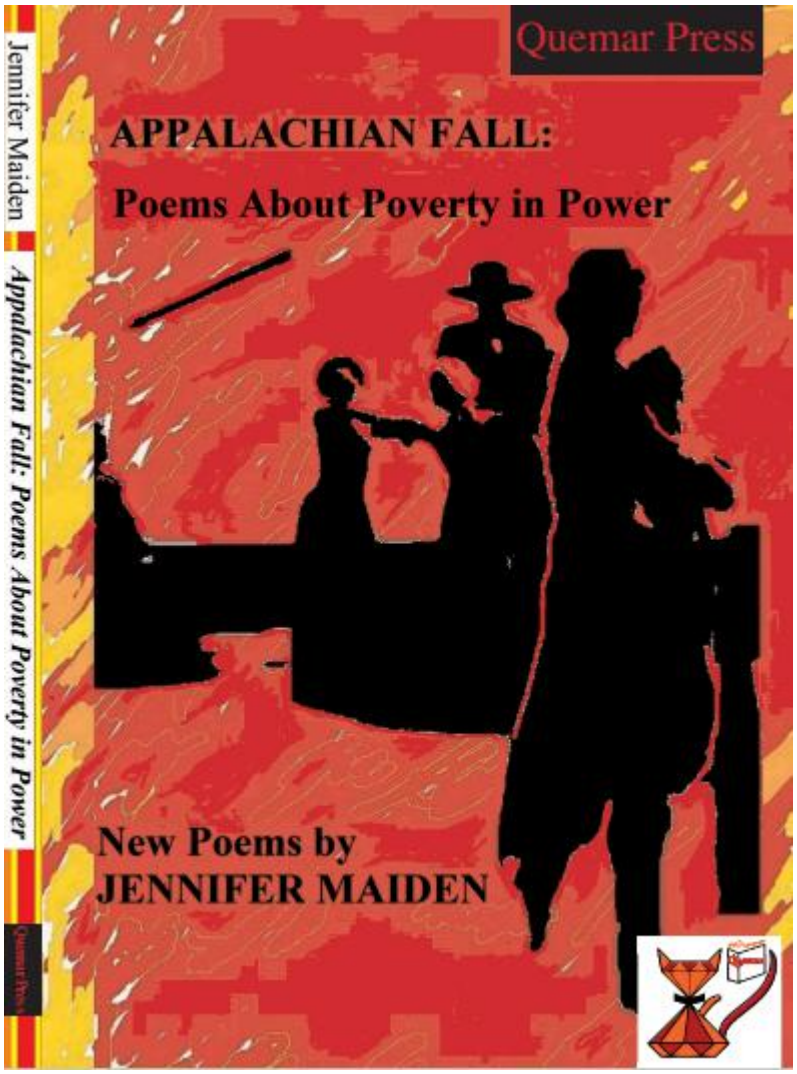

Appalachian Fall:

Poems About Poverty in Power

Jennifer Maiden

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Jennifer Maiden was born in Penrith, N.S.W., and has had 27 books published: 22 poetry collections and 5 novels. Among her many awards are 3 Kenneth Slessor Prizes for Poetry, the overall Victorian Prize for Literature, the Harri Jones Memorial Prize, the H.M.Butterly-F. Earle Hooper Award (University of Sydney), the Grenfell Henry Lawson Festival Prize, the FAW Christopher Brennan Award for Lifetime achievement in poetry, two The Melbourne Age Poetry Book of the Year Awards, the overall Melbourne Age Book of the Year and the ALS Gold Medal. She was shortlisted for the Griffin International Poetry Prize.

Jennifer Maiden's new poetry collection on the power of poverty and the poverty of power

To Katharine

Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

'The difference between what I do and other things called political poetry or satire is that they consist of commentary or caricature, both of which place the writer

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

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

Katharine Margot Toohey

Quemar Press

Contents

Into the bodies of poor men

Eric Milner-White, army Padre and the King's College
chaplain in WW1,
wrote back to his colleagues: 'A continuous firework
of light balls goes up from the German trenches. But
most
awesome is the noise. We feel powerless against those
splitting cracks and roars, and dream of the metal
tearing its way into the bodies of poor men.' Back home
at Cambridge and shaken, he stopped the regulation
of compulsory chapel attendance, brought in fragrant,
flagrant ceremony like the Christmas Carols, anything
to give the horror justice, seeing the incense of comfort
as *being* a viable justice, offering something different
to those empowered numb, and dumbed by agony.
They
attended at the first treble, were promised no sermon,
a scattering of lessons falling like fire on the wind,
the bidding
prayer of the chaplain: 'all those who rejoice with us,
but

on another shore - that multitude no man can
remember',
reminding now of Slessor's 'enlisted on the other front',
but
even gaunter: the horror not of the last poem, but
the first.
The little treble, shrill as a shell, lit exquisite in
a silence
as tremulous as his tears sways down the aisle, bidding
the apostates in to pray, on him the unjust weight
of every
man's salvation, calling to him in his diamond cry
now even
the multitudinous hordes of the dead, and he can
see them.
A 'continuous firework', the munitions, but the very
building
here by the most profligate of kings, is an incandescent
catherine wheel in continuity: the arches rise
vaginal in their
feathery spinal grace, a fortified trench, a structure that
a lord
knows will not hold by itself forever. The other

choristers close in

on the treble, like long echoing dying voices. There

was a music in the human cries above the 'splitting

cracks

and roars', there was a music to entice back any victim,

thought Eric Milner-White

as he witnessed the first stumbling treble

tremble towards his lesson like a song.

Jimmy Carter: 1:

Pretty Saro

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

through peculiar ceremonies in Africa. He knew why

he loved her. She smiled interestedly at Sara,

who might have been anyone, but dressed in
splendour

in silken jazz age drapery, one step ahead, Miss

Rosalynn supposed, of Carolina Herrera.

Sara said, 'When you're from West Virginia, you dress

as best as you can when you make a bit of money,

you show that they can do that where you came from.

They like that where you came from, in the little shops

and farms.' Jimmy nodded, 'It was the same in
Georgia,

where we came from.' He remembered now this
woman

singing songs on the radio, in nights smelling
indelibly

of peanuts and exhaustion. The singing Carter
Family

who found songs anywhere, made them respectable,

gave a voice to poverty so fatal

it could only express itself in music. I won't be hungry in heaven. I won't have lost you, love, in heaven.

You'll be sorry when they find me in the river, the cold rushes. I'm a thin boy selling papers because mother says my father is a drunkard.

Starved.

Miss Rosalynn was talking to someone beside her. He said, 'You were lead singer, Sara, I always liked your voice, and that loud guitar behind you. Was that played by your sister?' 'Sister-in-law. My cousin Maybelle. She was better, you know, than Robert Johnson. That old question, "Who's playing the second guitar?", when there wasn't one, was appropriate to her, as well, but no one said she'd done a deal with the Master of the Crossroads. She was a pretty little lady, at first wore glasses. I was more classic in appearance.' He said, 'You still are',

not lying. She

had the dark distant expression of a painting: strong

bones, mountain eyes. Singing, her voice was deep

and harsh but soothed, uncannily,

like a cross between a violin and buzzsaw. He

recalled: 'Wasn't there a scandal?' Miss Rosalynn

smiled at them, encouraging vaguely.

She and her companion were discussing the blue dress

being worn here by Melania Trump. Already it was

said it resembled the outfits

worn by the French Team in *Harry Potter*, but in fact

it was Ralph Lauren cashmere, wrapped

in crossovers, the blue not French but

unprovocatively

childlike and pale. He had thought once Melania

was a sleeper, since her father was a Slovenian

Communist, but now she just seemed frail.

For some reason, he was touched by the matching

high heels. Sara was puzzled by the dress: it did not

have the straight filmy lacy

flow she thought was luxury, but she continued: 'There

was no scandal:

there was only me... A.P. was away quite often and I

had to run the farm,

the crops and the three children. I found new songs,

too, sometimes in churches, but not so

peripatetically.

He could come home with one-legged black men,

not that they didn't know good music. I didn't learn

to read music, but when I first recorded my voice was

as high as a train

going into a tunnel. I dropped the pitch to move

the sound around. I did it

by smoking cigarettes. Once I was doing that, I wore

trousers,

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

it soothed me,

firing off that rifle. Then I fell in love.' 'I'm not surprised', said Carter, 'I once annoyed people by referring to "Adultery in the heart". I can see why I was an annoying President. That was the closest that I ever came to the obligatory satyriasis.' He seemed amused, however. She said, 'This wasn't in the heart. It was Coy Bayes, A.P.'s cousin. So we went around like lovers, until his family discussed it, all moved together to California, took him with them. A.P. already had the devil's temper, shook all the time from some infirmity, but he did love me. I went on singing the songs to get the children money, but I lit out back to my own people, on the other side of the mountain, and then I only came back and slept there at Maybelle's, or if the children were unwell.' Sometimes,

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

We were married three weeks later. He was truly
still the prettiest young man. We went back
to California, without ever me singing unless I
wanted, or ever learning
music. God was good', she added, with one
of piety's graceful addenda. He thought
she had once been the preacher of a vast
vulgate bible, had grated to America its soul. He
thought: we knew ourselves when we heard it:
the low gut-scream of hunger,
for some food, some pride, for any sort of
civilising action, answered passion, and if all
these people were Trump voters, maybe that in fact
was why he couldn't despise their desperation. And
who but Trump or Bernie Sanders would dare
to prevent the TPP? No one cartels like a rich man,
but Carter
thought if Trump were a drug he'd be generic. His
attempts at copyright were always too legal

clumsily and he had the truculent passivity of an old man less bewildered by the small. Sara was becoming distracted by the strangeness of the dresses.

He refocused her wistfully: 'Did you ever shoot a swamp rabbit?' She considered, alertly: 'Why, no, but I've seen them. Big things with big teeth and very unpredictable, especially in the water.' She giggled, her face's dignity rippling into arch Appalachia: 'Why, Jimmy, did one chase you?' She was Saro now, not Sara. He could recall that the other Dylan (Bob) tried numerous times to record the old song, from the Appalachians, '*Pretty Saro*', didn't succeed.You had to accept it was all about money: *'My love she won't have me/And I understand./She wants a freeholder/And I have no land./I cannot maintain her/I've no silver and gold/Can't give her the fine things/That a big house will hold'* was

the version he'd heard himself. He said, 'Yes,
a swamp rabbit chased me. I was in a boat
and I was President, fishing. It swam over, tried
to jump in. I think that hounds
were chasing it. I splashed it and it left. The press
made a big joke of it, but it was feral. I don't know
what so alarmed me, Saro.' He thought: if she
understands this, she will understand Iran, and that
I did better with Egypt and Israel, that my prestige
has gone up since I left office. She said, 'Well, you
could have shot it, but they don't eat well.' Still
she continued to watch intently
as he spoke, with an Appalachian
earnestness now: in photos, her face when she sang.
She thought: he follows strange roads - so did I, after
all. He's talking about lands,
of course, not rabbits in the river. Some of these coats
on the women looked like something A.P. would wear
in winter. They obviously don't need

to make their homes seem tasteful. They must have been rich for centuries, or something. She herself liked fine silks that flowed shiny, cut crisply. Why did Cousin Jimmy think some embassy in Tehran was so crucial? She said,

'So, they tricked you - sold you out for arms and money, while you tried to outwait them and outwit them, like a fool, and then your use of force blew up against you, and you tried at last to introduce college conscription, lost the only vote you had. But that treaty between Israel and Egypt sounds straight out of the Bible. If I were you I'd stick with that. And nobody likes poverty, and everyone likes people who build homes.' 'It depends where they do it', he corrected: 'The downside of this Inauguration is Trump Towers in Jordan Valley, less immigration, Demon Mexico, maybe torture, more even than under Obama.'

But in her company the most languishing, dire
anguish had a backnote of the cheerful, as if
Maybelle still strummed
and scratched along, self-taught on the guitar.

Jimmy Carter: 2:

Dylan Thomas

Dylan Thomas woke up in Plains, Georgia, at
the close-to-earth, lyrical little house
of Jimmy Carter. It whispered all over with trees,
country sun caressed its constant windows,
where the thirty-ninth President smiled like
a leafy sun, himself a waiting window. As Thomas
came in, 'I sang in my chains like the sea',
murmured Carter, half-haunted again by that
poem. 'There's no sea here', grinned Thomas, 'And

I wonder if the slaves sang in their chains here?'
His own work made him nervous. America still
made him nervous. College girls made him nervous
expecting you to fuck on a beer and sandwich after
some breathy reading that sucked your gut out.
Their terrible politeness for what Caitlin called
his 'sexual autograph' made him nervous. Was that
what murdered Dickens, too? He, Thomas, had
made being rude to these people another art form,
writhing and scratching on floors
not always metaphoric when they offered some
interpretation
of a poem once written in seventeen drafts
and now forever shut away by booze from any
prospect of memory or explanation. Carter said,
kindly, 'You're nervous', helped his jacket off,
explaining, 'This means very much, Mr. Thomas,
to me. I have read your work in every sort of
crisis, and have found it a key to staying sane, to

knowing that "after the first death, there is no other", in all its hope and horror. And I did not confine the meaning, of course, to Jesus.'

'The meaning,' Thomas agreed, more softly, 'was not confined to Jesus.' Carter had opened the blue and fawn drapes and afternoon-easy breezes of Georgia honeyed in. The couch was hard and straight, the room was easy, but built on firm edges. Carter poured coffee like midnight in white thin mother-china. As if in a Swansea parlour, Thomas said with courtesy: 'It's you I have to thank for that memorial to me in Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey. You suggested it on a state visit, I've been told. By Caitlin, actually, but she was sneering.We'd just had another row, of course. Can you believe that after her second marriage, she told everyone she'd never had an orgasm with me?' He heard his own voice summoning 'Cait!' down the ages, waiting for her in every

lost pub and lecture hall in Christendom, until her form
in all its curly sea-eyed blondeness Irished up, as
enraged
as if she wasn't used to him by then. Carter was
prepared for some bitterness about women from
a poet, but discerned the way here was to praise
and not condemn. He ventured, 'I thought her
autobiography, the *Leftover Life to Kill* one,
was very finely written, very vivid, indeed quite
wild but brilliant in its overview of grief.' 'It's
underview, you mean', amended Thomas, but
the coffee was so strong it might have been
a shot of whiskey, and he remembered the
death-numbness from morphine
like a Welsh graveyard in a joke or funeral,
like something from *The Doctor and the Devils.*
When he took the medical mistake that killed
him, she was watching: his American mistress,
not Caitlin. He would say they were all the same,

just meant for bed or kitchen, but they seemed
so different to each other, and it wasn't them
in either room, that he at last remembered,
only their desperate voices
flying, flying at him in the blackness. He said,
'At the hospital, Caitlin came in, demanding,
"Is the bloody man dead yet?" But I *was*, in
roaring snake-tubing, and she just had to admit
that she'd lost another child. She says in *Leftover*
Life that she frets for me like an old cow for its calf:
the thing is so badly physical. What she didn't admit
in it yet, though, was that she was forced to have
an abortion to do the American visit. It was late
for one, and the child came out in pieces. When
her prose breaks up like a sky of crackers that
is what comes to my mind.' Carter poured him
more coffee. He had swigged the last like spirits.
Georgia breeze played with the drapes like
a bored, determined kitten. Carter confided,

'The abortion issue is very hard for a politician.
The current President, who is not really
a madman, was a liberal about it years ago, but
now wants to unfund it as a program overseas,
and I suppose that might be some sort
of tactical diplomacy. Can you really help
a country if you deplete its population?
I have overseen elections where the lost votes
of the poor were all that mattered.' Thomas said,
'I was a socialist. I was also a small man
with bad manners. I deplored the BBC, but sold
it *Under Milk Wood* - which Caitlin hated.
The name of the town is really 'Buggerall'
spelled backwards. Do you still trust my poems,
after that?' 'With my life, as I always have', said
Carter, who had known all that, of course,
already. He said, 'You should know I am
a feminist. I left the Southern Baptist Convention
when they ruled out any women as pastors,

and that they should submit to their husbands.
Abortion should be unnecessary, but I upheld
Roe v. Wade.' The coffee pot was empty, and
he took it to the kitchen, brought back cake.
Thomas said, 'What will I read you?', as his books
were on the table. 'You pick', enthused Carter,
thin-eyed like a laughing infant. Thomas said, 'Nye
Bevan quoted this one in *In Place of Fear*.' It was
A Refusal to Mourn again. His voice had
quickened quietness, not wasting wind, as Caitlin
had accused him: 'Deep with the first dead lies
London's daughter, Robed in the long friends,
The grains beyond age, the dark veins of her mother,
Secret by the unmourning water Of the riding
Thames...' Caitlin would spend most time with her
second husband, the Italian director. But he saw that
she now waited at the window,
barely to be distinguished
from the gold-haired light of Georgia. She had some

of Carter's cake in her mouth and hand, as an Irish child, watching. He concluded, without echo, and almost without projecting: 'After the first death, there is no other', and read until late at last with no effort. Then Jimmy Carter, delighting

in the success of the visit,

walked his guests to the first unguarded gate.

'You Look Different Every Time I See You'

She said once, 'You look different every time I see you.'
She said once, 'I dreamt about you. You wore a cloak
and spread it over children.' She said once I had
given her more than anyone else had, because
I wrote her a poem about sex. She asked once
that I would write about her. She had eyes like pears,
a rounded gold and green. She had hair
fair as an Ingmar Bergman heroine. She was as
tall as me. I was thirty-three.

We would stand and face each other.

She worked in the city. She rang me and said
she was afraid I was dead, because she had been
caught behind a flower truck for hours. When at last
her suicide succeeded, her mother buried her
up the mountains, and I was caught in traffic
all the way up behind her hearse of flowers. Later,
there was more information. She had been

molested by her father. For a long time, she would
write me a daily letter. She said, 'I could never
leave you', only signed with her initial. I told her
she believed too much in omens. I remember
how quiet your voice was, how you were afraid
at night and amazed and reassured I didn't bother
locking any doors. How I woke once and you said
you were surprised at how silently I slept. There was
a rosebush outside my mother had planted, but
I still don't know what rose. It only bloomed once
for each flower, and you asked for the bloom.
I lied I had been going to give it to you, and you were
unusually happy, like a child. You returned it later
as a perfect watercolour. When you died, I gave that
to your mother. She would only receive some
tailored truths, but she understood perfection.
You told me when you won your Honours, she said,
'Yes, but you didn't win the Medal.' The quote
does her love injustice, but you need some peace,

too, as your needs were sometimes second. I hope this is close to what you wanted. I should add: I can see you in a rich soft skirt, sophisticated high heels in the sunshine. Her dressing table shone with a film of scarves, like a mysterious cross between a boudoir and a cave, and she said that she was pleased that I had seen. She'd never thought I would, but it was created for my sight. She was left-handed, played the piano well, that long after I wrote the *Left Hand* collection. I told her she should play Ravel, but she didn't, and she warned me again, correctly: I would never hear her sing.

Diary Poem: Uses of Book Piety

The front roof of a friend's house collapsed

and a weight

of experienced books chaosed around him, as he sorted

them precisely into piles, then boxes with labels, meant

for keeping, giving and disposal, but mentioned that

traditional Jews can't destroy books, must bury them

with ceremony, as if still somehow the ambivalent book

were haunting and formidable, as well as just

human and untidy. I've thought of that lately.

Katharine's Press having started digital, and mostly

free, most readers have been happy, but a few

maybe mostly my age have objected to the loss

of paper books as if she were responsible for that

problem. The issue can't be lack of price, surely:

we all started in *Free Poetry*, *Ear in a Wheatfield*.

I have

Indian ancestry, but when did the Capitalist Cow

become so holy? I think we should discuss

the immaterial,

material and sacred. I think we should discuss

how paper books have beauty. We should discuss

how my belief - no longer just a theory - that poetry

is digital technology and therefore that the internet

embodies it as wholly as a singer with a harp,

an ancient bard obsessed with the mnemonic, means

the experience electronically is gnostic: direct

summoning of the divine, unlike the paper book,

which is a sacred object and a conduit, not a baby

touching its mother's face.

Diary Poem: Uses of the Appalachian Fall

What would it involve, the small apocalypse where

trees

stream down autumnal like the manes of tired horses

in their sweaty or dry horse colours, every whinny

in the wind as sexual and fatal as the vocal fall

of a careless rider, or an Appalachian singer? What

would it involve, the old bones breaking over

the scarlet ground like playthings, the old songs

resurrected like staggering corpses, what would

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

of *Appalachian Spring*, on the digitalised film

of the dance by Martha Graham, to the tunes

wrenched from life and deified by Copland? Why,

I would still fall for the levitation. The staid way

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

as a couple of times she risks, and gravely hovers

in air like a leaf with no apparent basis, since

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

involved out there still in the stubborn, stillborn wild?
What songs of use fall gold for its famished creatures:
that moonless one, so far, that stole the future, or
the sunless one, so close, that stole a child?

Diary Poem:
Uses of the Appalachian Fall: 2

'that stole a child'? What sunless one is out there
in the hills' blue shadows that they know will come
and take away the very flesh of living, what one
moonlessly will trap their staring soul alone
scared torchlit with its possum-eyes in wire,
so that the next step can never happen, never
the next new scent or difference in wild
between cob and seed or apple, pear and melon:
that future tasting on the tongue, but gone?

The dance is a ballet so moves like a rumour,

glides lithely then springs up with terror,

like a gunshot in the crags at the horizon.

Then mellow, mellow, mellow, like a child

swathed and swaddled mellowly in slumber,

since children taste sleep like solid supper,

if the appetite's more sudden in possession.

There is the use here of suddenness to own

and suddenness to defend the hearth's power.

But I crave now mellowness like some song

by slaves about Gilead's balm: not any quiver

when the mountain monster enters like a zephyr

and carries off the child in its arms. When

it cradles up in rugs the smiling sleeper

and carries off the future in its arms. Then

what would need to be involved again

except the monochrome ballet and staid water

forever like some millstream grinding down?

Why would the dance resort to any figure, wild

erratic and mechanical as a gun? Unless he came

to return the rumoured life, if by him stolen:

if not, steal into woods to bring it home?

If it's all about the loss and something out there,

the idea of use is not in temporal bounds. Nor

is there any need to trust the hunter. All within

the dance stretch out uncaught, on the ground.

Lilith

Thinking of Christopher

Brennan, grief and mothers

reminded me how Bruce Beaver

in his first falls into psychosis

hallucinated the pre-Adamite goddess

Lilith as a deadly demon lover.

There are only two choices

really with Lilith:

to fall in love or run forever.

The wiser is the former,

but if she was his mother

fifty years later

with a perfume lost in paper

the world turned pretty and capricious,

turned imperious and vicious,

turned him to a dancing mirror,

mirrored him and mirrored death.

There are only two choices,

to run and fall or love forever,

and the wiser is the latter.

But still pretty and capricious,

and imperious and vicious,

he turned to a dancing mirror,

mirrored life and mirrored breath,

as it fogged with perfume's surface

neither air nor glass nor paper,

he feared ghost-illusive vapour

in her fluctuating mirror

showed him less.

Lilith: 2

As I recall, she was glowering in a tree

as Bruce described her: Lilith, the devouring

lady myth-monster whom he

associated with his insanity, when suffering
his early psychosis. He always was acutely
sensitive about writers demonising
women: described with disgust every
detail of the spider Shelob in Tolkien:
the sticky vagina-thing enveloping.
When I met him it was the Age of Plath
and Sexton, R.D. Laing and the Family
as the cause of Double Binds: a sea
where good harbour was in rejecting
one parent or the other, as if killing
oneself mandatory to poetry.
It seemed to us suspicious, even then,
in our conversations. A quiet small lady,
Bruce's mother, would often listen.
Every time I showed him something
I'd written, he would always let her see,
as well as Brenda, and she seemed to be
a patient audience. Much later in describing

Brenda with dementia as one 'frail lady',

he reminded me of those nights with them.

I think we were four frail ladies, one way

or another, sitting there in a unit at Manly

that did not face the sea. Of course when he

was psychotic later, he still attacked women.

And when he recovered, would rue it again:

had a story repertoire about poets who'd try,

like Webb, to kill girls if they had freedom.

I've always argued that Keats was really

the *Lamia* monster Keats wrote about dying,

tried so hard to warn Fanny to flee. I

knew if Bruce's Lilith leapt from the leafy

hissings she lurks in and attacked me

the struggle could not be easy. I am seeing

the cunning helpless hardness in his eye.

The Mystery

(Jessica and Malcolm were requested by

Joanne Burns)

George Lansbury woke up on Lady Martins Beach.

Malcolm Turnbull sat

reading, solid and life-wan like George himself

quietly next

to two ladies, both of whom seemed now to be

George's

granddaughter, Angela, except that one wore silk

and looked filmy and beachy, the other wore a suit

and sat on a blanket, typing, but never losing track

of something in the bushes. The silky one with the

soft

sun-raised arm rose in welcome. Malcolm helped her

up,

as if expert in aunt-lifting, although she was his third

cousin, and the other woman fiction. The other

one said,

crisply to George: 'I'm Jessica Fletcher', but

with a strong, bright welcome, went on writing.

It was this one, thought George, who might

at last give them all a verdict, but Malcolm

seemed to need more than that, and urgent.

Angela said, 'Please don't expect her to interact.

She isn't real. I made her. The novel that

she writes is called 'Appalachian Fall: A Season

for Death', and is meant to show how American

poverty creates the last advent of apocalyptic

power: in this case, murder. I know because

I wrote it.' 'There is no such novel', the Prime

Minister laughed, 'But the thesis sounds like

something that my mother might in her

American phase have written.' George wasn't

confused

by their banter. He knew his granddaughter supported

Labour, but the mystery was Malcolm. Malcolm

who had

tried to budget down Welfare - how ever could kind

Lansbury blood

drumming through the pitying heart allow that? Angela

thought of Ronald Blythe's essay on her grandfather,

how it said that, in some, socialism was just a penchant

for tidiness, but how his had represented the antithesis

of that, removed park fences, let the public in, tried

to oppose the Second World War until he accepted it for

want of a better method, always plagued the Home

Office with exceptions: every case seeking refuge

exceptional, Blythe

observing, parenthetical, that God knows how many

lives the old man saved. As she typed, Angela

the novelist

wrote death. Malcolm sat down beside.

He said, 'It would be easy to deny the mystery, and I

tend

to do that, as a policy, so that even if I horribly inherit

a plan to foist a couple of awful islandfuls

of Dispossessed

onto the Appalachians and the Rust Belt, I cheerfully

convince

the President his surprise isn't normal. There was good PR in that.' The moving fingers didn't slow their pace. He thought of the old poem he'd learned

at school, 'Nor all your tears wash out a word of it.' She said, 'There are assassins in the bushes, and a race with machetes is what simple survival seems simply to need where you want to work these days.' The other Angela seated herself on the sand, held out her creamy arms, and George reclined like a Victorian picnic with the ladies. The pretty beach was such a

nun-embroidered

handkerchief, Malcolm thought, long-won, short-won, superlative with lace. 'I don't own the beach,' he

admitted,

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

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

since

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

and packed his book away.

And on the seventh day He excavated

There is something visually amusing about the sudden
slicing
off of a mountaintop at first. One thinks of Martin
Luther King:
'I have been to the mountain, but I haven't seen the top,
because
Beloved, it was *gone*!' But now I am thinking how
Anne Elvey's
astute paper on metaphor points out that the
Appalachian
Mountaintop Mining and the protest against it both
used
the same Bible quotes from Isaiah and Luke: 'Every
valley
shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made
low; the uneven grounds shall become level, and the
rough

places a plain', in the Old Testament, and in the

soothing New:

'Every valley shall be filled and every mountain
and hill shall be made low and the crooked shall be
made straight and the rough ways made smooth.' Elvey
called her paper, 'Homogenizing Violence', and indeed
the people may have accepted more readily the loud
and choking violation were it blended with something
so familiar as their Sunday homilies, but there's, too,
the fact that they must have seen their holy pathway
to protest revealed as made plain. The decapitated
mountain settles in its tangled trees and tarns, like
an executed fowl, all frenzied nerves and oozing.
Oh God who leaps from hill to hill, return.
The valleys smooth to meet us and we realize again
how alive a lost body can become then, even
without its signal from the misting brain.

The Thousand Yachts

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

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

need to drink now, although this teasing Harbour always looks alcoholic. That is what men write about when they write about drowning, you know, they really write about plunging death-deep into drinking.
But you seem a sober man.' His critic's shadow ever shook or expanded like the discrete water, but their pace was steady on, towards the bridge, if then they turned and walked the pace again, quite like two professors in a college garden. The critic said, 'One thesis was that you stopped writing poetry because you'd lost your ancestry: your European influences becoming too distant and you losing the importance that your father had been Jewish.' Slessor in turn became parallel, and literally, as he found the other man could not be accompanied easily, unless the pose confronted. He walked ahead somewhat, then turned to face him: 'At the time, I said I stopped writing because of the death from cancer of my wife, Noëla.' He still could hardly bear to

include

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

much

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

my

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

out

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

eyes',

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

could torment him in its anchored speculation. He

seemed

a man who murmured to suggest significance. He

added,

'I saw time sailing like a hundred yachts', which might have been a favourite line from Slessor. Slessor

nodded:

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

sharded

lights returning, like the billow from a ferry under

stars. But

I was never conscious of a need for home. I found one in power every time I ran a paper: *Smiths*, or the

Telegraph

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

never

has a need for poetry and, indeed, verse was always as painful to write as it's reputed to be, when I did it

Noëla

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

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

sometimes

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

sound

emboldened to suggest an opinion, although, thought

Slessor,

the young mannerisms masked a different man. They

both

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

forgetting

to blink in their limpid concentration. Slessor still wore a slight mustache which made him appear younger, as did the high smooth forehead of either. There could

have been an air

of innocence and power: the wry-lipped combination that stoops to charm and then discards it curtly, to

confuse

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

thousand not a hundred

yachts were competing for the prize once. Now Slessor
saw only out there the sparkling harbour ferry, from
which his friend had drowned, the still dove's gaze
that would have made poetry agony, not for nothing
he a warco, she a nurse, and he longed from rib to groin
for the simplicity of *Smith's Weekly*, whilst this man
before him seemed obsessed with Promised Land. 'But
it is',
said the critic, understanding: 'The Israel of poetry you
lost, too:
all your influences from the German Jew: the lyricism
and the studied sadness. *Five Bells* teases about
mourning
and plays with death like Dickens. The thousand yachts
should return to one small harbour like this one,
which can
uniquely support them in their loss.' It seemed to
Slessor
now that the successful vulgarities of *Smith's Weekly*,

and the unsuccessful vulgarities of the Lindsays, were

part

of what he had needed to blend in the poetry

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

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

the vulgarity and the high holy were sealed away

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

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

critic

suggested, back to the murmur: 'And power,

of course,

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

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

parallel:

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

boy

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

really for my mother, but since he found the soul

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

hunger

roaring from the elaborate menu. Was it right,

I wonder, that I wanted from my father the old music

that he had lost as a profession, becoming so very

inland as a Mining Engineer? This place is never'

- his gesture swept the Harbour, suddenly as

agitated as their wind-warped shadows - 'inland at all,

is it?' The critic said, 'I grew up by the sea

here, thinking always I would soon possess its

richness.

And sometimes you gave that to me.' The Harbour

emptied

of any ghosts but the moon, and they still stood facing

each other, sought the power to sail free.

Last time

I am

thinking again about Margaret Diesendorf, I suppose

because it is flaxen autumn and the light wakes one

with its arms around one, as she did once when

I stayed at her place, hostess smiling down, as if

natural part of a dawn sun. Once she said

I had looked '*luminous*' somewhere. She chose

her favourite word then. Today, I thought

again of her poem *For Liselotte* about the child

she coached under the Nazis, whom she taught

her studies despite pleas for more happiness

just being with each other, because oblivious

that this was the 'last time'. There are close

poems which warn forever from their lesson,

passionately, like Shakespeare's last sonnets.

She'd laugh, luminous, but capable of those.

Last Time: 2

I don't know if I ever put it in a book:
the poem of mine Margaret Diesendorf once
liked most. It was called *Migrant* and describes
one, who will try: 'with his little arctic sigh to sing,
but comfort-tunes won't stay and no
reasons remain to die.' It was in a Macquarie
Uni paper when I was a student, but then
I was surprised she thought it so true
to her experience. She still had so many causes.
Maybe what you die for is different. I'd meant
the anti-climax, the dying fall, the open agendas
and the knowledge that your life
bleaks without its negative value: that country
which needs it only as a number against death.

Hillary and Eleanor: 15:

San Francisco Bay

Eleanor Roosevelt woke up in yet another hotel room, this time in San Francisco in fresh March. Hillary Clinton was just back from the Professional Businesswomen in California Conference, and looked as if San Francisco were wine, and she a maenad prancing processionally, giddily, into Eleanor's old arms. Hillary exclaimed, 'My God! Spring in San Francisco. I want to put some flowers in my hair!' The only flowers in the room were a bouquet of baby's breath and daisies from a fan. Eleanor said, 'I think that

might make rather a mess, dear. Anyway, I believe

that song

spoke about the summertime, not spring.' But her

newly woken fingers

found their life again in Hillary's soft hair. Eleanor -

who forgot

nothing, had not forgotten the bayonet that was used

to sodomise

Colonel Gaddafi, and how Hillary had been so

ecstatic about

his death on TV, but she saw that this ecstasy was

not that one. She

saw that this mood was the peace that follows loss,

When

the loss is not of living blood and flesh. They held

hands on

the floral puffed coverlet, looked out at a view

of the Bay.

It was flat and mirrory, as often, but its

synapse-soothing shine

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

'It's full of sharks,

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

with her head

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

She said, 'At first, I thought

they gave it to Trump because I was too tough:

they thought

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

the Senate, score

myself a Supreme Court Judge, and Putin

wouldn't back down,

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

now, it seems

they thought I'd be too canny when they dished

the propaganda:

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

my dear, you do

not have jerky knees', said Eleanor, 'and Trump

as a businessman

has knees that bend in any poll direction. At first

that gave one hope,

of a rather macabre nature, but once he sacrificed

General Flynn

as National Security Adviser, it was clear that he might

scare in any

undesirable direction.' The Bay fluttered, glowed in

night. Hillary

said, 'I miss dark eyes. She doesn't contact me much,

but I guess

without the White House I'm not much use to her.

It seems I am

still some use to you, my love, however.' It wasn't

a remark

for response, except the endearment, and Eleanor

kissed

the little fisted hand, and placed it gently on

the leggings. 'Korea',

she said, 'and the Mother of all Bombs on that

Afghan ant's nest,

will need you to seem restrained in contrast.

Now you are

the ideal that should have been and you suggest

Stephen not Vince Foster. You are Appalachian

Queen, the Mother who would have saved,

and kept the secrets.

Take off the *Wild One* coat, the blossom blouse,

and get you down

to work the crowd again: no San Francisco summer,

just New York,

in its black-ice spring, where you belong.' 'And if

I don't', teased Hillary, 'You still will stay?' For

the Tammany was gone

so no End of Days would come

and she knew that the old lady wouldn't leave her.

Exit Pursued By a Polar Bear and a Carbon Credit Salesman

'But that was in another country;
And besides, the wench is dead', Marlowe wrote,
echoed by Eliot. But it is my thought of those lines
from Robert Lowell: 'Dearest, I cannot linger here
in lather like a polar bear', when shaving for his son,
and indeed how that once recently
it was said my poetry might well succeed
in some other time and country, eerily
echoing Marlowe so that interiorly I had
to mutter mutedly:
'But, besides, the wench isn't dead', almost said
so but genuine grief just allows for formality,
surface talk, or that
strange over-response to peripheries one utters
in despair. Let's, though,
discuss the hungry polar bear. When Peter Porter
wrote about
'exit pursued by a bear', from *The Winter's Tale*,
Shakespeare's rare

stage direction, the bear isn't polar, and offstage

ate Antigonus.

Porter concentrated on the financial industry

that was shaped

around Shakespeare, to save the British economy.

Now suddenly

in the Press an army of ravenous, luxuriantly furry

white mammals have increased their appetite.

It is because

of Climate Change, apparently, but wildlife

reports actually

didn't say that: but that simply because we spend

a much longer

time in their territory of ice, there tend to be more

left of us

around for them to eat. But it does allow

the photographs of teeth

closing on cameras to drool hallucinatory. And besides

this living sort-of-wench writes now

about a company

including hedge funds, four hundred million

pounds worth,

that started as a Holding under British Law, to
sell Pollution Permits, encourages them to increase
activity on the stock exchange, to concentrate
conservation energy into the West, as the U.N.
might identify
the cause as Western wars too much. After all, it was
U Thant
who started Earth Day, blamed the Vietnam War.
But that
is general history, and it is my memory
now just of Lowell the poet: 'Dearest, I cannot linger here
in lather like a polar bear', though I won't exit easily
from my own atmosphere
pursued by myself as a bear that starves
from western missions, emissions, fear,
once more successful in another country.

Posing a political threat

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

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

she was so afraid that she retreated to the toilets,

where her periods started from terror,

but was still proud of her action. It's when one is most

afraid that one is most a woman, but maybe that

becomes the time of greatest resurrection. If

I have never

posed a threat to anyone in power, dear great good

spirit of the universe give me this,

O Frightened Lady: let

my work be as posed as real insurrection, let my threat

be in positioning, not diction, an equality in stature

with the weakness I enshroud. One makes a threat

from below or above, not looking in the eyes. One

could

look in the eyes from where I stood:

sometimes the eye had power,

but it stored its waiting message in the blood.

Wind-rock

Trump always walks uncertain, braced for wind-rock.
Wind-rock is good for plants, doubles their grip
in the earth, unless they blow away or their soil does,
unless the wind dries out their sap like fire. Nietzsche
had much to answer for, including the thought that
anything makes one strong that doesn't kill one. One
keeps thinking of Causley's poem about Katharine of
Aragon: 'O the Queen of Castile has a daughter, torn
out
by the roots. Her lovely breast in a stone cold chest
under the farmers' boots.' Wind-rock seesaws, doesn't
tear, but if one is in power how much can one bear
of the ruthless velocity in air, I wonder. Wind-rock
lines the face with its small contradictions, deeper
forever until the wrinkles bleed, until the feet tilt
height-sick on the ground. So the powerful hold on,
like damp sheets on a clothesline. Now, for nothing,
I recall the feel of sheets in their grasping, groping

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

George and Clare:

Back in the Wilderness

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

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

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

It is the wilderness of which we speak here.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

George Jeffreys: 21:

George Jeffreys Woke Up in the Wilderness

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

As often, and as fitting for the scene, their

conversation

played around sex as sex played around the edges of all else in the room. George had been jotting down more of his memoirs, *The Haunted Brothel*, as he held the baby in a rocking chair all night. Clare had at last

slept,

a cotton swathe between her thighs for the postpartum lochia that had lasted long, because of her age

and tension.

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

its lips

and the way they channeled blood that confirmed skin was in itself an experiencing organ, not just some soft envelope to breathe from other feeling. He remarked, 'I'm finding the sex as difficult as Lawrence did, to

write.

It must be portrayed with justice, like the visible

universe

of Conrad, although justice always seems to have its

own

literary merits.' Her bleeding and the baby still had

that smell

of rubbled vanilla biscuits. She said, 'And again

that portion

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

heroic

embarrassment, and the older and closer he got

to description,

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

bedrock.'

To help the birth, she had gripped aside her clitoris

like a switch

and around it everything was swollen, but the wrinkles

on her stomach

had re-absorbed neatly. At first she had

expected it to stay like a sodden dishcloth. Distracting

herself,

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

that sex

shouldn't be justified by literary merit, as if to suggest all art was just an antiseptic. Do you think it's just the irritation makes me want to come all the time?' He laughed: 'They're valid themes: the sexuality of irritation, of impatience. But its probably to relax nerves and clean the wounds. At my age you identify the function of every profound emotion.' They tucked sleep-sighing Corbyn into his cot beside them. George let her place his hands along the forming scars until she writhed back, not gasping but breathing out shortly, in almost exasperation: the antiseptic, they both thought, of reducing the soul to a function. Because

she had come and they had talked, the way she stroked

him until he too came was at least again beyond

the functional-reciprocal, he thought. Her cellphone

sang

and he lifted the woken Corbyn, now near to smiling.

*

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

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

I quoted Thomas Hardy in his rare grimace of mirth:

— "You left us in tatters, without shoes or socks,

Tired of digging potatoes, and spudding up docks;

And now you've gay bracelets and bright feathers three!" —

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

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

*

George:

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

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

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

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

*

It seemed…

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

George Jeffreys: 22:

George Jeffreys Woke Up In Thirroul Again

George Jeffreys woke up in Thirroul again, a windy
wilderness
of black sea-night threshing in waves at the french
windows. He
channel surfed the wildernessed TV, the quiet baby
Corbyn
on his knee but not asleep. George remembered that
his grandson
and daughter had been stormy babies but had deeply
slept
more than this one. Here, you looked back checking
and the eyes
were open. George and Corbyn watched the screen
together. Trump
was explaining another liaison with the Russians, but
slapped
more sanctions on them. George suggested to his son:
'They may have agreed to this as a sort of trade

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

with the baby, who crowed with pleasure, suddenly. Clare's nocturnal marine eyes looked more blue in the TV light. They didn't use the TV as much now, more the internet, but it was still the best nursery nightlight ever. He rested his free hand on her hunched shoulder,then when that was accepted, his fingers deep in her sleep-thick hair. She said, 'Idris said on the phone the Russians still seem okay about him working out his bitcoin for the Palestinians. It must be that the Israelis have accepted the idea.'

'Or some of them' amended George: 'It's still that thing my old mate in Langley said about Intelligence: it's always made of heads that hate each other, but I grant you Tel Aviv has less of them than Washington.' She said, 'I'm sick of murder',

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

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

Sacrilege

I fear not doing her justice: however,
for a long time I've wanted to write a poem about Vera
Rudner. We'd meet at many opera matinees. She'd
a wicked sense of humour, a shrewd, warm manner
and a witty pretty daughter. After a few decades
Vera's end-of-year card was her painting *Sacrilege*,
the first I'd heard of her as a painter. It transpired
Sacrilege is in the National Gallery, she'd studied
in her early twenties with Eric Wilson, and she'd
painted it after the Second World War, having
come here with her Austrian-Dutch mother and father
at seventeen, and exhibited with painters like Nolan
at the Contemporary Art Society. The *Monthly*
magazine
recently said *Sacrileg*e was 'scarifying' when they
described earlier Australian surrealists, echoing
the Butler-Donaldson book on Surrealism, but
I'm not really sure if I see it that plain,

or the book's idea that she 'abandoned painting
haunted by her European experiences.' My Vera
is, underneath her charm, as powerful as
Sacrilege, certainly, but maybe not neatly haunted.
Painting things like *Sacrilege* might make one daunted
about art's costs to the psyche. I'd call it maybe
'uncompromising'. The violent nature
of any satisfied concept could be enough if one
wanted
a solider reason. *Sacrilege* shows a distorted head
perhaps
in physical and mental anguish on a tilted cross,
barbed wire at back trenchlike and also protrudes from
its only eye above a green crooked snout and sidelong
teeth in that open mouth of disbelieving pain. It
remains
for me again as a transfixed outsider
the most sudden uncompromising horror depiction
I may ever see. After it, any operatic world might be
a daily dallying relief for the painter. Like Plath

on related stark themes, it's as technically skilled
as a polished aria. I don't know if my instinctive
memory
that they played Viennese operetta to reassure
those entering the gas chambers is here in any way
appropriate. It's probably another needed wedge
of continuous information, but there is enough
of that, then there's *Sacrilege,* which in its way fits
as an end-of-year card, being in Christmassy primary
colours: blood rust, linden green, at two blues: sky
and sea on the wrinkled grey air. The yellow eye
is darker than the bits like tainted cream, the face on
the cross sings helpless with agony, anger, but never
demands that the eyes return. For a long time
I have wanted to write the right poem about Rudner.

Growing the City

When I was searching for more work by my old friend
Vera Rudner -
who painted the fine fierce thing *Sacrilege* in
the National Gallery,
I came across on the internet a sinewy painting by
another
woman, also a clear discerner: *The Growing City*
by Mary Indyk. I wondered if she were a publisher's
mother
and sent him the file, but in his answer, he
couldn't confirm the painting's author. Let us neither
know who she is. The name is frequent. Instead, I'll
offer
you the painting as it lives in my eyes: lives in colour
unusually: there is aquamarine, there is cobalt, there
is French blue, there is the topaz floor of water,
running under, running under, running under
all things like a city built on sea. There are tinctures
like dull mango orange, lemons. So it seemed to me

the parts from buildings also fruit in a crowded
kitchen,
and the building-frameworks blackly wrought like
chairs.
So why and where is the city growing? And did she
want it to, the solitary painter, want it so blurredly
near
as it is here, and yet every object solid, as if the clear
growth were mysterious in fusion? There are stairs
made of stone and rock passim, and rocks in
fountaining
rivulets, not certainly deliberate, not natural harbour,
surely.
It is Venice, perhaps, or Sydney or some normal
sudden kitchen, or
maybe outdoor arbour, only window-glimpsed forever.
The painting's provenance is 1964, the dealers in
Sydney.
If that is this city, the time for extravagant building
was just over, the habits of buying land too keenly
from the poor and over-investing had begun to be
mistrusted. So did insight/instinct persuade her

to give these structures back to their garden?

Certainly,

their shapes taste sweet, in meticulous confusion,

the russet gourds too round to convince as curtains.

Curtains should be drapes, with those upright chairs,

and there

should be aspects on water, such water as we see

here in strange catalogued variation. And would one

want to meet her? The painter? Want to meet her upon

the steps to that pier, where perhaps only a gondola -

something singular and gliding - could float past us?

Would one want to look more closely at the archway

across from her on its liquid tumult? Would one

begin to see cross-lines, as in music, on certain

hues, so the objects turn again, and one can play

them?

Yes, I think, one might choose to meet her, without

any

hope that the streetscapes be mapped. And if we

do insert the human figure, would it need to be

those black angulations, that sun-rimmed fruit, every
restless colour for water? Or like a Modigliani, she
could recline a little, eyes composedly elsewhere,
a shadowy but compact aura,
so she would fit on the pier, the bridge, the chair
bowed like an instrument to encase her? There are
no such spaces in a city. Space needs this edge at
water.
And, defeated, even I who can, however,
duet anyone, cannot provide the voice: the art
in this work's arrangement closes and forbids it.
The objects shut one out. The eyes can't rest.
Still there is space,
in there, voice
still for the waiting figure: there are platforms,
those ledges everywhere that she has left within
the canvas, she
who shows a city glow with nothingness, she
whose own unresting eyes lead ours to enter
and see a city grow to nothingness.

George Jeffreys: 23:

George Jeffreys Woke Up on a Golf Course in New Jersey

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

even if the room itself seems illusive and loster. She
shuffled into sandals, did that sexy thing women
do of forcing the back
strap up behind the Achilles tendon, with her serious
head bent towards the effort. She said, 'He's bought off
the Deep State
about Syria but we'll be in Afghanistan forever.
Tell him that.'
She went to feed the pets they were house-sitting:
still a white
rat called Johnny Depp, two canaries, Snape and Lily,
and a very
conditioned Blue Tongue called Hello Kitty. The baby,
Corbyn,
slept on beside George like a porcelain Buddha.
Donald Trump could apparently see him,
remarked, 'He's your hole-in-one, Old Feller.'
But George was too afraid here to tempt any
gods who cared to listen. He said, 'Nevertheless, his
mother

told me to warn you about Afghanistan.' Trump

pondered

slowly with his ponderous persona: 'It's better than

the loss

of Syria, to carving up the Silk Road, losing Russia.

I must

keep Russia and the Deep State never like it.

You know that,

and so does she. I've just calmed down Appalachia

like a stallion

with a clutter of Confederate statues: they all have

Equestrian values.' He had lined up the golf ball

again, his strange pink

hands at an odd angle, but he added: 'It's still

a mystery

why I was chosen for this job, George: if someone

maybe

in Washington or Langley decided I would win,

temporarily.

But it's hard being temporary, George.'

And Jeffreys said,

'I know: it's what Lowell said about loving everyone:
you're heart won't let you. You're there and some
necessity
in the bones won't let you leave, even if you want
to please
whoever wound you up and pressed the button.'
The white little ball made a noise
like coconuts in percussion. This time
Trump wandered off to find it in some type
of breezy manmade swamp. He waved at George
and the Skype image vanished.
Clare came back and Corbyn woke up hungry.
She said, 'Afghanistan stays one thing or the other,
at least:
You can't carve up a curse or a ghost.' She nursed
the baby, but lent her head on George's shoulder,
with the stoop
of one beaten soldier in a statue holding up another,
in grief: a face
ashamed by its own knowledge, its relief.

The round, pretty eyes of the Hebrides:

A duet poem

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

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

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

kept

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

remained

with her eyes' fine circles taking in the room, that
old Hebridean mix of awe and pity, did not leave him
striding his new rug with awkward almost-flounces,
his hand in his lion-lank hair. She gave him calm.
She thought aloud: 'There is so much that is important
about money.
The rich have such a gift for seeming poor. What I
wore
when I married your father was the brightest fashion:
coats extravagantly collared in protection. He was
fearful of infection from all others, being German.
He housed the poor in the city, but we had to defend
his exclusion of blacks to the Department of Justice.
It wasn't quite like that, though. He gave the poor
what they wanted: to be exclusive, and that means
the power to exclude.' On a table, King's head looked
back it seemed with equal pity, pride. Donald could
remember articles on some song by Woody Guthrie
just discovered, that upbraided his father for such
things. They

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

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

Flamboyance

in golds was all around like wildest autumn.

Mary Anne

felt Hebridean caution. Her son, in his phased defeat,

ragged-edged, paced, braced like a brittle leaf,

walked away from her with gold beneath his feet.

Can one still write about Martin Indyk

Let us still have a way-in, despite confusion.

Once, that would have been a way

into the process of writing about Martin Indyk, but

it seems more awkward now: and yet that is

still where the thing itself is: where it was

forever, and still that it may be late

in his own terms to write about him, but I think

in truth it isn't out of date, as the poem

originally would have been called *Two Embassies*

and looked at his suggestion in the *New York*

Times to Trump that America have two of them

in Jerusalem to reassure both Palestine

and Israel, using each as a bargaining clause

to control the actors. It was the Brookings

Institution that interested, too, since he is its

Executive Vice-President, and the Brookings

has a left wing reputation, although has never

been really so, except once, and rather early.

Still, it moves around a bit, and its reputation
in some quarters as 'Neocon Lite' is balanced
by its reserve about Netanyahu. Moving around
by working out first uses for Trump, rather
as did Jimmy Carter, perhaps another more
and more unpredictable Democrat, does seem
an advance after Madeleine Albright, patronage
as such, and all its starving sanctions.
The way-in and its necessary caution
helps me here because the pace is slow, I see
that this is a poem about patronage and that
a value in age is that one discards it. That such
discarding slowly of all patronage is a supreme virtue,
indeed, of age, truly, so that one has nothing
to inhabit but the minute, twisting it like
a formal handkerchief, an embassy
before a no-longer formal speech
in fingers nerveless in concentration on
nothing but the time, one opportunity
in this world which will never be one's own.

Diary Poem: Uses of Twin Peaks

Don't Gen Y girls want to be murdered? When I read
the confessions of educated women who talk
of being excited by *Twin Peaks* and Laura's murder,
they turn out to be at least forty, in love with their
own ambivalence, and don't refer
to that other aspect, the purposeful naughtiness
of Audrey, delectable and hilarious,
which Gen Y twitter declares to be
the best thing about *Twin Peaks*. I agree. Gen Y
may not be turned on by plastic, a thing only
irresistible to all animals (who eternally desire
to devour, tear up or sleep in it), may
not even need
to consider encasing themselves or another
in cling wrap as a means to fame or death:
knowing perhaps the two to be sinisterly
similar in their intensity and numbness.
There is the edge of s-m's unwrapped sandwich

in '*Shades of Grey*' and then there are snuff
movies, the habit of watching which
in traumatised women slightly startles me.
I think I have too much frightened empathy
to watch one, and then there is the fact
that empathy objectifies all and the watcher
of snuff is a subjective victim, killer:
imagination's polarity implodes. Of course,
the idea of women wanting murder
is very old and was, already, when Orwell made
fun of it in Dalí's memoir of Gala, was, already,
when Lawrence saw that for each murderer
there must be a murderee. And some of it is
still just the old term for orgasm: kill and die.
How really did Shakespeare get away
with Antony exclaiming to the comely boy
who played Cleopatra, 'I am dying, Egypt,
dying' and no one laughed? It is then we
know the heart is beyond all humour's tricks
at evasion and defence, we know that every

audience awaits a solemn art. James Ellroy
says he wrote his thrillers when dead Black Dahlia
became an obsession after his mother's murder,
Maggie Nelson describes in *The Red Parts*
being sexualised by her aunt's murder, a partner
acting it out for her, and also that old snuff
movie thing once more. Again, how much do I shirk
investigating here about it? Note how every
murder seems to take on a possessive apostrophe
belonging to the victim: as if it's the one thing truly
theirs. Since their wild individuality
is the thing of least interest to their killer,
who is just thrilled by the sameness in behavior,
I wonder whom one sees as the identifier
of the body: who says, 'Yes, My God, it's *she*!'
giving a last reality to Laura, indeed whether
she is Palmer or Gene Tierney in the movie.

Maybe

'If I am dead', she says, 'I will be loved at last,
I will be me.' And indeed then she is she. In sex,

one gesture elides into another: power

shifts like shadows, pain to pleasure, but

nothing transmutes sexually in murder:

in her fear,

the victim can only be the killer, an empty

zero that protects herself from terror: no longer

one voice in the harem, but the master. Breath

at its end jack-knifes in his laughter. Empathy

no longer patronises. Woman-writhing, it

escapes. The police

at the Jack the Ripper killings took pictures -

in case they showed the killer - of the eyes.

Should each identifier, in irony,

confirm that the victim is the body: 'It is Laura.

I know her by the plastic on her face'? Yet

I think Gen Y will always mourn for Audrey:

like me, even though I can't forget

those women whose one private voice is death.

Victoria and Tony: 7: The Veil

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

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

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

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

nothing

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

the painting.

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

Emigre from the Mead-Hall

It must be lyrical, with compounds.
When I was very young and owned, I studied
in Early English the original desolate *Wanderer*:
'Oft him anhaga are gebideð', call it:
'Often he solitary finds himself mercy',
but it is about comfort, of course, not just anguish.
He is a bard who has lost his gold-lord, his hall
of companions where the mead shone like
the honey it came from, bush- blossoms. All was
as mead-yellow as the hearth. He has lost
the hearth. Now he strays anywhere over ice
that is as black-sharp as wind, that roars carnivorous,
where nothing protects him again. Because
absolutely every medieval lyric seems religious,
but those loving someone called Allison,
his solution will be in God's greater mead-hall
with an even more powerful Lord. Brennan
writing his *Wanderer* sequence tried an overall

comfort like that, but since his halled solution
was in poetry, the pieces cry sadness and ashes,
as he did not know or trust incarnate words.
He wrote it before his lover Violet Singer died,
killed by a drunken tram, Sydney Uni dumped him
ostensibly for adultery but really for his madness:
a grief more antisocial than any that he'd written.
So there he was, mad to make-do, an emigre
forever from his mead-hall, honeyed hearth.
Eventually, he took the medieval answer, was
converted back to his young religion, where, at
least, they understood his need for books. But
it is the Anglo-Saxon that stays with me, not just
wailing wildernesses, but restless endurance, that
ongoing savage energy in loss.

The Civil Guard

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

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

I wonder so compactly with four legs under

me, earth slippery with my rivers?

The Civil Guard: 2

Black and red a dress in Spanish lace

pain's colours behind the eyes,

the dry lace texture, the lattice,

blood at midnight, blood at black dawn,

black and red flouncing on the wind

in papers shredded to lace, pain

purified to colour, black and red,

nerves graphic with mercy

as grace. Black and red to earth

the eyes close to see

pain change to Spanish lace.

Jumping to Conclusions

The crucial difference between verse essays and
essays, maybe,
is the question of the conclusion. A publisher accused
me
of 'rhetoric' and 'jumping to conclusions', but rhetoric
can be
the great acquired art the Greeks learned carefully, and
bring
to its best divinely flying concatenations something
of what Dransfield saw in a blackbird with words to
sing
'as high as Pericles.' It can provide a round-trip to the
real.
The word comes from 'exigere' with its very Roman
ideal
of testing, examining, and, in a last desperate fall to
feel,
to drive something out altogether. I'm not sure if

exorcism

is an academic art, but it may be a particular paroxysm for the surviving poet to master, as every hard

humanism

requires that some baggage be left over. If I were Pope - the poet not the chosen Cardinal - I would no doubt

hope

to continue these formal, but trauma-rocking, triplets.

'Cope,

Watson, cope!' as Holmes said, confronted by those in

grief.

While I'm not an impassioned rhymester, there's relief that the rhyme does cope a little, in its controlled and

brief

return to sweet-savouring ways a child learns to speak: by putting the same sensual sounds together. It could

also be

the synapses' equivalent of rocking. And in terms of

memory,

of course the rhyme is mnemonic and has digital

trajectory,

like internet codes, plungingly poetic, although

quantum

may be closer to the triplet form in its loose solution,

since there is a rogue concept, no conclusion.

At any rate, I was insulted by a Pope comparison

(and there you have a quad, so we've turned

compulsive)

as the publisher meant my verse essaying could give

no scope for the narration in a novel. But I believe

Pope to be a satirist, and satire too conservative.

An essay should still have the wildness to live

by poetry in the wind's eye on Greek mountains.

I made sure the work we were discussing then

even more exaggerates the plot that I had chosen.

The *War and Peace* aspect of the problem -

that Tolstoy called that entire book an 'essay' -

thought his first novel *Anna Karenina* - does convey

at least the irrelevance of the plotless. We may

be talking exegesis, and on such a day

when a breeze code-switches every other way,
buffets between verse and prose (that's five rhymes),
between third, second, first person, and at times
between any of the genders, known forms,
and we realise an antique critic or teacher
clenches his knuckles on control by trying harder
to reclassify or classify the genre, or to remember
a weird one, or invent another. When I was younger,
an earlier publisher rejected my '*Problem of Evil*'
because they thought it a very unsuccessful
Victorian verse-monologue. I agreed, but by that rule,
said, too, it was an unsuccessful sponge. At the start
here it is to conclusions I respond, and then the art
of leaping across labyrinths to them, and in verse
the result is in binary or quantum: such a universe
has my parallel-not-hierarchical position, but is no less
an essay than the heart's in its jumping random
exorcism of its own undying phantom. We are close
here to such infinity in flesh.

May Holman

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

me

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

dutiful

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

perched

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

head

forest shadow-filled, the poor crowding lonely around

the front of the train, hardly believing that a woman could just arrive like that, and be the sane mother, vow to them security. She was the first woman Labour Parliamentarian in Australia. Opening up more, there is the oddness of her only marriage: to Joseph Gardiner, an alcoholic with a genius for the non-consummation of absolutely everything, including his relationship with her and his career as a member of the Legislative Assembly, having left the state mysteriously, thus helping bring down the Scadden government. He is a wispy, non-threatening looking creature. He returned her letters unread, one weak occasion. She divorced him, and she never tried again. How could he abandon eyes so shy, sad, fine?

I am down, and on your eyes' behalf, May Holman. She was an alternate-delegate to League of Nations,

an isolationist who believed in only British

Immigration,

but was always solid on the woman-thing, including the Women's Interstate Executive, setting up country meetings. That's often the way with Labour women: like Gillard's, there is hope-wizening in wisening

pragmatism.

It isn't safe, as Bevan had foretold: so much constant standing in the middle of the road. Her health in fact was always fraught: chronic asthma, chronic heart. When she died after a car accident, eight women from Labour organisations held her coffin, and her brother inherited her electorate, since it was discovered she had been surprisingly loved. Trees fall unexpectedly in arboreal wilderness with its strained, alcoved gloom, there are eyes of children suffering

or animals in alarm,

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

Tanya and Jane: 3:

The Wombat and the Tea

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

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

Emma

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

had

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

Jane

would have crossed so very much to drink this tea.

Tanya

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I am supposed to focus on families, education, but I do still think on foreign policy, despite the general fear apparently that I will be indiscreet. It was actually good when I played verbal chess with Julie Bishop. We meet at certain points in sense and sympathy. But Korea?'

'I can bring you the Napoleonic Wars', reflected Jane, 'but the great asset in Korea currently seems to be that neither Mr. Trump nor Mr. Kim have any hunger for territories beyond their outraged spirits, if with too

much noise and not enough concession.' 'Noise', said Tanya, 'is a thing that makes me wary, but I see that the noises which frighten one when younger are the noises which can later save the peace: the art becomes like opera, to be critiqued, and that aspect in itself precludes some violence on the way.' The way to what, of course, they knew another question. The

day

around Tanya seemed a nursery in its passion, light's transparent freshness, energy, but something, too, tranquil, gentle, like her rounded cheeks. Jane had never had a friend like such bright weather. Tanya watched her shyly with firm eagerness to measure. That, and the tea, persuaded her to stay.

Silence's arms

I didn't have a funeral for my mother. I am really not as one publisher of mine suggested, some sort of pathological recluse, but one reason - not excuse - was that I was anxious that her spirit would attend it, and realise in terror she was dead. Better she just be here with us, included, was my logic.

Similarly, too, I was always so desperately tactful with my father. I would read him novels every night - everything from James Bond and Raffles to *Middlemarch* - but if there was ever the word 'blind' I changed it to 'deaf' or completely took it out. I was skilled at reading aloud fast and at the same time hurriedly reading ahead. Once I made the mistake of suggesting Lawson's *Sandy Blight* story, not realising it concerned blindness and he paused in stillness close to a shudder and explained what it was about with real mortification: as if

blindness were some sort of abortion, only
to be admitted very rarely, very gravely. He had
frosty satin hair like Cary Grant, but
once I mentioned it casually in conversation
and he said, 'It's not white, is it?' as if I were
bantering and could change it. If he were talking
to me now, I would avoid the obvious, in case
he might say, 'I'm not dead, am I?', anxious.
He talked often of his mother being Irish, but
said not once that his father was Indian.
If some Indigenous tribes (not in NSW) do not
mention the dead as a holy taboo, wherever
do the dead go to retain their sense of being?
However do the living process trauma? Perhaps
silence's arms are solid, comfort then.
When I was twenty-three my father's funeral
was something he had fantasised about: he was
right: there were massed sincere mourners, a choir
of local schoolchildren, rosewood-smooth coffin,
healed patients, mates, all very Roman Catholic,

but I did not feel left out, just a confused

mourner there who functioned as a witness. Now

I could tell him it was everything he wanted,

but would that involve him knowing he was dead?

Diary Poem: Uses of Golf, Cats and Nazis

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

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

sent it to Ben Haneman, a friend who was a surgeon of the lower bowel, had a *Don Quixote* Library hoarding anything in the Spanish tongue. He was in the Fabian Society, like me, but when he went to Spain he would stay with Opus Dei, as *Don Quixote* transcended any vulgar politics. He was so happy I remember to receive the Borges issue. Now I wonder if *Encounter*'s Swastika preoccupations grew from the need for readers, and to validate the position of their ethics, or from that bone-gnawing obsession to understand the soul's strange double crosses, how the fall into a whipping trap is sudden. Would we know more about the cats? But before I'm quite over *Encounter*'s anomalies we should remember Shirer: *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* was read, too, for every HSC Course in History about then, that the gas chamber bits are pure pornography, beloved by bored schoolchildren and the late Moors Murderer.

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

And God Created Nora Barnacle

I think for Gen Y sex is more relational,

knowledgeable,

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

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

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

it means he won't shoot her, or because she
wants him braver, like her, or her nerve-tips
crave for the dramatic. They do end up together
going back into the house quite gently (bad news
for his mother) and we remember most perhaps
that she usually had her shoes off, that she walked
on her soft footsoles as rhythmically as Marilyn
Monroe on stilettos, acting sensuality as real
as the downy animals she harbours: for the bunny
is silly, trusting and hungry: not playboy. We
remember also her disinterest in money, luxury
and travel. That is probably what shocked the French,
who could cope with Proust's Odette, or Colette's
whores. And maybe it is what most pleased
Beauvoir.
There is so much power in those natural material
rejections. In the same way, I was thinking
about Joyce's wife Nora Barnacle, from whose letters
he borrowed Molly's monologue in *Ulysses*. Nora
was born in the Galway workhouse, and probably

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

but his voice could break her from another room.

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

Rich Men's Houses

I have quoted myself once already in a poem,
Uses of Live Odds, that poor men don't belong
in rich men's houses. I said it first in an essay,
Death by Persona, about John Forbes. I say
he spent too much time in the houses of those
friends financially better off than he was.
I will tell you how I witnessed the Luna Park
Fire, because I'm thinking bleakly of those
new things I know about it: Lionel Murphy
being friends with the crime boss of Sydney,
Abe Saffron, who is said to have ordered it
so that he could take over the land, a set up
to be approved by the Labour Party. Poor men
are a danger in rich men's houses. But then
when the fire burned the ghost train, a man
and some children, I was young. I saw it when
I'd had to transfer an opera ticket from my
usual cheap matinees to a sleekly wealthy

First Night of T*he Girl of The Golden West*. It was
the only time I saw Donald Smith sing, his voice
less harsh than the recordings, much more tender
in focus to his soprano, directed only to her,
as if a small fat bald man were ideal lover.
We've moved into triplets: I must be nervous.
There was reason to be nervous, but the guess
I had then was only about some fire as such, if
intuitively looking at the exits, fearing smoke.
When it was late and we had left the Opera House,
there was a light reflected in the Harbour
like the shuddering of autumn leaves on tar.
And no one left the pier. One followed their gaze
and saw the flames three times the height of the head,
and clown's face leer underneath. Next day the dead
were numbered. But I remember the strange tallness
of the pure thick flames, no blackness and no breath
of creeping smoke: all looked intentional.
Someone else there that night was Phil Hammial,
who was a carnival hand. Many of these were out

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

‘Dulcinea and I were Enchanted’

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

The ordinary light twists, falling

Like thick flashing water

& one feels

The day's strange heat solidify our sleeping

Into a victory lost to the crisp shadows,

Upon the weary, autumn-pungent grass.

It doesn't seem Enchanted, but be careful.

He keeps such places for his battlefield.

The Fabian Society was a unit distinguished
not by attending meetings but by realising that
someone else was in it, rather like the CIA,
perhaps, but on a calmer level. Ben's library
was lined with splendid woods and Spanish
volumes. I eventually sent him the Borges
Encounter. I was not yet twenty one and very
serious. When he asked for my *Quixote* poem
ms, I carefully copied it out in handwriting
and signed it, as I always did when someone
asked for an ms, not having any such thing,
just a notebook and cryptic scribbling. Everyone

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

Cobham

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

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