

***Jennifer Maiden:***  
***Excerpts from Selected Poems, 1967-2018:***

***Hypothesis***  
from *Tactics* (UQP, 1974)

***The Problem of Evil***  
from *The Problem of Evil* (Prism, 1975)

***For The Left Hand 1; 2; 3***  
***The Windward Side***  
from *For The Left Hand* (South Head, 1981)

***Bound Feet***  
***For a Dissident***  
from *The Trust* (Black Lightning, 1988)

***The Winter Baby***  
from *The Winter Baby* (Angus&Roberston, 1990)

**12 Poems** from the 16 poem **Gulf War sequence**  
***Guarding the Cenotaph***  
***The Guggenheim's Vacation***  
from *Acoustic Shadow* (Penguin, 1991)

***'Look, I'm standing on no-floor'***  
***The Case of the Dalmatian Diamond***  
***The Case of the Pharaoh's Penis***  
***Three Poems at the Thirteenth Pillar***  
***The Butler***  
from *Mines* (Paper Bark, 1999)

**Missing Elvis: 1:**  
***Missing Elvis and two naked Women at the Luddenham Show***  
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***All-Ways Winds, Christmas, 2001***  
**George Jeffreys: Introduction**  
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**George Jeffreys: 1:**



*George Jeffreys Woke Up in Kabul*  
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*Intimate Geography*  
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*Positional Asphyxia*  
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**George Jeffreys 7:**  
*George Jeffreys Woke Up In New Orleans*  
*Clare and Paris*  
**George Jeffreys 8:**  
*George Jeffreys Woke Up in Rio*  
from *Pirate Rain* (Giramondo, 2009)

*The Year of the Ox*  
**George Jeffreys 11:**  
*George Jeffreys Woke Up in Langley*  
*My heart has an Embassy*  
*Well Inside Fireground*  
from *Liquid Nitrogen* (Giramondo, 2012)

*Getting Anne Back*  
*'So That's Who Those Motorbikes Were'*  
from *Drones and Phantoms* (Giramondo, 2014)

*Diary Poem: Uses of the Female Duet*  
*Orchards*  
*Animism*  
from *The Fox Petition* (Giramondo, 2015)

**Eleanor and Hillary: 14:**  
*The Bayonet*  
*Mary Rose*  
From *The Metronome* (Quemar Press electronic 2016, Giramondo  
Print, 2017)



## Hypothesis

A woman with a fine ironic face  
There in the corner sits relaxed  
and she  
Is acutely in-love & acutely  
embarrassed by it.  
The  
Oblivious hero wanders  
Like a legend  
About the glowing pastel rug  
Explaining a terse theory of McLuhan's:  
That violence is the effort to create  
A personal identity.  
He pauses only when the lady sighs,  
Adjusts her gentle hair,  
smiles, stands,  
has cracked a tumbler softly in her hands.



## **The Problem Of Evil**

*('But the problem of evil drums: rhythm  
and the drug of immediacy...' from *Tunnel* by the author.*

It should be noted that when *The Problem of Evil* (written in 1971) was first published, it was often perceived by reviewers as having a female narrator, something not intended specifically by the author)

### *Part One*

'Mistrust  
the cool, the slept, the sure alone...  
they guess lacks & their strategy  
is hush & hazard: war again,  
its diesel-pulse of debt & appetite'

The soldier incognito, triggered, zips  
his briefcase on his thighs & strokes his chin  
at travel brochures: rescue.

Where salt has catacombed a reef  
the engine of all meaning breaks to prove  
each drowner molten in his sky of tides,  
the sojourn in identity too long.

'A terminal's air will bed  
the dust as velvet does'

Inaudibly, the wings spin out,  
from lips or antennae. One night  
traces them for politics. The waves  
lilt mortal here - the drones that meet  
the sea's swarm in a liquid sting  
to complicate the play.

We hid to wait.

She nipped an olive & the salt  
drifted on her patience as she told me:  
'I'm a shrewd bitch, but this  
is wheels within wheels, & it seems  
to be your thing, not mine'.  
'The trick,' I said, 'of wheels





wrong as a scribbled pulse along  
the lens that studies us & is  
insensate as the sky-tides, too,  
outside this fluid noon: the honeycomb.

Now we are cold, & hoard  
our energy like prayer, never  
losing it in words.

We wander back to it, although  
reprisals pulped this city  
& like delirium it quakes,  
deadly on our laughter's edge  
as our feet skid on denuded lime,  
& our hands are wet & stung  
by the cistern-ooze of shelter.

In a shop an upturned bicycle  
rears, static, through the rubbled glass -  
my finger jells in tar. The streets  
are glass-shatter green with beauty,  
opposing the apothegm  
that glory nests on satisfaction, calm.  
Or are we calm? I've found  
that killing needs no practice,  
& no plan:  
a killer loses his pretence  
of life, & lives. We can  
postpone the hunger now.

Our wilderness resurges: night  
like surf erodes the jet-ridge, ploughs  
knife-scintillant across the fields -  
& teases the trance of our lost,  
of our unknown...

Known, the fire we've lit  
swarms to sip old barricades for wood,  
on tinder we've hacked down to boil  
soup in tins. At last  
we can lie to each other, soft

& gullible with exhaustion:  
'It is possible - to know this



& not tour like our ghosts?'  
Her sleep gropes:  
'Indefinable . . .but sinister  
& thirsty in the living?'

'It's possible, I've thought, but may be late  
& distance us from normalcy  
of meaning, since  
we're now totalitarians,  
& we abstract our weapons'  
'but pain is form: an aim, & you  
have staggered, too: be careful ...'

Ear to earth, I hear  
the burr of squadrons in the hills  
& petrol's terse sleep-mutter.  
Fires planned by chalk stitch out  
their base-perimeter, a thin  
periphery of rest to troops as they  
consolidate our ambush.

She shrugs, abruptly truthful, palms  
grenades like pine-cones into cans,  
so vaguely that I laugh.  
We calculate the likelihood,  
of rain before manoeuvres.

The soldier shelves provisions, stocks  
bulletins of music in his wrist.  
A TV in the other tent heats up.  
The static pocks his nerves.  
But outside, chill as silk,  
the rain relieves  
in flushes over foliage. He leans  
his fist against his groin:  
the tendons  
    jut white, relaxing.

My mind recites  
lists against fear:  
brandy & black chocolate/  
rock-basin/ stealth/  
contrition/ love/



cheese-crust in my pocket  
frailty  
variety  
& pride. I crawl through  
rock-basins of vines that bud  
& sting from rainlight, fuscous  
as mucus: tumid pearls.

In front,  
she huddles, groping, fights  
with mud for the knife she's lost,  
must exasperate & rage  
in silence at the need  
for silence, to survive.

A throb of batteries  
signals on my rib.  
In tents the code-ticks clatter:  
paroxysms: accurate,  
an electronic empathy for pain.

She shrugs off tension, but  
my anger lasts. It is  
carbon-friction: black,  
unkindled in the pit,

potential.

Reckless with dusk,  
she climbs now, mirrors  
metal against stone.  
Her shadow corrugates  
on water at my feet. I wait  
for bullets or an alert  
from her arm for me to follow

'It was one year here,'  
the M.I. drawls  
'or two in Berlin gaol.  
I got pissed with two girls.  
We exploded a mine  
by a sentry-box over the wall.  
Sweet aim with empty bottles.



Have you tasted strawberry wine?'

Again on floodlit asphalt  
the copters land, unpack  
munitions & a hostage,  
without halting meal-routine.

Overhead the choppers spice  
monotonies of camouflage  
with flecks of rifle-salt.

Kite-neat, their flight  
seduces my attention.

Invulnerable, I watch them  
& I climb.

The choppers climb.

No sound betrays us,  
spinning. Rope spins me,  
unseen I sprawl down  
through stars of vertigo to anchor  
rigid in their numb sea, waiting.

Headlamps frisk the trees. The trucks  
interrogate the gravel. Insight  
thrashes in its crater here:  
is suppurated bone.

The soldier straps his helmet on,  
remembers being known.  
Beyond the bitterness of chrome  
half-tented shadows enter, stoop  
their silhouettes honed clean.

Their calculus (+ totality +)  
rubs out their blackboard culture.

At ease, I confront it,  
& crouch attentive, whisper  
as they do, & insinuate,  
quite clerical with power.

Ironic, my attention, too,  
diffuses to escape:  
outside as I answer  
rain's vapour reflects



the adventuring moon as danger.  
Their HQ test the threats of hope,  
persuasive, but not asking proof:  
they'll never need the names.

*Part Two*

I'd give the names, but they  
don't need to ask the names.  
Graph-confidence is wearied  
by old techniques of question:  
I'm useless if I speak  
to them, but silence  
can still be re-employed if I return.  
I'd give the names,  
but they don't ask the names.  
I test the brink of politesse, explain  
'I haven't guts for active treachery:  
the sweat of indecision stays about me.  
My friends have always told me when I lie'

This, though, is still the tiny  
ring of the arena,  
& choppers turn outside.  
Intent on lethargy,  
the soldier overhears our interview.  
Predictable at last, the M.I. offers  
his hand-cupped match & roll-your-own to me.

Outside, the choppers climb

Smoke's taste  
is saline, & it contradicts  
anxiety. Her eyes  
obsessive as opals, coil  
arid in my memory. They parch  
the patience from my trust.

Irritable, I glance  
at, my hands for comfort.  
I am numbed until alert  
as a sacrifice ('be careful'...  
says the lamb,



& leads us to the slaughter.)  
Cul-de-sac. The floor  
mottles like a carcass. Rooms, fanned  
as polar as an abattoir,  
freeze breath.

Outside - incendiary clouds -  
grenades/ a helicopter  
boils down to oily  
hiccoughs of spray and blood.

My fingers, now unguarded,  
clench, torturing the cushions,  
& act out my impatience  
which like a child's, pleads  
pain-subdued to be 'outside, outside'

Lights program me my task  
but, aiming from her absence,  
the woman's hand is steady, pours  
the gracecup of a death.

Outside in uniform revenge  
the helicopters swarm

Half-absolving me, they teach  
me of my 'conditioning'. The graphs  
prove it by recording fear's  
inadvertent reflex in my heart.  
But since I'd learned before to speak  
conjunctions with precision; hot  
nonlexical agreements; hate  
& all the asterisks which wink  
starrily of Other Place,  
so now at last their language serves me:  
tailored to me like a home.  
My voice explores unhurriedly  
their new machine: its own.

Amused,  
but drunk for sleep, she follows  
the smoke-scald of her brain, maybe  
defines me once again: a man



whose fingertips were always smudged  
by the cinders of the rich -  
who bit his fingers, laughed: now who,  
bone-taut with plans, can gnaw, aloof,  
the weakness at bone-marrow.

The radar-drifts abruptly  
convulse into scintillas, sweep  
each curtain of trees in shudders  
naked as magnesium on fire.

She hides in webbing shadows,  
slants the darkness like a mirror,  
closer to her, to decide.

Desolate with confidence,  
the days agree like bricks,  
set thick in solid shelter,  
& dried bland.

Clouds recreate the skin of fear  
outside in sumptuous chaos.

& with a tic of secrecy  
the M.I.'s finger curls  
in superstitious elegance  
from tea like clouded metal.  
Involuntarily, my lips  
will compound to a smile  
& say 'situation ethics,'  
as he nods. Co-operation.  
'Works both ways.'

Erect, the multi-screens  
still wall us in with visions,  
&, near at first, explosions weld  
the processed rooms together: limbs  
of furniture spill, careless now,  
as intimate as toys.

The nights are conversational.  
Through flaccid plasma engines float  
mutating on the dark.

Trussed by rugs a dead boy sweats



& gobbles for breath in his dream.  
We squint against a perspex tube  
at feathery intestines in his side  
while I think of Rembrandt: 'so  
immaculate that paint  
& so like lard...'  
my words enforce, anatomize  
prolong their flippant safety...  
perhaps his safety, too, & so  
I justify the wait.

Inert,  
the beats of time streak, won.  
Projecting on the dark, I screen  
the normal sex conventions. Fear  
domesticates to farce again  
&, doorway-framed, sleep's surge careers  
across the void of glass, becomes  
the insurrecting rain.

### *Part Three*

'Their myrmidon,' she'd grin, to mimic all  
the syllables of drunkenness & peace,  
but gentled by probation, I  
must corrupt a loss that tucks  
the bedside like a servant, grown  
discrete & satisfied.

Ripe-chambered as a hive, & hard  
the mauser's barrel snuggles, spins  
sweat-tender in my hand until  
arousing me - my tongue again  
slithers over consciousness  
as feral & elaborate as  
a talisman: 'their myrmidon . . .'  
but faithful to their testament  
of verbiages, pain.

Trussed in rugs, the dead boy roars.  
They dope his lungs with oxygen, cementing



air with his plump stupor, while his throat  
moans like a vacuum flask to shock  
my famine with his silence:  
satisfied.

The helicopters, outside, shrug  
fear's radiance in steel/ a pulse  
lurches unexpected through my side.  
I fasten the venetians & arrange  
numbered documents, the shut  
chantilly cream of curtains, brusque  
as a secretary suddenly high  
on her caffeine & efficiency, shake  
myself free in those twisting  
comparisons/ the fast nerve now

subsides to order, recognized.  
Insensate as the sky of tides,  
outside, the choppers sing, reflect  
the antics of dreamt corpses: arch  
the sinews strut in death.

The wind,  
which honeycombs from cumulus the worlds  
that eyes concoct on air is fed:  
sleek sea. The cliff of fronds. The beach  
is brittle as a crusted gauze.  
Cloud-seeds soak up the blood. Tide floods  
our tire tracks in shell-mulch here.

Face down, her heels baked  
flake-white like scones with work,  
a woman curls on rivulets of salt.  
Her arms still have the pastel  
torpor of attentive skin, not death.

The first  
snail strokes her mouth. I hear the sea.

The sea's tune swarms  
at my sinus like a drum, although  
the mauser cools my grip & rides  
ladylike between my hands again.



On sand  
outside their grasp, the woman scuffs  
across the shredded plage to touch  
the carcass of her friend, & stares  
at me where the horizon squints  
in contracted simplicity  
behind the fluid noon, the blue  
convulsive lung/ the sea

The woman squats, as she can't run  
or move exhausted fingertips  
to fold the relic's vision, just  
answer it, uncomprehending,  
hold. I hold the sun along  
the mauser's barrel, where it stings  
my static fingers like a honeycomb.  
She stands, to wander down away  
between the scabs of woodland:

    & I'll doubt  
that I just saw her there.

Pensive in turn, the M.I. wants  
a total for my day from me.

    Half sure  
that beach hulk was already dead.  
I frown, remember 'there was one' -  
there being, I know, one;  
but, speaking, tap  
the tumid ashes from my cigarette  
to stop the sliding eyelids of the lie.  
The soldier, activated, finds  
the alarm for a sniper-zap outside  
& coital & languid, light  
alters its blurred tempo, waits;  
& slow in wanton spasms, rain  
comes to burn the fog that gropes  
in thickets from the tar / I watch  
the landscape shrink as effigy:

    its warp  
pristine with taut specimens, that waters  
still pacify to stone/ their eyes



inhabit me vacantly, clawing  
with their quiet: & I turn, the sulphur's ache  
dragging down my shoulder like a hand.

Outside the singing windows, light  
regresses, spilt, to prowling fires.

My mouth  
sours on finality. The M.I. lolls,  
alone with me as card by card his fingers  
defly reconstruct a pyramid.  
Meticulous because unslept, the hands  
translate its height to fate, the cards  
as perfect as a sacrifice, the trust.

Outside the tractors labour,  
frozen in a charnel swarm:  
fluids, interlaced at zero,  
stitch thawed plague into the clay:  
are preparing for possession by retreat.  
Masked to tread the furrows now, the soldier  
rakes peace back in ochre lumps -  
rock: reassuring, worn to salt. Our eyes  
relax believe the hills again, the sun.

The choppers climb &, signaled home,  
flash, random as a wave to meet  
the terminal. Its windows shut  
&, furnace-smooth, the sterilizing dust  
rotates their wings on axis, cleansed  
in hypnotizing cold/ The world  
condenses as a hunger, sways  
to clench my sensing arms

I stand:

the twin heart of the mauser pulls:  
a pilot on my side/ I'd laugh -  
half liberal to die or run:  
to leave the base & burn; I talk  
so long that M.I.s restless, ask  
me outside: zip a harness lined  
to immunize our flesh/ We wait  
until the soldier comes.



*Part Four*

Immediate  
a field of flames patrols  
the jeep's periphery. We drive  
approximately, annexing the night.

Their guide again  
I drank my drugs for fear  
that sleep would seem the woman, show  
her laughter a reunion: tactile  
as comfort - my illusion built  
perfect on its absence, by this dark.

A copter skims. Its antennae  
ply hidden blood in diffident  
& velvet dalliance. 'What's close  
is causal' to their aim, which soon  
must 'simplify' her own.

A rubbery whine, our axle scours  
the incandescent road. We stop,  
investigate the prang, then group  
together against death.

Supporting us, the chopper voids  
in dribblets on contorting leaves

I huddle to run, with the mauser  
creched in my lap, & brush  
side-on a trigger timed to splice  
fuses, & the sulfur mauls. I crawl  
on my own ashes, lost, to reach  
her convoy in the trees.

Behind me now, on the encounter site,  
the soldier's bullets buzz short, without aim.  
The earth, not overtaken here,  
soaks my scrabbling limbs & hugs,  
to anesthesia, the bone.



I've met a settlement, & sleep,  
acid-silent in this netted grove  
of her guns as olives pulse  
like hives - the barricaded fruit  
from chasms that the foremen cut  
& lost before they died.

The partisans, in wind-black scarves,  
surround me as I wake.

They stand  
impassive in their disbelief. At first  
I knuckle my burnt vision senselessly  
reiterate to them

'I know...I know...'  
or warn against a plague celled under clay.  
The woman, summoned, walks from long campaigns  
of paper in headquarters at the caves,  
& speaks to me as if I'd never gone:  
incurious & casual, but armed.

She dimples with clinical tact,  
to probe  
me like a playful diplomat, her skill  
as conscious as a cauterizing knife,  
confiding

'I predicted you'd be here  
as soon as an emergency allowed.  
I'm glad it took my putsch to let you come  
although that confrontation wasn't  
... kind...'

She shrugs away the aftermath of luck,  
to supervise some progress in my wounds  
& nurse back my credulity of will,  
before my output suffering begins.

I harsh on wordless phlegm to warn  
these keepers from their soil

Outside the living honeycomb  
of caves my veins relax, forget  
cloud-salt & toxic seeds/



The guards  
still tend to my sedation, choose  
mechanically to prove their strength  
in the abandoned base, which glints -  
a dome like mercury -  
the pulse  
of all the taken sand.



## For The Left Hand (1)

(Things gentle & are gentling.

A woman's face with qualities of servitude, refinement & poignant ill-luck, the skeleton in it shadowed superciliously beneath the cheeks & eyes. A reader, a mistress, a victim, determined in all senses, the scrambling but balancing, surviving its rebellious march: small steps, back straight, hips in across the obedience of its breath: a scrutinising voice, low, knowledgeable, sly. Belonging to the kind - the race, the family, the eucharist, the child, the milker & the milked - the kind of being who could live thirty years in a house with the bones of something it had killed & still obey it.)

There are compass curves of mirth but nothing so arch as a dimple, the mouth corners set in something too knowing for a smile, the lips more relevant to people than to flowers. The dead do sketch quirkish invisible lines on her face, determining. The stubborn partial stars dance like scalpels through the attic slates & halo things in boxes, soft so quick.

If innocence were tangible & seen it would appear a natural fist: that of a baby or someone in torture or a woman like her, observing. Long observed, she provokes a petulance in nature, scalds herself left-handling teapots & saucepans, & the taps steam instantly from cold to hot, passim. The elements in all the jugs are broken. The busy kettle boils russet water. She implores like a musician, knuckling the seamy sleep voluptly in her eyes. The dawn's a listless undressed probing thing, with numb hips & crisp hands, a circulator of dusk-whiskers in the cellar, & between sinister attic avenues. The sinistral block, the reversal, is most solid in daybreak, can be blithe as an operatic arrest, sometimes. She never knew. thirty years in a house with the boxes, gentling.



## For The Left Hand (2)

Thirty years in a house with the boxes gentling &  
my right hand is cramped with rheum, but will write  
& my left hand is helpless & whole, although  
I have heard that the ring-hand is still  
the stronger between the thighs & I know  
that it falters out first to the light -  
& it seems to find lids & knots  
less strange than does the right.  
Sometimes when the monsoons flow  
it clutches itself as if struck  
& my right hand fingers stretch  
out, alphabetting the rain. Tonight  
the left hand seems not to detect  
the difference in music & pain, & so  
the world nears another hand until  
the sinister muscles uncoiling again  
hiss up in their fork to fight:  
when the boxes protest in their dusted row  
that the rain brings too much light:  
that the rain does not gentle, it shrills  
like a clock set to punish the night. From sleep  
the left hand will quieten the clock  
although it was wound by the right, & then  
the dumb dawn breeze will blow  
thirty years in a house with the boxes gentling &  
my right hand is crippled with rheum, but will right  
& my left hand is helpless & whole, although  
I have heard that the left hand is still  
the stronger between the thighs, & I know  
that it falters out first to the light -  
& it seems to find lids & knots  
less strange than does the right.  
Sometimes when the monsoons flow  
it clutches itself as if struck  
& my right hand fingers stretch  
out, alphabetting the rain tonight.



### **For the Left Hand (3)**

Out, alphabetting the rain tonight, &  
at dawn the venus wind was sick & gentling  
her when she had gentled it. Its eyes  
were hers, depended like the sea.

She liked it at her mercy.

It knelt away its lap: it could  
not nurse or patronise, it begged  
& she was good. Her right hand stretched to grip  
its left shoulder, half to reassure  
& half to keep it down, the left  
hand found its face too quick, was fumbling  
out aggressive excuses, desire  
resisted by the numbers which it cooed  
as its glance eluded her, snaked away over  
its free & fleshless shoulder, & she cried  
thirty years in a house with avenues,  
the wet as grubby as boxes, burning out  
puffily like a star. This crying  
gentled her as a lie would, & the dead  
came with their fingertip-irony, smoothed  
her cosmetic face as if their prints  
stole each line they read on it. They left  
some beauty-spots, black growths intriguing  
the left side of her face, & left side  
elbow, which was plumper than the right,  
& jarred itself more often, comic  
as an inadvertent curse. She knew  
the right hand locked freely in logic, but  
the left hand was a shifting, hurt, met thing  
too responsive to its skinless counterparts.  
The windy boxes sing a counterpoint  
to the skin of the hissing milk she skims  
above the fire, her cheekbones sharpening  
with the smell & its smile.  
In the attic & cellar the venus wind shrills  
in new health, hungering.



## The Windward Side

This island has a windward side  
walkless long & crossless wide  
& winds across the cliff-face ride:  
a woman's face  
caved in with pride  
that craves for every blow.

And here again beware - think how  
the imposter is imposing now

as if she learnt to speak & grow

as children do

by rhyme almost

as if - before - she learnt to know

as children do

by lies, by what

she was obsessed to hide.

This island has a windward side  
calloused by coral & gnawed by the tide  
as grey as a volcano.



## Bound Feet

As a girl in Penrith then  
I had a Chinese friend.  
I have seen her squeezed feet  
when they were unbound.  
They were of the tiniest -  
almost four inches  
but their petiteness caged  
two white, huge things.  
Almost feet, these had  
the notches from fractures and  
tourniques on them; and yet  
she walked from room to room,  
curled in a quiet knot  
with ivoried legs deliberate,  
and ivoried face unburdened, if  
no doctor and no daughter squeezed  
her arms, to hold her up.



## **For a Dissident**

From now on you will shelter in the past  
which gave at the time no shelter.  
From now the future enters through what was  
and the enterprise is fear,  
and any breath is its prevention.  
From now on you will never know what was.  
It will be the first ambition, and  
fearing it will make the cell plank soft  
under all ancient dreams and ancient horror,  
as touching it can soften the sharp wires  
by ambivalence, to rain. From now  
on every early light the sparrows wait  
for none but you who are as real as rain  
and promise them no safety and no sign,  
except to know that bread is on the sill,  
that there is sometimes bread and mind, and terror.  
So you will shelter in the bread that falls  
because it never was, and did fall once  
and your lips did shelter once the taste  
of it. From now on it will fall.



## The Winter Baby

So babies are primal: Moore-sculpted rock  
- rock from a flood as sleek as stone -  
that has no more, no less than body warmth,  
the warmth of the dusk sun.

Her strength  
is absent-minded and wordlessly good,  
a sleepsong sung in the key  
of a satisfied short groan.

Her laugh  
is as wide and wise as winter.  
There is nothing filmy  
nor flimsy about her.  
She feeds as firmly  
as the heart mills blood,  
her needs as fair as Milton's God  
and her eyes like night on water.



*12 from the 16 poems of*

**Keeping the Lid On:  
*A Gulf War Retrospective***

*(written in 1991, first published in Southerly and later in Maiden's Acoustic Shadow collection, Penguin, 1993. Broadcast on ABC radio twice, the second time on the Eve of Bush Junior's 2003 war on Iraq)*

**1. 'A Big Idea'**

- President Bush on his New Order

The big sand is the place  
for the big idea, and  
for war's moonface. The sand  
has a cinematic purity,  
pocked  
like a close-up of Richard Burton's face.  
We can watch sand relaxedly  
and simply, in victory, in  
big raid-on-moonlight movies  
for relief before we sleep.  
And in this *fin de siecle*,  
when death has to earn its keep  
and we choose an active Hamlet,  
the small sand is what we meet.

**2. 'We Are Not That Cheap'**

*(-King Hussein, after President Bush threatened to stop Foreign Aid to Jordan, for criticising the U.S. in the Gulf War, 11/2/91.)*

Like most of us, I fear my price is low:  
that when they hoist pay packets on the pole  
to flutter in a good march militaire,  
I will just shrug and watch the Romans go -  
admit they are accustomed to the role  
and, anyway, the other side are there  
to welcome them without apparent fear.  
Like most of us, I fear honour's a dream  
which rots when it is much in touch with tears  
of sentiment, or privacy, or pain.



Still, honour of the intellect can seem expensive, but less vulnerable to cares about the aura of one's luck and name. Like most of us, I understand both men and understanding is the nerve which stirs perhaps to rise responsible and blame that secrecy we must quite welcome when it saves us from a witness's grey shame, and obscures any reason, should we try. Like most of us, I fear my price is high.

### **3. Keeping the Lid On**

It's important not to write or speak in rage which will truss up the apter words and the syntax which sharpens the skin. But it's not a chess-like coolness which we require, so much as the white-jowled pit-eyed weariness once of McCarthy in Chicago or, now, Arnett in Baghdad. Having seen we must speak but slowly and with an insensate hand brushing our lips at times, and all our reflexes slow with some clear confirmation of futility: then we still do what we can: one word and then one more, forever framed in a context which ignores, denies our witness: this will work if we not unclench one finger or expect the power to be given us again.

### **5. Rations**

Simone Weil made the point that men and women would queue for hours for an egg but not to save a life. What TV wrung me most - apart from the Gulf War - lately was the ancient, trembling face of a Moscow woman whose fiercely saved higher currency notes had just been



outlawed to serve some higher cause.

I thought:

sanctions always do work, because  
eggs give us purpose, reassuring  
us that our mother is still here,  
at the day's end, and sane beyond meaning

## 6. The Journalist

27/2/ 91

Sometimes, she wonders if the job  
in PR would have been better, but  
they don't give a by-line to cadets.

At the cafe, she still sits  
apart from older journalists,  
who drink - while she drinks  
coffee, lots and lots  
of clarifying caffeine, but  
she makes sure that she does take  
decaf, if not often.

She sips the afternoon, watching  
CNN on the wall. She likes  
the drumroll, at the ads.

It gives her energy, and makes  
her feel part of something  
happening, just like  
when they let her do little things  
on disposable nappies, or smokes.

She doesn't smoke, unlike  
the older journos, who leave  
their tables smelling acrid.

Mainly, they're men who did not write  
exposures of Vietnam, Pol Pot,  
and so react with irony and heat  
if she shows even minimal distaste  
for this war. So she does not.

The coffee remembers how she read  
Camus for her B.A.: something like:  
'It will always be too late, thank  
God.' She stirs herself



and the coffee, thinks perhaps  
the PR job might not have meant  
this much passive smoking.

## **7. Miniatures**

It is interesting to see  
in the Art Gallery, how  
much Monet's seas  
are like his waterlilies:  
the same sumptuous, pastel ruffles,  
which still seem soft but cause  
fingertips to dream of fish scales,  
or the bearded feel from snow.  
It is true that in war  
we want the miniature focus,  
a camera small enough  
not to show a mad wind blow,  
but reveal the serene molecule -  
its tiny crimps and pleats -  
calm as a helix, floating through  
our heart's brittle holes, when each  
sea seems a waterlily, each  
lily a sea of peace.

## **8. The Road**

(compared by one U.S. military spokesman to  
'the Pentagon car park at going-home time')

It has a name - already infamous -  
in Arabic, which I don't want to know,  
although in coming months no doubt I will.  
I've dreaded writing about it, but  
I knew that it would press  
like a boil of pus until the words  
came out. I will retreat  
into an image which for me  
is safe because the animals  
in it are still alive: a cage  
with a pyramid of terrified



wild kittens which I extricated,  
tamed. The old image of pigs  
mounting each other at  
an abattoir recurs, but that's  
too blunted and inadequate to show  
170ks of road, bombed days  
and days beyond decision to retreat,  
stalled cars and wild trucks outstretched  
six abreast in the black sand,  
between merciless horizons.  
In time I hope it will become  
a hackneyed phrase, with which we  
prevent some lies again.

                  In the meantime, I have heard  
a rumour that we have to leave the city.  
I snatch a sequined dress  
for my wife from a shop window.  
I think that I remember how  
to drive and I have stolen  
some Prince's confiscated Ford, because  
my feet can't cross to home  
in time... they say that time  
is running out for us. Ahead,  
There is nothing but metal and blood.  
Some are burnt up, some are intact  
enough for me to recognise their wounds.

                  And there are planes  
in squadrons coming at me from  
both sides of the road - there seems  
no difference here between the land and sky.

                  My car  
is off the road and screams and I still try  
to overtake the convoys of the dead.

## **11. White Flags**

The point is sometimes made that the Surrealists  
were reacting against World War One, and trying  
to create a peaceful perfection  
in shape and colour. Perhaps the order



in their geometries is still too  
physical to be abstract, but the idea  
seems useful, since they are extremely  
tidy.

As Ronald Blythe observed, there is  
one sort of Socialism which is really  
merely an obsession with  
tidiness. But bold colours,  
which sing across the room  
like stars, do compensate for that.  
It is the white squares  
and rectangles, however,  
which stay in the mind much longer  
growing stronger then much stronger  
to the power of emptiness.

## 12. Dodge

(‘They were just trying to get the hell out of Dodge’  
- US soldier looking at the dead on the Basra Road)

The strongest thing  
in this has always been  
repatriation, been  
the right to go home again,  
beyond  
the right to truth or breath.

This  
supercedes the image  
of a bird in oil  
and is not  
about guns or gold,  
no longer even  
about fiery pride,  
or long  
plotting, long  
resentment  
bursting out at last in death.



Most of these, out West,  
were the crowd at the gunfight  
who watched from  
the windows, or carried  
their rifles barrel-down,  
                  unless  
the deputy was there,  
                  and then  
would echo his distress,  
                  always  
a little unpredictable,  
nervous, and a little  
unsure about the facts.

It would be wrong,  
though, to patronise  
what is framed here  
and dignified -  
a corpse-hand, half-curved, and half  
childlike,  
                  half black, or one  
frail stranger sprawled face-down,  
                  his leg  
tucked out for walking back.

### **13. Measurement**

                  There is not  
the kind nod now which ended  
many squabbles on the hearth.  
                  The risk  
now offered is not measured,  
                  and perhaps  
                  there's that  
to be said for the decade:  
                  it offers  
true scope for the dissident heart.



## 15. Grammar

Sibilants curl, succulent  
on the sweet part of the tongue.

Even before he  
opposed the Gulf War, I could agree  
with Chomsky that grammar  
was first and physical, as  
irreversible  
and subtle as a taste-bud, and  
as bowel-deep as passion. So  
even Chaos flows out in order  
we are told:  
like buds on a branch,  
this way.

The endless pattern guarantees  
no apple bloom the same. For a man  
with that belief, hope might not be  
so dangerous and so false,  
so fiery.

The infinitives and conjunctions in  
this foreign language stay.

## 16. Premature Burial

(13/9/91. On the 6-month-delayed news item that the U.S.  
buried thousands of Iraqis alive in the sand with tanks at the  
start of the Land War)

We've buried the war. It always was  
bad taste to mention it, even  
when it happened, unless one  
made jokes about Saddam or CNN.  
We've buried the war. It always was  
a matter of a soldier in the sand,  
on his belly, not believing where he was  
and seeing a tank as big as the U.S.  
- whose movies he loves, where his cousin  
still lives - arrive on top of him and take  
his air, his air, and fill his lungs with earth.  
We've buried the war. It always was  
a suffocated mouth, a word not said.



Before the Land War, the Republican Guard  
in their bunkers choked on sand bombed down  
ventilation shafts. The children  
Smart-bombed to bones in Baghdad suffered less.  
We've buried the war. It always was  
something the good journalist expects  
who knows his side will win, who does  
understand the wisdom in delay, that good  
journalist who always felt a bit  
cheated that we lost in Vietnam, who has  
now found how easy patriotism is  
when you bury the war in you, which always was:  
how easily that seems to let you breathe.



## Guarding the Cenotaph

*(The dialogue is between a highschool boy in his school cadets and a young female university student)*

*Him:*

I was a savage boy, a virgin,  
full of heroes. It was  
the year before Uni, when  
I was still in Cadets, as if  
I still believed the bullshit:  
                  anything,  
as they say, for a peaceful life,  
                  but part  
of me was still excited by it.  
The Cenotaph was in the Park,  
near a wall overlooking the lights  
of our pretty little City (most  
of which was still a country town),  
then night-loud Beach, blind sea.  
Our Adjutant - the Physics Master - warned  
us solemnly about the 'Women's Libbers' -  
last year, interstate, a rabid pack  
protesting Rape-in-War had sprayed  
red paint on many sacred statues,  
such as our Cenotaph (our State  
was always a year behind). This year, we  
'soldiers' were instructed to protect it  
the night before the Dawn Service.  
We were doing it in pairs, and I  
had the dog-watch: I think because  
I was the grim-death hooker\*, the one  
who always finished in the marathons.

                  My mate,  
Nicholas, went home yawning. I  
was there alone with a Walkman, and  
our Sixth Form anthology of poems. I read  
*Beach Burial\*\** for the tenth time: 'Enlisted  
on the other front', now wishing  
devoutly to enlist on any other  
fucking front but this one. Down



below the wall, the City shone  
as innocent and cold as the eyes  
of an insect or a baby. Night  
stripped the trees to bare white parts.  
The false dawn air was milky blue as stone.  
To keep myself awake, I recited  
Slessor about battles, *Captain Cook*: 'men  
who ride broomsticks with a mesmerist,  
mock the typhoon'; and how  
to strip and oil rifles. There  
wasn't any sign of angry women.

I hadn't really let  
myself hope there would be - but, too,  
I wished I'd kept my *Penthouse* (which  
Nicholas took home with him, the cow).  
I laughed and hugged my shivers.  
The Cenotaph gleamed underneath a row  
of soldiers standing guard with Brens, in bronze.  
I fantasised that if the 'Women's Libbers'  
attacked at last, someone might do a statue  
of me, as I fought off the Amazons.

[\* *grim-death hooker*: In football, a front-row forward who wrests  
the ball away for his team tenaciously.

\*\* By Kenneth Slessor.

\*\*\*From Kenneth Slessor: *Five Visions of Captain Cook: Vision  
II.*]

*Her:*

I wondered why all they'd left to guard  
the Cenotaph was a boyscout with the giggles.  
And I'd wondered what book he read. I was  
an intense girl - chiaroscuro: full  
of light, and flinching shadows. So I had  
some existential urge to be a hero: yes,  
but also to make context, space for it.  
I wanted just to run up close enough  
to spray a poem on the sarcophagus:  
and I'd chosen Elizabeth Riddell's  
*The Soldier in the Park*, because



it started, 'All day he slept', and  
ended, 'The boats on the bay rocked, the willows  
sighed / How long ago was that? / That  
was in summer, some time before he died.'  
I thought I could squirt those lines quickly  
from the spraycan, if there wasn't any guard.  
I'd thought they'd either guard it with battalions,  
or not at all. Therefore, the kid  
was one of life's newer puzzles.  
But, still, he made my subject more involved,  
as I'd chosen this to be my final essay  
for 'Professional Writing Two': a try  
at observer-inclusive science re what happens  
when you protest and discern at the same show  
(I'd thought of calling myself 'The Reporter',  
like Norman Mailer, but decided no). I  
was taking notes about my own reactions  
as I settled down behind the moon-bleed gum trees  
and waited for the sentinel to go.

*Him:*

There was less than an hour to go, and  
nothing'd happened, so I found  
some more Bruce Springstein on the walkman,  
although it was just *Born to Run* again.  
I thought: it'd be a patient Women's Libber  
still lurking in the bushes, but I stayed.  
I absolutely just did not expect her,  
when she strolled out of the arbour,  
with the paint.  
I'd enough sense to know not to expect  
something like an Israeli soldier in black  
bib-and-brace overalls, or a soft  
centrefold with prove-it-to-me eyes, but  
this woman was an absolute surprise. I  
thought that she was only, maybe, one  
or two years older than me She had  
Afro-braids, a notebook and a copy  
of a chocolate paperback of poetry\*. And she  
stood too far away for me to block her  
or try to confiscate the crimson spray.



As soon as I stepped nearer, she stepped  
sideways. And if each move took her nearer  
to the bronze man still each step took us  
closer to the day:

I only had to wait for the procession,  
and then she'd have to give it all away.

It seemed like a good time for conversation,  
so I asked her what it was she meant to say  
with the paint on the sarcophagus. She read me  
four lines from a sad rhyme, then I  
said 'That'd have taken you all day.'

She said, 'I've been putting in some practice  
on "found" poems at the Railway and the Clock', and  
held up her notebook: she'd put there  
a description of me as I as I kept watch. She  
said, 'You were blinking all the time:  
you were nervous.' I said., 'No, it  
was just hard to stay awake.'

[ \*Rodney Hall's *The Collins Book of Australian Poetry*,  
which includes the Riddell poem]

*Her:*

I knew he was temporising, and that  
I'd have to spray the paint on soon, or run.  
God knew how many cowboys were arriving  
at dawn, with their rosemary and rifles.  
I had ascertained he really might tackle  
me head-on, and grapple for the can,  
maybe hurting us both, so I warned him:  
'If you do, I'll just spray the red paint on  
the cenotaph, your clothing and your face:  
we could literally end-up engaging  
in a messy red fuck at the base.'

Usually, when you make the sex explicit  
to boys his age, they stare or leer bewildered  
but he perched on the cenotaph, considered:  
'Just be sure you don't spray it in my eyes?'  
I asked, 'Did you know that, these days, the Navies  
on some British and Russian ships have guns



made of lasers which have no other purpose  
than to burn out the retinas of your eyes? '\*  
He wasn't fazed by that one, and he added:  
'Yeah, the Yanks have got a hand-held one.' \*  
I knew that fact already - smiled, nodded,  
and then we both relaxed a bit at last:  
as if some required initiation  
in shocking each other had been passed.  
*[\*Both these exchanges are factual]*

*Him:*

I watched her write down what I'd not done  
in shorthand, like a court stenographer:  
her lips tightened to a bud, her gestures vaguer  
and her notebook pressed up against a tree.  
I realised she was one of those women  
who night gives a leaning symmetry  
- in daytime, she'd stride out of proportion,  
in her shoulders, her neck or her knees.  
Now she flickered like a fish in liquid autumn.  
I read her Slessor, about any country town.  
I didn't want to leap down and John-Wayne her:  
my heroes were much shrewder, anyway.  
I said, 'I only wish I'd had your picture  
up here with me for a while, in the way  
they say that a pin-up of Rommel was kept  
near his bunk by Montgomery', and understood  
at once that I'd bared open  
too much, even with her: that  
you must never tell any enemy  
who your heroes are.

But

she said, 'I admire Parer', as if  
to keep the battle fair. I said,  
'There's a family legend my grandmother  
had a milkshake with Parer', but she  
shrugged, 'Whose grandmother didn't?', span  
for a quick sprint, with the spray.

*Her:*

The Riddell line kept recurring  
to me: 'some time before he died',



and I thought: this one's worth saving,  
so I fronted up and lied:  
'If I don't pass with this project,  
I'll lose four credit points, repeat  
the whole year again - and, also,  
Anzac marchers always expect  
some cheeky slogans, providing  
a good excuse to booze. You know,  
it's what Simone Weil said about strikes:  
it gives them a communion.' At  
this point in time, we were standing  
by the statue, nose to nose  
and palm to palm, except for  
the hand behind my back, which  
held the spray. It was like  
a spontaneous ballet.

*Him:*

The sea was muttering rhythmically  
almost articulately beyond the wall  
and the outskirts of the City. I  
said, 'We could go down to the Beach.  
I mean: you could leave the paint, and we  
both leave the monument.' She  
didn't respond at once: maybe  
was considering the offer, but  
she did murmur: 'I hate  
those sea-sounds from a distance:  
it's as if your parents were  
quarrelling all night in whispers  
in the room next door.' I  
said, 'It's alright up close: like  
everything, it's easier  
when you're really there', but she  
added, 'Except pain,' and we  
still stood there, not fighting or budging.  
I asked, 'Are you a virgin?' which  
was the closest I'd come to admitting,  
but she said, 'No, I'm having  
it off with my tutor, but that's okay:  
She's not married.' I couldn't



tell if she were serious or not. I  
asked, 'Are you doing this to please her?'  
And glanced into the trees, in case  
I wasn't the audience here. But  
there was nothing in the outer dark  
but the gum trees' brittle sighing  
on one side, and on the other, sea. There  
was no sound much from the City:  
just the first trucks whining up, or  
first newspapers slapping down. She said,  
'No, I don't need to please her', which  
didn't fit with what she'd said before.

*Her:*

Behind him in the moonlight, one bronze soldier  
grimaced with exhaustion and dismay.  
They had an atmosphere of living shadow,  
an intimacy lacking in the day.  
I directed his attention to the sculpture  
and asked, 'Well, what would he say,  
if he'd his life back, and this spray?' Oh,  
he'd thought that out already. He  
laughed, 'He'd splash, "ENLISTED ON THE OTHER  
FRONT"', up there - no way he'd offer  
to die in public misery, forever.  
He'd write his epitaph and walk away. He'd  
trash the Cenotaph and walk away. But  
that would be his right, however,  
since he's a hero. I'm not one, so  
I think that I probably ought to stay.' I  
was hoping by then that I'd remember  
all of that for my essay, later. We  
now leant against the structure -  
interfacing untouching like unmatching  
data - and the sky was grey.

*Him:*

It was better on the Beach, the sand  
rough grey as an army blanket. All  
sky and sea were grey and cool.

The dawn



was grey as late April, her eyes  
against my arm, as she heard  
the long drumroll, glowed grey.  
She said, 'I think it was a compromise:  
I wouldn't have really had time  
to spray on all of the Riddell, so  
your suggestion of the Slessor line  
was fine, and as you say, it will  
be easy for them to erase, although  
I think you're wrong when you suggest  
that you're not a hero - surely they  
will drum you out of the Young  
Reserves, or whatever you belong to?'  
I said, 'No - I'll say there were twelve to two -  
I can't say Nicholas went home -  
and you held us prisoner, didn't you?  
He'll have to back up my story.' She  
grew more enthralled: 'Perhaps someone  
will put it in the paper, or TV. And I  
could write a whole thesis on it, after:  
you know, the credibility of the Press...'  
I slowed her down: 'What did you say  
in your notebook about the sex?' So  
she rolled onto her elbow, which  
was grainy red from sand (and had felt  
under my fingers as intricately whorled  
as I'd never known women's bodies were  
before: inside and at such supple sockets). Her  
notebook said, 'It was fortunate that  
the participant-observer always carried  
condoms in her jeans' back pocket: not  
that she'd ever really needed them, but  
just in case she was confronted by  
a rapist open to logic. And she'd always  
thought condoms were sexy, because  
they conveyed deliberation. What she recalled  
most about him was that his clean gaze  
glinted as quick as a crow's wing, flicking  
off water. His limbs had the angular  
racehorse contours of a soldier



in a stylised statue, and  
inside her, he drummed out music but  
as sharp as drink on thirst. She felt,  
red paint dry on her fingers  
as they couched under his neck.' I  
Said, 'Of course, that's only what you  
wrote for me to read', but I was  
unexpectedly unashamed and flattered.

Also I was grateful for  
the paint smears from her hand, as they  
tended to confirm that I'd resisted. When  
she gave me the thick notebook, persisted  
as if no observation dies, I  
wrote down impetuously for her:  
*'He felt dry paint on her fingers  
as they read around his eyes, and then  
he wondered on what front he had enlisted.'*



## The Guggenheim's Vacation

(*Masterpieces from the Guggenheim* on display in Sydney in 1991 while the New York Gallery was closed)

Maybe  
in the U.S. they finally wonder  
what it's *doing*, like a wife  
on a separate holiday. And I,  
refusing to view America  
as a spectator sport like  
most Australians, said  
with strained naivety: 'The  
best response to art's still  
art.' And that was the week  
George Bush also visited  
Sydney, but with what  
seemed like more security: an entire  
hotel full of entourage and agents.  
The Guggenheim had little red lights  
fixed above each art work, and  
some *Noli me tangere* signs, which  
my daughter, for once, respected. I  
was the one whose hungry fingers stopped  
only a fraction short each time:  
esp. at the Arp sculpture (that was like  
a soft icecream with buttocks, made  
of stone with glitter in it, nearly  
levitating, like a flying buttress,  
built  
on one wild trust in God). Maybe  
the idea of the hotel rooms  
lingered too long but each art work  
reminded me of one (of a hotel room, I  
mean, but yes: of an art work,  
too, because they never seemed -  
however ruby a Chagall, or goose-  
necked and Orphan-Annie-eyed  
a Modigliani - to be  
the *originals*...  
I always thought:  
the template is elsewhere



still. Maybe it was). I stood  
in a roomful of brilliant hotel rooms  
as empty as George Bush, and thought:  
am I the ball or the referee? with  
the integrity of Juan Gris. My kid  
saw the marmalade Modigliani: she  
said 'Nipples', with enthusiasm. I  
said: 'Yes, what a beautiful nude.' Someone  
with his ears in a walkman - telling him  
about all this art - overheard us, glared. I  
pointed my little finger past him, said  
'And you've seen your first Picasso.' She  
may remember all Picassos like dawn cats:  
sperm-grey, sperm-thin, or squat as fruit  
and that all Giacometti busts  
have noses like macho erections, but  
I noticed that female spectators'  
eyes were less respectful, more involved  
than those of the men. This, I  
said to myself, is a roomful of Holiday Inns  
for once designed for women, bought  
and sold by women, collected  
in the way women collect, who love,  
and love  
sameness and skin and nightmares and big bits  
of brightness as pure and sudden  
as a come. But then I thought of sculptures  
stroked possessively, by rich refugee  
women whose eyes are sometimes  
bright black fear-stars: that these  
are the paintings bought by pogroms,  
and travel  
autistic and naked together like Kirchner's  
soldiers in the shower, that to  
rephrase Dylan Thomas ('after  
the first death there is no other'),  
after  
the first world war there was  
no other, and this  
is all there ever was again: the



consummate confidence of never  
fearing any audience but mother.

George Bush

(you don't easily call him 'Bush', as if  
all politics needs metre) left before  
the Guggenheim did. It lingered, and  
in the end exploded - in quiet queues  
a hundred deep, while a truck,  
painted 'NEW WHEAT ORDERS NOT  
NEW WORLD ORDER', trundled  
away down a freeway, like thunder.

My daughter

refound her Modigliani wife: at last  
at home in a book from my past. But of course  
she loves hotels: almost has  
a refugee's taste for the high life.



## 'Look, I'm standing on no-floor'

said Margaret Cunningham's four-year-old daughter Tessa, her fingers clenched whitely on the table-edge, her feet luxuriously in air. Margaret is still Director of STARTTS the N.S.W. Service for Torture and Trauma Rehab., and I am still their sort of Writer-on-Call. Together we wrote a chapter about a child called Layla who comes from no-country in particular, a fact which has already - together with the letterhead Torture and Trauma - put off at least one publisher. Layla has witnessed torture and many other forms of not-belonging. Margaret and I often have also stood on no-floor, child or woman.

After Tessa said that, I joked about the shoes I'd worn the day before: open high-heels very black and very tall, and very precarious: 'I was standing on no-floor a lot yesterday', but it was worth it because I only paid nine dollars for the sandals and felt as sexy as something airy from another world.

But the torture: Margaret joked about a phone call to the T.&T. unit from the cloistered A.B.C., asking to interview clients who'd really enjoyed their torture, were into S-M. I observed this was a travesty of my theory that people after trauma need a hierarchy but both idealize and demonize it, and that recognition of S-M in their sexuality might clarify the process for them:

hell,  
when you're standing on no-floor, you skate or fall or just stay-put, appreciate the elevation. We also spoke of Arthur





## The Case of the Dalmatian Diamond

It's been a black and white week.  
I bought a 1.03 carat diamond, craving to wear that much purity on my hand, but affordable one carats have inclusions and so does this one, under the glass: a tiny black planet with moons. So I joked about 'Spotty the Diamond', at last trying out Sherlock Holmes titles: *A Diamond in Dalmatia*, or at best *The Dalmatian Diamond*, since my child is into Disney Dalmatians and bought one at the Show, spread out on its belly, like Miss O'Murphy, that cheerful Boucher courtesan. It is also the anniversary of U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam and my satellite receiver has an extra transponder for Ho Chi Minh City. While I work, my peripheral vision picks it up. On the rooftop of the former U.S. Embassy, Robert Wiener, the CNN Producer, and Peter Arnett clown between standups. CNN proper recalls Arnett's Pulitzer for reporting the U.S. disaster in Vietnam. In daylight, that roof is clear as a dawn diamond, but at night has tricky shadow. Off camera, Wiener worries, 'It looks like a night-shot in the middle of Baghdad during the War. I really think this fucking roof only works in daytime.' Later, on CNN proper, the present Administrator of Kent State University says that students at Kent State 'learned their lesson' from being shot dead during Vietnam, and when the Gulf War happened didn't protest so extremely as they once did. No, indeed. On a discussion program, Arnett mentions that the final Gulf War footage was censored utterly by the Media, not



because it was grisly or saturating but for political reasons. He doesn't go into what or why. Spinning the dial between transponders, I find the Bob Dylan *Unplugged* concert. He sings in Japanese PAL colour, his diction improved vastly since the Sixties and his emphasis better, I think. He concludes with 'If God's on *our* side, he will stop the next war', and I like the new italics. I feel a relief of communion with my husband, also accidentally enthralled by this better-than-nostalgia. I'm grateful to myself that, at seventeen, I went on record in *The Australian* to contradict Knopfmacher and Evan Jones. I argued that George Orwell was a socialist and would have thought Vietnam was wrong. My husband describes his march in the Moratorium. Back on the Ho Chi Minh transponder, Arnett's in the night street like Hester in *The Scarlet Letter*. For an hour before crowds, he stands, alternately jocular, nervous or angered at 'amateurish crap' in on-air linkage. Behind him somewhere a Viet rock gig celebrates war's end more than winning it, the dense bright chiaroscuro street, the faces. As a child escaping home, I kept a commonplace book called *The Terms* in which I quoted Kelen the artist: that the smiling face has such beauty, why would anyone want to stop that? Another quote, which once helped me with the death of my father, was Huxley's on re-marriage: 'the best monument to tenderness is tenderness.' The poem I wrote last week is about the need for explorative words in grief, but a friend hearing it insists gently that on her mother's death no words could help.



But that is words, of course, although I don't  
argue too much: disloyalty to  
the dead is a delicate matter, and  
my poem began with empty beds  
in another room (that time they were  
of Oklahoma children). Chiaroscuro  
has always seemed to me to be  
an existential pattern. On a transponder,  
a U.S. marine recounts how an old man  
offered him a bag of uncut diamonds  
if he'd airlift his family away, but he  
had to return it, refuse. Flicked through  
PAL and NTSC, the transponders turn  
black and white at last. Early  
in my work I wrote a 'cow poem' on  
Friesians in which their hide became  
a simile for life and death. My daughter and I  
joke about 'black and white cutes', and  
she won a panda on the Show Clowns, wrote  
'I felt as if I had won a diamond.' She brought  
home a toy Friesian from the Milk  
Exhibit. My new diamond has a milky  
glitter, reminds me of Wallace Stevens: 'when  
the thinking of God is smoky dew.' For  
my daughter's ninth birthday, I suggest  
a rock 'n' roll party. Would Dylan sound new?  
The diamond is set in tight, old-fashioned  
claws, is as clear and concentric as  
a Georgia O'Keeffe lily. The U.S. transponders  
are full of Robert McNamara  
humbly answering critics, some  
of whom lost families, bits  
of bodies and brains, about why  
he knows now the Domino Theory  
was wrong. I think: how black and white  
and subliminal a domino is, that my hair  
glints black and white now. On a transponder  
behind Arnett at my eye's corner, night  
burns like a diamond in Saigon.



## The Case of the Pharaoh's Penis

My amber-eyed cousin walks on the beach  
at Norah Head with me. My own eyes  
have tiger-spirals in their brown. She talks  
about taking her working-class school class  
to the Museum, that all the kids discussed  
was how the mummy's hands were crossed  
over his penis. I thought the conversation odd  
because the night before I had  
been reading how King Tut's cadaver  
these days is sans the penis anyway.  
God knows who has it. He was buried, of course,  
without a sternum, chest full of amber resin,  
perhaps the result of a chariot fall.  
But in the famous photograph, he lies  
re-assembled after autopsy, by Carter  
who had actually left him out in the sun  
for a couple of days to try to melt off all  
the resin, which had stuck him to his coffin.  
Apparently, his incinerated aspect  
is due to this, not the aging process.  
When first revealed, he would have looked  
quite nice: much more like his mummy-case  
in which the pallid gold was carefully hued  
to hint at death's virile calmness.  
But even after barbecue by Carter,  
the Pharaoh's penis was quite clearly there:  
not large or thick but firm and friendly-looking.  
When he was last disinterred, however,  
it was gone. I think Dot Porter  
might combine her three best subjects: murder  
stories in verse, sharp sex and ancient Egypt  
to explicate the mystery someday. In Akhenaten,  
her characters are true to Ancient Egypt  
in that they are like shrewd familiar children  
as sensual as cats with no abstraction,  
or pity for their prey. Dot said  
my *A.B.R.* Akhenaten essay  
is the one the universities prefer! On the phone,  
discussing amber trees, Chris Farmer the painter



used the phrase 'the luxury of the process',  
and I pounced on it, 'Yes!'. The cat-caught concept  
reminded me of all the great embalming  
(which sand did for the peasants, and much  
faster), that my daughter sings of in her Egypt project  
'Fair go, Pharaoh', making gold  
life-masks and pyramids, 'It's not funny,  
tell King Tut I want my Mummy...' The lapis  
lazuli luxury is in the process  
itself, the outline of the eyes  
on his wide, smooth-lipped sarcophagus.  
A penis is always first person.  
Dot Porter wrote Akhenaten  
in his own person, and earlier my three  
novels about men were by them, causing  
much publisher distaste (and still does).  
The penis of Tutankhamun  
took away my residual horror  
at comic curses and necrophilia. My cousin  
discusses the Maiden Family Reunion  
that night over glasses of red, confirms  
my knowledge of our Indian blood. Perhaps  
embellished a little, my ancestor,  
a Hindu princess, eloped with a British  
civil servant and both were undone,  
disinherited by their kin. Well done,  
I thought, and drank to them. The Maidens  
always drank red. My grandfather  
was an amber-skinned old man, a thin  
headmaster with a hawk-nosed, deep-eyed face,  
devoted to the Gould League, ornithology.  
In his eighties, before dying, he first found  
*The Arabian Nights*, asked my father  
'Have you *read* this, Alf?' in wonder,  
as if fucking were the finest finch of all.  
Scheherazade, I think and imagine his wiry finger  
caressing down the page, his eyes  
hardly daring to flicker, as if something  
precious on a farther branch might fly.  
Apart from her burgeoning necklace



of Egyptian charms, my daughter's new ring  
is blonde amber in silver, and full  
of graceful embalmed insects, wings.  
If you look in my eyes, they are such chiaroscuro.  
The Indian amber is there, the stealthy princess  
in her inky cloak slips through her golden window. First  
person is always vagina, clitoris. Some  
woman friend of a quick Cairo curator  
still has King Tut's penis in her wallet,  
with a residue of amber,  
shrugs, 'Maybe he'd have liked that'.  
And she knows  
it brings her luck if carried on her heart.







young ex-S.A.S. man, this boy  
who minds your fruit juice in the bar  
while you take a piss, the mirror  
confirming you are not drunk, the few  
you had you were careful not to  
mix with pills, you who  
are always so professional. The lovely  
Ex-S.A.S. boy is with his friend, another  
Ex-S.A.S. boy and they tell you  
some silly English plot concocted  
to fool the press and spirit the princess  
away from the back door. You'd sneer  
at the English thirst for conspiracy, but there  
is so much innocence in their  
excitement and it might make a story  
to cheer up your parents in Brittany,  
so: okay. And such a beautiful woman  
should be extravagantly protected,  
anyway. One boy leaves to drive the decoy car,  
you and the other are at the back door.  
She stands with your employer's gentle son,  
is tall—tilted as a lily, waiting gently  
like any English schoolgirl in a queue,  
who has said she often suffers *deja vu*,  
profoundly, you can see her  
becoming accustomed in landmines, a cannon  
loose or tied, and still afraid of horses.  
Somehow, you think of black, close-stepping ones.  
*Deja vu* may be contagious. In the car,  
as his seatbelt clicks, you feel very  
high and very slow, and you wonder  
why there are so few cars  
on the road before  
the Alma bridge, why the boy beside you  
insists you move, when as usual the press  
are far behind you fast. You are shocked  
that he sees a Fiat before you do,  
stretches out. And the horn. So it returns -  
that taste of citrus juice so sour,  
in the taste of blood so sweet.



## The Butler

*Australian diplomat at the time of Operation Desert Fox, December 1998*

They don't understand that you grew up near the sea,  
that blue indifferent organ, factory  
washing up death constantly. The radio  
you heard at school warned regularly  
against diphtheria, polio. Child actors  
with 1950s voices died slowly in great  
pain and medical detail. Now you fear  
AIDS and campaign against it, now  
you fear mass destruction: germs  
and the doubt-germs in your heart.

At last

now you have a police escort, but  
you still fold your arms and glare, as if  
that made father safe from mother.  
They scold like a woman: the Russians,  
the Chinese, only mothers are so concerned  
about 'honour'. You know in your soul that germs  
have no honour and that comfort  
for the body is not just sweet but safe.  
When the U.S. welcomed you it was not  
about bribery but safety: you deeply understood  
their long cold need to be safe: the years  
and years of it when the sea threw up  
face after face in the white dark  
- enemy after enemy -  
the long paralysis of night when you drowse  
on a plane in a New York trenchcoat, which slicks  
like a boy's sick snot under your thumbs,  
as the lights  
of Baghdad infect your window. You reject  
the natural rhythms of peace, as you did at Bondi,  
because  
they are also the rhythms of death, not clean  
enough: the invisible germs which if you cease  
counting your heart will stop in service, lost  
in strange sea-sounds from planes and crowds and bodies



## **Missing Elvis: 1:**

### *Missing Elvis and two naked Women at the Luddenham Show*

Last year, the Luddenham Show had Elvis and two dancing girls in G-strings. This year, it's two blokes with beards who sing like social workers. No Elvis. The crowd watch patiently, applaud, join in: perhaps still miss 'Suspicious Minds', but there are compensations: real cream on strawberries and pavlova at a new stall, no thunderstorm to spoil the fireworks. The fireworks, as usual, are fine. No bridge weeps brilliant Niagaras to the tunes of recent pop nostalgia, just something like a sudden flowerbed, no music but thrilled children and adults who need to explain it all aloud, as if to seem responsible for universal processes of combustion, as if responsibility is celebration. Elvis had glitz and rhythm, was suited to the fireworks. The Texan columnist Molly Ivins graded politicians on an Elvis Scale. What, I wondered, would George W Bush rate on it? - as I shook the grit of the showground from my sandals. George of the Lethal Injection. There is something Elvis-like in winsome, dyslectic mumbles, but his vocal tone is better than his father's: not so prim, so childlike and super-ego ridden. W's nose is sharper, looks more deadly than Senior's, like a beak built to tear not peck, his mouth a drier, twitchier line. Baghdad



is already bombed again. The fireworks  
always seem louder since the Gulf  
War. 'What must it have been  
like?' maybe in adult brains still. One  
wouldn't rate Bush junior high in Elvis  
terms. Perhaps John Lennon  
was right when he said Elvis died  
early when he joined the Army, but  
a divine etiquette does make  
any Elvis Elvis, any anxious woman  
dancing beside him some protected  
firework of unexpected grace.



**Missing Elvis: 2:**  
*All-Ways Winds, Christmas, 2001*

Small all-ways winds  
in the treetops  
bad sign bad sign again  
the fires  
two dark red caterpillars  
in a small shrugging motion  
crawl slowly to each  
other on the mountain, there  
the night too black for smoke,  
here  
at the street's end, the smoke  
too black for night. Small  
sudden all-ways winds in trees chant  
in waves like a fire, an ocean.  
On his way to deep water  
'Elvis' the sky-crane helicopter,  
looking like a monster  
from *Aliens*, flies over  
drops spit-spots on the veranda,  
hovers to talk, as I look up,  
shield my eyes from the molten sunset.  
'I've been wanting to ask you,' I say,  
'whether John Lennon was right  
and you'd already died  
when you entered the army?' The  
sky-crane says, 'I died in gold pajamas  
up against my bathroom door.  
The night before, I was singing  
"Through the ages I'll remember  
blue eyes crying in the rain".' I ask,  
'Will rain come now?' and Elvis  
grins, 'Yeah, and it's always more  
than you think it'll be, you know, the rain.'  
I nod: yes, I know about the rain.  
I say, 'I wrote a poem this year, that  
any Elvis is Elvis, but didn't expect  
this, although I should have. Anyway, what



have you remembered through the ages, why did you seem to change so much, to lose humour after they conscripted you? Was it the Colonel, or something else, some fear or satire within you?' Elvis thinks, hums 'Blue eyes...love is like a dying ember...' then considers: 'You know, some of it was just the diction thing. I got sick of people asking what I'd sung. The dope they give you in the army makes you want to be clear, too...' 'But not like Li'l Abner!' Elvis asks, 'But didn't the Twin Towers feel at first like Li'l Abner, or George W, in your mind and, baby, don't we all have some damn mountain - heart-warm drug and drug of horror - makes us simple as a soldier for a time? So, okay, I died in mine.' To my right, at Luddenham, Warragamba the fire's own cumulus clouds are red at their heart again.

Again, the king considers, 'And, anyway, I consented to earn millions, be all wanted, just like now.' The Caravaggio fat boy all light and shadow gulping grapes as he once was, slims to a skeleton in steel in the all-ways winds. He cries, 'But to save the wild life, you gotta live it - love you, honey!', flies off like a million US dollars, can remember something through the ages, if just the fire's clarity and then a free confusion of blue mountains, rain.



## **George Jeffreys: Introduction**

### ***George & Clare Do New York***

*There had been odd intimations all day. About 8p.m., Sydneytime on September 11, I was chatting to my friend Chris Farmer on the phone. After describing some strange encounters and vibes over the past twelve hours, we decided they word for that day was 'weird'. As we finished talking, he suddenly added, And the weird hasn't stopped yet.'*

*He was right. Thinking to sane up and relax, my daughter and I decided on impulse about 11 p.m. to watch a Happy Family Reunion (Taylor is finally unchained from the mantelpiece) we'd taped on The Bold and the Beautiful. We'd not watched much frothy TV for ages. The first channel was Channel 2. What seemed to be an old tall building was being demolished in morning light in an untidy grey cloud of concrete. A sight many find inexplicably fascinating, as I remarked to Katharine, which was why I supposed it was on the news. At the same time, she glanced vaguely at the screen and said, 'It looks like a beautiful sunrise...no, wait, it's a smog factory...' We switched up through the channels to the shopping and the weather: on the way up, the dull demolition footage was on CNN as well, and I said, 'There's that building again,' more puzzled. This time, it had 'LIVE' on it and was being treated as Breaking News. One realised that the two planes had hit the Trade Centre. The second tower still stood. Soon, it fell.*

*For hours, the pressure of events (in my old Problem of Evilphrase, 'the drug of immediacy') anaesthetised the human context with adrenalin. A plane crashed, part of the Pentagon burned. One waited for the next pyrotechnic. But then before dawn the trochaic falling effect of the unexpurgated commentary contained names and descriptions such as that of a lady in a black suit who was now 'encrusting the pavement'.*

*By 1a.m., my daughter had been on the internet checking the welfare of her young New York instant messenger friends, to be reassured over the next few hours that they were still okay. Then she became horrified at all the visuals of falling people. She finally managed to sleep after the sun rose.*

*The part of my brain that provides new things was often inaccessible about September 11. Then driving along the Monaro and watching the tumbling circus of clouds one day, I thought:*



*what are George and Clare thinking? George and Clare are characters from my second novel, Play With Knives and my later notoriously unpublished novel Complicity, or The Blood Judge. George Jeffreys is a Probation Officer turned Human Rights investigator; also a true descendant of his namesake, the Hanging Judge at the Monmouth Assizes. Clare is his former Probation client and sometime lover (George has acute ethical awareness but relative ethics) who as a nine-year-old child murdered her three younger siblings. The two could clearly do New York and in the process, with the freedom of fiction, the horror-inhibited portions of my mind might speak. This also made sense since the almost universal response to September 11 was that it seemed like fiction. To enter and use that response rather than resist it might have a particular value...but I needed incentive.*

*At a Varuna launching, Ian Syson discussed a possible September 11 Overland with me. Later, I remembered George and Clare and sent him a note. He responded with a request for both George and Clare and my own voice to context them. I have always agreed with Freud that the imagination is bisexual. It seems to me that you achieve a clearer view when you let the two sides talk to each other. Hence George and Clare:*

New York didn't look like Beirut, just itself under siege. But such violent sieges and occupations always bring out the essence of a city. Freeze it into disparate shadows and encounters in which you can say: yes, I knew that's what it was all the time.

Clare wasn't lost in it for long - but then she wasn't lost at all, only to me, as always. I walked as casually as I could through streets in which crowds were still herding like uneasy cattle. They were a little too close together, a bit too polite and anxious to please. Clare had been closer to the Towers than I. I'd been at a UN Human Rights meeting. No one in Security there had reacted instantly, as far as I'd seen. The barricades were just going up as I left.

From the UN, I tried to remember the way to Liberty Plaza, where Clare had been going to a Medical Rights for Women Workers meeting. And where the smoke was, but still high up, so you couldn't see what caused it. I sprinted south on 1st Avenue to 23rd Street. The buses were still running and I caught the Hudson bus.

Walking south, one realised eventually that one was breathing concrete talcum and that the light, whilst there, had a feathery,



tuft-like, uneven quality. Had there been noise? Afterwards, there were rumblings and crashings on the news, but I don't remember noise. Maybe noise did not exist in this special, grim dimension. The dimension was becoming grimmer as I walked. People were gathering, covered in dust and ash, their grey out-lines reminding me of Pompeii, or something Eugene McCarthy had said, staring down from his hotel room at the Chicago Riots, that it was 'like a ballet of purgatory'. It was like a great ballet, too, in that all movements seemed to exist for themselves, like those of animals, with no analogous meaning.

If Clare's prematurely white hair and skin were a biological attempt at anonymity, she had achieved it now. As she walked towards me, I only recognised her, by those strange, dark blue, Coppelia eyes of hers. Even her eyelashes were clogged and ashen. She said nothing: not 'I'm alright', not anything, and neither did I, but a cop was urging, 'Run north. Get out of here as quickly as possible. Run north...!', so we gathered up a limping librarian and ran north until there was no more falling debris. We left him at a café in front of CNN. We walked slowly and for a very long time to the apartment we were renting in Greenwich Village, on 13th Street between 5th and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue. It was high up and from the corner of a window we could see at times the new ruins burning in their fumid gap.

In bed, she said...it seems like a set-piece phrase, but it was in bed that Clare, who had become quite extremist lately, did say, 'They still won't understand, of course, why this has happened.'

Many years ago, when I was a probation officer, and she a stimulus-response conditioned adolescent in prison, she had developed a habit of asking and analysing what 'they' wanted, and I had accepted her terminology. Now 'they' seemed to have expanded to all the larger forces at work in the world. As sometimes, I realised, 'they' had for me, too. Depersonalisation always invades you long before you can name it.

I said, 'But anyone who analyses why things like this happen is accused of blaming the victim. I've never heard you blame a victim before.' Indeed she had never blamed her own victims. She argued, 'No one ever really blames the victim. It's not about blame, it's just about tasting blood. Both revenge and blaming the victim are about having tasted the blood. And anyway you could just as easily say all those poor people down there were victims of the



American Government. What power did they really have over it, and were they ever really warned about what sort of direct revenge its targets were capable of?'

I considered, 'George Orwell used to argue that things like the London Blitz were good because the public realised that they weren't immune to what happened to soldiers and would be less jingoistic about unnecessary warfare.'

'But it won't sink in. And their logic always comes unstuck on the suicide bombing thing: they can only see the perpetrator in terms of a bad person and they can't see a bad person as being brave. And even more, they have to be able to punish a bad person: being bad is about retribution, about punishment and the death penalty. You have to be able to punish the bad person, otherwise nothing makes sense to them. It's vital to their sanity, their sense of the logic of time.'

I asked, 'So if the bad person is dead, they have to find another one to punish?'

She asked, 'Who?'

I thought about it, 'The only vulnerable Big Bad with a big enough PR machine at the moment is Bin Laden, so I guess it's him.' I sighed, 'Darling, they're about to invade Afghanistan.' But she said, 'I don't object to that. I don't like the Taliban.' She'd become an extreme feminist, too. Something, perhaps, about our time with the Bedouin...

I said, 'If it stops there. But they need to see an execution, and war isn't about that: it's about war and it always disappoints you.' Downstairs, in an unbearable synthetic stench, the ballet of purgatory continued in slow motion. Slow, reverential, archaeological digging. Slow gaping machines. Slow crowds in slow grief. Everyone in stylised formation. And insidious around the site lights, the other light like that of a bushfire, rosily oozing its own round clouds. There were similar images on the TV, plus close-ups of victims, rescuers and rubble. I knew that soon it would be hard for my memory to distinguish the real and the electronic view. I had blocked successfully on the anguish. I found I had to re-outline it bit by bit in my head by superimposing Clare's delicate, fragile face and body carefully on that of the victims. Then the anguish hit like a passenger jet. I blocked, blocked, blocked again.



*Leaving George to re-block, I wondered as we all do: How dumb is W?*

*Earlier, I had suggested to a liberal Jewish New York friend (who had been advising me on the city's urban geography) that of course Bush might not actually be that stupid, just pretending to be so in order to appeal to his domestic voters. She had agreed, whilst still obviously favouring the former explanation. I wondered what George would think of W:*

New York blacked-out, as it was to our north, had the unnatural, secret air of a violently unconscious human being. Sliding her silken face onto my pillow and whispering in some mockery of girlish excitement, Clare said, 'Tell me how George Bush thinks.' We'd just seen his 'smoking holes' speech on TV. I knew I had perceived something extra about him, hoping no one would really ask me what.

'Well,' I said, recognising in my voice a judicial authority which could only be genetic, since I didn't have the slightest sense of personal confidence about it, 'he's not a dry drunk like most Australian Prime Ministers, even though his history might suggest that. He's not dyslexic either. Although he pretends to be since it's really his only pitch to liberal sympathies. He's obsessed with the need for punishment and revenge because he doesn't really feel that need. This means he has killed often for no passionate reason. He does have a compulsive-obsessive need to finish things, like the Gulf War, or to win an election. Killing in revenge is a form of that, but like any other compulsion-obsession it feels completely inauthentic to the person who suffers it. Hence the twitch - it's partly just the twitch of a bird of prey's beak, of course - the thing about being bred to power - but it's also guilt. You can see the guilt in his eyes and hear it in his voice. In those fraternal, ingratiating rhythms, and the small, flat breaths between the lines...'

She interrupted dejectedly, perhaps with auto-biography, 'Guilt isn't good in a violent situation. You keep on repeating the thing you're guilty about. It's as if that will make it real enough to solve something...'

'...Yes, and of course the guilt is also for doing what he's told. To get elected, not knowing all the implications, whether or not he's all that bright. And guilt for knowing, having known that things like September 11 would happen and that no amount of his sort of



power - no amount of lethal injections - will ever have any effect on that.'

'So you think there's another sort of power he could exercise that would affect that? I mean I suppose you're thinking of Adlai Stevenson again...' (She always liked my old quote from Stevenson that 'powerlessness corrupts and absolute powerlessness corrupts absolutely'.)

I agreed, 'Well, yeah, but he's been cossetted beyond any spontaneity. He has the intelligence to know he's programmed but not the intelligence to escape.'

She decided dismissively, 'That would fit with him not being able to give or receive mercy. Spontaneity is necessary to mercy, I think.' She looked into my eyes in the phantom light from the window and the TV screen. I realised she hadn't looked into my eyes like that for years. I would have liked to have said there was new depth and subtlety, more humanity in her gaze. But of course it was still two brilliant deflecting topaz cabochons I saw. The eternal eyes of a Doer of Good Deeds, one way or another. I rolled her over onto my chest, tasted the mercy, the mercury of her silver hair, and whispered, 'And when you have been programmed by your punishment, you have no spontaneity and are not merciful.'

*George seemed to me to be prepared for Afghanistan.*

**George Jeffreys: 1:**

*George Jeffreys Woke Up in Kabul*

George Jeffreys woke up in Kabul.

George Bush Junior was on the TV, obsessed as usual with Baghdad.

George Jeffreys hummed an old border ballad which haunted him

often now: 'What's that that hircles at my side?

The foe that you must fight, my Lord.

That rides as fast as I might ride?

The shadow of your might, my Lord.'

Was George Bush Junior mad?

A plausible US spokesman for one of those countless right-wing thinktanks



argued on the BBC that W  
only pretended to be mad, 'like Nixon',  
to intimidate his foes. But  
Nixon, thought Jeffreys, was mad,  
surely? Is that the price perhaps  
for pretending too long? Certainly  
on the TV now, W  
had the quality of an animal  
pretending - as you can see animals  
pretend when maintaining  
uneasy pack position, and he had  
an animal's absence of self-parody,  
one lack  
which Jeffreys (who had seen  
Ronald Reagan) thought Reagan had not.

As with Alzheimer's itself,  
there was some self-parody in Reagan.  
None in Nixon. None in either Bush.

George Jeffreys looked out  
at a paved alhambra of pain,  
at the latticed dust of Kabul, which  
looked back and pretended to be sane.

---

**George Jeffreys: 2:**  
***George Jeffreys Woke Up in Kandahar***

George Jeffreys woke up in Kandahar.

George Bush Junior was on the TV, obsessed  
as usual with Baghdad. Condoleezza  
Rice was 'revealing' that Al Qaeda  
suspects under interrogation said  
Iraq had trained Al Qaeda men  
in chemical warfare, did not  
add that this was before  
they left to join Al Qaeda,  
or that  
the confessions came from torture.  
The attractive Condoleezza  
Rice was articulate and calm,



and insistent with that strange insistence  
of a child rapid with its own agenda.

Here, when  
they protected Karzai, his American  
bodyguards killed two men who had  
just disarmed his attacker. Kandahar  
oozed an inexactitude of murder,  
war. Behind the cracked glass,  
Kandahar had its own agenda, arid  
and unconscious as a mountain, opium,  
rapid-sweet as regrown poppies.  
Pop. Puff.      Jeffreys  
recognised its gunpowder snore.

---

### **George Jeffreys: 6:**

#### ***George Jeffreys Woke Up in Baghdad***

*(This poem was written before the exposure of Abu Ghraib, so  
George must have been particularly aware of his setting)*

George Jeffreys woke up in Baghdad.  
George Bush junior was on the TV, obsessed  
as usual with Baghdad. The TV  
cut out quickly because electricity  
was still hardly ever there, like  
Bush, thought Jeffreys, who remembered  
seeing the Bush Ranch in Texas, so vast  
and isolate a soul could vanish like  
dust on its horizon, so miragefully  
empty. Clare demanded, 'Why  
didn't you let him die?', about  
George's story that he'd used the Heimlich  
once when W choked on a pretzel  
again.                      Jeffreys  
shrugged, simplifying: 'The alternative  
was Cheney.' Her absent-minded grip  
on his tensing bicep relaxed.



Even

more than rancid water, the street  
that day in Baghdad reeked of glue, 'like  
a cul-de-sac in Mt Druitt,' sniffed  
Clare who came from there. Kids  
drunk on glue reeled about them.

'What else is human  
in a jobless occupied city?' asked Clare,  
who gave a boy a US dollar and breathed  
in some fumes from a funnel, but George  
passed on it: 'I'm not that homesick.'  
Clare said suddenly, 'Nor me, but I see  
myself as a soldier.'

The eyes

of a soldier from Indiana in a humvee  
grew wide as Bush Junior's were tiny,  
watching Clare. As a Human Rights  
Observer, Jeffreys had visited the Airport  
- now a prison called Camp Cropper -  
seen people held without water  
for a night, no fresh clothes  
or a wash now for a week,  
seen the US leg-irons an Iraqi judge - for those  
who were relievedly back in Iraqi  
processes - had ordered removed. George was  
supposed today to visit the Abu  
Ghraib prison - but was denied access. He  
could have protested but enough, he thought,  
at present is enough, he should  
brace himself, had heard current  
accounts of real torture there. He strolled  
through the streets instead for a long time,  
not fearing attack because an American  
would not stroll there and indeed never  
could again relax here ever. Walking here,  
George answered often the eye-contact-first  
smile that signals despair. At last  
at the bombed rubble of a restaurant  
where Saddam was supposed to dine,  
George looked down at the burnt debris not



at all guarded or ever really scoured for DNA. Those neighbours who died instead were long buried. The heat was in centigrade forties as usual, his shirt was wetter even than that. Another man watched the ashes with him silently, a man with inky moustache and eyebrows, straight build and grandfatherly eyes. 'Are you Saddam?' asked George. The man said, 'No, and anyway I did not eat here. Unfortunately, they made good takeaway chicken, though.' The voice did have a staccato hardness. On the Mohr scale, Saddam's voice was definitely diamond not semi-precious stone, George thought. He couldn't help grinning with mischief, remarked, 'There's a 25 million reward.' The man sighed, 'Do you want that, Mr Jeffreys?' George said, 'No, but George Bush Junior has the soul of a bounty hunter. I've met him - there's more danger there than a sane man might suppose. You just destroyed your country, you know, but he is destroying his whole empire, bit by bit like Lego for a suitcase...' The man didn't seem to hear the last part at first, but said, 'George, America always only supported me because they knew one day I'd be smooth to overthrow. What they didn't know was that I'd keep them from the oil and that now the oil will cost them everything,' he smiled to himself, no eye contact, then he added: 'the billions of dollars reward.'

George replied, 'I've seen hundreds of bodies you killed when the prisons got overcrowded.' The man said, 'Just like Mr Bush, I had an answer for overcrowded prisons. Have you counted the new graves from this war, the thousands? But you're right, we rulers do



become too obsessed with neatness, space.  
Bush always had too much room and I  
could never have enough after my village.'

Jeffreys

must have looked too inadvertently  
empathetic, because the man inquired:  
'Mr Jeffreys, are you gay?' - in  
a whimsical, tolerant, western way.  
George considered, 'No, but at my age  
when you want something you play  
men like women sometimes,' and the man  
nodded at some memory of his own.

Jeffreys

said, 'When you gassed the Kurds I would  
have liked the US to overthrow you...'

Despite swollen  
recollection, it was like confessing,  
as one does to any person.  
'Recall not overthrow me, George, in those  
days it would have been replace, but some  
of them liked me gassing the Kurds, they said  
that Arabs only respect massacre. Perhaps  
they really knew that Kurds weren't Arabs,  
though. I'm not sure about the Iranians -  
they've called them "Arabs" often and  
they've always hated Iran.' George agreed,  
'One's never quite sure what their basic  
knowledge is. Anyway, I didn't approve  
of this war, so many dead civilians  
...and soldiers are civilians,  
too, of course, the hundred thou of them,  
perhaps...but tell me, was it just pride, as  
my friend Blix suggests, that stopped you  
showing evidence of WMD destroyed?'

The man

said, 'You know, the Russians killed  
nearly thirty thousand when they  
retook Grozny, after Lebed had  
almost fixed things up. Do you think also  
they killed him in that plane crash?' His curiosity



had grim casualness, as if the man discerned  
a fixation between Jeffreys and all facts.

'About

as much chance as the Diana crash not  
being an accident, I think,'  
said Jeffreys, 'a long time ago  
they could have killed you like that, too, but  
the WMD?'

'Yes, of course, we should never  
underestimate pride as a factor, should  
we, George? And also we needed a reason  
not to be attacked across our borders...'

The man

was leaving. For some reason,  
he scooped up a fist of the ashes and  
pocketed them in kleenex, said, 'The neighbours  
here were decent people. One  
should remember them, Mr Jeffreys. You're  
right, as you said, that soldiers  
are civilians like these, too, but still,  
you know,' the old man decided, just like  
her, 'I see myself as a soldier...' Jeffreys  
didn't answer, just stared there  
at the dead rubble pensively until  
the echoing space was bare. Then he sauntered  
softly back through night lost streets to Clare.



## Intimate Geography (*'Operation Iraqi Freedom'*)

It felt odd from the start, this war.  
At the start, the 'death' of Saddam  
when Baghdad was bombed, but  
    he's not dead, a bizarre  
        Zapata,  
and then the Scuds fired at Kuwait  
    but they weren't Scuds,  
the 'chemical weapons of mass destruction  
factory', with earth banks and barbed wire  
    which wasn't one, however,  
and the column of tanks destroyed leaving Basra  
    which was three tanks,  
the endless 'securing' of towns and cities  
    which aren't secure  
even allowing for the distinction  
that 'secure' does not mean 'safe',  
the 'Uprising' in Basra  
which no one could find there...

Once

there were poems in inverted commas, this  
is a war of inverted commas. Once  
I wrote that 'poems about poems  
don't seem as abstract as they once did'  
(although you don't need quotes, quoting  
yourself) and the *Oxford Companion* decided  
this meant I was no longer being abstract, when  
in fact I meant that poems about poems  
(in that case partly a child)  
are not abstract because the abstract  
in them works through to a deeper real. Will  
this war work through to the deeper real  
at last? Now it seems again, however,  
that it feels odd, this war. I have paid it  
careful attention for almost a fortnight and what  
I would note here is that singular oddness  
of feeling it evokes: one is always  
at a tangent to it somehow, albeit  
with despair's edgy wit. The deaths



have black solidity, as if from method, no  
white napalm suddenness...I thought: is it  
farce encoring tragedy, but there  
is too much earnest passion in the evil,  
and one watches that eros like watching  
spiders breed: 'It is what they do on this planet,'  
as a child's science fiction exercise  
might observe. Spiders feed in street windows  
broken by children's bones flying, but  
the US polls say yes: who want this so much.  
Who know what they do and also that  
they want those inverted commas, George-  
Bush-as-by-George-Orwell. Is the US  
need for war not 'a way to teach Americans  
geography' as Bierce is often quoted, but  
a greed for abstractions: for the abstract, rather,  
not met by food or sex or fashion, by  
any intimate geography but this? But then  
the abstract is not the inverted commas,  
either, and it is those they want: the quotes  
which in two days will expire,

the world

left gasping with winded logic, the new  
skulls on dresses in the marketplace,  
damp empty dusty shoes. Gunter Grass called  
this a 'wanted war' and perhaps that desire  
accounts for the oddness of feeling: the animal  
impossibility of communication. In a damp  
concrete corner in the market, one's self-sense  
crouches close, alert for friendly fire.



## **Positional Asphyxia**

*for Katharine Margot*

Watching the second but not last massacre  
by the Israelis in Qana, my daughter  
hopes that the scores of dead children  
died in their sleep, and I reassure her  
hollowly, 'Perhaps', but I remember  
Thredbo, where the Coroner said some victims  
were alive at first, died later  
of 'Positional Asphyxia'. Families cradling limp, lovely, livid Qana  
children say after  
the bombing at first they heard them .  
crying under the concrete. Their asphyxia  
in a tight compartment there perhaps is over,  
while need to breathe safe air in a sealed nation  
traps their enemy, trauma-rigid and forever.



## Shortlist

Once an English left-wing MP complained  
to Nye Bevan of not being asked  
to an Establishment dinner, and  
Bevan said, 'Make up your mind.  
You can't have the C-Crown of Thorns  
*and* the Th-Th-Thirty Pieces of S-S-S-Silver',  
with his strategic stutter.  
Sometimes my daughter  
reminds me that I quoted this to her,  
when I fail to be on some shortlist,  
again. Lately, I've listened at random  
to Robert Johnson, Paul Robeson's solemn  
*Kevin Barry*, a Russian chorus who sing  
*Stenka Razin* sadly, and The Seekers'  
*The Carnival is Over* (which is the same  
tune as *Stenka*, of course, but, then, so  
I realised is *Kevin Barry*, just  
a little bit more slow) 'Turn informer, or  
we'll kill you. Kevin Barry answered  
"No"...! The problem with *Stenka*  
is that whilst an ex-monk Cossack  
rebel, he performed many massacres  
and the whole mad point of the song  
is that he murders some helpless  
pretty Persian princess, in the Volga  
to prove he's still a warrior, after sex.

Kevin Barry was a brave  
helpless medical student even  
Michael Collins couldn't save. The sweet Sixties  
*Carnival is Over* is a helpless  
love song to an almost  
irresistible drum-roll, which  
I think I resisted. Robert  
Johnson was reputed to have contracted  
a Faustian bargain at the Crossroads,  
but has one of the most calm,  
intellectually ethical voices one  
could hear, apart from Holiday, in Blues.  
At the Crossroads, your own ghost



warns you perhaps: 'Don't go,'  
when you choose, though I know  
when I was young, I heard the great  
Sutherland sing quite often and saw  
how she expanded the idea  
    of voluptuousness  
with a sweep of russet hair, her diaphragm  
as wide as love's horizon, lower lip  
seductively trembling with each high note, as the dawn  
flutters across a mountain, while  
her molten silver, complex coloratura had  
such ethical logic in it -

    but in some flight  
she joined the fearful Festival of Light.  
According to my old hierarchical  
theory, bouncing unrequitedly between  
high and low status is a sure  
sign of early trauma, but  
equilibrium is not that easy either.  
I used to think a solution was  
in art or sex where such  
bouncing is acceptable, but still  
art and sex are not predictable:  
when the carnival is over, one can  
drown in Mother Volga or  
    nearly helplessly some nights  
dodge a crash in sleepy silver:  
    eyeblick-fast  
but crossroads-bright.



## **George Jeffreys 7:**

### ***George Jeffreys Woke Up In New Orleans***

George Jeffreys woke up in New Orleans. George Bush Junior was on the TV, obsessed as usual with Baghdad. The TV should not have been working, thought Jeffreys, as the street below flashed with powerlines in water.

Hiss. He looked at black water already blacker with blood, shit and all the opals of oil. The TV changed to a group of women wailing in funereal harmony:

'Kiss me mother, kiss your darlin'. Lay my head upon your breast...I am weary, let me rest...' George Jeffreys was weary and so, anyway, had been New Orleans. Weary.

He was searching for Clare, his not-quite-girlfriend, who herself sought some victim or other in a local prison. George had driven in on the Highway next to the Mississippi, where the levees were okay. The storm had started, was now keening like a train around the building. Another keening noise outside the window, George saw was a thin black man clinging upright to a lamppost. At first he had looked as if testing how long he could stand in a storm - but now, George thought, the guy could not let go for fear of flying debris, powerlines. George felt that Bourbon Street was probably undamaged and a bar seemed more attractive than this, so he left the room and the TV, ploughed over to the lamppost, helped the man that much further down the road. In a brothel's bar full of candelabras, George and the black man drank Southern Comfort. On the wall was a photo of Robert Johnson, the guitarist-singer who was sometimes not mentioned around here, being said to have traded his soul to the Master of the Crossroads. Jeffreys' impressions of Voodoo had usually been benign, however, involving much dancing, trancing and



a gorgeous goddess Ezili, clad in blue. For such a weary town, this was not a tired religion. A TV in the corner blurted on, the same group of singing women: 'I am standing by the river Angels wait to take me home...'

In the sixth hour of the storm, George left the Southern Comfort with his friend, forced open the door and walked back towards the nightflood, easily for the wind walked for him. Soon a broken angel in stone floated past, and too distant a tiny nightdress or a child. Waiting-weariness will lead always, he thought to violence. As a child, Clare had killed her younger siblings

for no-reason  
for some reason

that seemed to have significance tonight.

The water

was black salt. Ezili was a seawater spirit from ancient Dahomey. He focused on her and not the crossroads. the sighing black street,

but suddenly there was

Clare liquid with rain, in a blue dress like Ezili with trance eyes, walking.

Jeffreys

touched her with both hands and the electricity numbed him to his spine. She held a white, purring kitten she had somehow pulled from some electric wires, and George soon guessed she had spoken with the Master of the Crossroads of whom he no longer felt afraid. She said, 'If you do want to meet him. You should probably do it now, before the flood.'

'The flood?', asked George puzzling biblically but she added dryly, 'Just the levees - when the waters "stabilise" tomorrow it means that this whole city will have become part of Lake Pontchartrain.'

So Jeffreys

followed her back down through deeper water to a place near the Garden District. They could hear





of sentimental satisfaction, and was gone.  
As they walked up, Clare said, 'You know I was quite nervous to go there, after everything I've done.'

For some reason,

George kept expecting  
the cat to become a baby, but it sat  
as still as a statue in her arms.



## Clare and Paris

Clare Collins woke up in the Paris Hilton. Paris Hilton was on the TV. Fox News, having disastered on Iraq, retrained its sites on Paris Hilton, more in its scope, but its obscene joy at her suffering, her crying for her mother, filled Clare with horror.

The hotel was as smooth, clean and confident with light as Paris herself once. The city itself, however, seemed to Clare the world's most terrible. She had thought at first it would be like a metaphor for herself, who had killed her younger siblings as a child, in what she was forced to acknowledge had been a type of revolution. The Catacombs of skeletons, now tourist attractions, might be like the way the haunted have to treat their lives and deaths as over-crowded commodities. Poor Paris the woman in prison reminded Clare of grief. At an early age, Clare had been warned by George Jeffreys that any emotion she showed about her crimes - especially remorse - would seem obscene, so she'd just shrugged her soul back into the normal, felt the usual things about most things, with some relief. And one of the more normal things she always felt was grief. Paris the city was grief,

so grey  
and sparkling in its rigid overfocus.  
Grief had made Clare careless with her life if still organising others with that other big-sisterly carefulness in grief. It seemed as if her dead flocked beneath her wings upholding her in danger and she never cared at all if they should let her fall to be with them again.

But now she left the Hilton and found the right address. Where suddenly was fire:



real fire not metaphor danced up  
about the old hotel become a refuge  
for women and their children from abuse.  
Clare was here because the Human Rights  
unit she represented had followed up that  
Amnesty report condemning maltreatment  
of women in France. Perhaps some angry  
husband had heard that she was visiting.

A crowd

below watched and videoed but no one  
appeared on the landing above. Was  
the woman in 32 trapped alive waiting?  
Whole as usual only in a crisis,  
climbed the fire escape. No one  
seemed to see her. I have been a ghost  
since I was nine, she thought, in terror. Jeffreys  
in her head accused her of melodrama. The metal  
was hot but the flames were uneven:  
sometimes mountainous then skirting  
back wider like a pack of wolves. Clare  
to focus on the horizon, if one  
were scared of heights. The Eiffel  
Tower obsessed the horizon. The window  
to 32 was open. Inside, a woman  
was tied to a couch and a baby shrieked. Clare  
crept in and untied the lady's washing line  
from her arms. The lady quietly rubbed  
the blood back as Clare led her out onto  
the fire escape, holding the baby, which  
breathed now quickly, like a kitten. The crowd  
at the bottom of the stairs for some reason  
assumed the women lived together. The lady,  
who looked like Paris Hilton: fair, fragile, calm  
and childlike in inviting conversation,  
said, 'I'm Sophie', politely. Clare asked,  
'Do you want to tell the police?', was relieved  
when Sophie said, 'You bet', in careful English.  
The wolves of flame were rushing at the roof now.  
One heard their howl and then the sirens.  
Clare swayed giddily and in her head Jeffreys



said by now she should be used to conflict.  
Get back, she smiled. Old super-ego, you.

With Sophie and the baby,  
walking back in the Paris of Sarkozy, this  
Bastille Day when he had just refused  
to grant the traditional Amnesty in prisons,  
Clare said, 'The only really beautiful parts  
of Paris are the new concrete suburbs.  
They remind me of Mt Druitt: small  
trees in grouted tubs and the same eerie  
green tinge light has on long concrete malls.'  
She texted Jeffreys: 'Darling, as you know,  
quite practically, one can't save anyone  
at all if one is saving one's own soul.'



**George Jeffreys 8:**  
*George Jeffreys Woke Up in Rio*

George Jeffreys woke up in Rio. George Bush Junior was on the TV, obsessed as usual with Baghdad. Then they showed the De Menezes shooting, the numbed Brazilian family of the personable electrician shot to bits by London terrorist police. Here it was Carnival. Clare was curled up like a small white cat in George's bed, but her life was clearly in danger. The whole plot of *Black Orpheus* was haunting George: the mists rising from shanties in the morning as if from some succulent graveyard, the insinuating jazz which was actually trickling through his window. Clare like an Eurydice pursued by an assassin in skeleton costume had wriggled through his dreams, hiding amongst oblivious nudes and the sweating floats of flowers. In reality, her pursuer - Lieutenant Corcovado - 'the Hunchback' - was the leader of a Death Squad she had just photographed about the murder of some street children a few months earlier. She woke when George stroked a fine silver hair strand from her mouth corner, smiled hi and murmured an apology for making him anxious. The usual downy pressure of her head - light as a form of anti-gravity - on his shoulder turned as heavy as hard metal. Despite her having killed as a child and later, he thought she herself was too streamlined, efficient to be a real, grown-up assassin. They, in his experience, were inclined to blunder about, to be strangely accident-prone, like Princip who started World War One after giving up and wandering off for coffee, then shooting Franz Ferdinand when his car broke down. But death



in the street wasn't something he wanted to focus on today. He had only been there, anyway, to interview Death Squad survivors but Clare of course had charmed the children, knew their secrets more than he. They told her heroic facts involving threats and torture.

The Lieutenant

pursuing her was mad enough to murder a tourist or human rights observer.

She held his picture

in her cellphone beside her, although George had sent it to the internet at once. She wouldn't leave until the kids were in protection, he hoped tomorrow or next day and, anyway, She laughed, 'I want to watch the party, don't you? Sex *en masse* but stylised like that is fun, and

Venezuela

is sponsoring a samba competition.' George feared he was too turned on by exhibitions for the act to be much more than functional, but Chavez's samba for socialism seemed to show some enterprise, if he didn't really have to dance. Clare, of course, might well have decided to samba all around him silverly in the street, in six inch heels. The Death Squad man would probably skip the samba. George, the Rottweiler, padded close beside her and she kissed him with spontaneous grace as they strolled onto the street in Santa Theresa.

George wondered

why the place had so much glamour: maybe its closeness to the African, the Portuguese, the proximity of mountains to the sea, at any rate the air excited, genuinely. They were overtaken by a *bloco* of drummers, singers and dancers. George winced. He wasn't braced for the dancing so soon, and some wore crystal G-strings. Clare reassured, 'They're just from a samba school'. Bright screens of limpid plasma reflected silken bottoms



in shop windows all around them, the music now so loud and dense that objects - people - might vanish into its hot fog like ice. Jeffreys asked, hiding in the professional, 'Does this man actually have a spinal curvature, or are they talking about about his soul?' She said, 'He sort of crouches, and The Hunchback is what the mountain the big statue of Christ is on is called here. If you like...!' with some discernment, we could catch a bus to the train up there, and look over the city.' George grinned, 'Later.' Later, after Clare had won a prize from Venezuela - maybe in consolation for such a blithe dancer with such a frozen partner - they looked up and there was the Lieutenant crouched intent behind a crowd of dancers, and clearly watching Clare.

Unhesitant as a toddler, he advanced directly towards them and Clare backed behind a line of drummers. George stepped forward sideways, alert for a gun. The bus - Number 180 - to Corcovado Mountain - loomed slowly down a side street. Clare jumped on, leant forward below window level. The Lieutenant in the crowd had smiled and gone. George weaved through crowds after the bus, lost

sight of it soon, and caught another, then a loquacious taxi, and ascended the twilit mountain, as Rio's lights began to samba to the anxious sea. Maybe Clare had caught the train up. Anyway, he knew where she would be. The thirty metre statue of Cristo Redentor glowed in the dusk, arms outstretched like a prospective diver. The site had shut at 6.30 but the killer - Corcovado, not mountain but man - had some arrangement with the guards, perhaps, or higher. On



the statue was new scaffolding, protective after  
one of those odd custody disputes  
about it to which Brazilians were prone.  
And there was Corcovado, climbing.

No longer

*Black Orpheus*, Life was homaging Alfred  
Hitchcock again. The taxi driver  
recognised the officer and left.

Clare had achieved  
a foothold halfway up the statue's tunic  
hiding her from the Lieutenant, his  
stylised dementia and his gun. The climb  
did make sense - the mountainside was open  
beneath her, otherwise. She climbed further  
up. out of range of the Beretta. Tiny  
George had his hands in his pockets, far  
below, not even near the steps yet, walking  
slow. Not as in Hitchcock, her high heels were  
firmly strapped to her feet, finding ropes  
and ridges, and she still seemed more cool  
than punished or vulnerable. Corcovado  
only shot well if the children  
were close, stoned, or clumsy with fear. And  
Clare was feeling elegantly sober, clear  
in her thought that it was he who should falling  
from the Cristo, could she lure him that high.  
Her flight and George's presence made him climb.  
She was standing on some scaffold on the shoulder  
and balanced on the neck, removed her shoes: not  
to cling but to throw, Jeffreys saw. The first  
shoe had some accuracy, but missed.  
The gun fired then and grazed the index finger  
of the Redentor. The second shoe  
with the knifestroke of gravity caught well  
the Lieutenant's cheek and eye. The Beretta  
exploded on the stones near where he fell.  
He was lying in strange angles, but alive,  
thought George, if unconscious, luckier  
than the children or De Menezes. The taxi driver  
returned from somewhere. Clare slid



down, now conventionally barefoot, and held  
George's hand with an absent-minded  
formality which thrilled him, as the driver  
called a doctor discreetly. They returned in their taxi  
to the hill of Santa Theresa, and their freed  
bed, not escaping still  
the singing streets and sea.



## The Year of the Ox

The Year of the Ox is almost over. I was born in the Year of the Ox. The fireworks and Dogs of Fear indistinguishable from Dragons dance next for the Year of the Tiger. My daughter was born in the Year of the Tiger. My element is earth and hers is fire. I plough my furrow heavily and fruitfully and my seldom rage is that of the earth like an earthquake, sudden and efficiently gutting. She is full of lovely liveness and protection. Next year I will still plough slowly, heavily. She will circle and shadow through our soul's village, creating safety. The prophet Isaiah I read as a girl said that where no oxen are the crib is clean but much increase is by the strength of the ox, which seemed true but also amusing. Homer and Joyce were preoccupied by mythic Oxen of the Sun. I am an old ox of the moon. From mist-grits, my furrow forms at night and ploughs easiest in candid unmythical moonlight, where her eyes flare moonlike in the branches quick and slow and hers seems every shadow every claw of this new sharp oxhorn moon.

For Obama, the nature of the ox suggests possible salvation. One can't pretend long to be the tiger without a certain slink and spring he is lacking, but the ox can seem soft and slow, quite dreamy and still feed the soul's village, resting moon-silent with tucked-in limbs, although powerfully inhabited by shadows, certainly Obama convinces he can kill. As an ox, I am Lying on Straw and watching Straw Lying. That former British Foreign Minister at a hearing says the U.S. Republican Party felt trauma at losing the pro-Israeli vote when Bush Senior withdrew financial support from Israel, that Blair bargained Britain's support for the Iraq invasion



to gain a tougher anti-Israeli position, and lost.

As an ox,

I am a machine of memories, no roadmap  
is enough to cope with shifting but stagnant mud.

Hillary Clinton

woke up in New York, having said the U.N.  
Report on Gaza was 'one-sided', knowing  
the Democrats need the pro-Israeli lobby, herself  
needing Eleanor desperately but the old lady  
was saddened and slow to visit her today.  
When the doorbell rang at last, Eleanor was  
mechanical with memories, an old  
ox moving carefully in only one direction.  
She said, 'When I was at the U.N. first,  
Bert Evatt was in love with Israel. It seemed  
such a merciful answer, and no-one liked the British.  
It was such a streamlined concept, stylised. If  
Modigliani drew a state it would have been  
Israel, my dear. Bert Evatt actually owned  
a Modigliani, but then his mind went soft  
and they had to sell it...' 'God, Eleanor,'  
Hillary offered, afraid: 'Your mind won't go  
soft now. I need you, need you...' But the old lady  
was chewing some private cud still: 'In terms of the UN  
it was odd Conor Cruise O'Brien became  
so conservative, but he did say that the only  
thing certain if you kill someone to avoid  
something is the death not the avoidance...I  
might have said that myself.' 'Eleanor!'  
'Yes, I know what you just said, dear:  
"one-sided"...I suppose you could have said worse,'  
as if trying to envisage 'worse', then drifted  
away instead to some 50s simpleness, leafy  
and deadly like a siege street of sun. Hillary sat compact  
as a tiger behind her, in misery for attention.

On another court,

George Jeffreys woke up in Mt Druitt, in  
Clare's mother's pretty house, babysitting  
and shining Clare's shoes with oxblood polish:  
a blue-based crimson on tower heels. Barack



Obama was on the TV, studiously non-obsessive, an expression of nonchalance George had last seen on a water buffalo about to charge, its eyes urbanely on anything but its target. George's charge was the tiny French daughter of Clare's friend Sophie. Clare had come back to Mt Druitt to find her own mother - gone missing but since returned; a short, rather than the long, meander which seemed to have provoked a good reunion. Obama's rage was against the Supreme Court's lifting restrictions on Campaign Finance. George felt himself beyond non-tactical anger but that Obama might have tried a haka before, about Gaza. Florence the French baby crawled upright, holding George's hand, which, if he moved it to help her, caused her to squat in a rage half haka, half can-can, so he was a statue in one arm, used the other to incarnadine Clare's shoes a little more. He thought: the Year of the Ox is almost over, planned to ask the women to Chinatown, wondered what Florence would make of the fireworks, she such a delicate, powerful porcelain dragon: you could see where Beauvoir, Cliquot came from. Then Clare in his head snapped: 'Patronising', like a silvery super-ego and he laughed. Florence was named after Florence Aubenas, the journalist from Liberation who was held hostage in Iraq then released. Sophie wanted the baby to be elegant, professional and - foremost - a survivor. Clare called the baby, 'Florence Aubergine', to the baby's giggles, but if George had dared joke, the baby's glance would have shrunk him to ice. He really thought the baby more Florence Nightingale: neat, emotional, mighty with an oxen perseverance and a great pleasure in the suddenness of birds.

Florence

Nightingale woke up in her small Scutari room still mercifully tearful after meeting her dead pet owl Athena on a nearby cliff last night. Athena had returned and stayed enough to give her heart



for the struggle at the hospital then left. Florence wrote about it matter-of-factly to her family. All is a matter of fact on top the existential cliff, facts inexorable and comforting as ploughing oxen, with their bird-straight, night-eyed reliability.

George Jeffreys

used his free right polishing hand on the remote, saw that Chemical Ali had been hanged in Iraq for gassing Kurds and that Sky by coincidence was featuring birth defects caused by chemicals the U.S. used in Fallujah. He recognised the firework flare of active uranium, the same brilliance he had seen from the outskirts of Gaza. The Sky program was called 'The Baby Doctor', a quite brilliant focus of human interest on the shabby continuity in war crimes. Florence the baby made it to the couch arm, gave herself an uppercut on it and fell down screaming. George was allowed to comfort her in a hug this time. This comforted George from the echoes of screaming babies.

As an ox

I am alert to the point of twitching but still trample through the difficult. One difficult thing was reading Dot Porter's poetry after her death at a tribute, also seeing her father grey-quiet, aloof with grief.

As an

ox, I use a small hardcover to lean on, write all first drafts longhand on paper. Currently, my leaning book is Chester Porter Q.C.'s *The Conviction of the Innocent: How the Law Can Let Us Down*, which seems in the remedying spirit of ox-work. As I sat at the reading, also grey-quiet and perhaps seeming aloof with grief, I looked up and Dot's father unexpectedly grinned at me with Dot's quick huge lets-get-through-it grin. My daughter the tiger when I told her said he must have been channeling Dot. Perhaps: for



that second he had Dot's face. His book has Blake's 'Lear and Cordelia in Prison' on its dust cover: Lear tranquil with exhaustion, his daughter guarding over him, sitting as tranquil as a sentry tiger, head on powerful curved fist.

The Year of the Ox is never over. What, tiger, would you guard if the furrows filled with mud not rice and water? Mud scatters beside me and my hooves slip under me often and always then my heart like an ancient engine coughs in terror, but the muddy ditch holds, live with rice and water.

In a cheerful part of Theme Park Nirvana which includes the Christian Heaven (the Good Spirit of the Universe having shrugged, 'Whatever'), Mother Teresa sat with Princess Diana, laughed at the brief verdict her murder wasn't murder, held hands and still enjoyed some time together before mingling again with the living, as they both usually preferred, now being free of annoyance with image or marriage. Diana's face entered the face of her elder son, and his eyes grew finer.

He was being hugged by a crowd at Sydney Harbour. Diana always felt reassured by Sydney Harbour. It was lustrous and simple, all emeralds, explosive diamonds and sapphires like a scent by Elizabeth Taylor. Patrick White was wrong about the 'rhinestones' of Sydney, she knew. And she did know her gems, backward and forward. It was time, she thought, for the boy to become obsessed about war crimes or landmines, something - anything - awkward.

Even awkwardness in general need not be an obstacle, thinks this ox enlarging its furrow as it sways on its own bulk, stepping through with balletic care. I once saw live



Sonny Terry in his old age singing. Blind, he almost stepped off the stage, was guided back by his boy companion, whom he thanked rapturously later, and still sang smoothly with the voice of Sonny Terry. There are recordings like 'Bury Me Beneath the Willow' of Sonny Terry, Leadbelly, Woody Guthrie and Cisco Houston together in which their harmony grows with the awkwardness of lyrics, grows with the harmonic sound of blowing dust engritted and overpowered in it.

Eleanor Roosevelt played her old Woody Guthrie LPs for her friend Hillary, with whom she was pleased, now that Hillary had stood up against Israel for insulting America about Jerusalem settlements. She focused again, brushed Hillary's powerful, expressive little hand (no longer matronly and chunky in Eisenhower American coyness) with her old lips which were dryly fine as lavender. They heard the Grand Coolie Dam song together. Eleanor talked dust storms, despair, broken water, but laughed again: 'There's more than one Jerusalem' and Hillary dimpled back: 'There's more than one New Deal,' felt herself quite newly dealt, and dryly hopeful. Clare Collins woke up in Mt Druitt, hopeful with the amnesia of waking, drymouthed from a nap on her mother's sofa. For the first two minutes, one has never killed. This was a new house her mother had bought years ago, not the one where Clare had killed her younger brother, sisters. This was a new small house with neat square rooms, low ceilings, the colours all shades in mellow rose and autumn. Clare, who brought her ghosts with her always, knew them peaceful here, but she herself was restless until now. Now, the cold chiaroscuro autumn moon



sealed the pre-dawn windows against fear  
and she thought of Clarence Darrow:  
Darrow the Attorney's speech for mercy in  
the old Leopold and Loeb trial of law  
students who had chill-thrill murdered  
a younger boy so badly that Darrow thought  
it hopeless to defend them and preferred  
to attack the death penalty instead, won partly  
on the grounds that time would allow  
them to suffer terrible remorse which  
they were too young to feel at the time. That  
was the bit that meant something to Clare,  
although there might also have been things  
about love. Once Jeffreys had asked her  
if she had loved her siblings and she'd said .  
she wasn't sure what people meant by love.  
Later, he'd told her neither was he, except  
'it doesn't appear to be an emotion which  
necessarily desires its objects to remain  
alive.' But she did need them alive,  
the warm children. She walked the night house, saw  
George warmly asleep, her mother, Sophie, and the baby  
Florence warm in Sophie's arms. An autumn  
black breeze with dew in it broke in  
through a door crack and she sat in her mother's  
recliner rocker, closed her arms loosely  
on her ribs with enough room left  
for the children, fell warmly asleep until her  
mother woke in daylight, made Clare some  
coffee, which to them was a held hand.  
Oxen have electric rivulets for muscles, so  
like waterfalls the light flicks out, the veins  
too strong to show, that eroded arterial cliff  
which does show in my hands. My daughter's  
veins are sapphire and don't show. My veins  
are jade. Her skin is Celt, cat white and mine  
is pale parchment. She gives me a jade  
ox and I'm ever a jade ox, my smooth shoulder  
shrugs with electric impatience.

Wise, I give my daughter



many tigers. She sleekly paces or hunts asleep  
guarding, her chin on tucked-in paws  
with tiger patience, peaceful tiger sighs.  
In the wild a tiger can kill a water  
buffalo in thirty seconds, but her  
energy has an outward focus, dreaming  
the village she protects, the ancient ox  
whose furrows entrench safe caves, a place  
for meanings in the forest. Forever  
all cats watch moon-eyed for meaning.  
Eleanor Roosevelt woke up in New York, next  
to her young friend Hillary, who watched  
*Sunrise at Campobello* on TV. Eleanor  
was played by Greer Garson docilely. 'It  
wasn't you,' said Hillary. 'Well, no, dear,  
but that movie was the 50s, early 60s. And I did  
find Campobello daunting. Sea views  
are always so demanding and, you know,  
the better the view, the worse the relationship.  
Washington was much easier, especially  
when I gave up on the White House. Making  
it look human, perhaps. Have you actually  
given up on the White House - I mean,  
the other thing?' Eleanor's directness always  
thrilled but troubled Hillary. She held the warm  
old fingers with evasive suddenness:  
'I thought I had, but...I'm feeling old, and...'  
'Running for office makes you feel younger. I know,  
it took years off Franklin. I've always thought if only  
he'd made it to the Election, he had another  
decade in him. Are you missing  
Miliband?' Her fingers pushed between  
Hillary's firmly down to the knuckles. 'No. British  
Foreign Secretaries come and go. I just  
looked flirty with him in public for fun.  
The new one's bald and really Conservatives  
are a bit more isolationist than Labour.  
'That's always okay, though, anyone to blame  
for caution in a war is useful. Someday soon  
they'll have Nick Clegg and I'll flirt again.'



Hillary had two dimples. One was exasperated, matronly. The other was cherubic and luscious. At present, this was the unexasperated one: 'I'm often sorry I missed out on Joschka Fischer.' The ox wakes and unbends her strong knees that snap like rifles, moves along her furrow with a firm step then a neutral one in a digital pattern: iamb then trochee, a digit and a cipher, pattern of poetry. Asked to speak at the Sydney Writers' Festival on poetry's survival in this time of digital technology, I explain that poetry is digital technology,

its history

is digital, its form finger-disparate, but communicated by the binary. Analogue technology flows and is prose, but poetry is disparate concepts combined in binary structures: stress/unstress, iamb/trochee, alternating syllables, stanzas, letters, space. It was the first form of digital technology, hence its importance in early societies, oral then spoken, its varied manifestations of the binary the essence of mnemonic technique. Memory: essential to human identity and clearly in nature digital and binary. The ox a trifle ungainly defines the furrow, stops, snorts a prism of living vapour, more warm than dawn which is many crystal-azures like blood within the body. The binary tiger's long furrow is the horizon, breathing moon there breathing sun.

Florence Nightingale woke up in Queen Victoria's bedroom at Balmoral. She rested on a chaise, her pet owl Athena perched on the quilt as Her Highness stroked her, oblivious perhaps to her being a loving ghost. The Queen's smile always inspired: it was candid and full of compassionate



mischievous: 'We're pleased you're awake, dear Miss Nightingale. We've thought again about your success with Sanitary Commissions. We believe your philosophy might have saved our husband who was killed by an infected well.' She was very direct, but so was Florence. Athena chuckled and bled. The Queen said, 'That is so much more pleasant than her night scream, which freezes all one's veins.' 'She may have suffered a dream,' suggested Florence, as Athena bit porridge from the Queen's finger. Florence thought: Despite being mocked, this round woman has a brain like Athena's: my beliefs have given her comfort, as does any progressive remedy. They are safe through her, are embedded in her grief.

George Jeffreys woke up in Mt Druitt, in Clare's mother's house. Clare was watching Julia Gillard on the TV, wistfully. Ms Gillard was accepting the Prime Ministership politely from the Governor General, whose yellow frock complemented Julia's pinstripe, the room a fantasy of Canberra winter gold. Clare shrugged, 'I'm jealous,' guiltily. George comforted, 'You're meant to be, and the worst is their stressing any woman can do it,' but in Clare's case he knew the impossibility was more poignant still. Clare's mother had been planting olive trees. There were dishes

all over the room and to George they tasted of Clare and the sea and lately Lebanon, sleek green and purple capsules of utter peace and war. Clare bit at olives and said, 'I'm still pleased, though,' about Julia. Jeffreys said, 'It's hopeful she was inspired by Nye Bevan, even if part of that is homesickness for Wales.' Clare now referring to the taste of olives, said,



'I've been thinking about sex and pornography.'  
George's autobiography, *The Haunted Brothel* had stalled a bit lately, so he asked, 'What?'  
with an author's twinge of espionage. She laughed  
'It's just about grammar. I mean that in porn  
it's in the oblique case, things are done 'to'  
people or bits of them and in most real sex  
there are two agents active, even in foreplay.  
Nothing  
actually feels dative.' 'That's true,' said George,  
excising many mental prepositions. Julia  
delayed her victory speech at Question Time, as  
all honoured the latest dead in Afghanistan.



## George Jeffreys 11:

### *George Jeffreys Woke Up in Langley*

*(A Defence Academy lecturer has stated that WikiLeaks encryptions are useless because the U.S. has decoding computers so huge they are kept in liquid nitrogen not to overheat)*

George Jeffreys woke up in Langley, Virginia, next to a vat of liquid nitrogen, where bubbled a giant computer. Assange was recorded on a monitor, Jeffreys supposed in the spirit that Montgomery kept a photo of Rommel in his tent. Julian's white hair and odd angelic youngness reminded Jeffreys of his partner Clare, her logic also having quiet, loquacious rancour: a strange likeness between them both and that balletic White-Haired Girl, the symbol of China. The M.I. who had boastfully shown George the computer returned with more beer. 'Have you cracked it yet?' asked George. 'They change it a lot but I think we crack it. I guess whatever it is spooks us too much here for decryption to be much use.' 'That's why you don't want him snuffed, just on ice,' nodded George, 'in solitary in Sweden?' 'Sure, and Extradition's messy; last resort: troubles, but we want to send a message.' 'Yes, as messages go, it does seem clear. But with the results you like?' The M. I. sniffed the U.S. beer, which left mist on the air like the vat, where Julian decoded again in slow, nitrous bubbles



## **My heart has an Embassy**

My heart has an Embassy  
for Ecuador where I will seek  
asylum. Earthquakes  
and aftershocks undermine  
my hope and my means to work  
and the Americans  
have wormed into my psyche  
with their black knack at fear.  
My heart has an Embassy  
for Ecuador as rare in air  
and sumptuous as the Andes,  
as clear as the Equator. There  
will be in it waterfalls  
and jungles like salvation.  
There will be friends  
whom I owe nothing, no  
famed bail, no knotty  
knowing sexualities. My heart  
has an Embassy for Ecuador  
where there will be no secrets  
and the truth falls down like water  
from giant granites of despair.



## Well Inside Fireground

Looking for a parallel that was actually parallel and not autistically fragmented, I recalled my favourite excerpt from the State Emergency Services *Current Incidents* site, which I read often checking up on backburnings and fires: 'Bugtown Road, Adaminaby Advice Contained 2 trees burning well inside fireground. Bloke on horse patrolling Snowy River Under control Bush Grass 8 Rural Fire Service 22/09: 07.00PM.' Adaminaby is a strange, flat country, either windy with skinny sleet or potentially alight, but high plains pretty with sun that can come filtered through harvest clouds or snow. Its emblem is a huge metallic trout in the middle of the village. It was once another town, now underwater, bits of which emerge in drought at the hem of the lake. Such places attract artists. I mean, the past buried in water, but all tarns have that crypt-deep silence beloved of Poe. I'd like to think of a plot that isn't Gillard against Rudd. Thea Astley once told me Patrick White at a party complained, 'My dear, I have such trouble with my plots,' as if they were varicose veins, but inventing plots can be distractingly therapeutic. Here, the bloke on the horse could have a name: say, 'Maurice', pronounced 'Morris', with that rural Australian habit



of naming the baby something rather British  
and aristocratic and also  
because his mother liked Chevalier, so  
he had to be a horseman. He  
is always called 'Morry' anyhow.  
Right now he is watching the fire  
as attentive as a cattedog, swings  
the horse around the periphery, hits  
sparks out with his hat, not  
a bush hat but a gardener's straw  
from Cooma and much better  
to keep out the painful sun. He  
has gardening gloves on. His face  
sweats red and black with smoke.

His adventure  
is over now since only two trees blaze,  
and they dance well within  
the fireground. Earlier,  
the bush and grass were dancing  
on his ankles and his boots  
stuck gluey with the heat. He beat  
the flames out with a plaid made  
rigid for picnics. This was  
the sort of fire you can't phase  
normally, which always tears  
across the fields torturing  
stock, wildlife and trees before  
it canters out at Collector, or  
toylike Michelago, with  
its tourist fireplace. This  
time, though, something in his heart  
was angrier than burning ether, he  
knew that he would not permit such death.  
He thought the calmness of his horse  
untethered by the fence and grazing  
what wiltedly remained of grass meant that  
Nature understood. Like everyone  
in his community, the only  
higher-power over him was Nature,  
that nervy Lady with whom one



suffered a long mutual intuition.  
He'd never fought a fire alone.  
He knew of course you work in from  
the outside, but he found the rim  
of it to be tiny, cunning patches  
snake-slow but somehow snakelike sudden.  
It took him minutes to detect its rhythm -  
a strange one in which you lost the war  
and in the futile aftermath hit once  
and found it had leapt elsewhere, which  
was the closest that you came to victory.

Eventually,  
he allowed it one tree. However,  
it settled for two, which finally  
crackled away like Christmas there, as  
he circled them on a horse not quite  
involved yet in the process.  
This is a plot found  
and needs no more: for a plot  
is a story only about safety,  
securing peace -  
a sequence in logic unbound —  
and if one requires  
another plot using intrigue wound  
in conspiracy, one realises it never  
succeeds as succeeds the plot of a person  
locked in fire language with fire, that  
that plot is ever  
the trickling well within the fireground.



## Getting Anne Back

Lucy Maud Montgomery woke up on Prince Edward Island in the tourist version of Green Gables, as spruce with green edges as spring spruces, filled with Japanese as joyous as spring birds, their syllables as sweet, their passion for Anne as pure as treetop dawn, while hers was always like the ground at the tree's feet, patchworked by rain, snow and sun as if all the elements were needed to make Anne respectable. Her affinity with Anne was often intermittent and awkward: its start a photo she had clipped of Evelyn Nesbit from a magazine: a girl of spirit and fine features later to be known for causing a *crime passionel*, and velvet swing seat indoors, and a pose spreadeagled on white bearskin: teeth, head, eyes and all, while in her own bedroom Maud had always chosen to undress behind a screen. Left to her own devices, Anne's swift, sharp spirit could have *femme fatale* in it. These Japanese were starving for her traces. Maud perched thoughtfully on the quilt in the little gable room: at least everything was still kept clean. She had always explained that Emily of New Moon with her writing and sense of direction was more like her than Anne. Anne was meant to be a restless soul, rewarded with a True Romance ending, to win over readers calculatedly, even the story of an adopted orphan child having an unexpected gender current at that time in Maud's family, not Maud's own. Remembering Emily Dickinson's 'I like



a look of agony because I know it's true' again,  
and despite amusing readers with Anne's  
tale of *My Graves* with wryness,  
the truest thing in Anne, she thought,  
was anguish, trembling at the edges  
not of womanhood but trauma, Anne  
almost losing the power to grieve  
which Marilla and Green Gables re-gave  
the poor, practical, accidental, prattling orphan.  
Despite Anne's drift into evenness  
and poised convention in the later books,  
Maud's patriotic brief bombast in *Rilla of  
Ingleside*, Maud didn't quite despair of Anne's  
ability to despair. 'Did I kill  
myself for Anne?', she asked a young  
tourist who photographed her on the bed  
thinking her an actress like the young Anne  
downstairs greeting others. Maud was pleased  
the nose on that one was more chiselled  
than the unsuitable nose in the TV version.  
'Pardon?' asked the Japanese, and Maud  
said, 'I took an overdose the night  
I gave my publisher the last *Anne*, which  
gave her back to grief, and in it  
Anne wrote poems about her son's death  
in World War One and called  
a second war "abominable". It was not  
published for decades because  
the second war was on and after then  
it did not fit the role the world  
had concocted for Anne as a kind  
of poetical Pollyanna, even if  
I acknowledge she was conceived so.' The man  
with the camera retreated, thought  
there must be something here he'd forgotten  
about Marilla: or was this Rachel Lynde?  
Maud looked down at the actress Anne  
graceful as a larch beneath the gable.  
'One dies,' she thought, 'because one's heart is freed  
or because the other half of one



behind the screen is angered and unstable  
at that freedom, or indeed  
just because the need for justice  
is achieved at such a cost one can  
fight no longer. My own  
sons did not receive the reasonable  
love that Anne did from the Cuthberts.  
I gave her what I could and at the last  
I let her write poetry - my best -  
as young as the grief which only lets one sleep.'  
She rubbed her spectacles with peace,  
and the setting sun danced like the Northern Lights  
on all the island and the farm,  
the tourists and the other Anne, now not  
lost at all within the mellow dusk.



## **‘So That’s Who Those Motorbikes Were’**

Mother Teresa woke up near Princess Diana in a particularly beautiful part of Wimbledon Common near where the old Spencer House had stood. Diana did not usually brood, however now she was wistfully, stilly alone and Teresa sat beside her. Diana did not often talk of her murder, except at the inquest and occasionally laughing she’d been ‘topped’, but she seemed serious now and finally said, ‘So that’s who those motorbikes were...I remember the Fiat that hit the car and the huge light that flashed and how long I was kept bleeding in the ambulance, and thought the press had only cars, except one, so who were the motorbikes, but that it was the SAS as such seems so crude somehow.’ Teresa understood Diana’s fear of crudity, they both the most vulnerable of creatures, but she felt in herself a flinching away from the idea of Diana dying, Diana still the most living thing for her, Teresa who had been so compelled to deathbeds in her life. She knew that she should pay heed to this deathbed again, but fought a compulsion to cheer Diana up, did say, ‘My darling, it is wonderful news about William giving up his uniform to be more with his baby and to rescue elephants.’

Elephants -  
and a baby, of course - were exactly what Diana had wanted for that son, but she still worried about Harry, who had killed so many in Afghanistan that she’s had to urge him back to her landmine charity, although in truth that odd discrepancy



had never been sorted out. But *'elephants'*:  
her eyes were like stars at sea  
again at Teresa's comfort. She knew  
the last thing Teresa needed psychologically  
was to process another deathbed, but  
with no one could she converse more easily,  
and the old brown hand was so practised  
at soothing any doubt except her own.  
Diana asked, 'It surely wasn't Dodi  
who made them paranoid, it must  
have been the landmines and the fact  
that I was aiming for all their other salesmen  
after that? The landmines were just  
the start?' Teresa laughed,  
'You did not do pacifism by halves,  
clearest princess. But, yes, I think Dodi  
was the least of their worries. Perhaps  
he was an excuse to make the murder  
seem less plausible, or just  
what they call "collateral damage", but  
we must mourn for all who love us,  
as' - at last she found the words -  
hand in hand in the wildflower garden -  
'We will now mourn for ourself.' They  
clung together for a long time, nodded  
to and fro until a revived Diana  
asked Teresa what she knew of elephants.



## Diary Poem: Uses of the Female Duet

Considering requests to write a poem about Julie Bishop, I wondered who she felt had been her inspiration but found out she'd stated she was inspired to enter politics, give up a wealthy legal career, by an eight-week Advanced Management Program for Senior Managers at Harvard School of Business in Boston. I thought I can't write: 'The Harvard School of Business woke up next to Julie Bishop', but maybe I should have. Would it wake up in Canberra or Adelaide? She grew up on a cherry farm in the Hills. That sounds a bit more like poetry, except the Hills worry me since that Boarding Kennel there let their animals burn. My nose twitches at the smell of kindled cherries. Let's begin with her in Canberra, then forget the passport scandal in which she said it was okay for Israel to forge Australian passports because we do that sort of thing as well, forget her having defended asbestos bosses against sick workers, forget as Education Minister that she almost said State Education was run by Chairman Mao, tried to introduce teacher performance pay. When I last saw her on TV, she seemed less smooth, more wistful and fragile, less aloof. If I were going to crystallise her performance now I would simply give you a picture of the limpid respect on her face the day Tanya Plibersek described in terms which were sheer Clarence Darrow the way her husband had reformed from the heroin trade, become a public servant in education, and given her three children, how her brother was murdered in Port Moresby, so she understood how hard it is to desire mercy. Bishop too had just made a speech for life for the Bali



prisoners and the two women stood on either side of the Parliamentary table, linked in cadence by their purity of purpose.

It reminded me of the duet from *Norma*: when Rosa Ponselle and Marion Telva sang it, they maintained the difficult rhythms by holding hands as they sang to steady and inform their voices' passion. There was never a more persuasive melody than that duet by two women. On YouTube, it is Sporty Spice's 40th birthday. Emma - formerly Baby - sings a duet with Sporty, exclaiming, 'I love this girl!', the whole robust with convincing affection. When Katharine was ten or twelve, the songs she sang and danced with each friend were often 'Stop Right Now', or 'Two Become One', duets with enthusiastic emphasis. At the time, someones Big Sister said the Spice Girls' Big Shoes and short skirts were tarty, but I thought needing a person 'with a human touch' an acceptable priority for women, likewise the recurrent theme that a relationship be on the woman's terms or not at all. Not to forget, as well: their bouncy loyalty to other women had significance. To signify, transcend commercial constraints, was a small victory quite obvious to children. 'I thought you might like to hear a man's voice,' Liberal Senator O'Sullivan roared across the Main Committee Room in Canberra to the Chair, Liberal Senator MacDonald, as Penny Wong went on questioning Gillian Triggs, the Human Rights Commission President about whether Brandis' Secretary of the Attorney General's Department had offered her a job as an inducement to leave her post and therefore not present her report on refugee children in detention.

Triggs



said she was shocked by the offer, stopped  
short of legal accusation, but left  
it open for the Labor opposition to refer  
the matter to the Federal Police. They did. I  
wonder if shock helps the female duet,  
in that its tone is mother-powerful, hid  
in magistrate-black, glove-white, gone quiet  
as if

that helps in digesting the Black Cloud.  
There is a form of domestic argument  
that deliberately lies on smaller points, entraps  
the woman to refute them, miss the larger  
issues of untruth. Katharine and I  
have always called this being quite set-up  
'to argue like a girl', and we avoid it  
as much as possible, but Liberal senators  
seem gloriously adept at the tactic. In  
the Triggs event, the ATD Secretary was  
accidentally misnamed by Wong as 'Moriarty',  
not Moraitis, and if that mistake was apt,  
she still apologised that she had read too much  
Conan Doyle. Said Senator MacDonald. ' I  
am glad I did not say that. I would have  
been accused of other things, but anyhow, carry  
on'. Wong asked, 'Reading the Classics?', but  
Brandis added, 'You might have been  
accused of sexism, Senator MacDonald.' Wong  
asked 'How is reading Conan Doyle sexist?',  
almost caught in an obvious trap, but didn't swerve.  
I wondered myself, though, would it serve  
me here to ask if Conan Doyle is sexist. 'Moriarty'  
is what Katharine and I called a neighbour's cat  
who would watch her steadily for hours  
in a black reverie after she imitated a cat  
and charged at it to keep it from self-harm  
on the mad plants and pots on our terrace. We knew  
it still thought she was another cat. It thought:  
'She walks on two legs and the humans accept  
her as one of them.' It wanted that power  
terribly for itself and studied her



for clues to the magic process. 'The Woman',  
to Sherlock Holmes is clever Irene Adler, not grave  
Queen Victoria or a demoness. His emotions  
for her are as much as he can do, in  
the romance position, a deficit Doyle  
sees perhaps as sad as his cocaine addiction.  
Holmes is pathetic in measure to heroic. This  
is why Holmes stories survive when Bulldog Drummond  
barked his last in the literary senate, long,  
long ago. What survives in the Senate now  
is the quiet questioning between Wong  
and Triggs, that process which acquires  
some police-importance Holmes would know  
and recognise as worth the concentration.

On YouTube,  
Joan Baez and Mary Travers still sing  
'Lonesome Valley' in 1963, with over  
246,000 views, 704 likes, 13 trolls and the bling  
women thrilled by their own daring:  
the lyrics at ready-for-anything Newport  
aren't just existential, religious: 'No one  
else can walk it for you', but instruct  
hearers to join a union, picket, 'go down  
to Mississippi', their uneasy/easy harmony  
blends Mary's deeps and Joan's odd heights  
in a way that probably did send some  
to the union rep, the pavement and  
deeper days in the deepest south.

In age, however,  
do we all succumb to the softer  
doss on a signposted left, welcome  
Global Warming like a familiar  
script for an Apocalypse we need  
to hide our own in, keep the audience  
close under our prised coats and not disperse  
them out on the winds of caring? I can't  
listen so much to their later solos, their so  
vague, sure, sentimental meaning, lack  
of detailed instruction.

Anyway, my favourite politician



now is Melissa Parke, particularly since she'd guts to sign the Fox Petition to allow some foxes desexed and vaccinated as pets, and said she wished they had that in WA. Her Facebook shows her with her pet Scotty, Haggis, but doesn't state Haggis' gender. Her duet here therefore must be with Jenny Macklin. In two photos, they address over 130 pensioners on Families and Payments. Parke has her arms in front of her, Macklin tends to have hers behind in royal style. Macklin is compact, squared, and Parke taller, rounded, but slender, her dress black and white without Macklin's grey. The pensioners are on small blue chairs, alarmed at the threat to their money, after Abbott's budget. Macklin and Parke have humour, composed mouths, composed hands, to look like good teachers or schoolgirls: honey smiles not a threat to any body's second biscuit, cup of tea. They make each other credible, which is any duet's requirement. Earlier, Parke questioned the metadata legislation, which Labor now supports, but she will often form internal opposition. Yesterday, in Parliament, she said, 'It is we the political class who should be ashamed of ourselves - all of us' about the attack on Triggs, and about Children in Detention. After the Bishop Plibersek duet, she made a reasoned legal speech against the death penalty as such and asked 'Why is it that blank bullets' are given to nine of the twelve firing squad members, so they don't know if it was them, if killing sits well with human values? All this in keeping with her work to build the UN Ethics Office. She drank the tea of Kevin Rudd with the first Rudd for the RSPCA, but perhaps the best



female duet for her would have been  
Haggis, if a girl' as Parke does seem  
devoted to the innocence in living.

My favourite politician  
of all time is Charles Fox and indeed she  
seems fitted above all I see to sign  
that lonely Fox Petition.



## Orchards

*(Melissa Parkes' parents had an apple farm in WA,  
Julie Bishop's a cherry farm in SA)*

When she met the Christians Bishop had arrested  
for protesting detention of refugees, Parke  
wore a coat like apple blossom: pink,  
white and green, translucently. Bishop  
on the day the Bali two were transferred  
to the death island wore a dress  
the colour of cherry blossom, dark pink,  
looked gaunt with anxiety. Politics  
will pierce you with its empathy, if you  
practise it successfully. Apple flowers  
spread raggedly and openly, breeze  
dapples through them. Cherry blossom  
reblooms so densely, brilliantly that we  
plant temples to ensure its resurrection.



## **Animism**

*(Julie Bishop has said she was inspired to enter politics by an eight-week Advanced Business Management Course at the Harvard School of Business )*

The Harvard School of Business woke up next to Julie Bishop, as yet unused to his new incarnation as a human being, but she smiled too wearily and explained, 'When I was trying to save Chan and Sukumaran I became involved with Indonesia, found it more Animistic than Muslim, although of course trees and rocks and ancestors don't give money for education. We tried money for education, of course, but no one has more money for that than Riyadh. Would you like some coffee? I need some. I've just said we should "move on" from the deaths of those poor kids and their coffees aren't even back home yet - sorry, I meant "coffins".' Harvard thought if human meant coffee it wasn't too bad but Julie was a real human problem. He said, trying hard to justify his unexpected being, 'You don't have to move on from anything, except maybe back to that cherry orchard sometimes, angel: no one minds that you threatened consequences. You're scared that Market Forces did approve of Joko taking off the people's petrol subsidy so that it went up about thirty per cent, depending on Riyadh, but we coped with East Timor, still have them over - no joke - an oil barrel. There are always new arrangements. In fact, why would it matter if the whole Indonesian archipelago broke up? You are paying too much real cash to them to torture resistance in West Papua, and Aceh used your aid to establish sharia law. Why fret?' 'I thought,' said Julie, animate with coffee, and closing her eyes less often because behind her lids were the bullet-slumped bodies, 'Would just a string of islands give your forces





## **Eleanor and Hillary: 14:**

### ***The Bayonet***

She almost didn't return again. She was old and the mess was bad. But then when they dragged Hillary into the car out cold, it was really too much for Eleanor's heart, and she'd remained wryly in the house at least until Hillary lost, or won. Now she said, 'It was getting to me dreadfully, dear, about Colonel Gaddafi and how you were ecstatic on the air that you came and saw and he died. Was it a fugue? I didn't know at the time, but have been told he was sodomised with a bayonet. Before he died he said to someone in the mob, "You could be my son...", I always recall that. I had really hoped you weren't watching on a special feed, the same way you did when they killed Bin Laden. Still I think this time you didn't know?' But Hillary was oddly evasive. Everyone here was that: evasive and odder now than ever. Huma, not allowed to be photographed too close to Hillary, in case an ex-husband was contagious, drifted through all the rooms in a dark and lovely trance. Hillary alternated between a sort of ramrod diction, like a bayonet fixed tightly to a gun, or told jokes about Trump, her face responding too fast to her own wit for anyone else to, her smile strangely sweet in its doll-like demeanour.

Eleanor did everyone a favour and locked up the pill cupboard for a while. On the porch swing, Hillary told her - being expert on military history from her father: 'You know, dear heart, the thing about bayonets is that they came into their own at Culloden, because the new technique was to attack the enemy attacking the man beside you, underarm, so he couldn't defend himself. No, I didn't know that thing about Gaddafi, I believe. I know you grieve too much now to visit me sometimes, but if I win, you should stay here, for the country.' It seemed the saddest of reasons, but Eleanor tried



to truck, as usual: 'I don't like that woman, Gillard, though, you know: her man McTernan is back in England, attacking Corbyn, threatening to turn the unions to the right again.' Though Corbyn, thought Elinor, was showing surprising pizzazz (and his wife a small gorgeous Mexican cross between Frida and Juarez). Hillary said, 'I don't see Julia. I won't renege on stopping the Trade Agreement, I won't wedge Russia and I'll shut down the Foundation. You wouldn't be here if you didn't know I'd win. Dear Eleanor, you use me.' Hillary seemed again, comfortably, reconciled to that one. The panic pain in her stomach had almost gone. Eleanor said, 'But it doesn't matter now, dear. When you don't win, I will still be here, still watching.' The old lady settled near her, to enjoy the setting sun.



## Mary Rose

One thing among the many things I love about Gen Y is that they're ready to accept transgender in anything, as if Caitlyn Jenner was the best fan fiction ever. I'm thinking of Emily Bronte having baked the bread for her family, charging over the moors, with a rapturous dog and a headful of Heathcliff and Cathy. I'm thinking of the first and one of the best English novels, Defoe's *Roxana*, written in a saucy female first person: never marry a fool, she says, ladies, whatever: you must never marry a fool. I'm thinking of Alfred Hitchcock, after *Marnie*, eager to film Barrie's *Mary Rose*. He'd seen the play in England as a boy: in England, where the police locked him as a child in a cell, to frighten any trace of crime away, his parents quite okay with that: Oh, God. The plot of *Mary Rose* is that a little girl on a remote Scots island goes AWOL into mystery, returns the same, but later visits as young bride with baby, does the moonlight flit forever, until one day her grown-up son returns to find her, by accident: the child-ghost-mother, perching on his knee: a little 'ghostie', transcending any fear. I think, from memory, they part again, but everything seems better. He should have made that movie, despite studio screams about money. After *Marnie*, he was opened like an oyster in the dark. The Hitchcock blonde, of course, is Hitchcock, hence his tendency to beat her, but now here Marnie was allowed an understanding, maybe relief from retribution: we escape those hours in the killing cell at last. I'm thinking of Gen Y with real thanksgiving. When I was young and used male first person in my novels, my feminist critics - as if I wasn't one - were horrified that I seemed to want to be



a dull man when I was still really such an  
interesting real-life woman. *Really*. Now they've  
grown old as me, some still seem to disparage  
transgender as if they had monopoly

austerely

on anything female, or indeed maybe  
on all things that can stop the living body  
claiming its other half in any way. Gen Y  
would have no problem with moorbound Emily  
in perfect English hymn metre writing 'There let  
thy bleeding branch atone', or Keats, becoming  
*Lamia* so he could face the autumn, writing 'You  
must be mine to die upon the rack  
if I want you' to an unfazed Fanny Brawne. The psyche  
well-expressed splits like an atom. It's energy  
flies wild as the unconfined electrons  
of lightning finding home.

