



Jennifer Maiden has had 35 books published: 27 poetry collections, 6 novels and 2 non-fiction works. Her awards include 3 Kenneth Slessor Prizes, 2 C.J. Dennis Prizes, the overall Victorian Prize for Literature, the FAW Christopher Brennan Award, 2 The Age Poetry Book of the Year Awards, The Age overall Book of the Year Award and the ALS Gold Medal. She was shortlisted for the International Griffin Poetry Prize.

*I woke up and an ox was at the window, gold and silver like the dawn's dapple around it, and I asked it: 'Are you the ox of this Lunar New Year, whose element is metal?'*

Intrinsic to this collection is the image of an ox with metal as flesh or metal as armour, alive, on watch and casting light on perilous situations, signifying the importance of veracity, labour, perseverance, tactics and endurance. Here, in superb experiment the poet inhabits this essence and examines it, combining personal poetic themes and continuing her tireless exploration of political guises and the nature of passion and power.

'Combining a free-wheeling, meditative style with crisp, lucidly elegant lines... one of Australia's most prominent living writers, "alert to the point of twitching" like the ox to whom she likens herself... who nevertheless "still tramples through the difficult."' - Griffin International Poetry Prize

'Speaking of the Literature Nobel, I can't think of a better Australian contender' - Professor Maria Takolander, *The Saturday Paper*



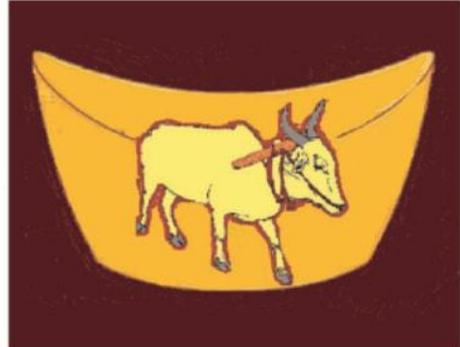
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Jennifer Maiden

Ox in Metal: New Poems

Quemar Press

**Ox in Metal: New Poems**



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**Sampler from *Ox in Metal*  
Jennifer Maiden**

***Quemar Press***

***7 from 28 Poems:***

Ox in Metal

Murder, He Worried

Doctor Donne and the Country Women

Tritium the Mascot

Death-Wish Moths

The peace prize

*George Jeffreys: 34:*

George Jeffreys Woke Up Skyping with Joe Biden

## Ox in metal

I woke up and an ox was at the window, gold and silver  
like the dawn's dapple around it, and I asked it:  
'Are you the ox of this Lunar New Year, whose element  
is metal? I once wrote a long poem, *The Year  
of the Ox*, but that ox was earthen. I said that  
I was an old slow ox, and my element was earth.  
Nevertheless, have you come to greet your brethren?'  
The vapour from its nostrils was like that of an engine.  
The vapour from its nostrils smelt of grassy warmth  
and vegetables. It was clearly organic, no meltable totem.  
The dawn behind it was pure ruby in the paperbarks,  
then the dawn behind it eased to precious metal.  
The ox's eyes were meditative, helpful,  
with the enhanced perceptions of a beast of burden,  
or indeed of all fated quadrupeds.  
It answered, socratically, my question with a question:  
'Do you invest in crypto currency at all?'  
I said, 'I know your being metal is traditional this year,  
as romantic as all else from ancient China,  
but I also wondered if it might be fortuitous  
from the point of view of the rumoured Great Reset,  
in which Europeans have withdrawn their gold from America,  
anticipating the landslide of the stock exchange and dollar,  
and plan to return to the Gold Standard and silver?'  
With a hedge in crypto, as you say, although to answer  
your question I assumed Musk's recent crypto binge was  
some ploy of Israeli Intelligence, whether the Army or Mossad

to shake up the Americans: sort of economic Epsteinism. But no, I wouldn't trust the stuff myself. I admire your lustrous metal, though. You are like the sleek gold boats, which were the first Chinese currency. Surely you are not in any way composed of crypto?' It pondered: 'No, I seem to be entirely alive. The metal in me moves as flesh and bone, not ornament, artefact or abstract.' I agreed, 'Yes, the earth of which I am made is also incarnate. The furrows I deepen cough back my straining breath.' The ox tilted its huge horn - almost too large for a modern species, more like those worn by an extinct aurochs in a gold and silver glade - as if it were in restless meditation. It lowed like a whole abattoir in guttural desperation, but then seemed to brace itself. It allowed itself to be petted, and I rubbed its forehead with my forehead, a medicinal gesture soothing pain, accustomed in our breed. I tried: 'Of course, as well as return to metals as currency, the suggested conspiracy in the Reset is to de-industrialise and reduce the population, so that it is controlled by reserve-owning Davos-style elites: hence attacking Russia, China, your new moon's silk road, but not power of the Military-Industrial Complex?' But the ox's shrug was simpler: 'You are yoked to trudge your stumbling furrows longer. Your skin like mine will turn to golden armour.'

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[Whilst this poem, 'Murder, He Worried', is not graphic about violence, it refers to the hero Malcolm Turnbull's public doubts about the death of a possible assault victim, and his imagined discussion of this with his relative Angela Lansbury, shown as playing one of her famous roles: a woman detective and mystery writer. We therefore give a trigger warning for this poem.]

### **Murder, He Worried**

Malcolm Turnbull woke up on Lady Martins Beach again. Behind him, his house towered handsome. The beach was eerily empty, but on a rug next to him sat his cousin Angela with a typewriter and a cold long glass of something sparkling. She was playing that role he always loved: the lady author who herself solves murders. He also wanted to hug her because he loved the Lansbury soul. Sometimes he wished he had been even more like the great George, although he knew there was still hope, especially married to his Lucy. The inlet gleamed aquamarine, perhaps because it was so small, and the boats were like toy decorations on a cake for which Sydney was the plate, so storied and surrounding. The mystery writer character, however, seemed to be concentrating only on his evident concern. She was indeed too much a subtle part of the scenery to be distracted by it. She said directly, 'She was a great loss, the woman who died last year in a way you have described as "counter-intuitive" to being suicide. You said she was to complain formally to police the next day, and had always had recollection clear as this crystal water of being raped appallingly by someone you had originally appointed to the cabinet.' He nodded, 'Yes. by some sudden email she retracted the accusation, and no one questioned the retraction. Next day she was found dead.' Angela began typing. He hadn't seen a typewriter since their last picnic at this beach. It was a reassuring, busy noise. She remarked,

'The woman had a keen and useful intellect, and she had written a published history of a school and many academic observations on how to sustain urban living through ecology, including for the old. Lucy would have respected that, and you as a born lawyer would have also been anxious about timing. It is always handy for assassins if the victim has tried suicide before. You are as interested in espionage as I am, and indeed your advocacy of the Peter Wright book made it legal. There are so many ways to facilitate a death if a government decides to save its own.' He said, 'I think perhaps they did, or some loyal network of friends went into action. I have never been one of those people, and I have never known how to play them, except now I am certain that you cannot control them by appointing them.' The typewriter tapped with a sudden hollow note of exasperation, and he added, 'Simple, yes, but being Prime Minister over-simplifies everything. You live your own requiem. I am more myself again.' She said, 'You wouldn't have summoned me to you when you slept, if you were not so worried, both by the murder, and the method. I can write you a plausible plot, but is the coroner a solution?' 'I have raised the indelible doubt', he insisted, 'and in a court of law that is sufficient.' But she typed once more and laughed: 'We are on an expensive beach, not a tennis court, let alone a law court. You've called it counter-intuitive for you to assume a suicide, and the possibilities that you open are almost too enormous for one sly and corrupt crime in isolation.' He said, 'Of course, beyond this beach there is an ocean. But what haunts is just that one smiling woman's face.' She said, 'If it's just *cui bono* - although I've heard that phrase is now used to label things a conspiracy theory - then you can

rest uneasy.' She gave him the manuscript. In the harbour breeze,  
he sat and read a clever plot for murder. The dapper boats  
avoided each other gracefully at his sight's edge. Clear light  
dazzled on the wave-crests as they sighed.

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## **Doctor Donne and the Country Women**

If Donne were concocting a synthesis from last night's news, he might say that the Israelis using Trump to assassinate General Soleimani killed the civilised top predator they could talk to, the one dedicated to fighting Isis, and therefore they left a plague of Arab resentment which when they provoked it rose in misery beyond words, and that his metaphor was completed by the mice the NSW Government, having killed top predators like the dingo, fox, and the cat, wants to use banned poison to destroy, risking native animals, water, pets and wheat.

A conceit as used for unusual metaphor by the metaphysical poets is an accuracy not an irony and Doctor Donne would have frowned on the annihilating ironies of the Country Women's Association, they unable to sustain a concept and its binary horizon, voting always to eliminate every threat.

But no doubt they would still enjoy a lively sermon.

We can transport him, older and un-Donne without Anne, to address one of their meetings, taste a stolid scone, and drink the tea of hell, not Paradise's milk. He'd say that Israeli Intelligence - Mossad or the Army - is like these ladies too temporal not to betray itself and its desperate assets - his theme might example Ghislaine Maxwell, with whom they'd be shocked to compare themselves. They again would deflect his metaphor with knowing mirth, although he watches his watch and exits politely. Across a slow meadow that writhes with corpses, he must travel to remind Mossad of Heaven.

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## **Tritium the Mascot**

Japan has decided not to use its little mascot Tritium-kun (little Mr. Tritium) to promote the release of Fukushima water to the ocean. Tritium is the only radioactive atom that remains in the wastewater and the small jade-pale guy with the larger grass green nose and slightly crossed eye - cute enough for couplets - and the headgear of atomic symbols - two yellow orbs and a green cross, was comic in an endearing way they thought too unserious. He's gone. China and Korea and some neighbours are still grim about the vast, long release of the real atom, but Japan's Reconstruction Agency said the little mascot 'means friendliness. We aimed for an intermediate feeling that is neither "good" or "evil"'. Well, yes, that meaning with its innocence of inverted commas, suave neutrality, again makes me miss the little creature. In the jade sea, he seemed so free, and happy, so morally unencumbered. He was retired too young to have any adventures, but my own little Brookings gave him serious attention and is disappointed, being sort of adolescent now and into anime. I guess they - pombats (wombat and possum cross) - are anime in a way, themselves. Named after the Brookings Institution, which he thinks was named for him, Brookings tried to win the Compatible Left (another pombat) over but she rejected his flowers, at least temporarily, and he took refuge in literature and manga. He still loves

me to read to him, still has his joey fur, feels like plush,  
when he cuddles to see the book better. I suppose  
'Tritium' is still copyright, if retired, but I can always invent  
stories for Brookings about Tritium in his element.  
Sea. We will follow him in the water. He will make friends  
but not too easily and some will try to eat him.  
He will flip away at the last, though, and know  
more adventure. Brookings likes Tritium's greenness now  
and his roundness. Like Pierre in Brookings' favourite *War  
and Peace*, he survives by innocence, luck and wisdom.  
I console now that you can't retire an atom.



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## Death-Wish Moths

To amuse Katharine, I called the small grey moths that try to drown in coffee cups and computer screens 'Death-Wish Moths', explain that they are a form of Death's-Head moth, but much less common. Rescuing yet another one from a keyboard, opening its wings with a fingernail and breathing on it until it flutters away to repeat another try at self-annihilation later, I am reminded of how assets of Intelligence agencies are habitually betrayed by them: the latest the President of Haiti gunned down in his home, by English-speaking mercenaries who pretended to be from Drug enforcement, even if he had served his U.S. masters, he thought, well. One is thinking of the pathetic Stephen Ward again, or le Mesurier of White Helmets, or Witness K who was advised in his truth-telling by an Australian boss who retired and pegged him hanging on the line. Do they never expect what will become of them? Afghani interpreters without proof the CIA ever paid them? Editors of magazines whose darlings no longer win crazily confected prizes, fake cream arid cherry on top, and the funds dry up? The dictators in a hundred states advised by a hundred April Glaspies it is good to take Kuwait. Perhaps they always saw in dreams the final Embassy roof as the pitching helicopter left them? Or were they chosen because mad and addicted to death, as the manual instructed? Rhodes scholars in refrain to heart's Rhodesias again? They seem the last word in loyalty, die inexplicitly in love. There is no tragic satisfaction in it, only numb pity, dread at the willingness with which they chose to fall, the trust until beyond the end that they were exceptions, known, as if just to be obsolete it must be just. The moth

left some flying-dust on my fingers but can watch  
me type this from the ceiling, taking some brief  
respite from the light, the downward summons, but  
in Port-au-Prince the states of siege don't stop.

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## The peace prize

Gore Vidal woke again in Belmarsh Prison, pessimistic from life, hopeful from death, in a plastic grey chair beside Assange, who was as usual in limbo but steely with concentration, if brittle with despair. Vidal was more disappointed than he had expected to be by the Nobel Peace Prize not mentioning Julian, although the recipients again were the Empire's minions: a Russian funded by oligarchs, a Filipinx MSM advocate who had already attacked Assange for not being governed by her bosses. It wasn't as outrageous a choice, of course, as Kissinger. Vidal recalled Tom Lehrer retiring and declaring satire possible no longer after Kissinger won the Peace Prize. Vidal introspected: 'I am more preoccupied by this than the confirmation that Pompeo and some other CIA cut-throats planned to murder Julian in the Embassy. When have they never planned the murder, even if the White House lawyers decided the act should be more cautious? And so too decided Biden, dreamy with dementia.' The idea of Julian being sawed into small pieces by a doctor with a walkman, suitcased out like Khashoggi was always a possibility each time Vidal arrived. Vidal still winced whenever the cell was empty. But Assange was always returned to it, seemingly forever. The final appeal was soon, in October. The verdict

gave a promise of peace, some painful recuperation or the Empire's last numb spasm towards decay. The Biden Administration had already promised Assange could serve his 175 year sentence for revealing their war crimes and corruption in Australia if convicted, but Vidal did not expect to see much of the scenery there that Julian described as if it were a wistful planet.

Vidal could guess however he would attend even that place if necessary, wry that the last emotion he had expected to experience after a century in nimble scepticism was this last emotion that he felt now in resignation: faithfulness.

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*George Jeffreys: 34:*

## **George Jeffreys Woke Up Skyping with Joe Biden**

George Jeffreys woke up Skyping with Joe Biden.

It was still daylight in Washington but midnight rained indigo in Mt Druitt, Australia, the light from the window in Clare's mother's house sodden and Sydney a carbon rose glow on the horizon.

Clare was pacing the carpet with her fists tight on each of her wrists to show opposition to his talking with Biden at all after Iraq and other examples of his Council on Foreign Relations rationalised aggression, but Biden had rung suddenly, contrite at not having called George when Trump had said he would find him a good critic: someone who'd help clear your head.

George said: 'I thought you might phone me when you called Trump 'George' before you took office - that I was a subject of discussion.' 'Is this phone safe?' asked Biden. 'Tell him it's CIA', said Clare. George said, 'It's CIA, but the guys on the other end don't listen much, as they're a Langley faction both anti-anti Chinese and anti-anti Russian these days, though they're still into economic Imperialism.' Biden sounded wistful: 'I'd like to meet them. My Borg guys have still got

an obsession with Russia. My CIA Head  
and I have to talk to Putin on a phone  
secured by Russian Intelligence in case  
the Foreign Relations people eavesdrop  
and use it against me if they think I'm soft:  
like Vindman used that stuff on Trump.  
Are you CIA yourself?' Clare gave a snort  
of derision. 'No', said George, 'but I like  
a phone that works and the contacts  
are useful for my Prisoner of Conscience outfit.'  
'Yes, Trump said yours is the only one left  
not run by some Intelligence division, bad jokes  
like the White Helmets. Would you please  
tell your lady that I was never part of Rumsfeld's  
plan to turn the Middle East to chaos'...  
'Iraq, Iraq' muttered Clare again...  
'and don't want to de-stabilise other places  
in order to rule them now. Obama set me down  
on the chessboard to counter Hillary. I did.  
Even though Victoria Nuland and things  
like her were left behind to continue aggression.  
I'm an old man, George, with a bad succession.'  
'You must,' considered Jeffreys, 'hold your brain  
together as long as you can. I believe things complex  
about the Democratic Party: it doesn't just function  
as a false Left to subvert the real one, but  
The New Deal is a long time gone.' Biden  
said 'I just got Congress to pass my new trillion  
dollar Build Back Better plan. That's something

FDR would have liked. But the brain, the brain.  
I bombed a whole family - not the first -  
to death in Afghanistan to make our airport  
massacre look better and maybe I did think  
those babies there were terrorists. George,  
the brain. How much should I really let  
myself sleep, how much can I still trust  
any of my rebelling bodily functions?'  
Clare saw that the old man with the slight  
tremor and stiff, instructed, absent face  
was a walking metaphor for his nation.  
She sat with George on the night-deep bed.  
He explained to both her and Biden:  
'He is Roosevelt now before any war: and a man  
for whom crippling from each failure, grief,  
can in the drug of dementia be forgotten.'  
Clare said, now also in the conversation,  
'But still they want other countries de-stabilised,  
having failed to dement Syria, and the lies, lies,  
lies of propaganda must surely confuse an old man  
genuinely?' She added clearly and more gently then:  
'They are not good for him.' As the Washington  
vision showed a face smoothed out and open,  
'No. They are not good for me', said Biden.

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