

## **Sampler of Jennifer Maiden's 2020 poetry collection**

### ***The Espionage Act: New Poems***

#### *Sample Poems:*

1: *Resistance*

2: *Except*

*(The Federal Police Raid on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation)*

3: *Brookings Gets A Helmet*

4: *Gore Vidal Woke Up in Belmarsh Prison*

5: *George Jeffreys: 25:*

*George Jeffreys Woke Up on Abu Musa Island*

6: *The Espionage Act*

7: *Diary Poem: Uses of Fear*

8: *Clare's Dream*

9: *Brookings Tries Out Ubiquity*

10: *Diary Poem: Uses of Alan Turing*

11: *Diary Poem: Uses of Poetry Wars*

12: *What if all the village were vampires?*

13: *Maximum Security*



## Resistance

Gore Vidal woke up in a London Magistrate's Court. Julian Assange was beside him, reading Gore Vidal's *History of the National Security State*, and Vidal didn't wish to interrupt him. The Magistrate was waiting impatiently for Assange's lawyers and evidenced in himself a hatred of Assange that to Vidal seemed strange in its own narcissistic intensity. He expected this small judge with his inappropriate power soon to attack the man on trial as if it was Assange who showed the vanity - a sort of transference, perhaps. Vidal was puzzled by it, but then remembered that this Magistrate was the one who had stopped a private prosecution of Tony Blair for war crimes. Vidal felt quite possessive about his reader - as a species most readers seemed to achieve a tragic extinction too soon, unlike magistrates and writers. He felt possessive too about all those pictures of Assange under duress carried calling out in handcuffs from an Embassy with this same book, from which Assange feared to be parted. If it was a signal



to the Deep State about Dead Man's Handles, thought Vidal, it was also clearly something he loved reading. And, really, there was no need to mistrust the veracity in this man. He seemed to share the love of Montaignian honesty in discourse Vidal regarded as the first necessity to perpetuate the human. Perpetuating *this* human, however, would not be an easy task. The legal team having arrived, Vidal wandered over to eavesdrop on them. He was reassured when he heard they understood old American methods about deceit in purchase: that the U.S. and the British would say the U.S. wanted extradition for a smaller charge, and when Assange was their prisoner, increase it to 'Espionage' as if discovering offences, and obtain 'new' British permission. One could not be American, he reflected, unless one believed one had power to threaten death. From his vantage point there beside the blond Defence, he could suss up Assange from the perspective of appearance: he could see the change in him from the former photographs. The Powers, of course, cut off



his electricity for some time, and absence of sunlamps, easy air, shut-off electricity in general, shut-off respect - and the general electricity from respect - will coarsen the reflexes as it over-sensitises skin and makes it lax. Adrenalin might cause frontier beard and whiskers, but undoubtedly that distinct face, features, did observe outwards, fine as ever, over his book. It is not the dark that makes us mad, nor waiting's violence, but still what terror always springs in sudden police arrival, the new fatal manacles. Vidal had sat beside this man, his reader, in the grey and orange police van, and before that heard him shouting 'The UK must resist this attempt by the Trump administration... The UK must resist!' but somewhere in it all he also heard, 'You can resist' and thought of the things that his reader had exposed: from a helicopter massacre, to diplomacy's myriad deceits, surveillance on a people by their State, the Democratic Party's Borgia phase, and the long fatal illness of Iraq. Hillary's people of course called themselves 'The Resistance', but she'd never reminded him of Odette, and as dry, sassy English went, he'd preferred Princess Margaret. But he decided if his reader wanted



him to resist, in another way, he'd try it. Vidal said, 'There was a point when Montaigne's truth became the only real history I retained, as in your revelations. All else was another man's novel, if essential.' 'When I saw the handcuffs, I went back one last time to my room to get your book but then the brute force was a shock'. Assange smiled in the van. The white dollhouse the Embassy was behind them.



## **Except**

*(The Federal Police Raid on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation)*

Flat whites, sandwiches. Strong men. Most around the table, except the Tweeter in the corner, who used to run the room. Except, the ABC in general supported every war from Five Eyes, except the exceptional coverage: The 4 Corners Assange, and except things like our Afghan Murders, which they revealed, except they thought like Pastor Niemoller that as the numbers except them diminished they would remain safe, except then Fuzz came for the Murdoch underwear drawer, except they said USBs were small enough for that, except they don't understand Murdoch's Rolling Stone heart, except how can the end-of-their-sanity order flat whites, except the more serious ones, the ones standing behind, except when they lean over explaining the technology, except they are always two steps behind the technology: except when it mimics a video game, it in its core can except



everything but the binary rhythms of the minstrel, except  
that the minstrel still sings his story on Twitter: except  
that the rhythm of a beat and a space was there, except  
it mirrored the quick coolness of a beating, except  
it is such great violence nothing comprehends it, except  
the exceptional powers, whose up and down Except  
is escaping through the flat white air.



## Brookings Gets a Helmet

Wee Brookings is curled up foetal in his basket. It is all my fault. I read him the *Herald* review that called him a 'stray cat', and that again was my fault for not fully explaining his marsupial nature: that when in defining brookings as things that trickle the Overton window rightward by focusing on little soft left topics and saying this suggested a creature to my mind: Brookings, the silk-nosed squeaker, I did not allow for his solidity, his timidity, the wildness of his sensitivities. He must have followed me home again without my realising, after I read him the book review - which was otherwise so positive - as I leaned against his tree, not understanding how the power of his receptive language works. He seems to be a cross between a wombat and a possum, but 'pombat' seems an insult.





Maybe not? At any rate, the other tricky point in the review was about the White Helmets, and somehow he has found one. It encompasses most of him in his abject state, but I can fix the buckles under his ears. It is an elaborate contraption, full of straps and panels: white with serious blue trimmings. It was thought-out cleverly to suggest respectability, cleanliness, practicality. It is the planning that takes the breath always and the millions in the funding, not just the Al-Nusra connection and the deaths, but it seems to make Brookings feel safe. Perhaps Penrith is not a good place for me to think or research, according to the review, but would another area suit little Brookings better? Here he is as near to his bushland as he chooses. From his basket we can both see the mountains: he, too, ambles wide enough in Walden. The photos of themselves by the White Helmets



have them carrying such children in their grasp.

If Brookings could be older, with more deliberation,

I'd ask 'Should all my poems have tables, footnotes, stats?',

but I've been reading him *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, *Scarlet and Black*  
and *War and Peace* and he sees himself like that.

I'll be caressed back by his innocence to the last.

And who am I to take away his comfort,

who has offered me such comfort with his trust?

I talk into his fur as he regains his equilibrium,

clinging to my shoulder, in his hat.



Jennifer Maiden with her concept of the marsupial 'Brookings' (originally from her collection *brookings: the noun*) in his helmet



## Gore Vidal Woke Up in Belmarsh Prison

Gore Vidal woke up in Belmarsh Prison, Julian Assange at last asleep on the solitary bed. Vidal sat in the metal chair beside him reading to him from *History of the National Security State*, the book by Vidal that Assange had clutched, dragged from the Ecuadorian Embassy in handcuffs, and later read awaiting his Magistrate's trial. Vidal had accompanied him, therefore: the loyalty to one's reader being more fierce than any family tie, sexual passion, social obligation.

It was true he did not see himself in teddy bear fashion, but he felt that it was necessary for him to read aloud from his own work, as they had taken Assange's glasses.

Vidal's own history had been edgy, but he still thought it amusing to be at last in Solitary. The Espionage Act's 18 charges were what had been predicted by Assange and Wikileaks for years, and he'd expected them, too. The man was not a liar. Montaigne



himself had commended him to Vidal, but when Vidal recounted that to Julian, there was just a polite grin. Montaigne had been irked by normal Hillary-fibs that the DNC leaker was Russian and not young men annoyed about Bernie, unknowing about death.

In this angular, gaunt room,

Assange's face had gentled younger, perhaps due to the lack of close eyesight, to white light from the barred widow, the small television with its simplifications like childhood. Vidal the man had been in war and recognised the exhaustion from trench to trench bombardment. He was touched that this boy who spoke with an almost baritone timbre of reason once fell for a honey trap. Vidal had never experienced more monumental dissembling than in his affair with Anaïs Nin, but nevertheless fucking a CIA spy plus a stooge in a tight pink top would seem to be a greater erotic unwisdom.



Assange had said, 'I thought they were my friends.'

Vidal had never been much impressed by Sweden.

They had produced but then harassed Bergman

and Greta Garbo showed no love for them, despite

her penchant for plunging naked into lakes, no doubt

inherited from her upbringing. The lawyers all seemed

to be politicians on the make with the States.

A serious question: would Assange be safe

in Sweden from Extradition? Hardly, Vidal thought:

just as with the UK, his countrymen would promise

no death penalty and all would pretend to believe.

He let his own gaze accept the furnishings.

The cell had shining floor and dark cream cupboard,

ceiling light a high fluro strip. He cupboarded his book

about power of presidents: no locks. In his sleep, again,

Assange's face regained fugitive trust. Vidal tugged up

the grey thin blanket resignedly on him.



## **George Jeffreys: 25:**

### ***George Jeffreys Woke Up on Abu Musa Island***

George Jeffreys woke up on Abu Musa Island. It was 4th of July.

Here were crisp woodland, hilly grass, quiet scenery.

In Washington, Trump's Military Parade was sogged and rainy.

On George's Langley-lent phone, Trump was asking:

'Why are you there, George?' and George was responding:

'For the sun.' Trump knew George wasn't CIA, but that he

had a beer-drinking buddy in Langley,

and this was closer to the Deep State than the President was

yet to be, on a man-to-man basis.

Trump was always uneasy man-to-man,

but had found George convivial at a dinner in Washington,

if at first mistaking George's Human Rights Concern

for all the CIA ones. George was comfortingly anti-Global,

however. George asked, too tactless for trouble:

'Did you know that your Military just sent a RC-135V Rivet



Joint Surveillance plane over this island, where are set up Iranian anti-aircraft units? Clare has confirmed that the plane used a fake Iranian code, and that it was manned, unlike the last drone of provocation. Fortunately, the Iranians held their nerve and didn't shoot it out of this very relaxing summer sky. Clare and I thought it was a good time for us to leave Dubai, and bring Corbyn here for a holiday. There isn't just grass, and he's rapt in beaches: just walking now, but much more into a sort of crawling-climbing'. Trump could still sigh, 'Aren't we all? I crawl and climb, old man, and try to dodge the bullet that was made for me, when they dum-dummed me up for the Presidency.' George comforted, 'Hillary's No-Fly-Zone in Syria would have started a shooting war with Russia. Avoiding that is at least a collateral gain. Were they going to nuke this little island here if the Rivet was shot down?' Clare sprawled on his arm



on a relatively smoother sea rock, grinned  
with a death's-head irony, still seductive, always young.

Corbyn found a spent shell-case amid scattered stone,  
and she examined it with lazy admiration.

The sea was dark as Australian sapphire gems -  
like her eyes - because of its steep fathoms,

a depth allowing oil easy access, making this place  
the controlling point for mercantile passage.

Trump said, 'You know they want to prove that nukes  
are okay in small doses. When you speak  
to your friend in Langley doesn't he tell you that?

They need them to frighten the Chinese and the Russians?'

George said, 'My mate isn't in the anti-Russian faction.

You could have had nukes at your 4th of July Happening.

You must have known they wouldn't allow tanks  
to crumble up their fragile civic roadways.

The streets in D.C. are bad enough already.'

'An airborne warhead would have looked quite scary.





Zoom!', giggled Clare to the chortling Corbyn.

George: 'The point of Putin's Military Parades is simply that all the World War Veterans still cheer him.'

Trump said, 'I couldn't line up many veterans. They're all so fucking suicidal. And if not they'd all prefer the Parade millions to be spent on them. So selfish, but I suppose, as you'd know, all PTSD does this.'

'I don't have PTSD', said George, 'but I think that Clare still has it sometimes.' She bit him. 'Not', he winced, 'a good example for little Corbyn.'

Anti-aircraft artillery splashed past on a speedboat.

Clare said, 'They're building a hotel but it will not be open until the end of the year. By then they could organise post-nuclear vacations, like they do at Chernobyl, for short durations.'

Trump overheard her, asked 'Did you see the television series on that? There was great naked-men-and-heroism, but anything anti-Russian is anti-me, ipso facto.'



Clare said, 'I tuned out when the soldier shot the cow.'

She was still sensitive about all animals. Now,  
a grey Indian mongoose had followed them onto  
the beach and she threw it some crusts:

'They were imported', she explained, 'to hunt for rats.  
So all the rats are gone, but they're still hungry.'

George said, 'I don't think you could post it easily  
home to your mother. It seems much too toothy,  
like a ferret.' Corbyn watched it in detail, calmly,  
understanding that distance meant safety,  
and there was a way that space made room for time  
in time to avoid explosions, animal pain.

There was a brisk explosion on George's phone.

Trump said, 'The bands are here. I have to speak.'

George inadvertently wished him luck,  
lay back in Clare's arms while Corbyn was fossicking  
and above them in the soft sky there was nothing.



## The Espionage Act

Emma Goldman woke up uneasily in Belmarsh Prison Hospital.

She recognised the sharp shape of a reading Gore Vidal,

who was watching over Julian Assange, curled foetal

in a prison sheet not blanket, not at all

well, she thought, but fragile as an angel.

Death had made her even more maternal

and she had always been motherly, since a girl.

Vidal gave her his usual tough smile:

'I've really been expecting you for a while,

as soon as I knew they were setting up a trial

under the Espionage Act for Assange in the Capitol.

In 1917, you were sentenced, after all,

under the same Espionage Act they'd just chosen to reveal

for Socialists and Anarchists like you who wanted to appeal

to the public against Conscription. You were in jail' -

he pronounced things in Patrician but Southern style -



'for three years, I believe? But of course the charges as they fall together for Assange are eighteen in the grand total the Grand Jury has concocted so far. He'd be locked up all the rest of his life: a waste, and only a fool would deny that this was always their intention. Do you recall anything of your own time in prison?' Even this prison was grey hell for her, but she nodded: 'In fact, The Espionage Act ordeal was the second time I was sentenced. With two other girls - O'Hare the Socialist, the other Anarchist Antolini - they'd call us "The Trinity" - we'd protect inmates from what always seems eternal. How can I help this good man who suffers?' Vidal felt an unusual warmth under his ribs for her: he had expected someone practical and well-versed in lasting strategies of survival, but her appearance was so Jewishly ample and salvational. He remembered: 'You said voting would be illegal if it ever had any effect. I myself lost the taste for irrational democracy after I voted for "Peace" and Lyndon Johnson. Quotable, I've talked of the two right wings of the American eagle.'



She laughed, 'I was cursed with quotability myself. A powerful tool it always is, but double-edged.' 'Assange is conversational, but not aphoristic', explained Vidal, 'and conversational, rather than conservative. He believes more than either of us are able in a progressive democratic text that yet might be helpful to the prospects of humanity, fed by anything informational.'

She conceded, 'Such hopefulness is always all.'

Assange turned in his sleep to the woman's deep vocal tones that soothed with sympathy and rescue. Vidal replaced the volume - that was his own still - on the sheet, lest the hand slumber-search until it miss the book, Assange wake up in hell.



## **Diary Poem: Uses of Fear**

*(written a week before the death of Jeffrey Epstein)*

He tried to hang himself, apparently. Epstein in his cell,  
was rescued by his ex-cop cellmate, who was under arrest  
for four murders, but Epstein seems to be well  
again now, if maybe warned. Indeed, what might he tell  
of CIA money laundering, Clintons, the Royal 'Lolita Express'  
to the great green land of Ponzi, always a dulcet hell  
at the top of the Faraway Tree? This poem is about sex.  
In fact, the whole subject of underage girls  
was revived again by the Epstein factory. In the U.S.,  
adults buy children for sex 2.5 million times as an annual  
statistic. One woman who had been kidnapped for this,  
said the demands of the clients are more hard core, anal  
and abusive now, that of the roles a prostitute can express  
- sophisticated, motherly, innocent or fearful -  
the last is almost always the client's demand. That's a real



let-out one assumes for a tired young woman, whose terror at last becomes a professional asset.

I am thinking of Virginia Woolf's reference to the fact of that odd need people have to feel frightened. All whoring is plotted empathy, of course. As we talk here of the CIA, it is also a matter for the thoughtful about how their psychological torture drove the actress Jean Seberg to death (she'd gone out with a Black Panther) over a long time including through the pages of Mockingbird publications like *Time*. Was it at last an actual murder? They were the artists of accidental death, miss-attributed slaughter. She was so beautiful, with an air unaware and detached, self-possessed. Was it indeed one person who kept the chase alive, or did committees inherit it? Not enough is said about the role of the purely sexual in the field of Intelligence, the prettiness of a pawn like Yulia Skripal. Did the agents line up



like migrant workers outside the shed-in-the-head,  
making sure each target is swapped from place  
to place? Epstein perhaps understands that the sensual  
facade, the plane skin-pearl, skin-polished, was not  
expressly about money, became irresistibly about  
fear-in-the-eyes orgasm, and the patient, in-the-dark  
spasming fingers of the noose around his neck.





## Clare's Dream

She feared that he dreamed her again.

With his head on a sack of souls in slumber,  
on the midnight moonlight border,  
as if he were George beside her,  
she lay on the pulsing arm  
of the Master of the Crossroads, as he told her he  
'Would not be Alexander Downer  
for all the oil in the Timor Sea.'

Like all obsessives, the mind of the Master  
revolved on card-stacked scenes:

'The snap with fat fishnets in dreams,  
fuck-me flirt heels, that smoky bar where they  
set up a slick boy to implicate Russians,  
every chortling MI6 conspiracy,  
the bugging devices disguised as charity  
in Dili, where the infant mortality  
is like this' - a grisly Tarot skull picture -



'then Gillard denying the trickery,  
insulting them with a spokesman who was spy,  
and Upper's cool woodside consultancy  
which finally snapped poor Witness K,  
now pressured and pleading guilty;  
the forthright but raided Collaery  
once on his way overseas to testify  
now carrying some cross of passportless humanity  
to prison as a token lawyer's fee.'

'There is more than one passport, as you yourself might say,  
however,' Clare recalled, 'And the brave K information  
meant they re-negotiated more in Timor's favour'.

With a sudden Tarot grin,  
he vanished and the dark cards scattered free,  
but waking she could still half-hear the Master:

'Don't you know, my dear, that once I dived with Downer  
for all the oil that was in the Timor Sea?'



## Brookings Tries Out Ubiquity

I've finally coaxed the white helmet off him, in my fear  
he'd strangle himself in his tree. He's left the headgear  
here in his basket, temporarily, comfortably near  
so he can still curl up in it to sleep. I didn't care  
to explain too explicitly that the real Helmets are  
Jihadists spreading out globally where  
it suits governments to create bizarre  
provocations for bombings there and here.

If he were Jann Harry's Peter, his fur  
would bristle with curiosity to hear  
about the other Brookings' mighty Brother,  
the Council on Foreign Relations, wonder  
if he has any Foreign Relations to mentor,  
but Brookings is more marsupial, would rather -  
with such possum and wombat ancestors -  
as a pombat, roleplay - not decipher - how things are.



I've told him the Council on Foreign Relations say  
their motto is the word 'Ubique' to convey  
their ubiquitous role in every powerplay,  
whether global or presidential, and today  
he is rolling, bouncing and sprawling his way  
through the bush like a plump drone dodging a laser:  
ubiquity, if with that self-aware  
energy observable in a baby or a joey.

When we are old, we no longer act the play  
so much for the back stalls of the theatre.

When he follows me home at the end of day,  
and wriggles into a helmeted comma,  
a pink-padded marsupial semi-coma,  
his coat left twig-tossed and leafy,

I still read him his favourite bits of *War*  
*and Peace*, where Pierre courts Natasha,  
slowly like a cautious bear, and also where  
Pierre exchanges one glance with an officer,



who conducts executions, a glance *before*,  
which involves each's spontaneous humanity  
and - here Brookings will snuffle, happy - therefore  
is spared the conveyor-belt of murder.

Like me, the little creature  
feels safer incarnating human mystery  
and before he sleeps is comforted by mercy.



## Diary Poem: Uses of Alan Turing

Half an apple by his bed.

Apparently there was no apple in his stomach, just the cyanide.

So much for his recounted fondness for Snow White,

the Queen's hand stroking the poisoned apple's roundness.

I was wondering about cynics who say he was killed,

but then Wikipedia calls them twice Conspiracy Theorists,

and that does make the murder thing more likely. Expect

this poem to be a little speculative, seemingly to one side

at times but keep in mind that he wrote a thesis -

as well as cracking the Enigma code and computer exegesis -

thought to be his masterpiece, *The Chemical Basis of Morphogenesis*

that postulates a catalyst A and an inhibitor B that diffuse

across time at different rates, their interaction in space

creating different but echoing patterns. The simple result

being stripes and patches in cats, in everything. The Turing Test

is to find the difference between Artificial and Human thought,

the reverse of a Captcha Test, but it is here he may have balked



too much at the Binary, I think. What if in the core of it, interacting positive and neutral, there is more similarity than not between digital and human? Would guessing that make a man a threat to the instincts of MI5, MI6, the FBI, whatever, even in the Fifties? Intelligence Agencies are so subject to their instincts. Even if they just knew that they didn't like him... I grant you could ask why they didn't just blackmail him, use Mafia to be primitive Epsteins, as they blackmailed J. Edgar Hoover in the dress? Maybe the genius at codes was practical, no photograph could exist of him in so much compromise. He had enough wit, perhaps to laugh at the chemical castration, the sudden lack of erection from the sentence, the newly applying breasts, that anyway stopped a year before he died. And his true love had died when he was young, the rest were just pick-ups outside the cinema, at random. Equipment to plate spoons with gold including cyanide were stored in another room, as if to cover for any form of death. Perhaps he wondered if his arrest for being homosexual was a warning. I will digress - but



not really, I don't do that - I think I love you too much to lose  
my concentration - so many of the 'Virtue-Signaling' press  
are now swearing off the Net like alcoholics,  
pact by New-Year's-Resolution pact with self,  
having been told by quarterly essays, Murdoch Successes  
and Scott Morrison in Paris, how newly dangerous  
Fake News and any internet opinion left outside  
Overton Window creates massacres, and according to Art  
Mandarins with Pulitzers the customers should be instead  
exploring the orchard of their senses, their social life  
falling rose gold in orbs for picking from the trees:  
paintings on rich walls, breastskin fingered feel of pages,  
the poetry in the detail of new nerve-ends. Books&breath,  
I love you and your history, your resolutions. I would not  
quarrel clumsily with the beautiful. If they all write in the interest  
of combating the internet's dissident power that is based  
as I've often said, on its binary rhythms as mnemonic  
as poetry, as intestinal, metrical, universal, catalytic





as the memory of the minstrel, on the natural heartspace,  
invincible electricity that calls us back to earth, one should  
still respect their panic at the beat of their own blood.

Is that some of the hatred of Assange? But the new £50 note  
in Britain featuring Turing has on its ribbon the binary code:

101011111110010110011000, which in decimal is 23061912:

Turing's birthday, 23rd June 1912. He must enjoy that. He wrote  
his dead love's mother he believed in afterlife: something a bit  
like re-incarnation. He worked before his poison-death  
apparently on Operation Verona, identifying Russian spies  
in U.S. government from wartime radio signals. A risk,  
they may have thought, if he travelled to Europe: or just  
something the CIA/MAFIA/MI 5/MI 6, may have thought  
as simple as sex, as controllable, uncontrollable. Who knew what  
his brain would do next? What the man would? What the tides  
binary between the shores of man and metal would spread  
out at their feet? Better stop it: suicide by suicide.

Cyanide. And half an apple by his bed.



## Diary Poem: Uses of Poetry Wars

In a panel where we joked about Rose  
Lilley's childhood house and the hidden pit  
from renovations inside the front door, I  
remembered a poetic anecdote about  
the word 'accident' and recounted that at twenty  
I wrote to Tranter that my poetry was just  
an 'attempt to mend its own accident'  
and he responded that his was 'an attempt  
to create its own accident'. The panel chair  
took this old friendly discourse as evidence  
of 'Poetry Wars' and laughed, and I forgot  
to explain there was no conflict, perhaps  
amused in private by the contrast between theory  
and the practice that poets disappeared downwards  
in some shrugging accident at the Lilleys. But  
clearly Australian Poetry Wars are axiomatic,



expected now where they are not. So what  
was their purpose? Perhaps If the CIA had  
devised them, or some such, Cord  
Meyer or some such would have explained  
it was about the future, that in the next round,  
if some poet reacted to something, they'd  
be classified and dismissed as part  
of Australian Poetry Wars, with that shrug  
in public opinion that is worth some effort:

a shrug

and an effort that belongs to greater wars. That  
would entail of course a prescience like chess,  
but it is interesting that when I wrote in Fairfax  
about the politics in being dumped by a previous  
publisher, someone on Twitter used the phrase  
'Poetry Wars' at once as if that dismissed it.  
Indeed, I'm remembering that as soon as I'd  
won *The Age* Book of the Year over a deep decade



ago, some U.S. website suddenly decided I must be nefarious and outed me on a 'watch-list', and that Jann Harry suggested they might be Intelligence, although it was more comfortable to doubt.

*The Age* may have made the danger-difference:

an award that was overall, not just poetic. Perhaps

I had fallen into some perilousness like prose. But

the blogger on that U.S. site had just recounted

the Poetry Wars in which Australian poets sent

sinister emails to a bewildered other, their phrases

honed black like knives of ice. I wondered indeed

at the time why they bothered to write with such art,

such effort. But the audience in retrospect may not

have been the victim. There may have been a different lateral critical

urging force that needed to discredit any disagreements later

and the cause had therefore to have arctic eloquence. Nothing would

have sidled up to them as Mockingbird, Paperclip, Operation Chaos,

Operation AEDinosaur, Condor, but could have reinforced in whisper



the unease of aesthetics. There have indeed been decades dated back,  
candidly paperclipped and mockingbirded, and always, always, always  
in the past: in victims' imprisonment, mourned only microcosmal.  
Even if one careful agent in the night, there would never have been lack  
of accident. There would never have been lack of innocence:  
innocence that will hone black like knives of ice.



## **What if all the village were vampires?**

Gabriel García Márquez woke up on a sea bench in Barranquilla, Columbia, next to an Australian critic, recommended by Borges, but did not know why they were there. The complex waters of the Caribbean flickered like ancient candles. García Márquez had suffered dementia caused by experience but now his brain tided clear like a sunlit harbour. The critic said, 'You lived for thirty years in Mexico City. This place is near Aracataca, where you were born and your grandmother brought you up. You said it was due to her impassive manner in telling impossible stories that you developed your technique: Magic Realism, but I don't know if you or I want to discuss that concept as we're probably both over-used to it. The term was first used by the art critic Franz Roh in Germany

about painters.

He praised some as not Expressionist, as welcomely bizarre

because photographic.

That was in 1925. It always seems to me good that those banana



## massacres

perpetrated by the Colombian Government for the U.S. United Fruit Company were so seminal in your work. They remind me of Goya.' Márquez focused, now more interested than polite: 'I guess you could call Goya a Magic Realist. But you are correct: I would not have wanted to discuss terminology with you. It would be the CIA I needed to discuss and by which I was haunted. Borges told me you were helpful about Conservative infiltration, understood his Nobel Prize ambivalence. Of course, I received one. And the U.S. finally let me travel there because President Clinton said *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was his favourite novel. I wonder if he also liked my description of how they gunned down Allende, how Allende tried to defend himself for six hours with a submachine gun Castro once gave him, before they shot his face into a burst banana. His wife was not allowed to see it. But they called it suicide.' 'I have heard that Castro was your friend and very well-read', the critic nodded. Márquez looked at him for irony, but saw that there was only child-like earnestnesses, careful concentrations, in his eyes.



They were very fine eyes, with almost Latin astuteness, but his body had a northern lack of eagerness, of hope. Why had Borges found him so soothing? 'Is Congress for Cultural Freedom 1966 funding of the *Mundo Nuevo* magazine', the critic asked him, 'still troubling you profoundly? You said it made you feel like

a cuckold,

to be used as a left-wing foil for right-wing propaganda. However, you'd let them serialise *Solitude*. But be fair to yourself: they had also duped the young Neruda. And a cuckold is not the worst thing an ambitious man can be.' The problem with being a cuckold, you see,' Márquez explained quietly, 'is that it is a permanent condition, not dependent on any refreshing reality like sex. In terms my grandmother might have employed in her tales: once you know there are vampires in a village, you are never sure at what point the entire town becomes comprised of vampires. And then, my good new friend, what if all the village were vampires?' Their gazes met and the critic felt the realism less than magical. Márquez seemed very young, high-cheekboned, there as they read the Caribbean like a book,





in avoidance, but the critic tried to summon in himself the reason for materialising there, so unexpectedly, confronted: 'Do you believe me too a vampire, Senor García Márquez? Perhaps you have summoned me to stop me? Did Borges sense in the Geneva blueness where and which we met that I was a great danger because I understood his frailty? It is true that I have developed by rituals of convention cleverly. That I have invented dragons to destroy, and frightened myself and others with them. That is the trade of what I do: you, too, have been a journalist, but luckier.

I was cuckolded by truth, and by all art. And then one is only comforted by comfort. Wasn't it comfortable in Mexico with money, soaking up seclusion like the sun: all you had to say was that a new book's coming? And you wrote

at the last

about transcending even sex by sexual passion.' 'That was perhaps the submachine gun my friend Castro gave me. The civil war *La Violencia* between the Left and Right, that killed the thousands upon thousands in my country never left me. If you write about



sex and a circle of ghosts recurring, and the reader sways along on a train full of bodies whose hands are calloused by decades picking bananas, knowing that rebellion in the perceptions is built from rebellion by desire, then you triumph. But to answer: No, I know that Borges said he found you soothing. You are soothing, with your categorisations, classroom questions, simple eyes, long machinations. The CIA were playing games always with the Nobel prize, but sometimes it was still given to me, Jelinek, White or Pinter. In the end, you think it literature in which you believe and your allegiances coincidence: indeed perhaps that could be so.' He conceded, still quiet, to comfort.

The critic listened with his forehead pressed to his hands, which were clasped between his knees, as if he were defeated or disassociating under blows, but was soothed by the attention of Márquez, the privilege, was grateful to have seen the Caribbean: even more azure than Lake Geneva, even more silent with secrets, as if any city that surrounded it a village.



## Maximum Security

Gore Vidal woke up in the hospital of Belmarsh Prison.

Julian Assange was awake, although lately he slept

more than not, his body preparing for freedom,

but, anyway, well-slept nerves tuned more apt

to the infinite concrete in maximum security.

Vidal felt an emptiness that even in his living

had not affected him so much and so often.

He remembered that when his companion

Howard had died he lifted up his eyelid

for one last look at the brilliant eye,

but the colour was already umbered dead.

That was how he felt now, although Howard

could look on him again with vivacity.

Vidal wanted to chat with Julian for comfort.

That was easier than it seemed, as Vidal had nothing

nostalgic to say about the tangy bush



in Australia, had no penchant for the beach:

topics which to Assange were agony.

Vidal asked, 'Did you like my book?' -

added 'God, we authors remain pathetic' -

the book Assange still teddy-beared

in the crook of his elbow, transparently thin

like something from a late El Greco. But

Assange's voice was still the casual baritone

deferential with explanatory energy,

that Vidal had always found convincing.

Had they sat in Montaigne's tower room,

taking care to substantiate their diction,

the discourse could not have been more human.

Assange said, 'I don't really abscond serially,

as they've accused me, but I admit I am

maybe a chronic seeker of sanctuary.

The internet had offered that, crisp binary,

and friendships from women, the patient embassy.'



Vidal said, 'Graham Greene says there can never be friendship between a man and a woman, but I don't think I've befriended any other sex. Men flirt too much with each other.' Although there was not flirting possible between Assange and any delegate from the universe. That line from Donne, 'a verier ghost than I' made Vidal uneasy suddenly. There were no visitors today from the worldly or otherworldly sphere. He observed at random: 'They say the Andromeda Galaxy is going to eat up the Milky Way. They're right. And yet you're important enough for me to bide beside you - you: my reader. And did you like the book?' He, too, could be enchanting, thought Assange, who like all seeking asylum, was weary for, but wary of, enchantment. Said Assange: 'Your *History of the National Security State* was the first book I really wanted to take



away from the Embassy with me. It was its tone  
of wry transcending reason, and the facts,  
of course, the discerning facts. And perhaps  
I thought that it would seem a form of code.  
I don't remember. But you showed they'd put  
in place their own espionage of power. Stay  
with me while I drift off: a thing from childhood  
that makes me feel safe.' And overwhelming sleep  
curled him up again inside the flimsy blanket.  
What was the sentence after extradition?  
thought Vidal: two hundred years or was it less?  
There was the long haul, then there was Assange.  
He settled grimmer on his grey chair with the book.

