

**TEXT Vol 7 No 1 (April 2003)**

**Poetry and prose contents**

- Steve Evans, *10,000 Poems* page 2
- M T C Cronin, *His Pen (The Heart in the Sleeve) and other pieces* page 4
- Michael Wilding, *Writing Class* page 9

**Flinders University**

**Steve Evans**

***10,000 Poems***

*On the eve of war, 10,000 poems  
are to be sent to the Prime Minister,  
calling for peace.*

the PM is up late  
in dressing gown and slippers  
hunched at a desk lamp  
for the seventh night in a row  
frowning his brow  
as he works his way through  
the piles of poetry  
answering no calls  
refusing visitors  
biting his lip  
misty-eyed

actually, the poems  
have been jammed into boxes unread  
a mute petition in a locked courtyard  
at the back of a concrete building  
not far from the incinerator -  
and the emailed ones  
have been dismissed to Trash  
with a finger-flick

but there is an infiltrator  
a single haiku already smuggled in  
that will slip under his guard  
when he is deep in the morning papers  
expecting only politics  
and the images of war -  
no one yet knows what it says  
or who wrote its three short lines  
but he will startle  
at his own tears  
his heart wide open

*Steve Evans teaches writing at Flinders University. His fourth poetry collection, Luminous Fruit, is due out in May 2003.*

**TEXT**

**Vol 7 No 1 April 2003**

**<http://www.griffith.edu.au/school/art/text/>**

**Editors: Nigel Krauth & Tess Brady**

**[Text@griffith.edu.au](mailto:Text@griffith.edu.au)**

**M T C Cronin*****His Pen (The Heart in the Sleeve) and other pieces*****His Pen (The Heart in the Sleeve)**

'It's private.' This they said of his words. Though they were made by the hand, what he reached with into the world's whispered voice. What called him. What calls us all. His pen, now orphaned, reproducing in language by a fusion of his elements. Dedicated, indifferent, he says to me 'There are no such things as survivors (only relatively). No such things as those who die and those who live only another day and someone who, for the moment, has three whole minutes of eternity with which to play that verb they hold up their mortal sleeve. Why does the heart look always for a hand? Because only the hand knows that love too must be tended by love.'

**All So Familiar**

All so familiar, any of this himself.  
 In the beginning he used magic, memberships and a fixed address. From there, it dwindled. With religion he pretended not to have a body and then without a body he was a man ruined by distracted women. See that pool of blood - he bled it. It's a bird's blood, ripped apart by a sack of cats. Here, something, interrogated by other things and not of those other pieces.

When was he born in this dead state? With the details of his grandchildren, the details of his loyalties and interests, his travels, crafts and names known to others.  
 Through the celebration of dreams, Yes! The tall corpse inside him, the one standing around who doesn't know where to go, who has no need of anywhere to go. Around this muscle, this exorcism, he tensed all fear. He sat up, alone at night, for eight hours until he ached like hot water but nothing changed.  
 Even now, nobody is leaving through his eyes.

**Little Drips of Me (*Her Operation*)**

Little drips of me are falling into the space next to her. *pat,*

*pat pat, pat* She doesn't recognize me at first and then she tries to be resilient and remain herself. I like all the things she does with difficulty and that little flannel cloth with which she wipes the splashes of me from her smooth elbows. It is all so specific - as if I might be created by a really new law - that I try to exact myself in this, *her* operation.

### **The Earth is a Graveyard**

It's too easy to lose our hearts. ~o~ The earth is a graveyard.  
 ~o~ Take little poems out of their tombs and praise them. ~o~  
 Hands fall like gliders from the mind. ~o~ Hearts shock other hearts. ~o~ The earth is the dream of a single sun. ~o~ For all readers a new remembrance. ~o~ In the graveyard's glare all sin fades. ~o~ Lost hearts bury dedications in fire.

### **'Reasons to be inconsolable abound...'**

*Alain de Botton*

Jumping around with arms swinging, face-to-face in the light carriage of Dr Proust's advice ('If only I could value myself more! Alas! It is impossible'), I wondered what could be got, with such health, from the end of the world. Always, of course! It always is and may be. Knowing this, and I mean truly knowing it - *Hello Death* and afterwards I'm sure we've met because it tipped a bucket of cold water over my head (baptising the poet!) - there's no wariness about time and how to use it, but *practically* everything still remains impossible. You would think I didn't have to worry, being a very quaint small drawing of a human figure, knees up, in someone else's book - why do I need exercise?!, but we all have our troubles, our little *bête noires*. For example, I may not have to write by inadequate lamplight but even electricity hasn't found me poring over the mistresspiece to his master. O, in all the world! a life crumbling towards inadequacy, via inadequacy. Reasons to be inconsolable abound - fifty thousand dollars, the producer being my leg this afternoon because they didn't want to pay me, the face glimpsed in the street indistinguishable through resemblance from the face of a dead love. Last year: eighty-seven thousand dollars buried somewhere in a beach of words, more people than ever with tattoos, complication exponential for the living... For the future, I may leave these pages, born into a true poverty where thinking follows its own true course for *that* (can't write about it because I don't know) but now I stretch in the present like a lazy cat belly-full on sun-dreams where the ghosting shadows pass through my eyelids to a deeper brain than action, paws epileptic in the crushed basil as I enter the cave of nighttime TV. Shuffles past, a young man just starting to be a vagrant, matted hair, still clear skin. He looks surprised - not at us - and a little oblivious. Young girls - if they could think: *they want us - because we*

*walk arm in arm, have gotten here without losing love. And what is it I'm remembering from all time, writer, fourteen years under your thin coverlet? Remember what? That living is in it - the sad little bits that feel like nothing, not even grief.*

### **Torn Like a Grain of Sand**

He tore a grain of sand in half with his bare hands. Post-Solomon, yet unaware of the hypothetical, he ripped and ripped until he had it in two. Of course for a good reason he didn't divulge. And why should he for we didn't even see him do it. Just knew because there was an extra grain of sand (or two half-grains! He demands that we be precise. That's his real strength, after all.) Following his feat, he was exhausted but unlike weaker men - us, for example - he didn't sleep. He went and stood next to a mountain and craned his head till he could see over its top.

### **The Profile of the Dead**

*Most members of the public don't have the ability to correctly place on the ground what's meant to be on paper.*

I couldn't even reassemble my own skeleton, not being able to follow the special marks in order to get my life back inside the fence. 'Everybody is capable of dying' said the sign at the gate and of the alleged dream of the sum of activities of plants and animals in small print below, as if in place of warning a fine, 'Be careful - it's not compulsory'. And the latch sticks because in not allowing you to wake nature has its own purposes which have little to do with the matters to be shown. Then why this painful diffidence, this unjustified shame? Don't you know you can only expect praise for what is known? There is to be no lamenting here, just more good work. And so, inhuman, but keeping the format, I impose my delicate presence on the field through an unexpected semantic high-jump which immediately gave the impression that I was a believer in the liar's paradox. Such a rare allocation of the body took even the official record by surprise and I became (ironically) known as a double of living (kind of like an unrecognized member of staff in a German university). And though I now know there is nothing after death thus this journey has no end, I am still fiddling with another logic where nothing can constitute and equal that end. Infinitely I am being redrawn - really, you wouldn't believe the popularity of the only possible alternative. Everything in the world asks me a question. I am the answer.

## After 30 Minutes, No Kind Word

A person sleeping. Another person sleeping. After thirty minutes, no kind word. No hand bearing promises. No approach. No expression, no misreading. Nothing unmeant. No smile, no fist. No torturer with a string, the dark, a message from a lover. No lines of card-bearers for the war. No tears for anything beyond the body. No magic. The world is without them. No story. No fear.

## Pulse

'Sun is the only pulse that runs by itself.'

*Anne Carson*

The sun has crashed into a house, setting it on fire, but nobody on the ground was hurt. Record numbers of hearts have fallen in love this year. They wake in the mornings, when the sun tells its own story of the 1001 nights, to feelings of such happiness. They are boring. See them go around like two wading birds. And then growing human genitals in the afternoon walking with their arms trying to make new edges until they come to a field. Everyone sleeping can hear them. Snorting and riding the heat they generate in the rub of their speech. In fact, I will call them *tribein* and *logos*. The noise they are making is like the earth screaming its head off. Or like thunder when they are chased by a swarm of bulls which kneel on them to prayer. True, it might be that we could learn a certain objectivity, a rhetorical practice, from their *figures* - the three-rayed light given off because of their situation (they have swallowed too much warmth) - but when we lie at night it is your pulse I feel when my hands ask questions of the day. Earrings dangle down the side of the dream of fellatio and at every imaginable shove into me bracelets clink like a toast. Listening becomes like payment in acknowledgement of subjection and that just because nothing is happening. We can't stay awake. We notice, together, that red is the last colour to disappear - holding out against all those greys - and from the perimeters (*yes, plural*) there comes a muted cheer: the crowd has accepted your plea! Writing this, over the side of the bed, with my rouge brush, I am aware of the golden ovulation sliding towards the horizon-scar that lines my womb. Your nostrils make so much noise. Certainly, the sun will fall again tomorrow. Certainly it will.

## Acknowledgments

*The Profile of the Dead* and *'Reasons to be inconsolable about...': Stride* (UK)  
*All So Familiar* and *After 30 Minutes, No Kind Word*: *Muse Apprentice Guild* (USA)

*Little Drips of Me (Her Operation) and Torn Like a Grain of Sand: Leviathan Quarterly (UK)*

*M T C Cronin has had six books and two booklets of poetry published. Her next, 'beautiful, unfinished PARABLE/SONG/CANTO/POEM' is forthcoming in 2003 with Salt Publishing, Cambridge, UK. She currently lives in Maleny with her partner, a musician, and their three young daughters.*

---

**TEXT**

**Vol 7 No 1 April 2003**

**<http://www.griffith.edu.au/school/art/text/>**

**Editors: Nigel Krauth & Tess Brady**

**[Text@griffith.edu.au](mailto:Text@griffith.edu.au)**

**University of Sydney**

**Michael Wilding**

## *Writing Class*

*An excerpt from Michael Wilding's Academia Nuts (Glebe: Wild & Woolley, 2002)*

Creative Writing had been Henry Lancaster's salvation. Sometimes as the day dawned and work loomed he would gaze across the bleak sea and remind himself how it could be worse, how it might have been worse, how it used to be worse. Teaching Literature. Every night the half-read novel, the incompleting epic. Some people read a book once in their life and remembered it. Not Lancaster. He did not want his head full of everything he'd ever read. He wanted space to conceive his own books. Sometimes it had seemed that he remembered nothing. And so week after week, year after year, he would be re-reading the texts he was teaching, and always the rush, the desperation, the incompleting.

So Creative Writing had been an idea of genius. For years he had scorned it. 'How can you teach writing?' he would ask. '*Poeta nascitur non fit*. Did I ever do a creative writing course?'

'Dangerous argument,' said Dr Bee. 'Maybe had you done one you wouldn't have been teaching literature now.'

'Either you have the talent or you don't,' said Lancaster.

But then an invitation to teach it in the States had altered his world view.

'It's a network,' said his London publisher. 'The teachers all know each other and pass their prettiest students around between them.'

That was in the days before the sexual harassment guidelines, the days when every successful student seduced its teacher. Anyway, Lancaster had been there, done that. What interested him now was a life of teaching without texts. Freedom from preparation. Now he had found the way to ensure the students did the preparation and he just listened.

'Right, who has something to read? Excellent. Off you go.'

And then, after the student had delivered, 'Excellent, well done. I enjoyed that. Comments? Anybody have any comments? What did you all think of that?' It was like being a talk show host with compulsive celebrities, the ones who couldn't shut up, just let them go on and on.

The worst part was having to listen to what they read. It was something years of lecturing had made him ill suited for. But he learned. It was just a matter of

sitting there and not falling asleep. Or sleeping lightly enough to hear when the reading stopped.

And at its best it was like the midday movies on television. Sit back, put your feet up, and switch on to the sequence of sex and horror, incest, abortion, family nightmares, drugs and desperation.

'Don't you sometimes worry that there might be a degree of voyeurism here?' asked Dr Bee.

'I am a camera,' said Lancaster.

'I see.'

'What is literature if not voyeurism? What are movies if not voyeurism? What is art if not voyeurism?'

'Well, quite a lot I've always thought,' said Dr Bee.

'Perhaps,' conceded Lancaster, magnanimously, magnificently. 'Perhaps there are some other things too. But there is always the voyeuristic core. How do other people live? What lies at the heart of being?'

'Tell me,' said Dr Bee.

'It is the question, not the answer,' said Lancaster. 'Always the question. We are always asking, we are always curious how other people live, that is the eternal impetus of writing,' said Lancaster.

'Is that so?' said Dr Bee.

But Lancaster was in unstoppable mode. He had spent two hours having to listen to his students read their stories, two hours without holding forth.

'Sometimes people ask, how can you teach creative writing?'

'I seem to remember you asking the same question,' said Dr Bee.

'My answer is, you don't, you can't teach creative writing,' said Lancaster. 'You provide the chance. The occasion. You encourage. You facilitate. You offer the window of opportunity.'

'I am a window cleaner, as it were,' said Dr Bee. 'Or rather, you are.'

'Exactly,' said Lancaster.

\*\*\*

But it was not all exhilaration. Lancaster came in after one class his ashen, stricken self. It took a while before he spoke. Dr Bee waited affably.

'I just discovered one of my writing students is working as a call girl.'

'Have you got her number?' asked Dr Bee. 'Is she one of those who advertises in the classifieds?' He took a cutting out of his wallet. "'Candy and Roxy. Need

help paying Uni fees. Visit us for a wild time. Satisfaction is guaranteed." I'd been meaning to give them a call. See if they were students of ours.'

'All grist to the media empires' mills,' said Pawley. 'Pumps up the small ads. The foundations of the global empire. Money from the child labour of paper boys and the immoral earnings of pimping for prostitution. The companies that pay tax at less than seven per cent.'

'I find it all a bit depressing,' said Henry.

'It's late capitalism.'

'I mean the call girl bit.'

'Same thing,' said Pawley. 'What else can you do with an arts degree in a post-industrial age?'

'His wife was prostitute to all the age, His pen was prostitute upon the stage,' said Dr Bee.

'It has a nice homology,' said Pawley, his eyes bloodshot pinpoints, catching the cosmic pattern of it. 'Henry sells his mind, she sells her body.'

'Is it your mind you sell, Henry?' asked Dr Bee. 'Or just your pen.'

'Ah, that's apt too,' said Pawley, 'the phallic pen, the -'

'Oh for heaven's sake,' Lancaster snapped.

'What else can you expect when they remove scholarships and introduce fees?' said Pawley. 'Capitalism. On what foundation is the present family, the bourgeois family based? On capital, on private gain. In its completely developed form this family exists only among the bourgeois. But this state of things finds its complement in the practical absence of the family among proletarians, and in public prostitution.'

'I bet you say that to all the girls,' said Dr Bee.

\*\*\*

She had been waiting for him outside his room.

'I've got this manuscript I wondered if you'd read.'

'Just read it out in class,' Lancaster said, automatically evasive of undertaking to read anything.

'I'd rather not,' she said.

'Don't be nervous,' he said.

'I'm not nervous,' she said. 'It's just a bit, it might be a bit shocking.'

'I'm not easily shocked,' he said, Lancaster the shocker, the man of sensation.

'No, well,' she said, 'I took your advice.'

'My advice?' he said. It pleased him, though he couldn't think of any useful advice he'd given. What was there ever to say?

'When you said, don't think about it, just do it,' she said.

'Ah, yes.'

'So I did it.'

\*\*\*

'It was a whole manuscript about being on the game,' said Lancaster.

'Recognise any of the clients? Vice-Chancellor? Senior Management? Rowley?'

'I found it all rather, I don't know -'

'Voyeuristic, perhaps?' suggested Dr Bee.

'Depressing really,' said Lancaster.

'I'd have thought you'd have taken a more positive attitude,' said Dr Bee. 'Get her to fix you up with a couple of girls. Or a viewing booth. Ideal for the writer. A window on the world. You could probably pay out of your research funds. Think of it, Henry, the material, the sex, the opportunities. A new *Butterfield 8*. Or *The World of Suzie Wong*. You ought to be able to negotiate a percentage. That Japanese visiting professor who asked me to get him a girl, I'll tell him to give you a call. Maybe they could pay you a commission in kind so you didn't have to notify the university of other sources of income. Save you getting picked up for living off immoral earnings. Not that that seems to have worried them about your books.'

\*\*\*

'How's the happy hooker?' asked Dr Bee.

Lancaster gave his pursed lip look, the British aesthete of the 1930s one.

'Manuscript all sealed and delivered? Film rights all fixed up?'

'It's so difficult,' said Lancaster.

It had been. How to tell her.

'It's good small press stuff,' he said. 'Literary magazines. But there aren't many small presses or literary magazines left. And you get a couple of hundred readers and that's it.'

How to say that if you want to go on record with memoirs of the sex trade, why not make some money out of it?

'The material's good. But you ought to make more of it. Market it. Make it more commercial.'

'I don't want to sell out,' she said.

'What do you mean?' asked Lancaster.

'I don't want to prostitute myself.'

'But isn't that what you're doing anyway?'

She laughed. 'I suppose it is. But writing's different.'

Who was he to deny that?

'So how do you go about getting published?' she asked.

He suggested she got to know publishers. Hung out round the literary scene. Book launches. Parties. Ingratiate yourself. Sidle up to the senior editors. How do you go about getting published, you go about it like getting into movies or television, on your back.

'Oh, but I couldn't do that.'

'What do you mean you couldn't do that?'

'That wouldn't be right.'

'But you do it all the time.'

'But I wouldn't feel right doing it to get published.'

He shook his head in dumb amazement.

'Think about it,' he said. He felt he'd already said too much. Was this the sort of advice expected of a writing teacher?

\*\*\*

'You offered to show her round?' asked Dr Bee. 'Take her to the right places. Literary escort services?'

'Are you suggesting I should pimp my students?'

'Only the professionals,' said Dr Bee.

'She seemed resistant,' said Lancaster. 'She tells me one of the girls she works with did a deal with her dentist. Got her teeth fixed for you know, as she put it, rather than cash. But writing, she seems to have this elevated idea of it.'

'Can't imagine where she'd have learned that from,' said Dr Bee.

The Head of Department arrived for her morning tea and chocolate biscuits. Dr Bee sought clarification.

'What do the sexual guidelines say about having sex with a student who earns her living as a prostitute? Or his or her living, to be non-gender specific. What if you went to a brothel or phoned up an agency and you found it was one of your students you were offered? What would the official university ruling be about that? Should you, could you, go ahead? Or should you withdraw, as it were?'

'I think you should put it down in writing and make a formal submission,' said the Head of Department.

'In writing,' mused Dr Bee.

'Or is it too urgent?'

-- From Michael Wilding, *Academia Nuts*, Glebe: Wild & Woolley, 2002. Chap 15 pp.126-132. The book can be bought online through the NSW Writers Centre Bookstore on the Centre's website - [www.nswwriterscentre.org.au](http://www.nswwriterscentre.org.au)

*Professor Michael Wilding is one of Australia's most acclaimed writers. With his short stories and novels he was a leader among the avant-garde Sydney writers who in the 1970s created the revolutionary "New Wave" of Australian prose writing - an era which remains influential today. With his many academic publications he has also been provocative and influential. He has recently retired from his academic post at Sydney University and also as Chair of the New South Wales Writers Centre.*

---

**TEXT**

**Vol 7 No 1 April 2003**

**<http://www.griffith.edu.au/school/art/text/>**

**Editors: Nigel Krauth & Tess Brady**

**[Text@griffith.edu.au](mailto:Text@griffith.edu.au)**