

## Interchange Meets @...

Interchange (Bradford Writers' Network) meets every Tuesday from 8pm at the Irish Democratic League, Rebecca St, just behind the New Beehive, Westgate.

The sessions are informal and provide a sounding board for members' work, as well as constructive criticism and feedback should this be required.

Support, encouragement and words are at the forefront of the group's activities, and all kinds of writing is welcomed: poetry, short and long fiction, plays, memoirs, articles and songs.

### Inside this issue...

**Poetry in the park, a bard's tragic end, evolutionary experiments and the pain of writing a novel...**

# Park's poetic picnic

*Mark Cantrell reports on a one-day literary festival designed to bring the city's writing groups together.*

**THEY came to Lister Park to soak up more than just the rays, they also absorbed the inspiring muse of great poetry and song.**

The Rain God had fortunately sneaked off for a quick cigarette, because despite early misgivings about the weather, the rain held off and the sun praised the poets for the one-day literary festival called the Lit Picnic.

People came from across the district and even further afield to share their love of words at the event organised by Bruce Barnes.

Along with Interchange, there was a wealth of groups, performers, and information about the local literary scene. Tina Watkin was there from Bradford Writers'

Circle, as was The Perpetual Line, Redbeck Press, Pennine Platform and poet John Clarke had a stall, along with several others.

Music also got a look in, with Rahel Guzelian presenting her latest CD of her song recordings *City Light* (more info on that from [www.guzelian.com](http://www.guzelian.com)).

Kevin Flaherty, Interchange's erstwhile chairman did his bit to entertain the crowds with his poetry and a loud shirt. As a little extra, he later helped to entertain the kids (and more than a few adults) with his magic tricks.

There was more to the event than entertainment, however. The Lit-Picnic was also about bringing Bradford's diverse groups and poets



Kevin's loud shirt steals the show...

together in the hope that joint projects will emerge from networking.

"It's a stepping stone to try and develop some kind of umbrella organisation for Bradford's literature scene," Bruce said.

The event proved popular with those involved, whether on the stalls, performing or just listening to the words.

Carol Laffey, a therapeutic artsworker, was there to keep the kids happy and incul-

*Continued on page 2...*

**BACK ISSUES FROM:** <http://www.tykewriter.supanet.com/tw/>

# Bradford's boozed-up bard

**H**ERE'S an allegorical tale for the group's more beer-friendly members, warning of the dangers of a heady cocktail of booze, poetry and ambition.

In September, Salts Mill, together with Northern Broadsides, will present a tragicomic play following the life of Airedale poet John Nicholson.

Nicholson was a wool-sorter who worked for Titus Salt. He was also a poet, and fancied joining the ranks of the literary greats. Though Salt

was famously an advocate of abstinence in drink, he nevertheless encouraged Nicholson's poetic endeavours. The result was a published volume of poems.

Perhaps, Salt encouraged his worker-poet to steer him clear of the booze. If so, it didn't work.

Rushing headlong into the limelight, or so he hoped, Nicholson headed for London with his volume in search of fame and fortune.

Instead, he ended up being arrested for drunkenly haranguing

a bust of Shakespeare in a theatre foyer. He returned in disgrace, but only after he had commissioned a plaster bust of himself.

Nicholson's dream of literary fame reached its final tragic denouement when he fell into the River Aire and drowned in 1843.

The colourful character was resurrected by Yorkshire poet Tony Harrison, the play's director. It was first performed in 1993.

This presentation will take place in the actual

wool-sorting shed where Nicholson worked, with Barrie Rutter as the boozy bard.

The play runs from Friday 5th September to Saturday 13th September from 7.30pm (except Sunday) with Saturday matinees from 4.30pm.

Tickets: £10 (evenings)/ £8 (matinees). For more information contact the box office on: 01274 587377.

**Mark Cantrell**

## Bruce's Lit-Picnic

*Continued from page 1*

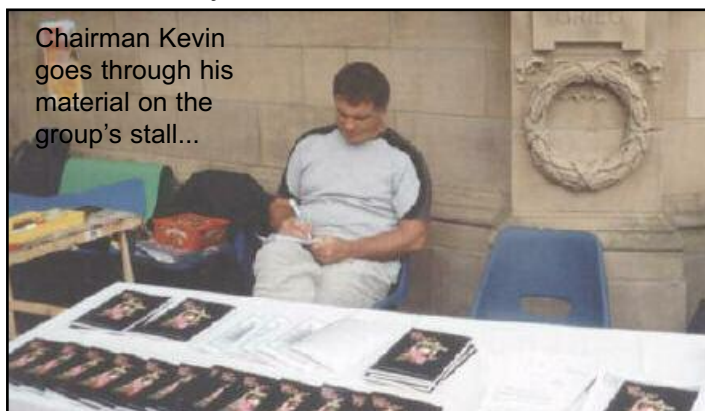
cate an early appreciation of literature. Good news for authors, because they are the next generation of readers and writers. The kids developed a mural containing poems they themselves composed on the day.

"I'd like to see the Lit-Picnic become established as an annual event," she said, "and maybe see

it travel around the district to give other towns a go."

Karl Spracklen, of the Perpetual Line, said that his group attended to come out from 'under a stone' as they have been 'quite reclusive'. But also: "To raise awareness and pick up a few people who might be interested."

Contact him on 01274 583479 for more info.



Chairman Kevin goes through his material on the group's stall...



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Its open all day at **Heaven Scent** Café and Holistic Centre, up from the open Market, on the bus station **Shipley** 11a.m. till 9p.m. Poetry @ 1p.m. and 7p.m. 'Open Mic' £FREE (bring a poem or just listen) and sample the Healing Arts all day

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# From The Primordial To The S[ub]lime

*Mark Cantrell looks at a dangerous genetic experiment to breed poets out of existence. It will never work. Or will it?*

**P**OETRY has long been part of the human courtship ritual, where some love-struck male scribbles verse in the hope that a female will respond and open the flower of her affections.

More often than not, the intended victim simply squirms with embarrassment and heads for the door.

Not content with such traditional clichés, however, David Rea, decided to go beyond writing poetry and is trying instead to breed them from a 'primordial soup' of random words. This is Darwinian Poetry, as the project is called. Evolution in literature. Kind of.

But did it impress the girl?

Apparently not. (*C'est la vie!*)

Fortunately, the web-based project has a more serious side, even if it is not 'hard

science' or literature.

"The girl isn't really talking to me anymore," says David, "but I hope that interesting language will emerge. I am not sure if any complete and valuable poems will result, but already after only a few generations some great phrases and rhymes and uses of words have appeared."

From a starting point of 1,000 randomly generated groups of words ('poems'), the aim is to subject them to a kind of natural selection to kill off the 'bad' poems and 'breed' the 'good'. If enough generations go by, so the theory hopes, then interesting poems should start to emerge.

Visitors to the site provide the natural selection. They are presented with two 'poems', and select the one they prefer (even if the basis for the choice is that they like one word). The rejected 'poem' is extinct. The chosen poem goes on to reproduce with another. This process is repeated and repeated down the generations.

David Rea is a senior technology associate with US company General Atlantic

Partners, Greenwich, CT. He has been interested in genetic algorithms for the last ten years and Darwinian Poetry is a sideline application of the process. These algorithms are a programming technique, whereby a series of programs that might achieve the best results are tested for fitness then either killed or bred. This is repeated until the goal is achieved.

"These techniques have been used successfully to solve complex problems such as gas pipeline control, factory floor scheduling and analogue circuit design," says David. And now, maybe, poetry.

The long term goal of the Darwinian Project is to increase understanding of evolution, rather than generate scintillating literature.

"It has given me a sense of both evolution's power and its slipperiness in a way that textbook reading never could," he says.

But should poets be worried about becoming obsolete?

No says David.

"Evolutionary systems only produce results within a limited domain. You'll notice that biological evolution never produced the wheel, even though it's a tremendously useful design

(*actually, maybe it did; by evolving the human form and its ability to think and invent creatively, but that's another story — Ed*). Even if this software surpassed my wildest dreams and produced a piece of meaningful and lasting poetry, there would be an infinity of other poems... some of them actually good... waiting to be written. Besides, this isn't really computer generated poetry. It's human generated poetry, just with lots of humans. The computer is merely a collaboration tool."

So, what's that saying about too many cooks? But maybe David has generated a mechanism whereby a large amount of monkeys can finally get round to generating the complete works of Shakespeare by trial and error. Or maybe just a whole lot of gobbledegook.

Whatever.

If you fancy checking out the results of virtual evolution, or want to try your hand at being a quasi-Darwinian selection pressure, or just a proxy poetry breeder, then you can check David's site at: <http://www.codeasart.com/poetry/darwin.html>.

GM poems? Whatever will Greenpeace say?



# It just got harder!

*Writing a novel is hard, writes Mark Cantrell, but it's nothing to the blood, sweat and toil involved in trying to sell the thing...*

**THEY** say that writing a novel is one of the hardest things you can do.

It's not like writing a poem or a short story or an article, though each of those has its separate challenges and headaches for the poor scribe.

But a novel — that's something else.

For one thing it's a long haul. Obviously. Day in day out, the writer is struggling to piece each word and each sentence together. They have to sustain the characters, the plot, the dialogue and the narrative over several hundred pages and many thousands of words.

Beyond that, the satisfying point of completion — of gaining a sense of achievement — can be months or years away. Seldom are there any mid-point grains of satisfaction to cheer the author on. But still, if they are going to be a novelist, they must persevere.

Take it from me, it's hard, often soul-destroying work. One of the hardest things ever. And it gets harder, because after that final word is added to the manuscript, the novelist must start again. Savagely. No novel is written. It is re-written, hacked,

edited and revised until both editor and manuscript look — or more like feel — like a bit-part victim in a cheap slasher movie.

Butcher your baby, dear novelist if you ever want to make the grade. But don't expect to retain thy sanity.

Okay, so don't just take it from me.

Try Tom Clancy, and he must know, because he writes some mammoth tomes:

"Writing that book must become the most important thing in your life. If it doesn't you will fail. If it does, you might just succeed... Success is a finished book, a stack of pages each of which is filled with words. If you reach that point, you have won a victory over yourself no less impressive than sailing single-handed round the world."

Clancy is spot on, but I prefer Orwell's take on the matter.

"Writing a book is a horrible, exhausting struggle," he said, "like a long bout of some painful illness."

Orwell, of course, was not only suffering the pains and birth-pangs of the novelist, he was also genuinely ill with consumption. You might say he took his research for *Down And Out In London*

and *Paris* a little too far, as that's where he picked up the wicked bug that eventually brought his words to a permanent end.

Of course, after all that hard work, after sailing single-handed round the world and finally reaching — salt encrusted and storm battered — the safety of port, the hardest part of all is yet to come.

For when that manuscript is finished, it must be touted to publisher and agent.

Expect them both to be hard-nosed and cynical, 'cos they've seen it all before and crushed many a shrinking violet author in the clenched fist of their business realism. Hard work? You ain't seen nothing yet.

After months and years at sea in an ocean of words, the novelist now has to boil the whole thing down into a mere page full of words.

Condensed, concised, boiled down to its barest and simplest points. And all the way through you have to make it clear what an exciting, original unmissable work it is.

So, you still think writing a novel is hard?

Try selling it to a jaundiced publishing world. Ocean sailing!

Where's my life jacket?

**T**he Tyke Writer is the monthly newsletter of the Interchange (Bradford Writers' Network).

For further details of the group, or to get involved, come down to the Irish Democratic League, Rebecca Street, behind the New Beehive pub.

Or contact:

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**E**ditorial contributions are welcome, but will be edited for space and style.

All contributions must bear the author's name, which may appear as a byline. Contributions are also preferably received in type written form.

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