

magazine

Publishers

Worker Writers & Community

The Federation of

ferret

Where is
**Working
Class
Writing**

Today

£2

- Ken Worpole
- Rebecca O'Rourke
- Worker Writing in Japan and Europe
- Pecket Well and more

Volume 8. Autumn 1996

feditorial

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Poetic Encounter Extraordinaire

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Guess what,
Half-way through last week's workshop,
A Working Class Poem
Walked through the door -
 Wrecking the woodwork,
 Scattering glass on the floor.
Then, bold as bra(r)ss,
Staggered up to our table, and sat on its -
 I'm not going to say that word.
 I'm far too genteel,
 A feel-
 ing man
 Full of finer feelings to the tips of my fingers.
(and further.)
It said, "Wha's up wi thee?"
And I said, "What do you think of T.S.E.?"
W.C.P. tucked into the "chips an' fish."
Said: "I like m' stanzas with salt.
And m' verses with vinegar.
Metaphors like mushy peas,
And rhymes like batter."
"That's better,"
I thought. "Now we're - "
But we weren't.
It started in on the paper.
(A Green 'Un.)
"Words" - between mouthfuls of masticated
print - "I love 'em."
(This with such relish.
Then came the embellish-
ing.)
"All the diphthongs an' the dactyls,
The datives and the decibels.
All the definitions an' deletions,
The dialects an' the dictions.
All the derivatives an' descenders,
The diaries an' dictations.
All the dialogues an' descriptions,
The dubbing an' the downdrift.
All the directives an' discourses,
The diminutives an' demotics.
All the dysphasia an' dyspraxia,
Dysgraphia an' dyslexia.
All the deciphering an' deconstruction,
The dialectics an' the - Hell,
I just can't get enough of 'em."
All of which was all very well.
Quite quaint in its way.
(If a trifle greasy.)
But then, eyes swivelling outrageously,
And with a vowel or two
Dribbling down its vest,
W.C.P.
Reached out and actually
Pinched MY poem
And popped it in its mouth.
"Hey," I protested. "You can't do that!"
"I 'ave," was the reply. "Bye, bye."
And without further friction
(This is no fiction)
W.C.P.
Headed for the door.
But not before It had looked me in the eye,
And said, enigmatic-lie:
"Remember this, son.
Poetry's like keeping pigeons."
Then it was gone.

Alan Payne

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It's not what you say, it's the way that you say it

“ Somewhat to my surprise I found this movement of working class writers' groups in stronger shape than ever. I was involved in setting up the Federation in 1976, and stayed active for about ten years. I had imagined that the organisation would, like so many other projects of the 1970s, be just about hanging on, or even in serious decline. Not so. If anything the Federation of more than 30 groups, representing hundreds of writers in some of Britain's most hard pressed communities, is stronger than ever; and wittier and warmer than ever too. ”

Ken Worpole, former FWWCP treasurer and founder member, was invited to the Festival of Writing to participate in a debate on the achievements of the Federation in twenty years of worker writing. In this article he appraises the Federation in the contexts and new directions of the 1990's.

John Prescott's recent remark that he felt he could no longer describe himself as working class because of his job as an MP predictably set the arguments raging in the wine bars of Charlotte Street, as well as in the tap rooms of Hull - or so we are told. He might have caused less fuss had he announced that he was changing sex, such are the taboos that today attach to the "class question", the wound in the national psyche that refuses to heal. Problems about definitions of class have haunted the vocabularies and programmes of political life for at least as long as the debate about the political franchise. Over time, they have brought many grand theories tumbling to the ground, and left dozens of social and cultural movements in ruins. Yet amazingly, issues of class still won't go away. No amount of political modernisation, whether of the new Labour or 'new times' variety, can hide

the fact that aspects of class continue to fundamentally determine the quality of lifechances, as well as the structures of feeling of millions of people in Britain today.

It is true that class is no longer the principal driving force of socialist or social democratic politics. But its wider determinations remain pervasive and unjust. Prescott may feel that it is an annual salary of £30,000 that has achieved the ineluctable transformation from able seaman to honourable gentleman, but I'm afraid there are many other aspects about him - the Ruskin education, the modern jazz collection, those Next double breasted suits, the patterns of what we know about his domestic and extended family life - that tell a much more complicated story. And if there is one simple thing you can say about class it is that it is very complicated.

Branded on the Tongue

It usually starts with the voice. Most British people are 'branded on the tongue' as someone once said. Our very, sense of our own self is intimately connected with the way we speak. Despite the apparent trendiness of 'estuary English' or Mancunian



or Scouse accents on 'yoof television', and even on the commodities trading floor, far away, in the corridors of power, most strong regional accents and dialects remain grounds for exclusion. The accents of the public schools and of the home counties continue to dominate the upper reaches of power, influence and money. If and when Prescott gets to his first ministerial meeting, he won't find many other ex-Ruskin students or ex-merchant seamen among the civil servants who politely file into his office with the latest briefings.

The rise of Irish, Asian and Afro-Caribbean news and current affairs presenters on radio and television is partly explained by the fact that these accents do not fit into the residually conflictual and socially divisive class patterns of speech of 'indigenous' English speakers. Thus they are thought to be more acceptable. It is the black news presenter Trevor McDonald who has been asked by Education Secretary Gillian Shepherd to spearhead the Better English Campaign.

It is not surprising that so many people involved in the adult literacy movement, in English teaching in primary and secondary schools, in

oral history and in the writers' workshop movement, talk about the importance of encouraging people to find their own voice. Finding your own voice is still the most transparent metaphor for being taken seriously culturally.

I was a guest at the 20th anniversary meeting of the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers this year. Somewhat to my surprise I found this movement of working class writers' groups in stronger shape than ever.

I was involved in setting up, the Federation in 1976, and stayed active for about ten years. I had imagined that the organisation would, like so many other projects of the 1970s, be just about hanging on, or even in serious decline. Not so. If anything the Federation of more than 30 groups, representing hundreds of writers in some of Britain's most hard-pressed communities, is stronger than ever; and wittier and warmer than ever too.

John Prescott may have had his wardrobe made over by Barbara Follett, and his speech coached into acceptability by media advisers. But short of brainwashing, his inner world is likely to remain obdurately

inflected by his formative years at home, in school and in work. For many people it is the 'hidden injuries of class' which shape their own sense of class identity, the invisible scars and traumas of poverty, harsh working conditions or social rejection. Even those who successfully translate themselves into the middle classes will often feel that they embody or hide a secret self which remains insecure, vulnerable, or aggressively defensive.

Telling History

The history of the Federation provides a telling history of class transmutation in Britain over the past 20 years. When it started, the dominant model of 'working class writing' was still the shoemaker's autobiography (Arthur Newton's *Years of Change*) for example, the shipyard worker's poems (Jack Davitt's *Shipyards Muddling Springs to Mind*), or an anthology of mining memoirs (*Pit Talk in Durham*). There was at the time, a magazine, significantly called *Voices*, which saw its principal readership and pool of contributors among trade unionists.

Within just a couple of years of the setting up, the Federation had become community based groups often made

up of unemployed people, of adult, literacy students, and of black activists whose writings displayed a sense of anger and urgency that had gone from traditional working class writing forms. Such writers often regarded trade unions as part of the establishment that had crossed over to the other side of the road.

By the end of the 1970's the annual general meetings (always held at residential weekends) were dominated by issues of gender, with some intriguing debates about whether women's oppression was as severe as class oppression, or whether there was such a thing as working class homosexuality (a decadent bourgeois aberration according to one or two last-ditch fundamentalists, not to be found amongst real working class men, let alone women).

Today a lot of the energy in the Federation comes from the homeless (the Big Issue is an active member), from ex-prisoners, or from disability groups or mental health 'survivors'. Thus definitions of class identity have moved in general from men to women, from the employed to the unemployed, from the oppression of material poverty to the damage done within. Class, which was once principally defined by

gender and occupation, is now largely defined by lack of employment, social marginalisation and even criminalisation. To this degree the process of writing oneself into the history books or into the literary culture becomes even more important. Two of the most recent anthologies of writing from the Federation, *Once I Was a Washing Machine*, and *Writing for A Change*, are full of vivid and at times traumatic testimony to the worlds of want and despair that many people in Britain, and their children, still live in, and of which the writing process, and indeed the writers' movement, remains one of the most articulated and politicised representations.

Writing is a fundamental part of the process of creating both personal and collective identities. 'If you doubt whether you have a personality, write a letter', Carol Joyce Oates once said. Although many now deny any productive relationship between writing and class, or the contemporary relevance of class patterns of experience to 'our' literary culture, it is salutary to recall the critical drubbing that Kate Atkinson received for having come from 'nowhere' (York, actually, and with a track record of short story writing) to snatch

the Whitbread Prize away from the home counties front runners with her exuberant novel *Behind the Scenes at the Museum*. The result was lots of snide press references to the chambermaid who amazingly wrote a novel. James Kelman's Booker Prize win two years previously elicited much the same response.

So is working class writing different? Think about some of the writers who started out in writers' groups attached to the Federation - Jimmy McGovern, for example, a founder member, Tony Marchant, Bridget O'Connor, Sandra Agard, all of whom have achieved mainstream success - it is their fidelity to vernacular speech, to the rhythms and idioms of dialect, that they share in common, and which not surprisingly has drawn them towards playwriting, or first person narrative, even performance poetry, rather than the traditional novel.

As always, class comes back to speech, and the emotional range and power of the human voice as the principal form of cultural expression.

The 'Real World'

Historically this has taken the form of jokes, story telling and gossip. In more mediated forms, particularly for women,

Writing about Work in Europe

it has taken the form of diaries and letters. Episodic, occasional, spontaneous, these elementary forms stay close to the exigencies and small victories of the quotidian life. They are part of the culture and politics of what recent anti-poverty campaigners have been driven to call the 'real world', of love, affection, sickness, poverty, mental illness, and existential despair. Little of which will be heard from politicians in the coming election campaign, with their cross party consensus that in modern Britain we are all middle class and comfortable now.

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This article first appeared in New Times 27 April 1996. Ken Worpole's latest book, Staying Close to the River, is published by Lawrence and Wishart

At the end of April 1996 Tim Diggles, Sarah Richardson, Betty Battle, and I were invited to represent the Federation at a conference on European working class writing, held in Roubaix, Northern France. The conference had representatives from Sweden, Belgium, Germany, Italy, from some of the many migrant waves of workers across Europe: Italian, Bedouin and Polish communities, and of course France. The lively debates both in and outside the conference, and the bringing together of so many different and yet very similar strands of experience open the possibility for us all to develop our own Europe of worker writers: a new Internationale.

Wednesday 24th April. Tim, Betty and I arrive at 11.30 and are whisked off from the Eurostar station in Lille by Katrin Schielke and Bernard Pigache of TEC/CRIAC (a French arts and cultural organisation concerned

Whether or not this writing is literature, those who write are writers. The development of worker writing may require us to reconsider other forms of writing, including that defined as "literature".
"Because you see me as a proletarian you despise me. But the bread I eat is from the wheat I sow."

with workers which has organised and sponsored this conference) to a lunchtime meeting with around 50-60 engineering workers of the French National Railway (SNCF) and Bernard Noel, prominent sociologist and writer. We exchange a sheaf of Fed leaflets in French for a beer and a Desperate Dan size sandwich. Noel, a distinguished looking man with a grey frizz of hair, has for several years been working on a book about the engineering works, but it is yet to be published.

Little Time for Writing

The SNCF workers tell us they work long hours and have little time for writing and making publications - we talk about Zola, how it is possible to produce your own books, what we can write about, the necessity of workers writing about their experiences to inform and share.

The debate quickens with Betty's reading of Olive Rogers' title poem reading from *Once 1 was a Washing Machine*, when we talk about the role of women, but the lunch break (extended in France to two hours), is over. The works librarian is very interested in the work of the Federation. Unlike Britain, the public library system is sparse in France. Instead, 1% of company profits go into cultural resources based in the works place: thus every large factory has a library and cultural events programme. Something like the Federation has real possibilities here.

We then tour the works, which repairs everything from rolling stock to fine old diesel engines and even the Eurostar itself. In the bodyshed there are the living examples of those obscure HO Playcraft French trains you could once buy in Woolies about thirty years ago. Some of the parts look identifiably scaled up from the insides of my old Tri-ang train set, and are cleaned in a vast washing machine not unlike the business end of a twin tub. The grease and oil is difficult to associate with the spick and span Eurostar.

Next, to Douai to the vast Renault factory for a meeting in the workers' library with Phillippe Bouquet, a university lecturer in Swedish at Cannes, and the translator of a number of Swedish books into French, amongst them many by Stig Dagerman. Phillippe talks

about the worker writer tradition in Sweden, in particular how the Swedish language is direct, preventing a distinction between the spoken and literacy language.

Off to the hotel with TEC/ CRIAC workers Christine and Clotilde in a rickety VW Passatt. A few minutes to unpack; we are off any moment to Lille to meet some of the other conference participants.

At a restaurant we meet Tommaso di Ciaula, the expressive worker writer author of *Tuta Blu*, an autobiographical novel which has been made into a play and a film, about the reflections of a factory worker on the way social forces conspire to diminish him. It has appeared in 14 languages since 1978 - but not yet in English.

Bernard Lecoine of CREAFL (who many people will know from his workshops at the FWWCP Festival of Writing) also makes an appearance. After dinner he proposes that we visit his workshop - it is the only time we have to meet. CREAFL are keen to join the Fed. They work with mentally handicapped people, and people from Algeria and Morocco learning French as a second language, use printing and pottery crafts to encourage expression. The print workshop houses over 200 styles of type face and by composing type from printers drawers people learn to

recognise letters, and produce texts on textured paper in a variety of inks, accompanied by photographs and pictures. These are stuck into the books as in an album. The results are highly individual, handmade, and beautiful, a real achievement.

Thursday 25th April. We breakfast with Phillippe, and walk around Roubaix, built around a large square with a massive town hall and a medium sized church. Tim buys himself a Tin-Tin camera for snaps Sarah and I buy postcards. "Le Pays de Miniers": views of slag heaps and overall clad men with davy lamps. I am waylaid by a pensioner who tells me that the landlord of his local pub as a boy knew Paul Lafargue, Marx's son in law. I shake the hand that shook the hand that... Betty returns to tell me to get a move on. We nip into the Cathedral where a portrait of the last confession depicts a childlike angel tugging a dying man away from his confessor.

The Forgotten Room

It is twelve and time for dinner. Armed with an A-Z, Pascal Mauny (who chaired the meetings during our last visit to northern France in 1993) shepherds us into the rickety Passatt, and negotiates the Roubaix back streets to the former Rita waffle factory. Now it houses an artists co-operative. In a yard are a couple of dogs, children, and an upturned half body made of barrel staves. Amongst

the other exhibits are some pathological specimens of telephones and binoculars, monsters from the forgotten room in every factory where they consign the things that are miscegenated from the industrial process. Receivers welded to mouth pieces in a seamless soixante neuf, binoculars with an eyepiece at either end, giving simultaneous miniature and enlarged views.

In the little cafe by the 'try the strength of your grip' machine, lunch is a tasty solid vegetarian lasagne with lots of herbs, followed by rum and raisin ice cream in "English sauce". This turns out to be chilled vanilla. We meet Ricardo Monserrat, a sensitive seeming man who worked in theatre against the Chilean dictatorship, and with the widow of Victor Jara, but has more recently been involved in Dreams of Work ("Reves de Travail") about dock workers in Nantes. He is later to tell us that we have lost the right to live in the work place, our human rights no longer exist at work. Bosses try to prevent workers who dare to laugh and tell jokes about their job. His current project involves unemployed people being paid to write a collective novel.

Working Class Writing in France

It's time to begin the conference, we return to central Roubaix, to a castellated former textile mill, converted into a gallery and large meeting hall. Jerome

Radwan opens on the work of Henri Poullaille and Michel Ragon, and the origins of working class writing in France. Ragon, the defender of and author of several histories of French working class writing, was sadly too ill to attend; Poullaille was a central figure in the development of working class writing during the 1930's, a study centre has been set up to continue his work. Jerome argues that since 1945 "worker expression" has moved on from being locked into a historical ghetto, and constrained by terms of definition - Henri Poullaille (who stiffened the lacklustre resolve of some of the thirties French left to petition Stalin for the release of Victor Serge), was more concerned with the issue of workers writing about their experience than the problems of party political definitions of proletarian literature.

Bare, Naked, Shocking

Phillippe Bouquet talks about the influence of Kropotkin and anarchism on Swedish worker writers in the earlier part of the century, and of the influences of Sweden's rapid development into an industrial nation. He and Jerome discuss comparative experiences of industrial expansion in French and Swedish worker writing, in particular the inclusion of agricultural workers in what is often characterised as an urban expression. As with the SNCF workers the previous

day a central problem is finding the time to write matched against the importance of writing about class conditions - including unemployment. Above all Poullaille argued the most important thing was to be yourself when you write. Phillippe quotes Ragon: "When the people's voice is true and it is bare and naked it is shocking". Both Phillippe and Jerome assert the desire of workers to know about other workers in other countries and the importance of spreading worker writing: Jerome attests to the importance of translators like Phillippe in facilitating this:

"Whether or not this writing is literature, those who write are writers. The development of worker writing may require us to reconsider other forms of writing, including that defined as "literature". "Because you see me as a proletarian you despise me. But the bread I eat is from the wheat I sow", to paraphrase Alan Gide".

Blue Overalls

Tommaso Di Ciaula failed his school Italian exams three times, so his Dad sent him to work in a small factory. Despite this, he kept a diary which eventually became Tuta B/u (the title refers to the colour of workers' overalls). He wanted to write about the way work damages health, how working hours had increased from the days of agricultural society, how industrial inventions had often not been

created by bosses but by workers. He wrote through anger that the media only represented bosses' interests, and contends the boss owes humility to the worker, not the other way around.

Tommaso is an impassioned defender of worker writing and workers' expression: later that evening we are to see a vigorous performance of Tuta Blu by the actor Jean Delval, who is to speak next. Jean Delval has been involved in many creative collectives in political and social movements in Belgium. *Theatre Action* is the latest of these, developing work around strikes, reflecting social causes. Jean gives a number of examples of collective working, including banner workshops, with workers involved in industrial struggles around Belgium.

Tim talks about the Fed, the relationship it has with its members through the voluntary work of the executive and the committees, illustrating the variety of groups and interests with example publications. Alfonse Salafia is a poet and librarian who distributes *L'Allantoide*, a freesheet. Later on he was pushing this little folded sheet of paper into cars stuck at traffic lights. Those who took it will have been amused to find '*A short vulgar and useless course on gynecolinguistics*' by Van Dog, and the unfortunate experiences of one Walter Clauzette, cartoons and photographs. Each is a

hilarious little catalogue of scurrility and art. Alfonse specialises in producing delicate and strange books, books in boxes, books made out of cardboard - art books.

Poems on the Metro

Francis Combes was involved in the project for "100 poems on the Metro" - the Paris Underground. He argues that French literature is a literature of white colours (the francoArabic slang for "bourgeois" is "fromage" or white cheese), of intellectuals and journalists who despise workers. Literature is dying because it has become a kind of intellectual product, to be consumed without meaning. The workers have not been successfully excluded from society. Recent events in France show they have been able to make themselves heard. This is the opportunity for workers to represent themselves in writing. Poetry, has to meet the people or die.

We return to the hotel for Jean Delval's excellent oneman performance of Tuta Blu. Then to TEC/CRIAC's elegant three floor house with red and blue stained glass windows, for a buffet. My French is sufficiently fortified to talk at length with Vincent Valdelievre of Editions Sansonnet, who publish rare classics of French worker writers - at around 70p a small volume. Could Shakespeare be said to be the voice of the people, (I contend Rab C Nesbitt holds the verite); the teaching of Shakespeare in the

national curriculum; the value of small publications which are cheap and accessible. After, Tommaso and I, struggling via an interpreter and our tiredness, find much common ground as we range over the issues of the play based on his book and whether it would find an audience in Britain. Tuta Blu is published in Italy by Millelire, an alternative publisher producing small paper editions for 1,000 lire, a pocket money price. The play, which has some of the frenetic qualities of Dario Fo, might, I suggest, sell the book.

Friday 26th. Tim and I grab a table and set up the Fed. bookstall. We've given out over a hundred leaflets in French about the Fed. - Ricardo fills our form in there and then. Quite a few of the people we have met are keen to get involved. We are already beginning to think of how we can develop these connections. We are torn from this by the beginning of the next meeting.

The first speakers are writers who have experienced migration. Kurt Kuther, from Germany, is a poet, children's author, and a former miner and mining engineer with many years of trade union involvement behind him. He reads a couple of poems about night shift work, and a man affected by the war whose children have six 'mothers'.

Brahim Benaicha is an accountant and judo teacher who grew up in a Algerian

migrant shanty town. His book *“Vivre Au Paradis”* (To Live in Paradise) describes alienation and misery as a consequence of thwarted opportunity. Later he tells how, as a child, he and his young brothers asked the social worker to fix it for them to see the place where their father had worked. He had had a stroke; it was a way to connect with the man he had been.

The first woman to speak on the platform, Christine Moskwa, tells of the difficulties writing about her Polish father who worked in a mine office and translated for politicians - her mother was French. When her father committed suicide she began writing - she was concerned to write in Polish; her father had spoken Polish when he didn't want the kids to understand him. To Christine writing is secondary to her role as a woman and a teacher, but she has found that she needs to use a dictaphone in order to write as she speaks. “That my name was on the book (*S'appeler Cesar et devoir mourir* - To Call Caesar and die) was very frightening because most of the things in it were true”.

Rue Des Italiens

Girolamo Santacono is a Belgian Italian. His autobiographical book *“Rue Des Italiens”* describes the life of Italian villages which migrated en masse to work in Belgian mines after the war. They lived in a former prison camp, with no water or

electricity, yet for Girolamo's childhood the sense of community enabled his mates and himself to have a good time, often it seems at adults' expense.

Ilse Kigbis is from the Ruhr. She wanted to write to free herself from the Nazi regime and writes to express life as it is. She is concerned with women's working conditions and the context in which she grew up, although the terms “proletarian” and “worker” have bad connotations in Germany - people are disinclined to read proletarian writing, even when it is good.

Peter Mosskin, a Swedish writer and former singer, interrupts his speech with a quick blast on the mouth organ. He describes collective writing with the workers and community around Hissmofors, a factory producing wood pulp for paper manufacture. He explains how alternative employment can be developed from cultural activities in the wake of industrial closures.

Novelist Alain Leduc discusses *“La Grande Nuit”*. This book, doubled back to back so that one side is a photograph collection (by Andre Lejarre) and the other is a series of texts, is about night workers of all kinds. Often Alain tries to relate experience to fiction; for example he describes linking policemen and detective novel characters.

I talk about the Fed's concern

with making working class writing available, rather than being an absent voice, and tell the audience of a remark I overheard last night about the Fed, that we were “ingenué”: simple - it was a compliment. If you are “ingenué” anything is possible. We are “ingenué” in order to be ingenious - and this inventiveness has enabled Fed members through struggle to bring out and distribute publications.

We rush back to the hotel for lunch. During the morning Christine has translated and typed up a resolution by the Fed, that we develop an international network, which is distributed amongst the tables. Conversation is loud, the meal runs over schedule, we return late to the conference.

The final session included Martine Vantses who also talked about the denial of workers' expression, and how this affected the creative opportunities available to young people. Her work has been with the children of gas and electrical power workers, and also with women cleaners. Sarah describes the collective processes which led to the development of *Writing for a Change* and *Writing on the Line*, and how this is fundamental to the organisation of working class publishing processes in Britain.

Bernard Noel raises an objection to “intellectual racism”, complaining of certain

tendencies in the conference to anti-intellectualism. Defending his position he insists that he has never used his being a writer as a power over workers and says that proletarians will be free when they can read James Joyce. A vibrant discussion ensues, much of which was lost in translation - talking to Olivier Apert later, who has worked with Bernard Noel on several books - it appears that some remarks were misunderstood and that more time was needed to resolve the issues.

The Limits of Literature

FWWCP members will have had many of these discussions and it would be instantly and refreshingly recognisable to anyone who had been at any of the Federation AGMs in the 1980s. Hands are going up all over the room, faces turning red, heads shaking and nodding, small bursts of applause. We are talking about the limits of literature, the place of politics in literature, the role of the writer, of technique versus reality, of the way worker writers have been shut out of the process by those who preceded them. In this melange our proposal is forgotten. Tommaso who made a similar proposition earlier, for a European journal of worker writers, says that poets should give us a vision of the world where we can live in peace and friendship and without fear: the worst is when a man cannot express his situation, cannot explain when he is in a

bad position, when he cannot give a name to his despair. Alfonse asks what the future of the workers will be tomorrow; ideas and solutions for the future come from writers. Phillippe says that there are people who can say interesting things apart from Joyce, the key thing is to give dignity to people. He is pleased to have met so many people interested in furthering worker writing: "I'm glad to have come here because I work alone, and I'm full of hope when I leave here".

Afterwards the group photographs, the final exchange of books with each other, the goodbyes.

We reconvene in a little cafe by Les Lisieres, the bookshop where Bernard Noel is to read from his latest book. We've made lots of contacts, there's going to be a lot of work to do when we get back. Pascal and I swap notes on dialects, popular culture and beer, Tommaso is signing Tuta Blu. Kurt Kuther describes his visits to England. The cafe owner wants to close up. Twenty of us eventually gather to go round the corner to a little restaurant where we give our best in renditions of a Beatles medley, and northern French folk and radical songs, many of which share the same tunes as those of English pub favourites dating from the first war. Clotilde, Betty and Sarah dance the cancan. Jean-Claude Toilet (Director of TEC/CRIAC), Tim and I do a quick bit of maths on the paper

tablecloth and cost up an international meeting in Britain. We'll have to work fast.

The Season of Cherries

Is this possible, is this appropriate for the Fed's members? Why not? Already, one of the French groups has joined us, Le Temps des Cerises (Their most recent publication is a reprint of Paul Lafargue's *La Droit a la Paresse/The Right to Idleness*). Europe doesn't have to be all about bureaucrats in Brussels, and we already have members in other parts of the world. As we said goodbye to other writers and community publishers at the conference, there was a real feeling that this is a beginning; that they, like us, will be working out how to get something going. Worker writers, we found, have much to teach and share with each other, language and culture are not such tremendous barriers. We face the same issues. As Brahim Benaicha says, "when you write your story, you are writing mine".

Many thanks to all at TEC/CRIAC, especially Katrin Schielke and Jean-Claude Toilet, and The British Council.

Nick Pollard

To read about French language working class writing: Michel Ragon, Histoire de la Litterature Proletarienne de langue Francaise, pub Albin Michel, ISBN 2 226 00111 5, 85Ff.

Worker writers in Japan

Nagisa Kagaya works in adult literacy in Japan, and attended the Festival of Writing. Here she writes about worker writing in a Japanese context. "The growing number of nonJapanese speaking people [in Japan] make us aware that our society is not monocultural. Sometimes we call them "new-comers".

The counterpart of this word, "old-comers"; means the Korean people. In Japan the problem of literacy is cast off because there are not many drop-outs from school.

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Our school system is very strict, which is the reason literacy in Japanese means the "problem" of foreigners. Multiculturalism will change the concept of literacy in Japan. Foreigners get married and acquire Japanese nationality, recently there are many young people dropping out from school. / am very interested in the changes in Japanese society. "

What are "Worker Writers" in Japan?

It is difficult to translate the phrase "worker writers" into Japanese. The words "worker" and "writer" are easily translated, however, independently, these two words do not reflect "worker writers", for which, to the best of my knowledge, there is no

commonly accepted Japanese. Therefore I would like to focus on the voices of adult literacy learners and a reminiscence group in Japan. Literacy learners and reminiscence groups are similar in that they stand in a culture of their own.

Voices from literacy learners - using language and expressing feelings

Please look at these short sentences (Original text in Japanese. Author's translation.)

1 Today I'm going home alone.

Won't somebody please take me home?

Futai

2 Today, after quite a while I was invited by phone to go out on a date.

My heart is beating.

Futai

3 On Wednesday* it always rains.

My home is far from here, I'll get wet.

Because of rain!

Rain is the enemy of my study.

Motevari

**Wednesday means "water day" in Japanese*

All these learners, from Armagasaki-City, are nonJapanese speaking, and are working in Japan without studying Japanese formally.

1 & 2 were written by a 59 year old Korean woman. She can speak Japanese fluently, but not read or write in Japanese at all. She came to this class with her daughter and husband. On the occasion that neither her daughter nor husband were able to take her home, she wrote the first example. For the second example she practised speaking over the phone with a 29 year old man from China. They talked about movies and used the phrase "Let's go to..." After that she wrote item 2 to express her good feeling.

3 was written by a 30 year old man from Iran. He is a hard worker at a construction site.

Many workers are at "3K" employment. 3K means "Kitui, Kitanai, Kiken (Hard, Dirty, Dangerous)". In spite of his hard and dirty work, he comes to class when he is finished. As he is interested in the word processor the tutor instructed him on its use. He typed his work by himself.

These sentences are used in the class for literacy study. This class is not for creative writing, but the teacher, Toshiro Suekata, asked

learners to put their feelings down on paper and discuss them. If some people wanted to use the word processor, they typed their work. Even if not publishing commercially, this activity is very similar to community publishing in the United Kingdom. However, this is not common practice in Japanese adult literacy education.

**Post War
reminiscence work
by Korean residents
of Japan**

A very interesting book was published in Spring 1995 in Shizuoka City, called 'A Peaceful Bell to the Spring - The voices of Korean Residents'. This book was published through cooperation between Korean and Japanese people. The authors are Koreans living in Japan aged from 7 to 82. The book is divided into three parts: the first, second and third generation to reside in Japan.

The Korean's history is rooted in World War Two. We Japanese colonised Korea, and brought Korean people back to Japan to make them work as slaves. There are now 690,000 Korean Japanese residents, extending to three generations. The first generation are not good at reading and writing

in Japanese, often lacking Korean literacy skills as well. The second generation struggled with discrimination during their school days and after. The third generation has changed. The following examples are representative of the feelings expressed in the three parts of the book. (Original text in Japanese. Author's translation)

First Generation

My life changed with history I have many things to talk about (72 year old woman)

Second Generation

At last I noticed I'm a person before I was a Korean (32 year old woman)

Third Generation

I will stay in Japan and live as a Korean. I'm a Korean even if I was born in Japan and grew up here. This is natural for me. (16 year old woman)

These cases are significant to the understanding of the multiculturalism in Japan where ethnic minorities meet the Japanese majority. Writing is a common means of hearing these authentic voices.

Japan is a multicultural society like the United Kingdom, but that is still unsaid. Multicultural has a different meaning in each society. There are many

conflicts between cultures and languages in multicultural societies - ethnic groups, spoken and written language, local dialects, gender, school and society. It seems to me that language use in Japan is very strict. It is only recently that the growing numbers of non-Japanese speaking people have been added to the complicated powerrelations in Japan. However conflicts remain if we do not attempt to understand the authentic voices from the people. For me worker writing means to write our voices - to write about our own feelings, imaginations, and the world.

Nagisa Kagaya

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Unity is Strength

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We are learning to be reporters. We decided our first article would be about Pecket Well College, then and now. For those of you who don't know, the College is in an old Co-op in a small village above Hebden Bridge. It has been interesting finding out what the Co-op used to be and meeting people who remember it then. Doing interviews, you get to know people. You have to think about what questions to ask. It has been a good experience. We heard some good stories. We would like to thank all these people very much for the information they have given us: Audrey Lumb, Marion Grayson, Shelagh, Brian Robinson, Rose Greenwood and Geoff, Ben Hughes, Stanley Austin, David Bell, Mrs Lonaghan, Colin Paton, Gillian, Ana and Martin and the staff in the reference library at Halifax. This is what we found out...

The Co-op

The Co-op was set up by working people for working people. The first shop opened its doors on the 21st of December 1844 in Rochdale, and the movement just grew from there.

Four years later the Co-op in Hebden Bridge opened. In 1876, Pecket Well formed its own society. Its full title was

The Pecket Well Co-operative Industrial Society Ltd. The local people built a shop which we now know as Pecket Well College. In 1891 there were 142 members, which means 142 families. At the time of writing this article, our Pecket Well College has 141 paid up members - but of course 100's of students come through the College.

Old Records

Mrs Lonaghan from the Coop Library in Manchester sent us some information from their archives. In the early days, Pecket Well Co-op sold grocery, drapery, boots and shoes and earthenware.

By 1934 it had expanded its goods and services. It now also sold fruit, fish, sweets, tobacco, hardware, tailoring and coal. Pecket Well Co-op "did its own thing" until, in 1936 it joined with Hebden Bridge Co-op. At Pecket Well College we do our own thing too.

Interview With Audrey

We interviewed a local Co-op member, Mrs Audrey Lumb. She lives at Wilcroft Farm, which we can see from the back of the College. She describes the shop as having shelves and counters on each side. In the middle of the room were boxes of vegetables. The

butter and cheese was at the back in barrels to be weighed out when needed. There was a hoist at the side of the Co-op to unload goods from the delivery waggons into the building.

You could get all sorts of corn and animal feed. Mr. Arthur Walters was the last manager until the shop closed its doors in 1964.

We have been remembering other co-ops that were our own Co-ops. Co-op tea from Ceylon, their own brew, it was good tea. Sugar weighed out into blue bags. There was their own brand of cigarettes, Players Number 3, which they sold cheap to pensioners.

Deliveries

We interviewed Mr Stanley Austin, who used to deliver coal and groceries in a Landrover and trailer to go to places where the wagon couldn't go. In the bad winter of 1947, he can remember delivering with a horse and sled over the fields to Old Town.

Ted Fearnside, the police sergeant at Hebden, went with him. Another driver was Levy Shepherd. He used to drive the Commer bread van and would take the wagon to Manchester for the groceries. We went to meet Rose

Greenwood at her farm up Crimsworth Dean. She came here with her young son and daughter in 1958. She has written a book of fictional stories based upon her early life here.

She recalls: "I used to go to the Co-op every Tuesday with a horse and load two sacks of provisions and take it up onto the moors to some people there. They had no transport. They lived at South Shields, right up on the moors." Such was the spirit of co-operation then. We like to think we have the same spirit in the College today.

Divi

The idea of the Co-op was that any profit would go back to the members, which is where DIVI or DIVIDEND came from. This was so that working people got a fair deal. The way the Divi system worked varied from area to area. Most people know the system described by Jim from Glasgow. "Every member had a number and when you went in and purchased something, you gave them your number and they'd write it down on a ticket. They gave you one part and they kept the duplicate in a book and it went up to head office. It must have been a lot of work because they didn't have computers or anything in those days. "When you thought you had enough to claim, you went to the Co-op offices and got your money. That was called Divi Day." Rose lent us a book about the history of

Pecket Well by W. Stanley Greenwood. Describing the Co-op at Pecket, he says: "... each purchaser was given tin cheques to the value he or she had paid. When a person had got cheques to the value of £1, these were changed for a one pound cheque." Audrey says: "It was a big day when it was Divi Day. It were a special do. My grandmother in Mytholmroyd, she used to buy a tin of salmon. Our number was 714." We wonder how many other people remember their Co-op number? Geoff, who lives with Rose, says that when he was a boy in Bradford, the Divi. paid for his mother's coal and all their Whitsuntide clothes. The Co-op there was called The Emporium.

When we were at Audrey's farmhouse, she brought down some old newspaper cuttings for us to have a look at. We read that in September 1891, Pecket Well Co-op had a Dividend of 3s 8d in the pound. In 1915 it declared a Dividend of 4s in the pound. Stanley Austin says that when the Co-op closed in 1964, it was only 2d in the pound. A bit of a difference!

Many people miss the Co-op. Ben Hughes is a Wadsworth Parish Councillor. He lives just a few doors from the College. He says: "At the old Co-op you weren't treated as a customer, you were treated as a friend. You'd exchange local gossip. Now when you go to the Co-op in Hebden all you do is take things of the

shelves and then out through the till." It was 26 years until the building opened its doors again. 1992 saw the opening of Pecket Well College. Not everyone had been happy with the idea. Rose says: "When it was first opened, I don't think the village minded what it was going to become, it was that it was going to cost so much money. It was that they'll knock it into this and next they knew it would become a Co-op again, or a hotel."

Marion Grayson who lives in the village thinks differently: "I don't think people bother. We know it's here and that's it. You set it up and we let you get on with it."

Doubtfuls

Some people worried about the parking. David Bell, who has been on Wadsworth Parish Council for a long time, told us that the village were needing the space next to the College for car parking, to get the cars off the narrow road. Joe Flanagan remembers this time: "When we came here, the Parish council was against us because of all these rumours, long haired thugs, drugs... but nobody made a formal protest, they were just rumours that you heard. I said, we are open by the goodwill of the people here."

PWC Friends

Not all locals had doubts. Ben Hughes was a councillor at the time. He has always been in favour of what the College is trying to do. "I voted for this

College. At that time I used to help out with people who have learning difficulties, in Halifax. I'm totally in favour of it. I think you're doing a very good job."

The opening

Many local people came to the opening. Michelle remembers: "They came with their chairs and things, and a woman came who used to live here in the house and she was telling me that they learned to ride their bikes on the top floor of the building. People came who had never been in it since it was a shop. They came for another look down memory lane."

First impressions

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Jan told us about her first impressions of coming here: "I was expecting a very formal grey building, like a school. I half expected lights out at such and such a time, you know everybody goes to bed at 9 o'clock! The first time I came I was late, and it was like the family waiting on the doorstep! You know, 'Where have you been 'til this time?' It made everybody laugh. I was rather sad to go home but I also wanted to tell everyone what a fabulous time we'd had, the new friends I'd made. We talked about 'cabbages and kings', we set the world to rights, racism, sexism, everything. The way the building is, it's more of a home than a College."

Another Chance

Many People like Pecket

because they see it as different to school. Jim Kennedy is a new student. He says: "Pecket Well College doesn't bother about people's background. Some Colleges do. For people like me, in their 50's, if you didn't learn at school you didn't get another chance, except, before the Government stopped National Service, you got it in the army. That's where I got my education."

"At school I got left behind all the time. I was 2 years behind where I should have been. I'm not blaming the school. I'm blaming the system. The teachers didn't have time to teach the individual. It got so bad they called us 'Dunderheads' and they used to have a Dunderheads class for 1 or 2 hours a day."

Julie says: "I liked school, but I went to a school for the handicapped and the teachers had more time for those who were handicapped than for me."

Special place

Shelagh has lived in Pecket Well for 8 years. She is the caretaker at the College. When we asked her what she thought about Pecket Well College she said: "It's very rarely I see anybody. What I do is usually in the gloaming, in the morning, and when everybody's gone at night. I think it's a special place. There's a couple of people I'd like to see involved in it, but they won't come yet. I've a

friend who stammers. She's got a low opinion of herself and it would do her a lot of good.

I think there's a lot of people like that. There should be more places like this. Being all together, and meeting each other, you realise you're not on your own. It's difficult to find people who don't belong to anything, any groups, - and they're the ones who need it most."

Thoughts of a driver

We asked Colin Paton, who is a volunteer driver for Keighley Community Transport, for his views on the College. He said: "I think this place is terrific. I've spoken to people like Malcolm, Ann, and a lass from Brighouse and they think the world of it. I think anything like this can only be good. I hope it goes from strength to strength."

Audrey Lumb is enthusiastic: "It's right! Learning what you want to learn and not what someone wants to teach you."

Ben Hughes thinks the College has made the village better. He said: "The landlord at the Robin is suited, because a few people go over for their lunches. I've spoken to some of the students in the pub."

Parents' opinion

Jan interviewed Brian . Robinson in Wakefield. His daughter Vicky has come on courses here. He says Vicky got great delight because of the things she made here.

He and his wife were worried at first about her going so far away from home, but he says: "When we knew they were picking her up at the house and bringing her back, we felt safe." Vicky has a condition called narcolepsy. Brian said: "In the house she keeps falling asleep all the time. Those days out did her really well. She was out for the day and she was with people, she didn't even think about going to sleep".

`Worker' comments

Malcolm and Karen interviewed Gillian, Ana and Martin, who work for the College. They thought Pecket Well is about confidence, rights, disability issues and helping each other. Gillian remembers how the idea for the College came from a group of people who went down to a conference at Nottingham University, and came back realising that they had a right to learn. The group became the founder members of the College.

Ana said that the learning that happens here is like a bud opening into flower. In writing this article, we have learned about the aims of the Co-op movement, and we think the ideas behind our College are very similar. Malcolm says: "The building has got its original feeling back! He has written a poem which says it all:

WE STAND TOGETHER

We stand together
No chalk in the flour

No watered down milk
Not silenced by others
We have a voice!
We stand together
Co-operative people
Birds of a feather
Reclaiming the meaning
Back to this building
And what it was built for
When people like us
Painted over the door

UNITED WE STAND
DIVIDED WE FALL

By Pecket's Publishing Project

Writing on the Line: Working Class Women Writers in the 20th Century, Sarah Richardson, Merylyn Cherry, Sammy Palfrey, Gail Chester, Working Press, 148pp, £8.95

I received "Writing on the Line" in the same week that Kate Atkinson won the Whitbread prize for her novel "Behind the Cases at the Museum". In a Guardian interview, Kate Atkinson quarrelled with the definition of herself or her novel as exemplifying working class experience or achievement. Her mother, she indicated, would have seen such a claim as a slur upon her daughter and herself. For Sarah Richardson, who edited the annotated bibliography of working class women's writing, and for Merylyn Cherry, Sammy Palfrey and Gail Chester, who contribute stimulating essays reviewing and reflecting upon working class women's relation to writing and publishing, the term is of celebration and solidarity.

A PREMIUM ON CLARITY

The impetus to produce the collection came out of the recognition of two absences. Firstly, class is often left out of discussions of women's considerable contemporary

Writing on the line

Rebecca O' Rourke reviews the Working Press anthology of working class women's writing and raises wider issues for women worker writers

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achievements in the field of writing and publishing. Such work is the produce of middle class women because they have succeeded in writing and publishing within the mainstream. Secondly, where a movement or grouping of working class writing and publishing does come into existence, as for example in the early 1960s novels of Northern working class life, it does so in such a way that masculinity becomes a defining feature of working class identity and its representation. The contributors, then, seek to open up this debate, not just in terms of class and gender, but also in relation to race and nationality. They recognise that it is not simply a question of filling in the gaps in the respective cultural maps of feminism on the one hand and class culture on the other. Rather, they explore the diverse ways in which working class women have worked out a relationship to writing and publishing through popular fiction, community groups and in autobiographical writing as well as the more conventional literary routes. The essays, especially Merylyn Cherry's attempt to situate and contextualise the achievement of individual working class women writers and the comprehensive answer to critics who suggest that the

term working class woman writer is a contradiction in terms. Although able to hold their own in an academic arena, they are written in straight forward language which puts a premium on clarity.

FROM THE MARGINS

The book list itself, while in some ways the most important part of the book is also the least satisfactory. To say this is not a criticism of the list or its compiler, rather it indicates the contradictions of beginning to redress such a huge absence as working class women's contribution to writing and publishing. It is, as Sarah Richardson makes explicit in her introduction, not definitive. But I am sure it will be read as if it is or should be: this first, provisional attempt to map the field will be taken as defining it. This has always been the case where challenges to the mainstream come from the margins and positions of subordination. Given this, I think a reordering of the book, so that the essays came before the list would have helped. Presented with the kind of authority which a listing suggests, there is always the danger that it is its absences and confusion that will come to the fore. Reading the list I was struck by the absence of women whose writing

had been nurtured, often in mainstream success, by the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers itself - Anne Cassidy, Ailsa Cox, Bridget O'Connor, Olive Rogers and Jo Stanley amongst them.

I was dismayed too, to see women included who, while they may write about working class characters, cannot - by any stretch of the imagination - be described as working class.

NEW READING SOURCES

A more serious weakness of the collection as a whole is the decision to take an international perspective about who is included in this list - there are a range of North American, Australian, Caribbean and Eastern European writers in addition to British and Irish women.

While I like this enormously in that it opened up new sources of reading to and in some cases made me aware of traditions I had not known about, it was frustrating that the absence of details about publication means I probably won't follow up as many of these leads as I might otherwise have done. Having decided to take an international perspective on the writers, it was disappointing and misleading the focus the critical and contextual work

solely on British writers. Class is a peculiarly British phenomenon and cannot simply be translated to explain the relations of power in, for example, Australia or the Caribbean. If, as the authors intend, a second edition comes to fruition I hope they will commission essays which discuss class in this transnational sense.

I said this was not a criticism and I meant it. The book is a considerable achievement and in offering these remarks I hope to contribute to the discussion and debate which the authors intended to stimulate. It is, though, also important to celebrate the achievement against the odds that working class women's writing represents: both in terms of the writing gathered together and discussed here and the determination and commitment of the contributors in producing such an attractive and important collection

Rebecca O'Rourke

Review

WORKSHOPPING: Here's how

“Creative Writing, A Handbook for Workshop Leaders”, by Sue Thomas, Department of Adult Education, Publications Unit, Education Building, University Park, Nottingham, NG7 2RD, 176pp, £9.95, ISBN 185041 078 X

It ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it! Is the adage which springs to mind having read this gem of a 'How To' handbook.

Presented in readily accessible sections, this book examines technical aspects of writing, alongside problems and issues. It also offers practical advice on getting into print.

Designed specifically to 'answer the needs of new writing tutors', Sue Thomas underlines sensitivity, integrity and tolerance as being essential when working with a cross section of people and motivations.

Locating the tutor as facilitator, as opposed to educator, highlights the complex issue of 'teaching' writing. This is explored through workshop exercises, which are sufficiently detailed so as to identify purpose and method,

without clogging the writing process. They also encourage the unlearning of set response patterns, by developing clarity of self expression in order to fulfil creative need.

Nurturing the imagination in this way (should) kick-start constructive criticism and enable the exploration of a variety of genres.

By derailing preconceived notions of what writing is, the individual is free to delve into a props room in search of her or his own 'magical robe', but it might be a good idea to keep David Fine's contribution to hand, as a reminder of how to fit writing into the distractions of our other lives!

Whilst the emphasis is on adapting teaching strategy to group needs, the tutor as writer is not neglected; the agony column serves as a gentle check for students who become too precious about themselves and their work.

The book could also be used as a teach yourself guide for those not yet ready to embark on group work. Keep a copy by your writing space to dip into for inspiration and illumination.

I'd recommend this book to anyone who convenes, writing workshops.

Lisa Durber

VISUAL ARTS:

Code of practice

"Code of Practice for the Visual Arts", Researched and written by Lee Corner, Published by the National Arts Association, Spitalfields, 21 Steward St, London E1 6AJ, £4.95, ISBN 0952589109

This excellent Code of Practice is a lesson to us all for its clarity, conciseness and ease of use. Each page focuses on the main principles. Sources of further reading and highlighted issues are set in the wide margins next to the relevant text, so you don't have to fumble around in endless index sections.

The Code was compiled in full consultation with artists, galleries, funding bodies and users and took three years to complete, and it has been most worthwhile. Which is exactly what I would expect from Lee Corner, one of the most professional and experienced arts administrators in the country. The language used throughout shuns the gobbledygook that so many arts documents seem to love and no unnecessary word is used. She has come up with a document that is usable and realisable, with points that are universal and valid for many years to come.

One point that may worry some readers is that The Code uses the word "professional" in many of its principles, but this

does not exclude the amateur or volunteer artist who should use this document as part of their working practices. As the NAA states, it "recognises a professional artist as an artist who enters into formal agreements with other parties as part of their working practice". That surely covers all artists whether selling or exhibiting their work at the Tate Gallery or a local library, who work with a community or as an illustrator.

As soon as I read the Code I wanted to review it and highlight the importance that codes of practice can have. I rang a number of literary organisations to see if there was a similar document for writers. I found one for writing scripts for TV and an excellent pamphlet published recently by The Oral History Society called "Copyright Ethics and Oral History"*², but not much else. I therefore suggest that the FWWCP take a lead and produce a code of practice for writers.

In an article Lee wrote for the June 95 issue of National Artists Associations Bulletin, she outlines the evolution of the Code and the consultation involved, so a useful set of guidelines is already available for us to work from.

The FWWCP's Constitution already touches on a number of issues that a writer's code of practice would include, such as Equal Opportunities. But it does not cover areas such

as copyright, good practice, or the relationship between writers, publishers, the local community, bookshops and readers. Some of these were covered in our Information Packs but were spread between articles. What I suggest is a democratically produced set of principles and good practice, uniformly set out in an updateable publication.

I already hear some of you saying "... oh no! Not more legislation! What about our freedom to write". This Code of Practice does not impinge on freedom (most artists I know are as vocal about the freedom of expression as any writer), and the principles prescribed help make relationships between artists and the people they work with (or for) much clearer. Most problems that arise in a working partnership can be dealt with beforehand if all parties follow a good code of practice.

The FWWCP shares many of the guiding principles in this Code, for instance the Equality of Opportunity section points out that "... The NAA will work to support artists who experience discrimination and artists who endeavour to challenge prejudice and encourage equality", likewise the FWWCP.

I cannot recommend this Code too highly and it highlights our need as a writers' and publishers' organisation for a code of our own which can complement this one and

improve our own working practices.

Tim Diggles

* *"Copyright Ethics and Oral History"* by Alan Ward, published by The Oral History Society, Department of Sociology, University of Essex, Colchester C04 3SQ ISBN 0 9507804 2 1

TAKE HIM AWAY

"Take Him Away", by Ron Piper, QueenSpark Books, Brighton Media Centre, 11 Jew St., Brighton, BN1 1 UT, paper back 144pp, £4.95, ISBN 0 904733 41 6.

Like myself, Ron was born in London just before the second world war. He tells of his childhood during the blitz when he took the opportunity to loot and steal from bombed buildings. This eventually resulted in time spent in Junior and Senior Approved Schools and finally led to a life of crime.

Ron's recollections include being evacuated with his brother and sister, relating their reluctance to be separated and feelings of abandonment. This strongly resonated with my own experiences of evacuation. He also recalls his early attempts at stealing, sharing with the reader some hilarious disastrous encounters and his consequent internment and friendships made in approved schools.

Take Him Away is a very readable book. It is evocative

of the wartime taken from a child's perspective; seemingly unaware of the actual horrors and consequences of war itself. Ron cleverly uses potential distress and makes it funny, with warmth and wit. This book is peppered with strong language, and with touches of sadness, but, above all, I think it is a book written in the hope that authorities will realize that brutality is not the way to help change young offenders. I really liked it.

Mimi Blackwell

UNTIL YOU COME OUT IN YOUR COFFIN...

"Those Lost Years", by Mary Adams, QueenSpark Market Books, Brighton Media Centre, 11 Jew St, Brighton BN1 1 UT, paperback 56pp, £1.50.

Mary Adams was a resident at St Marye's Convent, which housed "emotionally disturbed women" and closed in 1994. In this book she tells of her early childhood, diagnosed as being a slow learner, her abusive treatment at a squalid farm school, and how in her adolescence she eventually came to stay at St Marye's to learn domestic work so that she could be rehabilitated. In fact, her mother had insisted she stay until she came out "in her coffin", to protect her "from the wickedness of the world".

"I was told by one of the Sisters to go and join (the girls) while she talked to

mother. In reality she wanted me not to notice mother leaving as she had been told it was always a wrench for me to part with her and she thought it would be kinder to me if she left unnoticed... After dinner I told some of the ladies I was going to find mother, only to be told that she had left.

I cried then and thought how horrible of her not to say goodbye to me... I thought, there it is, her showing that she did not want me to live with her, and I felt that I had been badly let down again by both parents."

Mary details with amusing incidents the regime of duties at St Maryes in which everyone shared including decorating, and cleaning out the manholes, as well as the ritual, pageant and difficulty of adjusting to convent life. Mary, in her understated way, describes the hurt of a time when parents knew best for children without talking to them about how they felt.

Eventually, in the latter part of the book, she confounds those who consigned her to a life of limited potential by developing the skills to train people with learning disabilities on computers. An interesting book, not only for the historical detail, but also for the complexities of broken relationships, the lost opportunities and quiet tragedy it reveals.

"Catching Stories"
QueenSpark Books,
Brighton Media Centre,
11 Jew St, Brighton,
BN 1 1 UT, paperback,
£8.50 + £1.50 p&p,
ISBN 0 904733 46 7.

A fisherman's life is not always easy, as we read in *Catching Stories*. The same could be said of the life of the book itself. There have been ups and downs, and times when it's become becalmed, but it finally came to shore on 19th May, appropriately enough outside the Fishing Museum, where it was on sale for the first time.

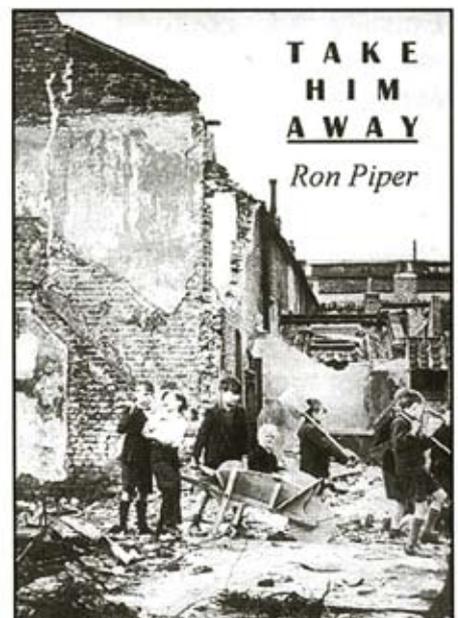
Having a strong feeling for the sea and a sense of sadness that the fishing community is no longer what it once was, I was fascinated by the idea of the book from the moment I first joined QueenSpark in the New Year. When I was asked to cast a fresh eye over the manuscript and read it to see if the message was clear and for any glaring errors, I jumped at the chance. The book making group had by this time become so familiar with it that they were finding it difficult to tell the fish from the nets!

I spent a fortnight of cold, late winter evenings curled up in the armchair, engrossed, as the voices of the Brighton fishing community spoke out, bringing back the pleasures and the hardships of their lives. The fishing folk tell of the physical hard work of winching the boats up and down the beach, sails mended; of the

excitement of a good catch and the wonder at strange catches, ranging from the quirky to the sheer macabre; and of the nostalgia of a time when there were fishing boats on the beach, there was a fish market on the seafront, and all the business of fishing was thriving.

It is a book you have to work at. It is certainly no lightweight. You have to tune into the language as it is spoken and the fishing jargon. You learn the difference between trawling and trammelling and meet words that would grace "Call My Bluff" - cuddycue, preak and prickel, to name but three. It is divided into speeches made by the characters who people the book, which helps the reader. I can assure you that it is well worth the effort: it is ultimately spellbinding.

I now have the book in front of me: it's beautiful to the touch, Steve Gilligan's icons capture



the spirit perfectly and the photos complete the picture; it's good to see some of the faces behind the voices. The feelings I first had about the book were right. This will be hailed as an important work.

A tribute to a part of Brighton's history which might otherwise have been lost, and to QueenSpark members who worked so hard to keep that memory alive.

Sheena Macdonald

TECHNOPOETICS

"Through the Pane", VHS Video (14 mins running time), £9.95 to individuals; £39.95 (+ VAT and post) with training notes for organisations. A SnowTracks Production for the Arts Council of England, available from 4 Argyll St, Ryde, Isle of Wight, P033 3BZ.

This excellent video is a compelling vehicle for workshops and training on disability issues. Unlike so many of these, often badly taped from television or backed with mawkish music, this forthright production (from within the disability arts movement) is well crafted in its own right, and repays rewatching just to enjoy the attention to detail. But it is far more than a video about disability, it's great video full stop. Concrete poetry, stills, sound, computerised and filmed images combine to

tackle (and demonstrate) social isolations and separations in a poetic structure which envelops and suffuses the whole multilayered project. The use of poetry is at its most devastating when a series of connected puns reveal the complications of communicating with partial hearing. Should be an award winner.

Nick Pollard

MAGS

4WORD MAGAZINE, Rhondda Community Arts, Park and Dare Theatre, Station Rd., Treorchy, Rhondda, Mid Glamorgan, CF42 6NL, FREE, ISSN 1360-4481

A free quarterly magazine celebrating Rhondda writing. Although everything in this issue is poetry, the word limit for contributions is 3,000 words, suggesting a promise of prose to come. This issue features poems on a good range of subjects, from the Rebecca riots to the M4, mainly with a strong historical vein.

PROP, Issue 1, Summer 1996, Edited by Steven Blyth, 31 Central Ave, Farnworth, Bolton, BL4 OAU, 52pp, A4 format, £3.00, ISSN 1363 1799 Prop is a fairly wide ranging new magazine, which promises eclecticism and dynamism: this issue features pieces by Sophie Hannah, Elizabeth Bartlett, Peter Plate, and Mike Harding, amongst

others; articles explore the literary limitations of Freud, the poems of Kenneth Fearing, and the amorous disappointments of Apollinaire. Next issue promises short fiction too. Refreshing writing, plain speaking criticism and a pretty reasonable bunch of poems - a good debut.

FEDERATION
Archive Project

The Federation is setting up a database and compiling a publications list of all Fed groups past and present. As part of this process groups are currently being contacted for contributions. Please help by returning forms promptly. In addition, if you have any information/contacts for defunct/ex FED. groups please get in touch.

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01782 822327*

Federation Magazine

The next issue will be published in January 1997. If you want articles, reviews, comic strips, artwork or creative writing considered for publication, send a copy (not an original) where possible on Windows/DOS compatible disk as well as on paper to: FWWCP, PO Box 540, Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent ST6 6DR by November 29th. For subscription details contact to the above address.

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Events & Information

1997 Festival of Writing

April 4th to 6th at The Co-operative College, Loughborough. Workshops, readings, bookstalls, networking. This is open to all and is a great weekend. Booking forms and full details will be available in early January. Send S.A.E. to FWWCP PO Box 540, Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent ST6 6DR and be sent details when printed.

New Members

Three new members were accepted at the Executive Committee meeting in Manchester. First Chapter members are Spread the Word a literature development agency from South London and Corridor Press from Reading. Provisional Associate Membership was given to Editions Sansonnet a community publisher from Lille in France. We welcome them to the organisation.

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Award for "Take Him Away"

Congratulations go to QueenSpark Books of Brighton, who have received the prestigious Koestler Award for Ron Piper's autobiography "Take Him Away". See page 20.

Fission

"Fission" (ISBN 1 899571 03 5) is Pulp Faction's most recent anthology of new fiction. FWWCP Members and subscribers can buy their copy at the reduced cost of £5.99 (inc p&p). Send to Books Direct, c/o PO Box 12171, London N19 3HB (make cheques payable to Pulp Faction). Pulp Faction also have an Internet site which is: <http://www.tecc.co.uk/twin/pulpfact>.

Gateway

Newark Writers have published their magazine "Gateway" and raised funds to buy a word processor to loan to members to write. They have also won awards from the Nottingham Building Society and Lincoln Cooperative Society and are working in partnership with their WEA. For details contact Newark Writers, c/o 63 Harewood Avenue, Newark, Notts. NG24 4AN.

Lifelong Literacies

Gatehouse Books have published a collection of papers from their adult literacy conference earlier this year. It includes papers on family literacy, multilingualism, vocational and work place literacy, and the tensions between policy, research and practice. Costs £10 from Gatehouse Books, Hulme Adult Education Centre, Hulme Walk, Manchester M15 5FQ.

Eastside Web Site

Find information and writing from Eastside members on the Internet on: <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/ray-stebbing>.

New Books from Northern Voices

Northern Voices have recently published, "The Darkness Sleeping" (ISBN 1 87153617 0), a book of poems and drawings inspired by Hexham Abbey, £8.50 +£1.50 p&p. "Innocent Blood" (ISBN 1 87153612 X) is the story of the 1761 Hexham riot, £3.50 + 75p p&p. Available from Northern Voices, 10 Greenhaugh Road, Whitley Bay, Tyne & Wear NE25 9HF.

Centerprise

FWWCP founder members Centerprise are celebrating their 25th anniversary. Their very full Autumn programme includes many workshops and readings. For full details contact 0171 254 9632.

People's Culture

The US magazine People's Culture features the FWWCP in its latest issue, "In England's Green & Pleasant Land" available for \$10 (inc p&p) or take out a \$20 subscription for all of the 1996 issues. Write to People's Culture, Box 5224, Kansas City, Kansas 66119, USA.

FWWCP Meetings & Deadlines

Exec. Meetings : October 26th in Hebden Bridge, December 7th in Birmingham.

Information, articles, reviews, cartoons for January issue of Federation Magazine, November 29th. Send to FWWCP PO Box 540, Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent ST6 6DR.