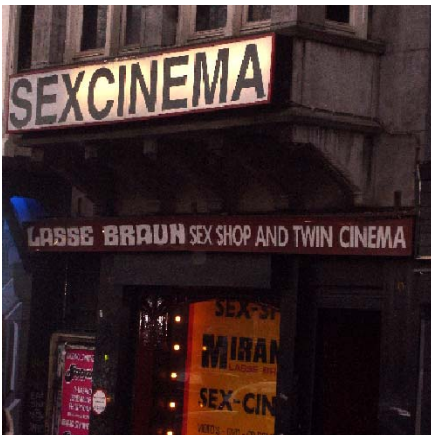




BEAT THE DUST

November 2007

Tony O'Neill interviews himself



Q: Why bother?

A: I don't know anymore. There was a purpose but I can no longer remember what it was.

Q: If the writing stopped tomorrow would you get a job?

A: No. I would rather live on the streets. My favourite line of Rimbaud poetry actually wasn't one of his poems. It was in a letter to Verlaine. He said, "Work is as far from me as my fingernail is from my eye!"

Q: So you would say you are a lazy bastard?

A: It's an aesthetic choice.

Q: Best job you ever had?

A: Shoplifter.

Q: Worst?

A: Human being.

Q: Thank you. Anything else?

A: Please buy my books, and visit me here www.tonyoneill.net

the ammonia angels by Tony O'Neill

Paco says "the only good cop is a dead cop"
 three dollars for a crackpipe rose
 Blackburn Avenue paranoia and seizures
 denial ain't a river in Egypt

opium sweats and night fevers in the St Francis Hotel
 Tommy's got ulcers in his arms
 just another reduction cure Sunday
 cockroaches tap-tapping in short let wallboards

a stoic Virgin Mary in USA Donuts
 three dollars for a crackpipe rose
 Suzie got cotton fever again
 says, "Why did you let me wake up?"

Dave, on the nod in twelve-step bathrooms
 Xanax hymns and crackhead logic
 night sweats and opium fevers in the St Francis Hotel
 chiva, hand to mouth, in Macarthur Park

keep coming back, it works if you work it
 I have spent 43 days waiting on Bonnie Brae and 6th
 hearing the death-sounds in the walls
 Diane gives head for forty bucks

my past skulks in the shadows of a motel forecourt
 a stoic Virgin Mary in USA Donuts
 Carlos holds rocks in his mouth
 veinte negro y veinte blanco

overdose, bow, curtain falls in the Deville Motel
 hooked so bad 80mls won't get me straight
 just another reduction cure Sunday
 Pedro OD's, las cenizas a cenizas

ammonia burns in the Burgundy Room
 round the corner, into endless white
 Blackburn Avenue paranoia and seizures
 "the only good cop is a dead cop"

Jenn Ashworth interviews herself



Me: Feeling chatty today?
 Me: Nah, not really.
 Me: Sulking, are we?
 Me: Suppose.
 Me: Tell us about what made you want to write this story.
 Me: An argument I eavesdropped on in a cafe.
 Me: That really true?
 Me: Could be.
 Me: Anything else?
 Me: www.jennashworth.blogspot.com - if you must.

thumb by Jenn Ashworth

I know she wants a camera. I'm supposed to get one for her. She doesn't talk though, doesn't come out and ask. Chloe has better ways of getting what she wants than that. Catalogues have started appearing on the kitchen table, biro-marked flyers from Jessops in the bathroom. I know how much it is going to cost me, how much she thinks sixteen is worth.

When I say she doesn't speak, I mean she doesn't speak to me. She brings friends back for that. I'm left hovering on the landing, listening to the noises in her bedroom. They laugh like baby birds. The stink in her room, which is mainly a fog of perfume and sweat, feet and cigarettes and damp school blazers, curls out into the landing and hangs around for hours.

I do knock on the door, but before I can push it open she's there, her face and chest jammed between it and the wall. There's something in there I'm not supposed to see. Drugs, or smoking, a bottle of gin, a boy. I can hear smothered giggling. I never look at her eyes. Best not to. I look at my hands every single time I have to talk to her. Dirt from work is ground into the knuckles. She'd be embarrassed by them. I put them behind my back. Now I look like a frigging waiter. She'd be embarrassed by that too.

'Shall I take your PE kit?' I say, 'get it washed?' She closes the door and I can hear shuffling, the crackle of a carrier bag. It appears, mud-spattered and stinking a second later. As I'm on my way down to the kitchen I can hear them making fun of my accent. 'Shall I take your PE kit' rattles round with the smell for hours.

It's a hockey kit. The mud smells like dung, like the sea, like bruised grass. I give it a rinse in the sink before I put it in the machine – feels strange to be wringing out her knickers over the draining board, but I've got to do it – otherwise the mud will clog the pump. I know how to do things like this – the cooking and the shopping, even for sanitary towels. Ironing was a sore point for a while, but even the tricky parts of her school blouses have become second

nature. I almost like it. I'm slow, Sunday mornings with Iron Butterfly on in the background, careful and precise, licking my thumb to test the temperature. It's not bad.

In the shop I tell the assistant how much money I want to spend. She tries to talk to me about shutter speed, bracketing and light metering, but I just shake my head: not interested. The assistant touches my shoulder and makes me jump: the bag's ready. It's bigger than I thought and I feel conspicuous as I walk home. I know full well I look nothing like the kind of man who'd buy himself an expensive camera.

I'm supposed to take up a hobby, or go to a nightclass. You get weird otherwise. Not weird, just a bit eccentric. I thought I'd try yoga. I bought a mat and practised touching my toes between classes. I'm the only man there and I worried a bit about the women thinking I was only there to look at them. It's not so bad now, all that closed eyes, visualising streams and rivers and what have you, sorting out the sore places in my back.

I drink as well, two or three evenings a week. Nothing serious, one or two pints, the paper. The regulars nod at me now, and I nod back. They probably think I prefer to sit on my own. I wouldn't mind a friend to clap on the back and do loud laughing with, to say 'women' with and to make a drunken speech to.

There is a woman at my yoga class. She always takes the mat next to me. She's got marzipan coloured skin. I know a few things about her. She can unlace her shoes without unlocking her knees; she hinges at the hips like a toy; when I drive home after and I see her car in front of mine at the lights, my hands shake a bit.

Chloe's not in, so I just leave the camera on her bed, the receipt stapled to the plastic handles of the bag. She isn't back by the time I want to go to sleep, either. It's morning and I'm chewing toast when she appears.

'Happy birthday, for yesterday,' I say. I can't tell if she's sulking or not. It isn't my fault I missed it. She looks rough. God knows what she was doing last night. She's not opened it yet.

'Is there something wrong with it?'

'It's automatic,' she says, 'point and shoot. Compact.'

'I don't know what those words mean.'

'I want,' she says, putting the box down and making her fingers and thumbs into a rectangle, 'creative control.' She looks at me through the lens of her fingers and frowns, 'I want,' she says, letting her fingers drop onto the shiny lid of the box, 'to learn how to do it properly.' I think she's still drunk.

'This is a very good camera,' I say.

'I'll use it for practice,' she says, after a while, 'until I get a proper one.'

Because I'm still watching her with the box she sits on the carpet and scrabbles her fingernails over the edge of the Sellotape on the flap and opens it.

'Well?'

She shrugs.

'It came highly recommended.'

'Did you get film?' she asks, holding it up to her face. It is wrapped in plastic, but she doesn't peel it away. Before I can say anything she says, 'Oh,' and looks at the receipt.

'Fifty five pounds,' she says, and shakes her head, 'you could have got a second hand Zenit for that price,' she puts the camera back in the box, 'and a few films.'

'I don't know what a zenick is,' I say, and pick up the toast.

'Zenit,' she says, leaving the room. 'and you forgot the batteries.'

The woman's name is Suko. I get there a bit early and take a mat at the opposite end of the room to usual. For some reason I don't want to be anywhere near her. I don't want to have to look at her. I find some of those postures we get into suggestive of other things. I want to look at her without her looking at me. I want to look at her eyes close-up without her seeing me.

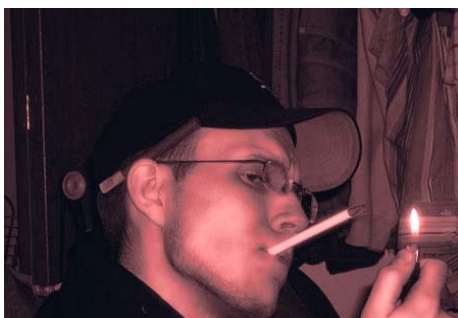
After the class I walk really slowly through the leisure centre until she passes me and goes to her car. I take my time tucking my mat into the boot until her car shudders around the corner. Then I drive fast, catching her up until there are only two cars between her and me. After a while, I park and watch her get out of her car. She shuts the door and the lights in her house go on. I see a spider plant in the window and her arm closing the curtains. Then I go home.

I'm thinking about that marzipan, although it isn't, I've realised, marzipan at all. It is very milky coffee, it is uncooked pasta. Horlicks. She is a very healthy colour. Horlicks. If I had thought of it earlier I could have told her about it. I could have licked my thumb and touched her skin and said you know the first time I ever saw you I thought you had skin the colour of Horlicks. I try to imagine what she would have done, what her laugh would have sounded like. Happy, or like the baby birds in the back bedroom? She might have made fun of my accent. I wouldn't mind getting the chance to say 'Horlicks' out loud to someone who isn't her, just to test if it sounds how I mean it to sound.

Chloe is lying on her bed with her eyes closed. She might not be asleep – the blue lamp on her desk is still switched on, making a warm yellow circle on the cover of her textbook. I can see the wires of her headphones creeping out from under her hair. As she turns in her sleep (she is asleep, I've got so close to her I could touch her if I wanted to) the cord wraps itself around her throat and her teeshirt bunches up around her chest. She's wearing black knickers, shorts really, like a boy and I can see how flat her stomach is, a little concave sail strung between her hips. There's a heavy smell about her, not in the room, but from her body. It is grown up – thick - oily and menstrual. Her hand is on the pillow and there's dirt under her fingernails; yellow stains on her fingers.

She opens her eyes and I keep still. She used to do that when she was a baby. I'd think she was awake and I'd be rushing to get her milk but she'd go off again, no trouble. But now her eyes come fully open. I just stand there. She won't remember in the morning. I can see her focusing, waking up properly, and I start making my mouth into the shape of an apology but she moves over on the bed and puts her arms out to me. I reach over and put out the light, the little bones in my neck cracking as I lick my thumb and get into the bed.

Mathias Nelson interviews himself



Q: I hear around fifty percent of people who grow up in the country have sex with farm animals, what do you think of that?

A: Well, if the farm animal's being a tease . . .

Q: What do you think about murder?

A: If the monkey would learn to swim the tiger wouldn't get him.

Q: Why do you write?

A: Why do you live.

Q: Do you believe in cannibalism?

A: If the setting's right.

Q: Is your poem going to be anything like this questionnaire?

A: No! Beat The Dust should have taken the other two I sent them, also . . .

memorial candles by Mathias Nelson

Sometimes my heart hurts
not because the vessels are clogged
but because
I think of the loved ones
that are still alive
but not around
and I think of the loved ones
who are dead
but still walking in
the dark corners of my heart
lighting candles
making it burn in there
watching over my arteries
to make sure I haven't drank
too much or smoked
too much or ate
too much
they walk around in there
remembering me
setting the clock for
our reunion
but I hate the wait
just as much as they do
and it burns in there
until the end
of my wick
it burns.

David LaBounty interviews himself



q. Why are you interviewing yourself?

a. Because no one else will and I still think I'm interesting even though I'm broke, going bald, and gaining more weight. That and I really, really want my work in *Beat the Dust*.

q. Why *Beat the Dust*?

a. Because I'm a submission junkie. I write and I write and I submit and I submit because I crave attention, adoration, fame.

q. Are you famous?

a. Hell no.

there is more than one shot at redemption by David LaBounty

there is Jesus

I see him with
my eyes shaped
like keyholes

and he is rags
and grease
and unkempt
hair and brown
eyes and brown,
brown skin

and he says
share and share
alike and be
kind and be gentle

he also says
each according to
his ability
each according
to his need

and well shit,
I say, that's
like communism,
damn near

he shrugs
his shoulders

says maybe

and I tell
Him about
all my sins,
at least,
the ones
I committed
yesterday
and they
all had to
do with
coveting
something
and it wasn't
my neighbor's
wife but it
might have
been the
wife a few
doors down

there was that
and bud light
was on sale
at the grocery
store and I
robbed my
kid's piggy
bank to pay for it

He pats me on
the head

His long
and dirty
fingernails
leave a trail
of remembrance
on my scalp

sin no more,
He says,

or the wife who devours us
We're all in our own little prisons

Even the maniac flying down the highway on a Harley is in his own cage.

Maybe it's best if you know from the get-go that you're
caught
Because that way the pressure's off
You know you're finished, and you don't waste time and
energy trying to thrash your way out
and into another snare

Some call it resignation

Others call it enlightenment

I prefer the truth:

Ever see a fly trapped between a window and a screen?

Ask him.

Eddie Kilowatt interviews himself



Q: Why do you write?

A: So the words leave me alone.

Q: Did you go to college?

A: Not really, I just take random classes when I have time. Things like French and capoeira and art history.

Q: What are you listening to right now?

A: Disorder off of Unknown Pleasures by Joy Division.

Q: What do you want people to know about you?

A: To understand what I write? If people have to know something about me for the poems to make sense, then I've failed at writing them.

Q: Do you like to be asked questions?

A: Questions are fine, but I rarely have the desired answers.

not broken yet by Eddie Kilowatt

some days are just broken,
 you know this
 from the first eye-open

and you try to go back to sleep
 but after the third time
 it doesn't happen
 anymore

and you decide - well,
 don't really decide -
 it just seems to happen that
 suddenly

 you're riding, 70
 in a 25, with
 your headlight turned off and
 no helmet, no jacket
 no reason or care or concept, just
 the veins pressed taut, raising through
 the skin on your forearms and
 hair wild wind deaf your ears,
 tears streaming the sides of your face
 as street lamps blur by
 the moon and stars smirk behind
 the clouded curtains of bygone storms
 eleven at night on pavement that
 hasn't even dried yet.

some days are just broken,

and all you can do
 is try to break yourself
 to prove you're not,
 yet.

out like a nice guy by Eddie Kilowatt

He went out like a nice guy,
 the paramedic said,

most of these guys
 they're so inconsiderate.
 They don't think about a guy like me.

They just put it in their mouth and
 that's
 it.

but the guy this morning
 he put a pillow between 'em, it's
 a lot easier that way.

There's less to clean up, it keeps
 everything under the pillow.

it makes our job
 a lot
 easier, but

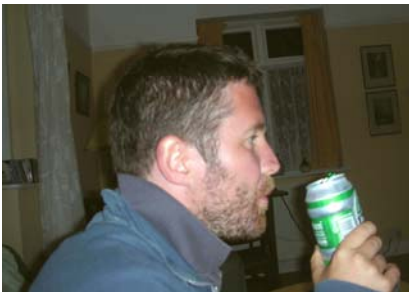
what I can't understand

is how
 such a nice guy,

like him!

could've done a thing
 like
 that

Joseph Ridgwell interviews himself



Q: Where were you born?

A: East London.

Q: Why do you write?

A: Out of Sheer Desperation.

Q: Who is your biggest literary influence?

A: It's an even split between John Fante and Charles Bukowski, but there're plenty of others.

Q: Any favourite new writers on the scene?

A: Tony O'Neill and Adelle Stripe.

Q: Favourite phrase?

A: Not sure if this is a phrase, but: All the sadness in the world stalks the land like a death heron in winter.

Q: What type of woman do you go for?

A: What's that got to do with writing?

Q: Not much, but I was curious.

A: Okay. I like blondes, brunettes, ginger, well stacked, and who recite spontaneous haiku while making love.

the young die screaming in the land of broken dreams by Joseph Ridgwell

Taking toilet breaks

To go for a wank

Out of sheer boredom

At work

While the

Young

Die

Screaming

In

The

Land

Of

Broken

Dreams

It's what kills us all

You and I

And the man in the moon

And the bum on the hill

As the sun gets hotter

Or nearer

And will one day explode and destroy everything

a recurring image by Joseph Ridgwell

Lately I have been dreaming of a

Recurring image

In the image I am twenty-five

Wearing sandals, long shorts,

And a white tee-shirt

That has printed on the back, the words

Journey for the Endless Schooner

I am in Oxford Street, Sydney, Australia

The sun is shining

In the image I am walking away from myself and smiling

Walking away into the hazy days of the future

And in the blinking of an eye

It is ten years later

And I am thirty-five

And no longer smiling

But I like this recurring image

For it reminds me of how short our lives are

And how late it is

Much later than you think

Paul Kavanagh interviews himself



- p. i'm slightly embarrassed.
 k. i heard you were shy.
 p. slightly.
 k. music.
 p. mozart's don giovanni.
 k. book.
 p. james joyce's ulysses.
 k. there's a connection there.
 p. quite correct. tell me about your book.
 k. go here, www.dogmatika.com/dm/more.php?id=2995_0_1_10_M
 p. i will, thank you.
 k. no, thank you.

i blame darwin by Paul Kavanagh

Maggie mocked my virginity
 I fucked her while she slept off the booze
 She was a local drunk
 You can still find her inebriated
 She looks pickled and she wears a wig
 Pip was Maggie's sister another drunk
 I knocked out her false teeth with my cock
 You can still find her inebriated
 She looks better than her sister
 The third sister is dead and I fucked her
 Just before the cancer turned her black
 Judy said that I was an ugly brute
 But she still sucked my mangy cock
 For fries, a cheese burger and coke
 She was a homeless girl begging
 On a street corner in the rain
 Wendy complained about my odor
 But I shot all over her face
 Her face was a mess of scars
 She had a husband that beat her
 The flowers I gave were a ploy
 Sara laughed at me because I was not clever

I filled her cunt up with my seed
I caught her walking out of the hospital gates
She was suffering from schizophrenia
June maligned me because of my height
I fucked her repeatedly in the ass
I had to carry her to the bed
She was in a wheelchair because of her legs
They were deformed and she had no toes
But she had a lovely asshole
Jean complained because I was always fiddling
She didn't let me fuck her
Instead she told me I should read books
I found Darwin in the local library.

an act that was played once by Paul Kavanagh

Suddenly it all came down
Crashing
My life was altered
Irredeemably
All the books I had read
Meant nothing to me
Philosophy
Religion were void
Across from my window
I watched my neighbors fucking
Mr. Jackson who I admired
Climbed off his wife
And wiped his cock on
The curtains.