up like a sky of crackers that
is what comes to my mind.' Carter poured him
more coffee. He had swigged the last like spirits.
Georgia breeze played with the drapes like
a bored, determined kitten. Carter confided,

 'The abortion issue is very hard for a politician.

The current President, who is not really
a madman, was a liberal about it years ago, but
now wants to unfund it as a program overseas,
and I suppose that might be some sort
of tactical diplomacy. Can you really help
a country if you deplete its population?



I have overseen elections where the lost votes
of the poor were all that mattered.' Thomas said,
'I was a socialist. I was also a small man
with bad manners. I deplored the BBC, but sold
it *Under Milk Wood* - which Caitlin hated.

The name of the town is really 'Buggerall'
spelled backwards. Do you still trust my poems,
after that?' 'With my life, as I always have', said

Carter, who had known all that, of course,
already. He said, 'You should know I am
a feminist. I left the Southern Baptist Convention
when they ruled out any women as pastors,
and that they should submit to their husbands.

Abortion should be unnecessary, but I upheld
Roe v. Wade.' The coffee pot was empty, and

he took it to the kitchen, brought back cake.

Thomas said, 'What will I read you?', as his books
were on the table. 'You pick', enthused Carter,
thin-eyed like a laughing infant. Thomas said, 'Nye



Bevan quoted this one in *In Place of Fear*.' It was
A Refusal to Mourn again. His voice had
quickenened quietness, not wasting wind, as Caitlin
had accused him: 'Deep with the first dead lies
London's daughter, Robed in the long friends,
The grains beyond age, the dark veins of her mother,
Secret by the unmourning water Of the riding
Thames...' Caitlin would spend most time with her
second husband, the Italian director. But he saw that
she now waited at the window,
barely to be distinguished
from the gold-haired light of Georgia. She had some
of Carter's cake in her mouth and hand, as an Irish
child, watching. He concluded, without echo, and
almost without projecting: 'After the first death, there
is no other', and read until late at last with no effort.
Then Jimmy Carter, delighting
in the success of the visit,
walked his guests to the first unguarded gate.



Diary Poem: Uses of Book Piety

The front roof of a friend's house collapsed
and a weight
of experienced books chaosed around him, as he sorted
them precisely into piles, then boxes with labels, meant
for keeping, giving and disposal, but mentioned that
traditional Jews can't destroy books, must bury them
with ceremony, as if still somehow the ambivalent book
were haunting and formidable, as well as just
human and untidy. I've thought of that lately.

Katharine's Press having started digital, and mostly
free, most readers have been happy, but a few
maybe mostly my age have objected to the loss
of paper books as if she were responsible for that
problem. The issue can't be lack of price, surely:
we all started in *Free Poetry, Ear in a Wheatfield*.

I have
Indian ancestry, but when did the Capitalist Cow



become so holy? I think we should discuss
the immaterial,
material and sacred. I think we should discuss
how paper books have beauty. We should discuss
how my belief - no longer just a theory - that poetry
is digital technology and therefore that the internet
embodies it as wholly as a singer with a harp,
an ancient bard obsessed with the mnemonic, means
the experience electronically is gnostic: direct
summoning of the divine, unlike the paper book,
which is a sacred object and a conduit, not a baby
touching its mother's face.



Diary Poem: Uses of the Appalachian Fall

What would it involve, the small apocalypse where

trees

stream down autumnal like the manes of tired horses

in their sweaty or dry horse colours, every whinny

in the wind as sexual and fatal as the vocal fall

of a careless rider, or an Appalachian singer? What

would it involve, the old bones breaking over

the scarlet ground like playthings, the old songs

resurrected like staggering corpses, what would

I make of the ballet then? What would I make then

of *Appalachian Spring*, on the digitalised film

of the dance by Martha Graham, to the tunes

wrenched from life and deified by Copland? Why,

I would still fall for the levitation. The staid way

the groom dancer and bride dancer *pas de deux*,

as a couple of times she risks, and gravely hovers

in air like a leaf with no apparent basis, since



his hands barely brush her waist. What would it
involve, her falling, as the winsome music drops
the dancers into tragic writhing, fearing every
agony in childbirth, religion, fearing whatever ever
in the bare woods steals a lover? What would
it involve, such poverty that warps within the bone,
refines the resurrected ghosts to nothing else but
folded arms and grinning confrontation? What
would be involved if I depicted the ballet in
modified silhouette, but made her barefoot, that
rain-risen woman? What if it were the dying fall in
water,
that cleans the graves from bones, what if the storm
in the singing voices fades into the mountains
like lightning exhausted? Apocalypse then
the hunger's
only answer? In the songs, the lost heart and the river
burst stronger than a world's end of starvations, than
some long-avenging election. What use would be then



involved out there still in the stubborn, stillborn wild?

What songs of use fall gold for its famished creatures:

that moonless one, so far, that stole the future, or

the sunless one, so close, that stole a child?



The Mystery

(Jessica and Malcolm were requested by
Joanne Burns)

George Lansbury woke up on Lady Martins Beach.

Malcolm Turnbull sat
reading, solid and life-wan like George himself
quietly next
to two ladies, both of whom seemed now to be
George's
granddaughter, Angela, except that one wore silk
and looked filmy and beachy, the other wore a suit
and sat on a blanket, typing, but never losing track
of something in the bushes. The silky one with the
soft
sun-raised arm rose in welcome. Malcolm helped her
up,
as if expert in aunt-lifting, although she was his third
cousin, and the other woman fiction. The other



one said,
crisply to George: 'I'm Jessica Fletcher', but
with a strong, bright welcome, went on writing.
It was this one, thought George, who might
at last give them all a verdict, but Malcolm
seemed to need more than that, and urgent.
Angela said, 'Please don't expect her to interact.
She isn't real. I made her. The novel that
she writes is called 'Appalachian Fall: A Season
for Death', and is meant to show how American
poverty creates the last advent of apocalyptic
power: in this case, murder. I know because
I wrote it.' 'There is no such novel', the Prime
Minister laughed, 'But the thesis sounds like
something that my mother might in her
American phase have written.' George wasn't
confused
by their banter. He knew his granddaughter supported
Labour, but the mystery was Malcolm. Malcolm



who had
tried to budget down Welfare - how ever could kind
Lansbury blood
drumming through the pitying heart allow that? Angela
thought of Ronald Blythe's essay on her grandfather,
how it said that, in some, socialism was just a penchant
for tidiness, but how his had represented the antithesis
of that, removed park fences, let the public in, tried
to oppose the Second World War until he accepted it for
want of a better method, always plagued the Home
Office with exceptions: every case seeking refuge
exceptional, Blythe
observing, parenthetical, that God knows how many
lives the old man saved. As she typed, Angela
the novelist
wrote death. Malcolm sat down beside.
He said, 'It would be easy to deny the mystery, and I
tend
to do that, as a policy, so that even if I horribly inherit



a plan to foist a couple of awful islandfuls

of Dispossessed

onto the Appalachians and the Rust Belt, I cheerfully

convince

the President his surprise isn't normal. There was good

PR in that.' The moving fingers didn't slow their pace.

He thought of the old poem he'd learned

at school, 'Nor all your tears wash out a word of it.'

She said, 'There are assassins in the bushes, and a race

with machetes is what simple survival seems simply

to need where you want to work these days.' The other

Angela seated herself on the sand, held out her creamy

arms, and George reclined like a Victorian picnic with

the ladies. The pretty beach was such a

nun-embroidered

handkerchief, Malcolm thought, long-won, short-won,

superlative with lace. 'I don't own the beach,' he

admitted,

'just the view. And if a boatload or bushload or both



of men with long knives foam in from the dark, I cannot
reach my home in time to transform and defend it,

since

- unlike you, Angela - I have no other forms. To turn
into a Lansbury at last is not open to me. Perhaps that
was your ending?' The light from the priceless harbour
glinted on the keys. If that was the end, she wasn't
spoilng it. Her hands continued, neat, plump, white
and busily in concert with her brain. The women's hair
was blonde, the hair of both men grey. He listened
for the motor's song,

and packed his book away.



The Thousand Yachts

(The concepts of Slessor failing to acknowledge his Jewish ancestry, and that images of the diaspora are present in his work in the form of light are from theses of Ivor Indyk, but the critic in the poem is not the latter, rather a composite of many commentators, including Slessor himself.)

Kenneth Slessor woke up in the Rocks, near the Museum
of Contemporary Art, the black Harbour in front of him
stinging in his ears and eyes with silence, as it rocked
where it sat like a sleeping mother, just a bit, as it
always does at night. There was no one left with whom
he wished to speak, except one critic. The critic
walked with him across from the drab building
brilliant in the water. Slessor noted, alert, that
their shadows were agitated, loose in moving,
although their gait was neat. He said, 'Grace Perry,
being a medical doctor, used to say that I only
stopped writing because of my liver: propping up
the bar at the Journalist's Club.' His companion
had a light voice, apparently at ease in being
politely parallel: 'The Journalist's Club doesn't exist
any more...' Slessor went on: 'It's alright. I never



need to drink now, although this teasing Harbour
always looks alcoholic. That is what men write about
when they write about drowning, you know, they really
write about plunging death-deep into drinking.

But you seem a sober man.' His critic's shadow ever
shook or expanded like the discrete water, but
their pace was steady on, towards the bridge, if then
they turned and walked the pace again, quite like
two professors in a college garden. The critic said,

'One thesis was that you stopped writing poetry
because you'd lost your ancestry: your European
influences becoming too distant and you losing
the importance that your father had been Jewish.'

Slessor in turn became parallel, and literally, as
he found the other man could not be accompanied
easily, unless the pose confronted. He walked ahead
somewhat, then turned to face him: 'At the time, I said
I stopped writing because of the death from cancer
of my wife, Noëla.' He still could hardly bear to



include

her name and "death" in a sentence together, but took
comfort in adding the fact of cancer: more than wine,
it is facts in which a journalist seeks oblivion, even if
the facts are sometimes wrong, he thought, as his
had been occasionally at *Smith's Weekly*. He went on:
'With the Lindsays at the time and others, there was

much

silly talk of the Muse being a woman: capricious, away
with her period, or such. By them, I was assured that

my

poetry would return. But it did not.' The moon came

out

capriciously and the sudden Harbour showed briefly
the colour of Noëla's dove-grey eyes, then vanished
back into its nightmare's edge in blackness. The critic
saw it, too, perhaps, remarked 'Behold thou hast doves'

eyes',

out to the deep, as if the memory of some line or other



could torment him in its anchored speculation. He

seemed

a man who murmured to suggest significance. He

added,

'I saw time sailing like a hundred yachts', which might

have been a favourite line from Slessor. Slessor

nodded:

'And perhaps that is the diaspora: the *thousand*

sharded

lights returning, like the billow from a ferry under

stars. But

I was never conscious of a need for home. I found one

in power every time I ran a paper: *Smiths*, or the

Telegraph

later. When one's home is really power, perhaps, one

never

has a need for poetry and, indeed, verse was always

as painful to write as it's reputed to be, when I did it

Noëla



was in it because she gave the power of mad magic:
it was right to discover my father was a mystic, if
of course he was also agnostic. So was she. My
mother
the Hebrides-dour protestant didn't like her. You can
feel the pull between them in the poems, that
religiosity
means not enough imagining, not too much. Noëla' -
just
to say the name again incarnate justified this - 'Noëla
was -
is - rather a frightening woman, although slight in her
appearance. You know her father was a murderer,
hanged
at Bathurst before she was born? He chopped up most
of a Bank Manager's family with a hatchet. Maybe it
was my
Smith's Weekly heart, but I found that quite exciting.'

The critic



still facing him in the lapping dark, offered: 'I

sometimes

do use the autobiographical.' His voice had risen, to

sound

emboldened to suggest an opinion, although, thought

Slessor,

the young mannerisms masked a different man. They

both

had child's eyes, though, looking at each other,

forgetting

to blink in their limpid concentration. Slessor still wore

a slight mustache which made him appear younger, as

did the high smooth forehead of either. There could

have been an air

of innocence and power: the wry-lipped combination

that stoops to charm and then discards it curtly, to

confuse

the friend as much as the opposition, or more. A

thousand not a hundred



yachts were competing for the prize once. Now Slessor
saw only out there the sparkling harbour ferry, from
which his friend had drowned, the still dove's gaze
that would have made poetry agony, not for nothing
he a warco, she a nurse, and he longed from rib to groin
for the simplicity of *Smith's Weekly*, whilst this man
before him seemed obsessed with Promised Land. 'But

it is',

said the critic, understanding: 'The Israel of poetry you

lost, too:

all your influences from the German Jew: the lyricism
and the studied sadness. *Five Bells* teases about

mourning

and plays with death like Dickens. The thousand yachts
should return to one small harbour like this one,

which can

uniquely support them in their loss.' It seemed to

Slessor

now that the successful vulgarities of *Smith's Weekly*,



and the unsuccessful vulgarities of the Lindsays, were

part

of what he had needed to blend in the poetry

with the harbour-wet, slippery sublime. He explained:

'When she died, I lost the energy to combine them:

the vulgarity and the high holy were sealed away

in separate suitcases, to open one at a time. I was

correctly dressed at all times: for club or power.' The

critic

suggested, back to the murmur: 'And power,

of course,

steals energy, doesn't it? It doesn't give it... Did you

think you'd lost your soul?' It was Slessor's turn to be

parallel:

'When I read Indyk's thesis, I was reminded that as a

boy

I first wrote poems for my father. I had thought them

really for my mother, but since he found the soul

in the diaries again, I do see what happened: the



hunger

roaring from the elaborate menu. Was it right,
I wonder, that I wanted from my father the old music
that he had lost as a profession, becoming so very
inland as a Mining Engineer? This place is never'
- his gesture swept the Harbour, suddenly as
agitated as their wind-warped shadows - 'inland at all,
is it?' The critic said, 'I grew up by the sea
here, thinking always I would soon possess its

richness.

And sometimes you gave that to me.' The Harbour

emptied

of any ghosts but the moon, and they still stood facing
each other, sought the power to sail free.



Hillary and Eleanor: 15:

San Francisco Bay

Eleanor Roosevelt woke up in yet another hotel room,

this time

in San Francisco in fresh March. Hillary Clinton was

just back

from the Professional Businesswomen in California

Conference,

and looked as if San Francisco were wine, and she a

maenad

prancing processionally, giddily, into Eleanor's old

arms. Hillary

exclaimed, 'My God! Spring in San Francisco. I want

to put some

flowers in my hair!' The only flowers in the room

were a bouquet

of baby's breath and daisies from a fan. Eleanor said,

'I think that



might make rather a mess, dear. Anyway, I believe
that song
spoke about the summertime, not spring.' But her
newly woken fingers
found their life again in Hillary's soft hair. Eleanor -
who forgot
nothing, had not forgotten the bayonet that was used
to sodomise
Colonel Gaddafi, and how Hillary had been so
ecstatic about
his death on TV, but she saw that this ecstasy was
not that one. She
saw that this mood was the peace that follows loss,
When
the loss is not of living blood and flesh. They held
hands on
the floral puffed coverlet, looked out at a view
of the Bay.
It was flat and mirrory, as often, but its



synapse-soothing shine

dropped Hillary's voice to a whisper, still happy:

'It's full of sharks,

yachts, ducks and suicides, as always, Eleanor',

with her head

a dollar-gold harbour on Eleanor's firm shoulder.

She said, 'At first, I thought

they gave it to Trump because I was too tough:

they thought

I'd wedge Russia too much on Syria, to impress

the Senate, score

myself a Supreme Court Judge, and Putin

wouldn't back down,

so I'd cause World War Three, or something. But,

now, it seems

they thought I'd be too canny when they dished

the propaganda:

that my knees wouldn't jerk enough.' 'It is true,

my dear, you do



not have jerky knees', said Eleanor, 'and Trump
as a businessman
has knees that bend in any poll direction. At first
that gave one hope,
of a rather macabre nature, but once he sacrificed
General Flynn
as National Security Adviser, it was clear that he might
scare in any
undesirable direction.' The Bay fluttered, glowed in
night. Hillary
said, 'I miss dark eyes. She doesn't contact me much,
but I guess
without the White House I'm not much use to her.
It seems I am
still some use to you, my love, however.' It wasn't
a remark
for response, except the endearment, and Eleanor
kissed
the little fisted hand, and placed it gently on



the leggings. 'Korea',
she said, 'and the Mother of all Bombs on that
Afghan ant's nest,
will need you to seem restrained in contrast.
Now you are
the ideal that should have been and you suggest
Stephen not Vince Foster. You are Appalachian
Queen, the Mother who would have saved,
and kept the secrets.
Take off the *Wild One* coat, the blossom blouse,
and get you down
to work the crowd again: no San Francisco summer,
just New York,
in its black-ice spring, where you belong.' 'And if
I don't', teased Hillary, 'You still will stay?' For
the Tammany was gone
so no End of Days would come
and she knew that the old lady wouldn't leave her.



Posing a political threat

It seems a topic that would suitably fit
the discussion of poverty in power: that once
I asked publishers if they had tried to stop
my work because of politics and they said
no, of course, and that I was deluded if
I thought my work posed a political threat.
I am me, and tempted to joke, if that
joke is close to despair and lives
like a ghost in the fisted heart, that
obviously, they didn't mean they might
want it more threatening. Could it perhaps
be they wanted me less deluded... but
when then have I ever thought my work
would alarm authority ever?

But now I remember
there is the power of the apolitical, which
cuckoos out all others. There are forever
powers from the political obvious, like the child



from church asked what did the vicar talk
about? 'Sin.' What did he say about it?
'He was against it.' That will certainly well cover
most questions of cruelty and race. To complicate,
there are reasons of sensible taste or cash, to prove
political threat irrelevant to topic. Indeed, the best
influence I remember wielding is when a late
Australian Democrats Leader told me that
my poem about her sustained her, through deep
depression, after she had opposed the first
American Gulf War. Some friend of hers sent
it to her. I never met her. On the phone later
she said she'd held onto the poem's words
about 'resurrection'. Since she's dead, and I live
anyway, old and explicit, I will tell you about
some more she told: that when she gave her speech
against that war, at the National Press Club,
straight after,
someone phoned in death threats and the police
made a cordon suddenly around her. She said



she was so afraid that she retreated to the toilets,
where her periods started from terror,
but was still proud of her action. It's when one is most
afraid that one is most a woman, but maybe that
becomes the time of greatest resurrection. If

I have never
posed a threat to anyone in power, dear great good
spirit of the universe give me this,

O Frightened Lady: let
my work be as posed as real insurrection, let my threat
be in positioning, not diction, an equality in stature
with the weakness I enshroud. One makes a threat
from below or above, not looking in the eyes. One
could

look in the eyes from where I stood:

sometimes the eye had power,
but it stored its waiting message in the blood.



Wind-rock

Trump always walks uncertain, braced for wind-rock.

Wind-rock is good for plants, doubles their grip
in the earth, unless they blow away or their soil does,
unless the wind dries out their sap like fire. Nietzsche
had much to answer for, including the thought that
anything makes one strong that doesn't kill one. One
keeps thinking of Causley's poem about Katharine of
Aragon: 'O the Queen of Castile has a daughter, torn
out

by the roots. Her lovely breast in a stone cold chest
under the farmers' boots.' Wind-rock seesaws, doesn't
tear, but if one is in power how much can one bear
of the ruthless velocity in air, I wonder. Wind-rock
lines the face with its small contradictions, deeper
forever until the wrinkles bleed, until the feet tilt
height-sick on the ground. So the powerful hold on,
like damp sheets on a clothesline. Now, for nothing,
I recall the feel of sheets in their grasping, groping



wind-rock roaring damp in the back yard on the face
of the entangled child in them dancing. The wind
smells like skin in drying cotton, carries with it
the strength of everything it touches, to embrace,
brace and blend into a finish. Trump's erratic pace
wind-rocked staggers stubborn with its hunching
at growth and gust in air and no escape.



George and Clare:

Back in the Wilderness

(This prologue to my next George Jeffreys poems mirrors the structure of the Introduction to the first George Jeffreys poems in *Friendly Fire*, again including autobiographical background and prose fiction narrative, but newly interposes a verse fiction piece)

When I wrote a preview version of this piece, I said that 'Few writers have had the historical distinction of being sacked at their own launching.' In retrospect, I should have qualified this, as I may be flooded with reminiscences by other poor wretches wandering in the wilderness, post-promise.

I also wrote that if one is in this situation, the reasons won't be political or economical, taking the reasons given on trust. At least the first aspect of the economical - initial viability - won't be an issue. I was Government-supported and also willing to pay my own way. The other aspect of the economical - sales numbers - was what I meant by unpopularity's numerical aspect. Some objecting to my discontinuation described this reason as mercenary and in keeping with the new values of the Trump Age, but numbers have their own talismanic power. Not for nothing did the Puritans in the Wilderness believe that God spoke to them through profit.

It is the wilderness of which we speak here.



A launching speech, for example, said that Australia wasn't ready for me - and that maybe in 'another time or another country' someone would be.

I have had while writing this a persistent image of Europeans exiled as convicts into the American wilderness.

Perhaps, nevertheless, somehow it is you who are ready for me, as you are my other time and my other country. I might have said 'You are my wilderness', but that presumes too much - and perhaps it is I who am your wilderness, after all.

I continued in the preview version that, since I am not a courageous person, courage means much to me, and that I've known no courage more difficult than that one then, of having to contradict for their own sake some in invincible authority whom I had only just realised how much I indelibly loved.

I said that, even over twelve years ago, I had to fight tooth and nail (joking uneasily, 'when I still had all my teeth and nails') to retain the prose George Jeffreys explanatory Introduction in Friendly Fire. I wondered: a mystery. The politics in it? The sex in it? The miscegenation between prose and poetry? Prose at all? Explaining at all? But we are human, I said - we are necessarily in love with explanations.

I decided that it was probably the miscegenation, but that now we know that prose and poetry enhance each



*other, just as digital and print do, and the two genders
of the imagination. So I began the prose/poetry
courtship again:*

George Jeffreys: 21:

George Jeffreys Woke Up in the Wilderness

George Jeffreys woke up in the wilderness. It took
the form
of the Thirroul bedroom they were house-sitting again,
its walls
a wilderness with prints of Sheaf's D.H. Lawrence
series, a chaos
in rose-clear but thorny colour. The noise of the sea
swarmed
through the summer rooms, and the baby, Corbyn,
in a doze
on Clare's breast was dreaming, like an animal whose
eyelids
dramatically follow some action, still private and soon
forgotten.



As often, and as fitting for the scene, their

conversation

played around sex as sex played around the edges

of all else in the room. George had been jotting down

more of his memoirs, *The Haunted Brothel*, as he held

the baby in a rocking chair all night. Clare had at last

slept,

a cotton swathe between her thighs for the postpartum

lochia that had lasted long, because of her age

and tension.

It was the fine tears, stretched cuts on the vagina and

its lips

and the way they channeled blood that confirmed skin

was in itself an experiencing organ, not just some soft

envelope to breathe from other feeling. He remarked,

'I'm finding the sex as difficult as Lawrence did, to

write.

It must be portrayed with justice, like the visible

universe

of Conrad, although justice always seems to have its



own

literary merits.' Her bleeding and the baby still had

that smell

of rubbed vanilla biscuits. She said, 'And again

that portion

of insurrection.' He agreed: 'And writhing with his

heroic

embarrassment, and the older and closer he got

to description,

the closer to the mine of his father: socialism, literally

bedrock.'

To help the birth, she had gripped aside her clitoris

like a switch

and around it everything was swollen, but the wrinkles

on her stomach

had re-absorbed neatly. At first she had

expected it to stay like a sodden dishcloth. Distracting

herself,

She said, 'I always liked the way Brigid Brophy said

that sex



shouldn't be justified by literary merit, as if to suggest

all art

was just an antiseptic. Do you think it's just the

irritation makes

me want to come all the time?' He laughed: 'They're

valid themes:

the sexuality of irritation, of impatience. But its

probably to relax

nerves and clean the wounds. At my age you identify

the function

of every profound emotion.' They tucked

sleep-sighing Corbyn

into his cot beside them. George let her place his

hands along

the forming scars until she writhed back, not gasping

but

breathing out shortly, in almost exasperation:

the antiseptic,

they both thought, of reducing the soul to a function.

Because



she had come and they had talked, the way she stroked
him until he too came was at least again beyond
the functional-reciprocal, he thought. Her cellphone
sang
and he lifted the woken Corbyn, now near to smiling.

*

So, I thought, Baby Corbyn appears in safe hands.

*In the preview, I went on: Still, I hope you are
discouraged by my fate: at 68, reduced to being made
an example.*

I quoted Thomas Hardy in his rare grimace of mirth:

— "You left us in tatters, without shoes or socks,
Tired of digging potatoes, and spudding up docks;
And now you've gay bracelets and bright feathers
three!" —

"Yes: that's how we dress when we're ruined," said
she.

*to hear my own cheerful whistle in the night. But I
could have added: to be 68, in the wilderness, by the
side of a strange road, is an awesome thing, so I am
grateful you are here.*

*



George:

I observed, as my fingers rubbed backwards with astringent knuckles along her soft tired body: 'There is that old use of things apolitical, safe, dated a decade politically, or century-old avant-garde, to cuckoo anything inconvenient out of the nest. Not that it need pose a political threat...'

She smiled, managing a short catlike stiffness: 'It doesn't, does it?'

I continued: '...but that the powerful - including Orwell's "shiny-bottomed bureaucrats" - have to be seen by the other powerful to be doing their bit to support the structure. The Overton window moves back to the right. The next "radical" will be a baby traditional Marxist - doing nothing because everything has to happen at once - or someone only slightly to the left of Julia Gillard.'

'But will they?', she asked, as she stretched out, it seemed at last without pain.

*

It seemed...

I concluded that the two sides of my imagination: Clare and George, now with Baby Corbyn, seemed to me to be prepared for the wilderness again.



George Jeffreys: 22:

George Jeffreys Woke Up In Thirroul Again

George Jeffreys woke up in Thirroul again, a windy

wilderness

of black sea-night threshing in waves at the french

windows. He

channel surfed the wilderness TV, the quiet baby

Corbyn

on his knee but not asleep. George remembered that

his grandson

and daughter had been stormy babies but had deeply

slept

more than this one. Here, you looked back checking

and the eyes

were open. George and Corbyn watched the screen

together. Trump

was explaining another liaison with the Russians, but

slapped

more sanctions on them. George suggested to his son:

'They may have agreed to this as a sort of trade



concession in return
for no one carving up the Middle East.' Somewhere
behind
the lustrous lapis eyes, the baby stored that. Clare
called out,
'But he kept the Deep State and the Appalachians
happy
by banning trans-sex in the Military. It's his trade-offs
that worry
me most.' The baby seemed to nod, and Clare came
out from the bedroom,
tying the satin sash of a wrap too tight around her
waist,
that was so much more finely defined now between
her hips' silk and her breasts. She had woken in a
fevered mix
of ardour and irritation, satisfied both moods by
kneeling down
beside them, her moist head on his other knee, in
eye-equality



with the baby, who
crowed with pleasure, suddenly. Clare's
nocturnal marine eyes looked more blue in the TV
light. They
didn't use the TV as much now, more the internet, but
it was still the best nursery nightlight ever. He rested
his free hand on
her hunched shoulder, then when that was accepted, his
fingers
deep in her sleep-thick hair. She said, 'Idris said on the
phone
the Russians still seem okay about him working out
his bitcoin
for the Palestinians. It must be that the Israelis have
accepted the idea.'
'Or some of them' amended George: 'It's still that thing
my old mate in Langley said about Intelligence: it's
always made
of heads that hate each other, but I grant you Tel Aviv
has less of them than Washington.' She said, 'I'm sick
of murder',



meaning her own and every other that they had ever
witnessed, as if permitting their own tamed trauma
the wildness in stylised ballet. The ballet of Trump
and Russians
progressed on several channels. She said, 'Well, MI6
is still in
strategic retreat after creating Isis, hopefully. It gives
Trump scope
to do these great Russian *pas de deux*. The man is
Nureyev.' She
didn't know the name of a more modern Russian
dancer, but
thought there had probably in limbed male passion
never
been another Rudy, anyway: 'Although Trump hardly
walks straight
on the tarmac.' She had started to absorb the
peacefulness
of little Corbyn's eyes and George's fingers. She said,
'You're not



angry with me any more.' He answered, 'Well, you
didn't die
in childbirth, did you?' She pursed her lips as if testing
wine
on her tongue tip: 'Well, I did try not to, for your sake.
It was lucky
he arrived before the ambulance, however. I survive
much better when I'm in charge these days.' The blue
breeze
from the wall of windows reached their skin, driven
by the knowledge that dawn was arriving. In its
summer duplicity, it
was both like a fevered hand and the ice it craves. She
settled
herself on the floor more comfortably, felt calmer, let
her skin
drink the air as they watched the news in its
comfort-rhythm
break bearably like adult grief in waves.



George Jeffreys: 23:

George Jeffreys Woke Up on a Golf Course in New Jersey

George Jeffreys woke up on a golf course in
New Jersey, where
Donald Trump had just achieved a hole in one, his feet
apart
a bit with his usual blend of unsteady and steady, in
a focus
that had an old man's desperation. George realised he
was not
himself in the U.S., but that Trump had woken him on
Skype.
Clare woke beside him in the vague Thirroul dawn,
which meant
it was afternoon on Trump's resort - apparently some
last one - resort, anyway - to do with Afghanistan
and Confederate
statues. George caressed Clare awake beside him,
thought
women's hips always seem so solid in the first light,



even if the room itself seems illusive and loster. She
shuffled into sandals, did that sexy thing women
do of forcing the back
strap up behind the Achilles tendon, with her serious
head bent towards the effort. She said, 'He's bought off
the Deep State
about Syria but we'll be in Afghanistan forever.

Tell him that.'

She went to feed the pets they were house-sitting:
still a white
rat called Johnny Depp, two canaries, Snape and Lily,
and a very
conditioned Blue Tongue called Hello Kitty. The baby,
Corbyn,
slept on beside George like a porcelain Buddha.

Donald Trump could apparently see him,
remarked, 'He's your hole-in-one, Old Feller.'

But George was too afraid here to tempt any
gods who cared to listen. He said, 'Nevertheless, his
mother



told me to warn you about Afghanistan.' Trump
pondered
slowly with his ponderous persona: 'It's better than
the loss
of Syria, to carving up the Silk Road, losing Russia.
I must
keep Russia and the Deep State never like it.
You know that,
and so does she. I've just calmed down Appalachia
like a stallion
with a clutter of Confederate statues: they all have
Equestrian values.' He had lined up the golf ball
again, his strange pink
hands at an odd angle, but he added: 'It's still
a mystery
why I was chosen for this job, George: if someone
maybe
in Washington or Langley decided I would win,
temporarily.
But it's hard being temporary, George.'

And Jeffreys said,



'I know: it's what Lowell said about loving everyone:

you're heart won't let you. You're there and some

necessity

in the bones won't let you leave, even if you want

to please

whoever wound you up and pressed the button.'

The white little ball made a noise

like coconuts in percussion. This time

Trump wandered off to find it in some type

of breezy manmade swamp. He waved at George

and the Skype image vanished.

Clare came back and Corbyn woke up hungry.

She said, 'Afghanistan stays one thing or the other,

at least:

You can't carve up a curse or a ghost.' She nursed

the baby, but lent her head on George's shoulder,

with the stoop

of one beaten soldier in a statue holding up another,

in grief: a face

ashamed by its own knowledge, its relief.



The round, pretty eyes of the Hebrides:

A duet poem

Mary Anne MacLeod woke up in the Oval Office
of the White House, where her son Donald shouted
on the phone with stylised power. They never
spoke when she came here, but she would wait, watch
looking as she had before her marriage, still shone
for him with the round, pretty eyes of the Hebrides,
hair Celt-curly and lips mischief-sweet, a bride
for a hopeful German, but a neat domestic servant,
one eye on the dust and the other on the dance.
She'd met Fred at a dance, and he had wanted
at once to buy New York for her, a strange lack
of confidence in his powers of persuasion. Donald
turned off the phone, quieted by her presence
as usual, but as usual did not address her, in terror
that if he did she might just go away. He could
monologue to himself, however, and sometimes
so did she. He said, 'It's not that I've got something



about mothers as such: I was happy to call out
the Bushes on that matriarch thing: the way
they used Barbara to make them seem wholesome.
What was wholesome about the Iraq War, I ask
you?' She wasn't meant to answer, did not
want to, but he knew she understood, with her
deep Island/Highland frugality, Appalachian in
its intensity, the profligacy of war, that rich man's
hound-sport. He said, 'I had the courage to call them
out on Iraq to their faces, and so behind me
the Appalachians took notice, kept their children
closer not to have them killed or turned to clowns,
court-martialed for every ordered, acted torture.
Rich families have matriarchs, but we poor men
have mothers.' She wondered if she had been
a matriarch. Perhaps not. She said, 'My son
Donald was always a mystery. Indeed, when he
was thirteen we enrolled him in the New York
Military Academy when we discovered secret
visits to Manhattan all the time. It was strange



since he seems so Presbyterian: that concentration on fixing a sin, and not confessing it, could have been direct from my own father. Indeed, I was brought up speaking Gaelic: a practical language quite unsuited to guilt or religious ostentation.' He said, 'Syria stays intact so far, thanks to me, while Hillary would have invaded it, using no-fly zones, when Isis never even had an air force. You'd think even apprentice Press sometimes could put two and two together.' She was looking again at his recent gold decorations in the Oval Office. He had replaced the Obama rug, rimmed with quotes from Presidents, with one golden like a small sea at dusk, and the mountainous drapes glistened as if asleep after a storm. She said, 'It is good you put back Mr. Churchill's bust, at the same time

kept

the one of Martin Luther King, who was, after all, an unusual Lutheran, like your father.' He bent closer to her in the golden ocean, gently, so that she

remained



with her eyes' fine circles taking in the room, that
old Hebridean mix of awe and pity, did not leave him
striding his new rug with awkward almost-flounces,
his hand in his lion-lank hair. She gave him calm.
She thought aloud: 'There is so much that is important
about money.

The rich have such a gift for seeming poor. What I
wore
when I married your father was the brightest fashion:
coats extravagantly collared in protection. He was
fearful of infection from all others, being German.
He housed the poor in the city, but we had to defend
his exclusion of blacks to the Department of Justice.
It wasn't quite like that, though. He gave the poor
what they wanted: to be exclusive, and that means
the power to exclude.' On a table, King's head looked
back it seemed with equal pity, pride. Donald could
remember articles on some song by Woody Guthrie
just discovered, that upbraided his father for such
things. They



said Guthrie would have equally opposed him, but
in truth, he
wasn't sure. Guthrie was a man sick in body,
but in soul healthily half New York ballet, half
Appalachian jig. He might therefore have understood
Donald's need to oppose, to be definedly defeated,
and need to square the Deep State about the Russians,
to square the Army on Afghanistan, so the dust storms
from dead deserts didn't take him down and with him
his Jewish daughter's frail country. There was
a picture
of her on the Resolute Desk: furniture he would never
replace, as it steadied his grip when signing.

Mary Anne
was looking at that picture of Ivanka. There
was a sweet
timidity in the perfect lips and eyes, their deerlike
stance
fixed a second too long on the observer, but the mouth
still had a Hebridean faith and expectation.

Flamboyance



in golds was all around like wildest autumn.

Mary Anne

felt Hebridean caution. Her son, in his phased defeat,
ragged-edged, paced, braced like a brittle leaf,
walked away from her with gold beneath his feet.



Victoria and Tony: 7: The Veil

Queen Victoria woke up in Redfern in Sydney,
perusing a street mural in which Tony Abbott
was depicted marrying a version of himself
in veil and lowcut gown. The veil indeed
reminded her of her own when first married,
but her bosom, she thought, was far superior
to this one. As he stood beside her, she said,
'I've never understood, Sir Anthony, why if one
takes the trouble to shock convention with
the suggestion of nakedness, one does not
make it appear more attractive.' He agreed,
'I certainly don't fancy myself in that outfit:
particularly the stubble on the breasts. But
this is all about gay marriage: I have been
vocally opposed to it and this painting doesn't
make it seem attractive, although apparently it
is in favour of it.' She said, 'Dear Knight, It is not
about the attractive but the inevitable, and in this



case the ineradicable. When I was very young,
I consented to a bill outlawing homosexuality,
but did not let it include women as that act
between women seemed to me physically
impossible. I am always very grateful for such
innocence: the Good Spirit of the Universe
does not let it blunder too far wrong. These days,
of course, I would outlaw neither.' He asked,
'But the ineradicable?' Her hair in the Redfern alley
had the same smooth lustre as her watchful eyes.
She said, 'It is sex that is ineradicable, not marriage.
I have often thought that why it is done, apart
from the need for pleasure or children. It is
our tightest rein on history. Once it happens,
there is no redefinition beyond that.' The artwork
stood crude but indelible before them: in it, he had
a circumspect subtle bridegroom face, another -
more entranced one - as the bride. He had to ask her:
'Apart from Albert, Ma'am, were you in love with

John Brown?'



He understood, suddenly, that history is not
a reliable antidote for jealousy. She was still studying
Sir Anthony walled up in the dress. She said, 'John
Brown, being a good Scots Gillie did wear actually
a kilt when he accompanied me. There is something
ineradicably irresistible certainly in meeting
the rest of a man after his knees. He had fine knees,
at once exploratively sensitive and double-jointed.
He reminded me often of the trees.' Tony said, 'A dress
is not a kilt, however. I believe that my dear sister,
who is married to a lady, thinks that my beliefs
in marriage between man and woman underpinning
society are stylised and brittle.' Victoria seemed little,
as she did in paintings of her, but still solid with
a special,
optimistic sexuality. She said, 'Sir Anthony, if you
were
a woman and married one it would not matter
to anybody's social underpinnings. You are saying
something else here, whatever it may be.' It was spring



in Redfern, smelt like harbour, settled cellars. And he
said, 'I want intuitive communion, I think, with those
like me who need their privacies to govern. There's

nothing

left of me but the implacable positions, rope-memories
that tighten like the memory of love.' They left

the painting.

She'd tiny buttoned feet that had survived mountains,
but he followed her when love would let him move.



The Civil Guard

One thinks of kneeling as being on two knees,
being human, but the bull in the arena kneels
on four, his side a blood creek, his sick tongue
thick with his pain and with his strange peace
at not walking at last. If he hears the screams,
the lust for his dying, perhaps in his desperation
to understand, he thinks they are shock,
as if he feels his herd surrounding. His image
is on Twitter now, after a hand and pen voting:
The first as the Catalan way, and the other
the Spanish. Bullfights are now illegal
in Catalonia. The Guardia Civil today, in relays
of four thousand, smashed doors, arrested
officials, confiscated ballots in millions, but
the EU warns against independence, the BBC
cautions division from Spain would result
in lack of security, terror. The same authorities
will argue that Franco may have preserved
Catalan by banning it forever, that the General



did all of us a favour. Could I kneel down at horror

I wonder so compactly with four legs under

me, earth slippery with my rivers?



The Civil Guard: 2

Black and red a dress in Spanish lace
pain's colours behind the eyes,
the dry lace texture, the lattice,
blood at midnight, blood at black dawn,
black and red flouncing on the wind
in papers shredded to lace, pain
purified to colour, black and red,
nerves graphic with mercy
as grace. Black and red to earth
the eyes close to see
pain change to Spanish lace.



May Holman

She seems appropriately Appalachian. Senator Tony
Mulvihill, with his devotion to Whitlam, Immigration,
hairy-nosed wombats, was rapt in May Holman, sent

me

a wad of material on her, which I've lost, wanting
me to write, or at least know, about her. Photographs
of her make her look beautiful, but with huge
unhappy eyes. I am down, so it seems time to be

dutiful

and open up to her. First, it is the 1920s. She is

perched

on the cow-catcher of a timber train to visit the forest
settlements in Western Australia. She is concerned by
their danger, will devise the 1926 Timber Industries
Regulation Act, to improve safety, medicine, schools
and housing for them. She will speak for them, her

head

forest shadow-filled, the poor crowding lonely around
the front of the train, hardly believing that a woman
could just arrive like that, and be the sane mother,



vow to them security. She was the first woman Labour
Parliamentarian in Australia. Opening up more, there
is the oddness of her only marriage: to Joseph

Gardiner,

an alcoholic with a genius for the non-consummation
of absolutely everything, including his relationship
with her and his career as a member of the Legislative
Assembly, having left the state mysteriously, thus

helping

bring down the Scadden government. He is a wispy,
non-threatening looking creature. He returned her

letters

unread, one weak occasion. She divorced him, and she

never

tried again. How could he abandon eyes so shy, sad,

fine?

I am down, and on your eyes' behalf, May Holman.

She was an alternate-delegate to League of Nations,
an isolationist who believed in only British

Immigration,

but was always solid on the woman-thing, including
the Women's Interstate Executive, setting up country



meetings. That's often the way with Labour women:
like Gillard's, there is hope-wizening in wisening
pragmatism.

It isn't safe, as Bevan had foretold: so much constant
standing in the middle of the road. Her health in fact
was always fraught: chronic asthma, chronic heart.

When she died after a car accident, eight women from
Labour organisations held her coffin, and her brother
inherited her electorate, since it was discovered she
had been surprisingly loved. Trees fall unexpectedly
in arboreal wilderness with its strained, alcoved
gloom, there are eyes of children suffering

or animals in alarm,

I've paid dues to Mulvihill in bloodless October dawn
and boasting a braced figurehead so observantly alone,
the front of the timber engine shivers on.



Tanya and Jane: 3:

The Wombat and the Tea

Jane Austen woke up in Sydney in September, 2017,
in Tanya Plibersek's office, drinking Mr. Rudd's tea
again,
still memorably delectable. In a photo session
for endangered species, Tanya had embraced a python
and been wet on by a wombat called George, so was
wondering if that was the right way to tell Jane,
who had after all so many brothers, nephews, nieces,
and could be relied upon to understand if the words
were controlled, succinct and cautious. Tanya asked,
'Have you noticed, dear Miss Austen, that when
creatures
wet on us they do not change expression? Indeed,
George
was quite young and had an unusually calm
disposition.'
'I'm sure you handled it all superbly, Ms. Plibersek.



I can hear how you would have remarked your long
experience with your children had inured you to it.'
'And I added', said Tanya proudly, 'That it had been
done from greater heights.' Jane seemed to understand
the mild vulgarism. Here, she was more the Jane
of her letters, not her fiction, but still took care not
to let the precision falter. It seemed to her Tanya
was in need of great delicate consideration: her grin
was an elated, engaging one Jane thought her own

Emma

might have had after many wedded years: however,
the top lip almost vanished and eyes in harbour-grey

had

an innocent focus as relational as tears, her ampleness
in build and bone and gesture as disarming and strong
as this very tea they drank and might cross time for.

Jane

would have crossed so very much to drink this tea.

Tanya

as they sipped it, said 'Kevin should have been given



the United Nations position he craved, despite Manus Island. I believe him when he said he meant it to be however grotesque and cruel, just temporary.'

Jane said, 'I have observed that no solution is as brief as the election which inspires it, my dear lady. But of course he seems to have the understanding, indeed, the devotion to paradoxes in which diplomacy, even in its infancy, finds relief. Is Mr. Turnbull a vindictive man?'

'I don't know. He has a certain mischief, savours frustrating the hopes of those opposing. It is like a schoolboy teasing.'

I believe he is a product of his school.' 'Men should not be over-schooled, I believe, Ms. Plibersek, in case they lose the spontaneity to question. I can see the same problem

perhaps with Mr.Shorten. There is rather more surprise



with Mr. Albanese. And with you. What are these
biscuits?

'Oh, just chocolate on chocolate, like a sandwich.

They
are best in this springtime, melt in summer. ' Jane had
an avian quality of observing all things gracefully, but
not seeming to move her head or dim her gaze. 'Korea',
added Tanya, 'is another thing I'd appraise, too, with
you.

I am supposed to focus on families, education, but I do
still think on foreign policy, despite the general fear
apparently that I will be indiscreet. It was actually
good

when I played verbal chess with Julie Bishop. We
meet

at certain points in sense and sympathy. But Korea?

'I can bring you the Napoleonic Wars', reflected Jane,

'but the great asset in Korea currently seems to be

that neither Mr. Trump nor Mr. Kim have any hunger

for territories beyond their outraged spirits, if with too



much noise and not enough concession.' 'Noise', said
Tanya, 'is a thing that makes me wary, but I see
that the noises which frighten one when younger
are the noises which can later save the peace: the art
becomes like opera, to be critiqued, and that aspect
in itself precludes some violence on the way.' The way
to what, of course, they knew another question. The
day
around Tanya seemed a nursery in its passion, light's
transparent freshness, energy, but something, too,
tranquil, gentle, like her rounded cheeks. Jane
had never had a friend like such bright weather. Tanya
watched her shyly with firm eagerness to measure.
That, and the tea, persuaded her to stay.



Diary Poem: Uses of Golf, Cats and Nazis

Alan Coren for a book of comic essays discussed how
to market it with his publisher, was let know
that what sold was golf, cats and Nazis, and so
called his volume *Golfing For Cats* with a Swastika
prominent on the cover. It may have been a seller.
I should probably learn the finer points of golf, so
that George and Trump can play it in this weather
which bubbles up sour, fruity and autumnal from
clouds like carved lead crystal in New Jersey. In
my late teens when the Vietnam War was on,
I would read *Encounter* even though they really
supported it, because I thought it made me suppler
arguing with them, and also the literature
if only *avant-garde* to the point of safety
was reliably fine. The essays by Kermode and Steiner
analysing the Nazis seemed to me to echo
my preoccupation with the problem of evil, but
these days I can't remember who was who



in terms of theory, although of course Steiner wrote *The Death of Tragedy* and Kermode a study to show that periods of civil unrest were a compulsion from history, thus neatly discounting the autonomy in protesting Vietnam. The most remembered essay for me might be by either: it talks of a professor whilst reading quietly an erudite quarterly being arrested by the Nazis, whipped to death, in the course of a single evening, suggesting this a sign that we live in two science fiction sorts of time. Of course, *Encounter* later was shown to be funded by the CIA and folded, but indeed are we sure that this mattered? I think the Domino Theory as post-traumatic anxiety has validity, literary not political poignancy: how scared would one be of whip and anachronism to take money? The last *Encounter* I remember reading was when I was still adolescent, moving out of home: it was a complete issue about Borges, had his poems including *Death Watch on the Southside*. I



sent it to Ben Haneman, a friend who was a surgeon
of the lower bowel, had a *Don Quixote* Library
hoarding anything in the Spanish tongue. He was in
the Fabian Society, like me, but when he went to
Spain

he would stay with Opus Dei, as *Don Quixote*
transcended any vulgar politics. He was so happy
I remember to receive the Borges issue. Now I wonder
if *Encounter's* Swastika preoccupations grew
from the need for readers, and to validate the position
of their ethics, or from that bone-gnawing obsession
to understand the soul's strange double crosses, how
the fall into a whipping trap is sudden. Would we
know

more about the cats? But before I'm quite over
Encounter's anomalies we should remember Shirer:
Rise and Fall of the Third Reich was read, too,
for every HSC Course in History about then, that the
gas chamber bits are pure pornography, beloved by
bored schoolchildren and the late Moors Murderer.



And how has that shaped the imagination? Although
golf and cats might not have held so much attention.
Katharine points out there are no cats in this collection
yet, although last time we had a Maneki Neko
saluting on either cover. I will describe for her
the perfect cat perhaps, although she draws one
as I taught her decades ago: a figure-eight with ears
and sometimes a winsome grin, she calls "Infinity".
The cat is black and white, the sublime domino:
luck's building block, a fragile Asian lady,
whose paws move leaves like a careful croupier,
around the watched paths, jade eyes still river
deep beneath the flickering fall glow. In New Jersey
wealthy autumn tones make patriots now
of anyone seeing their shadows like cats
twitch and prowl along the fine gold traps:
and George and Trump discuss their handicaps.



And God Created Nora Barnacle

I think for Gen Y sex is more relational,
knowledgeable,
and not so frequent because not so compulsive, as
compulsion I suspect runs on stereotypes, and
Gen Y switches and transforms those. That is what
their skill is, in wry tones and rueful. So what is useful
in me discussing sex last century, except that I've
been thinking about sexual feminism and poverty,
that there is the transformational in that?

Months ago, when I chose
a Moriarty, writing my last novel, I thought
he could look like Curd Jürgens in *And God
Created Woman*, remembering vaguely in him
the complex, corrupt, powerful. Then last week,
I actually watched the movie again. The Jürgens
thing was right, but naturally the film's focus
was on Brigitte Bardot acting out the sexual.
This was the performance Beauvoir considered



liberation for then modern Fifties women. Brigitte
is from an institution for orphans, revels
in her own nudity, is seen under a clothesline,
legs and bottom sunlight-smooth beneath
boredom's bourgeois washing. She is not a virgin.
Jürgens pursues her but he is too corrupt,
too experienced, too rich for her taste. She
falls in love with a low-pecking order boy, weds
him in bourgeois lace like white tides around them
but has to work through a compulsion for his
businessman brother, while Jürgens explains
one day he himself may have her, when she learns
to want money: sees her as a femme fatale.
She isn't. But he may have a taste for the fatal,
thinking at the end that he escapes her, all
stereotyping all and hiding a bullet, so that
her husband won't be arrested. At the end,
she has danced like a grief-frenzied priestess
with a Latin band, been hit by the husband,
which seems to please her: either because



it means he won't shoot her, or because she
wants him braver, like her, or her nerve-tips
crave for the dramatic. They do end up together
going back into the house quite gently (bad news
for his mother) and we remember most perhaps
that she usually had her shoes off, that she walked
on her soft footsoles as rhythmically as Marilyn
Monroe on stilettos, acting sensuality as real
as the downy animals she harbours: for the bunny
is silly, trusting and hungry: not playboy. We
remember also her disinterest in money, luxury
and travel. That is probably what shocked the French,
who could cope with Proust's Odette, or Colette's
whores. And maybe it is what most pleased

Beauvoir.

There is so much power in those natural material
rejections. In the same way, I was thinking
about Joyce's wife Nora Barnacle, from whose letters
he borrowed Molly's monologue in *Ulysses*. Nora
was born in the Galway workhouse, and probably



when she met Joyce, was on streets as well as scullery,
in the wistfully equal Dublin alleys, sensually brave,
but had unusual looks: not Irish big-eyed waif, but
a narrow gaze iridescently irresistible, and a taste
for everything he didn't. He knew it was inevitable.
But what I'm thinking about is one small scene:
they were living in Europe, pursuing his design
for 'silence, exile and cunning' but his work
demanded he attend some high occasion. They
could only scrounge money for his formal clothes,
but she came anyway and watched from the crowd
to see 'Jimmy' with the fine gentlemen and ladies.
He lived her sexuality, she lived his status. But
she would perhaps have preferred he be a singer.
He'd almost won a contest with McCormack.
There must have been a pure soar in his singing
as sexual as selfless watching. The words he wrote
maybe seemed to her too much still her own music:
he rippled with her skin and childhood mournings,
he was the snow that fell on her lost lovers,



but his voice could break her from another room.

I think for Gen Y sex is not about acquisition, Joyce
is part of the decor, not a puzzle or a scandal, they
are wary about process and position, and if one
understood Nora's poorness they would listen.



Rich Men's Houses

I have quoted myself once already in a poem,
Uses of Live Odds, that poor men don't belong
in rich men's houses. I said it first in an essay,
Death by Persona, about John Forbes. I say
he spent too much time in the houses of those
friends financially better off than he was.

I will tell you how I witnessed the Luna Park
Fire, because I'm thinking bleakly of those
new things I know about it: Lionel Murphy
being friends with the crime boss of Sydney,
Abe Saffron, who is said to have ordered it
so that he could take over the land, a set up
to be approved by the Labour Party. Poor men
are a danger in rich men's houses. But then
when the fire burned the ghost train, a man
and some children, I was young. I saw it when
I'd had to transfer an opera ticket from my
usual cheap matinees to a sleekly wealthy



First Night of *The Girl of The Golden West*. It was
the only time I saw Donald Smith sing, his voice
less harsh than the recordings, much more tender
in focus to his soprano, directed only to her,
as if a small fat bald man were ideal lover.

We've moved into triplets: I must be nervous.

There was reason to be nervous, but the guess
I had then was only about some fire as such, if
intuitively looking at the exits, fearing smoke.

When it was late and we had left the Opera House,
there was a light reflected in the Harbour
like the shuddering of autumn leaves on tar.

And no one left the pier. One followed their gaze
and saw the flames three times the height of the head,
and clown's face leer underneath. Next day the dead
were numbered. But I remember the strange tallness
of the pure thick flames, no blackness and no breath
of creeping smoke: all looked intentional.

Someone else there that night was Phil Hammial,
who was a carnival hand. Many of these were out



of work a long time, but he may have been too close
to really see the nature of the beast. I was across
enough water to measure the scope. Poor men
do not belong in rich men's houses.



‘Dulcinea and I were Enchanted’

What I remember most about Gough Whitlam is not
brave policy, the Medibank, the free university,
the end of Vietnam, the Arts Grants, the No Fault
divorce, the scandals and CIA-Arab money, or
Kerr's perfidy, the slow but typical justice
of Fraser's apotheosis into goodness, but
just that when I visited Dr. Ben Haneman's
private *Don Quixote* library in Ben's quiet
suburban house in Hurstville, Gough Whitlam
had just signed the guestbook: 'Dulcinea and I
were Enchanted'. Whitlam was a Fabian, like
Haneman and myself, although Ben, a surgeon
of the lower bowel, lectured at Sydney, where he
somehow through Dr. Harry Kronenberg met
Harry's wife Grace Perry, the wild doctor poet.
Ben read her magazine, *Poetry Australia*, and my
poem, *Quixote at the River*, which finished:
One can already see, Sancho, that here



The ordinary light twists, falling

Like thick flashing water

& one feels

The day's strange heat solidify our sleeping

Into a victory lost to the crisp shadows,

Upon the weary, autumn-pungent grass.

It doesn't seem Enchanted, but be careful.

He keeps such places for his battlefield.

The Fabian Society was a unit distinguished not by attending meetings but by realising that someone else was in it, rather like the CIA, perhaps, but on a calmer level. Ben's library was lined with splendid woods and Spanish volumes. I eventually sent him the Borges

Encounter. I was not yet twenty one and very serious. When he asked for my *Quixote* poem ms, I carefully copied it out in handwriting and signed it, as I always did when someone asked for an ms, not having any such thing, just a notebook and cryptic scribbling. Everyone



seemed to think the careful piece of paper
was really an ms, I discovered: it was pleasant
making people happy. I was never so solemn
as not to want to please. What did he read,
I wonder, Whitlam, in the Spanish gold texts?
Did he see himself as quixotic? 'Dulcinea
and I...' the other half of his imagination
a plain practical peasant, not understanding, but
also the Muse for whom one fights battles,
choosing to die to display her favours, hold
her shield. I think then Malcolm Fraser
had the easy route, being frozen and thawing:
the pain excruciating but living. I imagine
Gough standing there in the fall-lit library like
tall Jimmy Stewart in a stage-set, wondering
what to say in the guestbook, choosing to reveal
a bit more than he should about a future
that keeps such places for its battlefield.



Cobham

I will say to you: 'I must write about Cobham',
and you may say to me: 'Why? You are not
Indigenous and the entire problem
with Juvenile Detention Centres is that
you can't question anyone's reputation
before the ABC does.' But you wouldn't
say that impatiently or restlessly to me,
would you? I do not want to lose you.
You are astute, you don't bore easily
at things the excited psyche dismisses
as 'boring' defensively. In my last novel, I
described night's vertiginous beauty
in roofviews a character sees, trapped by
his circumstances and the Solitary
Confinement's lasting fall. At Cobham,
in the High Risk detainees transferred from
Kariong, the Indigenous were 70% of all,
and the Chisholm Plan was to put High



Risks in Solitary to tame them. This new
Solitary was called the Chisholm Unit, it
finished last year, but the long idea
behind it remains, and consequences. In
my novel, George observes re the effect on
lonely adolescent boys: 'The resulting social
regression was something you wouldn't see
as often in Guantanamo Bay', but I can't
vouch for his opinion. Maybe one day,
the ABC will get around to it, and it will be
the subject of a thousand poems and stories.
But now it is just you and me: be true.
We have lost so much and I don't want to lose you.

