

TheFED

e-magazine 2 Nov 09

The FED Emagination – “Making a difference with words”

Working class writing and local publishing

‘GUARANTEED’

‘No solid literary merit’ –The Arts Council of Great Britain (1980)

‘The Republic of Letters’

‘Back in print’



‘No solid literary merit’ was the view of an Officer of the Arts Council GB

Available Again: The Republic of Letters has just been re-issued with new material discussing the history of worker writer movements.

There will be a special panel at this year’s FED Fest where members of the original editorial team will join long time FED members to talk about the past, present, and future of worker writer movements.

This is the book which along with ‘Writin’ the anthology of work by members of the FWWCP, put our history and achievements on the bookshelves. Now a new updated edition has been published in a collaboration between Nick Pollard formerly editor of the Fed Magazine, and Steve Parks of Syracuse University in New York, who is part of a group that set up New City Community Press after a visit and performance of ‘FEDs Under The Bed’ based on the history of community writing and publishing groups across the UK.

The Republic of Letters examines how in recent years, working class people, particularly women and black people, have begun to develop new forms of writing, new modes of local, collective publishing, alternative distribution networks—the elements of a movement which aims to ‘disestablish’ literature, making writing a popular form of expression, not the preserve of a privileged metropolitan elite. Many of the people involved in these projects have, since 1976, been working together in the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers.

These new forms of cultural production are throwing ‘Literature’—as defined, for instance, by the Arts Council—into crisis. The question is, who is to define standards of ‘Culture’ or ‘Literature’ or ‘Literary Merit’? According to what criteria? And what about the power relations of class, race and gender hidden behind these definitions?

This book explores the central issues in this field of cultural politics, where the very words—locality, literature, community, culture—are the sites of tension and conflict, but are also, increasingly, the sites of breakthroughs for new forms of communication.

The Republic of Letters can be purchased at the FED Fest or by contacting Steve Parks (sjparks@sydney.edu). USA \$19.99 U.K. £15.00



Elected at last year's event TheFed Executive group have met 3 times during the year – in February for a weekend at Pecketwell, in June at Survivors Poetry in London and in September at John Malcomson's house in Sheffield. They have all been well attended and busy meetings working to build up the organisation, plan the Festival and keep us all in touch.

Stevenage Survivors- Roy Birch Interview

My name is Roy Birch and I am the co-founder or co-coordinator of Stevenage Survivors which is part of the Survivors Poetry network a national charity in the words of its mission statement it is to promote and publish poetry by and for survivors of mental distress whatever that may be taken to be. The organisation defines a survivor as anyone who has been through the mental health system and anyone who has suffered rape or abuse of any kind and anyone who empathises with all of that.

It runs a national network of independent groups much like the Fed, it is a member organisation of the Fed and so is quite a large organisation and I was asked by someone who had seen the work of Survivors Poetry to set a local group up in Stevenage, after a lot of trouble because SP was going through a lot of problems at the time.

We started the group and my co-director had a nervous breakdown practically the following week and so has been doing it ever since over 9 years now. We had no funding at first, so we were funded by donations from the members then we got a small amount from an arts project and we produced a pamphlet then the Co-op funded us then we got funding from the Hertfordshire Community Foundation through the good offices of Barbara Follett our local MP.

We meet fortnightly our groups are very casual it's a mixture of a writing workshop and a social gathering we start with a cup of tea and biscuits and people just gabble away then we have a writing exercise, each one set by a different member of the group, then we have a read around then we have a break and we drink too many cups of tea and then people read their own poetry or anything they have brought in. The purpose was not only to create writing it was to create confidence. We have been able to

bring along people who are good writers I have to confess but had completely lost their social confidence and the group has somehow managed to put them back on their feet. Quite a lot of people feel able to publish and we have produced quite a lot of pamphlets and books from our workshops.

We occasionally go out into the community to perform usually for the U3A and in 2001 somebody came to one of our sessions who was a recovering alcoholic based at Vale House in Hertford and he suggested that I phone up Vale House and I did and she invited us to have a look, for some reason she had told them we were a theatre group so they were quite startled when we began reading our poetry but we ran a fortnightly poetry group for several years which eventually collapsed through staff changes. But that led to something which Lucia and I now run there which uses Reiki meditation and creative writing as a single unit therapy which has proved very successful and we want to expand. We get an average of a dozen sometimes as many as 20 which is too many and 4 of these people have been published by the Survivors Poetry Mentoring Scheme, we do have some great writers.

This scheme is for promising survivors poets who are matched for a period of about 9 months it can be shorter it can be longer depending on need with a more experienced poet, not necessarily a survivor at the end of this they have a pamphlet of their work published by Survivors Poetry Publishing and some go on to have a full volume published. We do about 10 a year, its lovely it's being funded by Esmee Fairburn Foundation but this coming year we have to find further sources. It's a remarkably good scheme one of the things Survivors Poetry seeks to do is to cross this enormous divide that exists, there is this terrible dichotomy in society whereby we almost demand that our artistic heroes should be 'mad' but we aren't prepared to easily accept that anyone who has been diagnosed as having a mental health problem can be then be classed as a genuinely artistic person. What SP tries to do is explode that myth not just by producing therapeutic writing but by creating literature that can stand alongside the books that appear in bookshops.

Sheep's Clothing

she could put on my red plaid flannels,
I suppose, but even my imagination
cannot visualize her, shuffling, at 2:00 a.m.,
behind mom's frail frame,
guiding her back to her bed after yet another
dementia-induced wandering.
She could wear the lightly-powdered, disposable
vinyl gloves over her sublimely manicured,
dainty hands while performing the constant routine
of changing soiled briefs and disinfecting the commode.
She could use one of her costly, stylish cell phones to call,
just to say, "How is mom today?",
and pretend to be interested in the response.
I would gladly share this heavy garb of care and worry
and concern, but, she is too attached to her cloak
of self-absorption, and, sadly,
my wardrobe does not suit her.

(c) Marlene Rowe (POW)

TransFed Writing Prompt

Do you feel your education has been useful to you? Please write or draw a response? Several years ago, the *TransFed* Project brought together writers from the FED and writers from Syracuse, NY to talk about their education. These writers quickly moved to talking about how their working class background, representing a diversity of heritages, abilities, and sexualities, impacted their experience as students.

The Transfed Project is now completing an anthology of writing from this project. We hope you will take a moment and respond to the above writing prompt for inclusion in this anthology. The book will be published by New City Community Press, which recently republished The Republic of Letters.

Work can be sent to us by email to Alicia Landsberg [ablandsb@syr.edu].

(Submitted by The TransFed Project - <http://www.transatlanticfed.blogspot.com>)

NO DISGUISE

I shall dress you in rags
and top it with lace
with smudges of soot
to disfigure your face,
A sandal and slipper
to wear on your feet
two socks in odd colours
to parade in the street.

No label to name you
for you shall be known
for acts of unkindness
for which you atone,
For Karma foretells
the wheel turns around
no - one can escape
the culprit is found.

Sally Flood

Update on Raise Your Banners Festival SONGWRITING

On Thursday 5th November 2009, **James Bar Bowen** won the Raise Your Banners Festival of Political Song songwriting competition. The festival, which has been held every two years since the mid-1990s, took place this year in Bradford, and the songwriting competition was themed 'Living in Yorkshire in 2009.' The winner, Huddersfield-based **James Bar Bowen**, presented a song called '**Never Never Land**', which he describes as 'a mix of Orwell's concept of doublethink, along with consumerism, product-branding,

media manipulation and a dose of surrealism'. His observation that brands used to be things that owners and farmers seared into the skin of slaves and cattle, but that now they are labels that people aspire to marking themselves with caused a shocked intake of breath from the audience, and nicely set the tone for the song, with its clever observations and sometimes surprising one-liners.

Never Never Land -(EXTRACT) James Bar Bowen

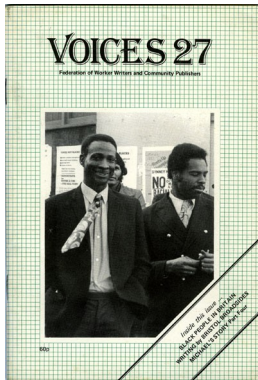
Down here on Airstrip One at the Ministry of Fun
They're having practicals in ignorance and fear
Double-edged with double glazing, doublethink is just amazing
And we're convinced that it can't happen here
In Never Never Land life is never never bland
Repayments are deferred 'til next year
With designer clothes and branding we relinquish understanding
And refuseniks hardly merit a sneer

Chorus

Now correct me if I've misunderstood
But when I came here somebody told me that she thought that I would
And I should have kept my mouth shut but I'm not sure that I could

Further info and full lyrics on FED website www.fed.btik.com

If you would like to know more about James Bar Bowen this exciting singer-songwriter, or any other related information, please go to <http://www.myspace.com/jamesbarbowen>
Or email Jacqueline Rose at brightredmarker@hotmail.com



Images from the FED archive
VOICES 27 the magazine that
brought work from groups
together during 1970s and 1980s.
We are working to make this
writing accessible online .



Poetic success

With pride and pleasure I announce that a poem of mine - Empty Teacups - was one of the winners in the Forces Poetry (FLOW for All) competition for 2009! Empty Teacups speaks of 'The Knock' those families of soldiers live in fear of receiving. It features an older couple, who have just drifted apart – then one night they receive 'The Knock'. Empty teacups because they are an innocent symbol of what can release the reality of grief.

This follows on from having had Absolution in their first anthology last year. The anthology is to be called; Poems of the Poppies (Poetry anthology Volume 1). The great news this year is that a sister book of Forces Stories is also to be published! Both books are to be published by Silverwood Books and can be pre-ordered now! Please visit their site for further details; www.silverwoodbooks.co.uk. The official launch has yet to be confirmed, but it will be early in the New Year, in the presence of Patron Dame Vera Lynn - so watch this space!

Jan Hedger GROW member



Above is the new FED leaflet. There is space for each group to customise their contact details, we really need to raise our profile and explore how we can work together to speak up for our perspective and all the groups who make the FED what it is. We need to link to people and communities and all sorts of organisations who have in common the access to writing and publishing for all.

2008/9 FED EXEC Lucia Birch, Roy Birch Sandra Breeze, Dave Chambers, Sharon Davis, Roger Drury, Louise Glasscoe, Ashley Jordan, Paul King, John Malcomson, Nick Pollard, Amer Salam, Pat Smart, Maia Tahta,

KEEP IN TOUCH

TheFED Website

www.fedonline.org.uk

Email

fed@fedonline.org.uk

Phone

Lucia Birch

01438 225377

Text

07954 141127

Post

TheFed

c/o 156 Gonville

Crescent

Stevenage, SG2 9LY

RISK *extract from an essay by Henry Dallimore*

At the moment we have all this kerfuffle about global warming. Now as our atmosphere is composed seventy nine percent nitrogen, twenty percent oxygen and only zero point zero four percent carbon dioxide, I really cannot understand how adding to a very minor gas would cause such problems. It strikes me that scientists support this popular myth in order to retain their comfortable research positions in the universities and politicians see it as a vote winner. Maybe I am missing something, but I honestly believe that this climate change is due to other factors of which we are currently unaware. After all, going back to the hole in the ozone layer a few years ago, how can we be certain that this is not a regularly recurring phenomenon?

(c) Henry Dallimore (POW)

This full essay is online in September 09 FED Gallery/Archive open to all writers and readers