

Writers Forum Information

ambition for the Poetry, not the poet

Archive for the 'Theft of WF's reputation' Category

The theft of Writers Forum's name

Tuesday, August 16th, 2011

This has been going on for nearly a year and an index to it will be provided a.s.a.p.

The following has just been posted on uk.poetry.info where Stephen Mooney posted an invitation to our workshops but at an address of his choosing

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Stephen Mooney has announced a Writers Forum Workshop, yet again

He is still in no position to do so. Nor to declare a second series.

It is passing off. It is, as passing off, despite what is said by him and his herd, illegal under common law, although it is very hard to enforce; beyond that, it is unethical.

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On July 3rd 2010, after he had already interfered in the administration of WF and only weeks before he, with others, tried even harder to take over, he emailed me — in reply to my accusation that he was — illegitimately — trying to speak for Writers Forum Workshop for his own benefit.

In that email, he complained that the accusation was unfair.

He said I am not party to the internal decision making in WF, nor should I be.

He went on I can assure you there was, and is, no attempt to associate myself, or Birkbeck, or Veer with WF's name, or to take advantage of WF. I am truly surprised that you would think that.

He said I have enough to do as it is (a lot more than enough).

Two months later he and others wrote me an email letter which proposed to do everything that this email denies he wishes to do and which demonstrated that they had been working on the project for some time.

They declared we are in the process of starting our own alternate (sic) workshop; but when they went public it was with the name *Writers Forum*.

It was, in the words of a colleague, the kind of letter that might be written by a business apparatchik with words like exciting, accessible, innovative.

It was written by Sean Bonney, Wayne Clements, Johan De Wit, Steve Fowler, Antony John Francis, James Harvey, Jeff Hilson, Matt Martin, Stephen Mooney, Nat Raha, Linus Slug and Jamie Sutcliff.

They offered to speak with me about it then, but sent the letter on the day when it was known I was going out of London; and they could have said it all earlier if they were sincere. Instead they cooked up their scheme behind my back and then offered to talk; and, if they were honest, all they had to do was a start a new workshop and walk out saying they didn't like the way I was doing things.

The letter heaps praise upon me whilst implicitly suggesting that I was leading WF to stasis and ruin, a ruin they could avert and I could not.

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I can only think that their main aim, should I have been able to talk, was to give me a verbal gold clock and persuade me to agree to be let go.

It didn't seem to occur to them that I took seriously Bob Cobbing having chosen me as one of those to run what he had made. He did not choose any of them, apparently perceptively. I would not choose any of them to take over.

They have some good points in their own work but it is clear from what little they have written on the subject that they have a poor grasp of what Writers Forum Workshop is about and see only the element which they value.

I am put in mind of a reply to a review written over 30 years ago by Peter J King and Alaric Sumner of a Writers Forum publication: they laid into wf and its production method, again with the tone of those who know how to save the world. (This was words worth magazine which did quite well and made a total of 4 issues over 2 decades; it was good in parts.)

The reply, which they had the honesty and openness to entertain and publish, told them: _You have made the mistake of thinking your opinions are important_. Perceptive words.

The main criticism — for them — the Mooney Coalition made — leaving aside the undertone — is that _there is no democratic mechanism in place by which our majority view can be expressed and acted upon_, the word _our_ apparently referring to whomever turned up to a private conspiracy invitation: two women presumably expected not to agree with the action were not invited. And nor was I, of course, despite their praise for my _long and important involvement with WF_ (I quote them — and notice in that quote that they only allow me _involvement_; while they speak of their fake wf as _our_ workshop. No acknowledgement that the process of hand over was of two years' thought and subsequent discussion by Cobbing; but that was known. There is no secret but it doesn't fit their mendacious narrative.)

So they had a (secret) unanimous vote by all those who could be relied upon to vote yes.

I had not been aware of this supposedly democratic urge in those of them I knew. I think of the oil company that proclaimed Power to the people and the brewer who urged us to join the red revolution.

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There never has been any attempt from Writers Forum to stop people leaving the Workshop. Nor is there any mechanism for doing so. I could hardly have objected to the departure of one who was hardly ever there anyway.

Democratic? Many voting never had participated in Writers Forum. Very democratic. (It's actually more complex and worse than this but I am trying to keep it simple.)

When it was clear I intended ignoring them as unreliable scoundrels, they went out of their way to confuse the issue for others, leading people to think that they really are Writers Forum, taking the credit for what others have done. Perhaps that always was the intention. People were told that our meetings were off; but *that can only be done once — if and when I find out about it.

Then leaflets in the pub we use were taken, repeatedly; not all the leaflets, just ours. It could have been done by anyone, but it was a hell of a coincidence. I think I know which one did it; but I'll keep shtumm

They said they had difficult issues to raise with me. They didn't explain that. They didn't encourage the discussion.

There would have been real difficulty for more than half of them because they had never spoken to me about anything. Perhaps what they meant was that I might laugh at them with their _collective impulse of all_. Where have I heard of that before? (I mean apart from in speeches from the guillotine.)

I know: it was LUC, London Under Construction, a collection of individuals, including Stephen Mooney, many of whom did some exciting things and worthy things but which was hard to work with, though I tried to, because (a) everyone was in charge, but no one seemed to have oversight or coordination (b) it kept trying to speak for Writers Forum and several times claimed to have _represented Writers Forum_ without Writers Forum's permission.

Chris Goode wrote recently of Ulli Freer running Sub Voicive Poetry between 1992, when Gilbert Adair left, and 1994, when I took over. That was inaccurate. There were 5 of us running SVP in that period of whom Ulli was very active, perhaps the most active; but the work was supposedly shared, and much of it which should have been done did not get done. I took very little part during that time, being preoccupied

fighting a criminal charge trumped up by the metropolitan police. That came to a sort of an end in early 1994.

I am not concerned to criticise anyone on the SVP committee (1992-1994), merely to cite the predictable failure of management by disorganized committee.

When I took over, I was told it was too much work for one person: I took over to stop the talk of closure. It was a lot of work, but not too much, once there were not multiple chiefs. The first months were hard, as I had to discover and deal with arrangements which had been made, unrecorded, by others without anyone else knowing.

(Incidentally, this period was cited to me last year by an observer sympathetic to the Coalition, as I call Mooney's herd, as an example of how difficult I am to work with, on the basis of gossip, as from 1994 I insisted that things be done in a slightly organised way; and to stop people thinking they could speak and arrange for SVP as part of some kind of collective will.)

So perhaps the mistake is being made again.

Or perhaps the proposal for democracy is for the same kind of democracy that might be proposed by either Milliband.

Last year, one commentator – you can find this on the blog wfuk.org.uk/blog (who gave permission for quotation) – remarked ‘Their actions look wilful, treacherous, competitive and bullying’ and went on to query ‘whether any serious discussion has taken place as to the ethical propriety of using the name.. Or whether this is intended as deliberately provocative?’ I have read a small number of ad hoc defences of this manoeuvre; none of them seem to get beyond “there’s nothing to stop us doing so”.

A man who sold poisons to the USA execution industry defended himself by saying ‘I have done nothing illegal’.

I think the desire for the name of Writers Forum is the desire for its kudos. I think it’s careerism. That may not apply to all, but they all signed the letter. I have been told that getting a herd to move is easy: one moves and the rest follow. I don’t understand this petit bourgeois sense of entitlement among those who claim allegiance to the practice of Writers Forum. They couldn’t have been listening.

They seem to want to remake it as some kind of self-improvement process. It's more radical than they imagine.

Writers Forum continues in its egalitarian way, but without democratic mechanisms, as it always has. And is still the target of misinformation, as witness Stephen Mooney's latest.

There is no second series.

They have no right to the name.

They have hijacked Cobbing's name and memory. None of them ever were members of Writers Forum because Writers Forum is not a membership organization.

They have done Writers Forum harm.

They have diverted energies.

They have done no good that could not have been done with an honest name.

Last week, some among us smelt revolution in the air.

If we *had just passed through a revolutionary moment, and were poets any part of that, I would be less than optimistic with this kind of behaviour being accepted among us. That's why revolutions go bad.

If even a few more challenged the Coalition, they would stop doing it; but we seem to be assailed by timidity.

Let them have their own workshop.(I wouldn't want them back in WFW.) But let them name it appropriately.

They could use their skills to try for the professorship of Poetry at Oxford.

This is where I came into poetry as a social activity. This is how it was in The Poetry Society in the 60s and early 70s, a few keeping to themselves what did not belong to them and refusing to admit it was so whilst talking up their own generosity and commitment.

The (truly) democratic takeover of the PoSoc was lost by a vote, sold out by self-interest, though much good it did the individuals.

The squabbles after Eric Mottram died were unedifying and counter-productive – and he would have boxed the Coalition's ears for the way

they quote him; Cobbing would have spat venom.

How beautiful mankind is! O brave new world! That has such people in it!

I do not think it is necessary to take Keats' Grecian Urn as axiomatic to find such behaviour as the Coalition's disturbing. If we are really content for such mediocre porkies to be told, what is the point of making poetry? Why don't they just join one of the three big parties or go into Marketing?

I have had to revise my opinion of several signatories to that letter. I didn't know some – and they could not know what they implicitly claimed to know so they judged me without evidence; and I judge them accordingly; but some have, for me, behaved out of character.

I think particularly of one whom I had previously considered to be at least one of the finest poets among us.

There has been a year in which all have had the opportunity to retract what they wrote, even verbally, including that person – I have been in the same room with some of them (though not thanks to any of them – I am excluded and that is that)

They have not retracted and now I read their poetry in the light of both their email writing and their subsequent failure to apologise for their mendacity.

But then it's Somebody Else's Problem, isn't it. So don't worry.

Apologies for cross posting

Posted in [Theft of WF's reputation](#) | Comments Off

WF ID Theft - Correspondence received

Friday, November 26th, 2010

Everything about recent events has seemed very strange to me. Not least that I was kept entirely out of any talk about the creation of a 'new series' of Writers Forum despite regularly performing original work at the Betsey and engaging in many discussions with other regulars – in the pub or walking up the road or waiting at the bus stop!

And all of the regulars at the Betsey have my private email too as Adrian Clarke used to send out group emails from time to time without ever masking addresses. Despite these things no-one sounded me out or dropped a hint or two in an email. And as no-one from the 'new series' talked to me about what was happening I have been forced to speculate as to what their reasons might have been for bypassing me.

1. **I'm not innovative.** Well, an innovation scale would be a difficult one to measure anyone against. And didn't someone say something about a democracy? Was there an undemocratic debate to decide whom to include in the 'democratic' debate? Was a list drawn up of those who are in(novative) and those who are not? Or perhaps a list based on some other unstated criterion? Who decided? And who decided who decided?
2. **I offer no routes to poetic fame.** This is undoubtedly true. I'm not a career-driven poet. Associating with me is unlikely to get anyone a cushy poet-in-residence or editorship of an esteemed poetry magazine.
3. **I'm a woman.** This is undoubtedly true. I'm not quite ready to jump up and down screaming misogyny but my pointing finger is twitching right now.
4. **I'm from Not-London.** The Midlands in fact. Perhaps this automatically discounts me from inclusion in anything innovative or interesting. I mean, it's not like anything good ever came out of Not-London.
5. **I would have mentioned any 'issues' to Lawrence.** This is undoubtedly true. And that could have caused some problems for the person or persons trying to appropriate the *Writers Forum* name and reputation.

Those who have abandoned *Writers Forum* should give themselves an entirely different name; so that there is no confusion; they have no moral right to the name. And they should stop timing their meetings to clash with *Writers Forum*.

Tina Bass 25th November 2010

Posted in [Theft of WF's reputation](#) | Comments Off

Re recent posts - ID Theft

Tuesday, November 16th, 2010

There will be some comment in due course on what is being posted; and I think maybe a repositioning of pages here so that this nonsense does not

occupy the eye too much.

Briefly, the thing about comments being off is that it was never intended as a discussion forum. Those exist. I don't particularly want to moderate discussions; though I am happy to have them and there are many channels for that.

This is a site to tell those interested in *Writers Forum* what's going on. When it was initiated at the start of the year, identity theft was not on my mind.

Those responsible for the scam could have communicated. Instead they hide behind phrases like "it was felt that..." – I quote from Stephen Mooney on Facebook recently. What Chris Goode has called "sub-DCMS" (department for culture media and sport – which in itself needs no comment) in a post quoted here

They can't even write the language they propose to subject to innovation

It's all very tiresome

Apologies for my poor fork-tongued fellow bipeds

Lawrence

Posted in [Theft of WF's reputation](#) | Comments Off

Commentary received

Tuesday, November 16th, 2010

Sun, 14 Nov 2010 18:21:31 -0500

cris cheek posted in reply to Chris Goode's printed below

(all reprinted by permission of authors')

Writers Forum Workshop (New Series)

I am one of those for whom this is the first i had heard of it. I've now read all of the stuff online that i can access.

It's a bit like an icky old-fashioned, even old-fashionisti, putsch! so people want a different workshop character (location, organizational ethos . . . or whatever) and have come to think that xxx is not serving their purpose or interests . . . times change and or time to move on etcetera . . .

but I find it extraordinary that there is any need felt to use the same name.

paucity of imagination anybody???

just pick a different name. start something else (no Something Else, that's already been taken ;=)) spirit of Bob Cobbing, start something different, something that makes a difference cris

On Nov 14, 2010, at 4:56 PM, Chris Goode wrote:

A number of people have already been in touch to say this is the first they've heard of any of it. At least I'm not alone in feeling outloped sometimes.

Lawrence Upton's account of the story so far can be found at the Writers Forum blog:

<http://www.wfuk.org.uk/blog/>

I'm not aware of any direct responses from the 'new' group in the public domain, partly I suppose because there is no provision for comments at the WF blog (or, rather, such provision has not been enabled). There is however an open Facebook group for the 'new series':

http://www.facebook.com/home.php?sk=group_161143470588115

and perhaps others can point to further sources of information and illumination.

It is curious, given that both these pages are in fully open public sight, that I feel like I'm snitching, or intruding on private grief. Can't help thinking that's indicative in itself.

Cx

Posted in [Theft of WF's reputation](#) | Comments Off

Commentary received

Monday, November 15th, 2010

The following was posted on "UKPoetry" on Sunday, November 14, 2010 8:43 PM by Chris Goode and is reprinted here almost in its entirety.

I have omitted the final paragraph which does not address issues related directly to *Writers Forum*

It is reprinted with Chris Goode's permission

Subject: Writers Forum Workshop (New Series)

My commitments away from the world of poetry — sometimes, it feels, a very long way away — mean that I sometimes, regretfully, have the sensation of being rather out of the loop. (The loop, happily, does fine without me.) Thankfully I'm not so estranged as to miss out on everything, though, partly because I still keep half an eye on this list and a few other useful online portals and trapdoors. It's been particularly heartening to witness, again without being able to be quite in the thick of it, the different kinds of engagement being made, both here and in connected zones, with the imperatives arising lately in attempting to respond publicly to the assaults being perpetrated on the education system and on arts funding, &c. In fact I received an email just now which I thought pretty heartening and exemplary in its determination to ensure that our anger keeps being translated into direct action, adventurous critical thought and plausible collectivity.

In that context, wherein more than ever we (many of us) want to feel that we stand together — and feel that it's true when we say so — I would really welcome a few words from any of the individuals who have taken it upon themselves to hijack the name of *Writers Forum* in establishing a new workshop series that seems, as far as one can tell from the currently visible information, intent on supplanting and presumably obliterating the series that, since the death of Bob Cobbing, has been run by Lawrence Upton and, until recently, Adrian Clarke.

I myself was only briefly a regular attendee of the *WF workshop*, while I was running the venue that offered its hospitality to *WF* during a period between about 2003-05; it is certainly true that I was aware even then of a level of discontent (largely muttered behind hands) about some aspects of the running of the series — not least, at that time, the unsuitability of that venue. (Fair enough.) To a degree I am surprised that it's taken until now for a similar workshop, inspired by Cobbing's model but run instead by those who've felt unhappy with current *WF* proceedings, to emerge: and probably on balance it's not a bad thing that it has. Were I ever in a position to attend either, I would quite like to attend both.

Can I ask, though — perhaps someone involved in the so-called “new series” would be able to comment? — whether it’s correct to say that their workshops are deliberately being programmed to clash with the, hm, “old series”? (WF Classic? — No, hang on, fuck off: *Writers Forum*.) And whether any serious discussion has taken place as to the ethical propriety of using the name of *Writers Forum* in doing so? Or whether this is intended as deliberately — to be polite and collegiate as ever — provocative? I have read a small number of ad hoc defences of this manoeuvre; none of them seem to get beyond “there’s nothing to stop us doing so”.

I’m puzzled because many of the signatory movers behind the “new series” are friends and colleagues towards whom I feel nothing but affection and respect (and whom I dare say would, and will, make a good job of running a workshop of this kind): so I sort of imagine I must be missing something. From the outside, assuming I have an accurate picture — and I concede I may not, from this distance — their actions look wilful, treacherous, competitive and bullying. All of which are things we have plenty of room to be, because no one will stop us, no one owns the means to do so.

As far as I know, no discussion of this wretched situation has been essayed here, and on a couple of occasions when I’ve tried elsewhere to ventilate my concerns informally I’ve been met only with embarrassment and fudging. I wonder would anyone care to set the record straight? I wonder if I might encourage them to do so front-channel, even? I am a bit sick of the amount of behind-the-hand whispering that goes on in a group of two hundred people. It is, to say the least, one of the characteristic behaviours that make my time out of the loop a little easier to bear.

Posted in [Theft of WF's reputation](#) | Comments Off

Recent posts

Thursday, November 11th, 2010

Three posts have just been posted

One reports on the last workshop and announces the next

A second is a letter received by email

A third is a commentary upon that letter

The second and third were held back until it was time to send our newsletter. That has now been sent.

The information is arranged the way it is quite deliberately so that those who have no interest in or really do not want to know about the theft of *Writers Forum*'s name do not have to read about it.

Having said that, I hope that you will read it. As Cobbing handed over the workshop in 2002, it was quite clear that he cared about it – then possibly more than his own work: I have written elsewhere that it was the workshop he most cared about. I am sure that he did not make it one of his central concerns for nearly half a century to have it taken over by those who do not apparently grasp what it is about, who have no right to it and are apparently incapable of making their own arrangements.

I have given quite a lot of my life to it and I intend that it will continue undamaged from now on

Lawrence Upton

Posted in [Theft of WF's reputation](#) | Comments Off

Correspondence received

Thursday, November 11th, 2010

On Mon, September 6, 2010 20:43, Antony Francis wrote:

Dear Lawrence,

In light of Adrian 's resignation as co-organiser and the circumstances surrounding his resignation, we are writing to express our concern about the future of Writers Forum.

Writers Forum workshop is rightly focused on innovative and experimental writing. This is a particularly exciting time for such writing, with many poets producing important work. However, we feel that neither the Writers Forum workshop nor the press are fulfilling their potential in this exciting time. New poets are not being attracted to the workshop and more established poets are not being retained because of the way the workshop is currently organised. The danger is that if this situation persists, the workshop will simply ossify.

The solution that we envisage is an overhaul of the way the workshop is

run, with the current situation replaced with a genuinely collective arrangement that utilises the many skills that WF attendees possess. This is the view of the majority of regular attendees to the workshop. It is something we would hope you, with your long and important involvement with WF, would recognise. We want a vibrant workshop that encourages work that pushes the boundaries of writing – an aspiration we know you share.

However, we also recognise that there is no democratic mechanism in place by which our majority view can be expressed and acted upon. As a result, in the meantime, we are in the process of starting our own alternate workshop focused on innovative and experimental writing, in which the best traditions of Writers Forum can be carried on, and the workshop open to new members, and the collective impetus of all its members.

We do want these things to be discussed openly with you – yours is a towering contribution to Writers Forum and to poetry in general. But Writers Forum needs to change if it to keep up with the exciting times we find ourselves in. This is a difficult set of issues to raise with you, especially as none of us would deny that you have not received the credit and recognition you deserve for your work, along with Adrian, in keeping the workshop and press alive. Given the scale of the job required to maintain both the workshop and the press, it is a wonder and a credit to both yourself and Adrian that either still exist at all. We want to build upon the work you have done, and to ensure that WF is taken seriously by, and is accessible to, the 'innovative' poetry community on a wider scale than is at present the case (we do not propose any lessening of its creative or poetic ethos in this, of course).

We would be happy to meet and discuss this further – discussions are always more amicable face to face than via email. We look forward to your reply.

Best wishes,

Antony, James, Jamie, Jeff, Johan, Linus, Matt, Nat, Sean, Stephen, Steve, Wayne.

[Readers of this letter may like to know that, at the time of this letter proposing democratic control of the WF Workshop and offering good wishes, 5 of the signatories were regular attenders, 2 less regular attenders and 5 were non attenders. A commentary follows]

Posted in [Theft of WF's reputation](#) | Comments Off

The theft of Writers Forum's name

Thursday, November 11th, 2010

I regret that a statement must be made about an ongoing situation regarding the fraudulent use of WF's identity.

A Q & A seems to be the most neutral way of doing it. All the questions have been asked of me in the weeks since August 2010; and the answers are, more or less, the answers I have given.

Lawrence Upton

Wednesday, November 10, 2010

Q There seem to be two Writers Forum Workshops advertised.

There is one Writers Forum Workshop. The other is a scam.

Q How long has this been going on?

In some ways, since shortly after our founder, Bob Cobbing, died in 2002

Q Surely not.

Yes.

I told people. They didn't want to hear. They said I was exaggerating.

Now no one thinks that.

Some attacks have been laughable.

This attack is serious and quite effective. It's still a scam, a dishonest and destructive scam.

Q That's a serious charge. Who's involved?

These are the signatories to a letter of 6th September 2010 announcing that they are taking over, although they had already started their attempt without announcing it:

Sean Bonney, Wayne Clements, Johan De Wit, Steve Fowler, Antony John Francis, James Harvey, Jeff Hilson, Matt Martin, Stephen Mooney, Nat Raha, Linus Slug, Jamie Sutcliffe

That is 5 regular attenders at the workshop, 2 less regular attenders and 5 non attenders.

At the moment, Stephen Mooney and Antony John Francis are advertising themselves as telephone contacts

Q The letter doesn't say they are taking over

That's true. Pardon me.

The letter does not seem honest to me in the light of what they are actually doing.

Q You must tell me all that before I can believe it. The letter itself looks ok.

Do you think it does? Let me start with the letter. Read it carefully. Think about there being "no democratic mechanism in place by which our majority view can be expressed and acted upon". It's a meeting of poets sharing their work!

But *Writers Forum* always has been participative. They protest too much. They did not participate; but want their way and they call that democracy, I suppose.

None of them had asked me for my side of Adrian's resignation; so they should say "hearsay" regarding the resignation and its circumstances.

I disagree with their analyses. They appear to be rather out-dated And I mistrust the letter itself because in many places it reads like management-speak or advertising gush:

"This is a particularly exciting time for [innovative and experimental] writing, with many poets producing important work. However, we feel that neither the Writers Forum workshop nor the press are fulfilling their potential in this exciting time." and "in which the best traditions of Writers Forum can be carried on, and the workshop open to new members, and the collective impetus of all its members."

It offers management-style analyses: "New poets are not being attracted to the workshop and more established poets are not being retained."

I think it's poorly written and it does not convince me of their sincerity. Is that the best these innovative writers can do?

Q But these are honourable people.

Are they? A few names surprised me. But there it is and there they are and they haven't withdrawn their signatures. They say, too, that they are truly collective; and I have to take them at their word.

I had thought some of them my friends. I certainly regarded them as fellow professionals. I had thought we had shared aims and shared ethics. Jeff Hilson is an exceptional poet.

Q This has been happening for 8 years?

Not this episode. It isn't always quite all the same people.

This attack started in June. Stephen Mooney, one of them, issued an announcement and invitation on behalf of Writers Forum Workshop though he had not attended for months; and I cannot remember when he last contributed.

He and I had been talking by email, but he was in his capacity as a Veer person, about a problem arising from his failure to organise a book launch in time. Then out of the blue came the announcement I speak of.

Everything he announced could have been accommodated, though I did not like much of it, but he had made no attempt to negotiate (ignoring

the small matter that he wasn't in a position to negotiate but was butting in). Eventually, Adrian Clarke, my then colleague, accepted responsibility for the announcement but refused to discuss it with me further until after 10th July despite it being our policy to reach consensual decisions.

Stephen Mooney later denied wanting to take over, and I even apologised to him; but he is now affecting to be the telephone contact for Writers Forum.

I acquiesced then in his imposition, in view of the lack of support — to put it very mildly — from my colleague, in order not to offend our guest-of-honour and in order to try to keep *Writers Forum* going.

I was M.C. of the 10th July event, at Adrian's suggestion, and it went ok. I'd had no list of proposed performers from the man who had put it together (Adrian Clarke) and no timings; which would have been ok if we had stuck to the workshop formula; but that was resisted.

I think I made a silk purse out of it.

After 10th July, Adrian Clarke resigned, dismissing me as "a barrack-room lawyer", so that no discussion was purposeful or even meaningfully possible.

Q How did that feel?

Upsetting. But one loses friends now and then, usually in the process of finding that they are not friends.

I came to the conclusion that the loss of my fellow convenor / director would not make much difference in work terms. I did most of the work already and could probably do all of it. I published a quiet unobtrusive reference to the matter on the website and prepared to tell regulars a little more of what had happened as best I could. These did not give me a chance.

Q Can't you let them start their own workshop?

Certainly. I can't stop them. And I'd rather they went, feeling as they do.

Q All right. So Adrian Clarke resigned and you concluded it wouldn't make much difference operationally. What happened then?

They put it about by email, behind my back, that the *Writers Forum Workshop* of 28th August 2010 had been cancelled, which affected numbers over and above however many there were of them then. There was no question of cancelling. The aim can only have been to damage *Writers Forum* and to dispirit me, like soldiers bombing a place before they take over. The lie violated the trust on which we have always operated.

That's before the letter to me, before any complaint was made to me that

they “couldn’t talk” to me. They have never said that directly; only behind my back. The letter says it is difficult to raise matters with me: they do not explain and they have never tried.

Personally ambitious poet: Let me run the workshop

Upton: No thanks. I prefer not to.

Personally ambitious poet: You’re very difficult to work with.

When I inquired of one of them on August 31st about an example of the misinformation exercise he had perpetrated, I was told “I didn’t actually say that” [i.e. “you told her Saturday’s workshop was cancelled”] So I quoted the email saying pretty much that, which had been forwarded to me [“i’ve been told wforum is most likely cancelled today”]; and this time I asked why he lied to me. And, at that point, I was told by the writer of the email, S J Fowler, that he was too busy to answer because he was at work.

I said I could wait till he had the time at work or otherwise, and I am still waiting. He’s had the time to do other things since and has sent me general emails about the poets he is interviewing; so I conclude he prefers not to answer. I am surprised he sends me emails; *Veer* emails seem to have stopped.

Earlier in the year, Mr Fowler had volunteered to help *Writers Forum Workshop* in any way he could; and he was embarrassing with what I found obsequious praise for *Writers Forum Workshop* and for me. Nevertheless, I was considering the offer and had been trying to think how he could help. I had and have some doubts regarding him, a gut feeling and, not least, the slogan “whatever it is, we’re against it” of 3 a.m. magazine with which he is associated.

Mr Fowler had asked me to open *Writers Forum Workshop* to some visiting Romanian poets in May 2010 and I assumed that he knew what he was doing. The poets were affable and competent enough when I met them; but, when I had heard them read, I wondered if Mr Fowler has any comprehension what the workshop is about.

Yet, now, a few months later, he says he is worried about its direction, despite his fulsome praise when he wanted something from me.

No one else has made any proposals regarding the content or conduct of the workshop. No proposals, no suggestions, no complaints, and until this contradictory letter of dismissal, no praise.

One other signatory to the letter clearly voiced doubts after the May event, about that event; and others muttered. I explained, quietly, that I had taken a chance and got egg on my face. So it goes. (Adrian Clarke

had expressed no opinion on the matter and left it to me.) What an opportunity the malcontents had to discuss the worries that have caused them to take this drastic action. It was an opportunity they did not take.

Q Where did the letter come in?

It was sent shortly before I was due to leave my office on 6th September to get a night train at the start of a three week working holiday. The time of my departure from work was well-known (and if they had said "We want you out of *Writers Forum* to stop you talking about Cornwall" then I might have had some sympathy!); so it could be that it was timed to cause me discomfort, as I was locking up and heading off to tranquil work, and thus to gain tactical advantage, in the way that they seem to see things. (I'm still waiting for someone to say: It's not personal; it's business.) Remember that they had already told people a workshop was cancelled before writing.

I changed my schedule and left early because of a tube strike and did not see the message for weeks. It would have caused discomfort; and I was never going to be taken in by "We do want these things to be discussed openly with you" given the rest of the letter. They had already set up their own organisation and already started attacking *Writers Forum* — claiming still to value it

Q But I still don't see why you can't both have workshops.

No reason at all.

Q So what's the problem?

They don't want another workshop.

They call themselves *Writers Forum (NewSeries)* too and meet at exactly the same date and time as *Writers Forum*. It is a passing off. It is a confidence trick. The aim is to destroy *Writers Forum* and then appear to become it.

They have been advertising their "alternate workshop" as "Writers Forum (New Series)" at 3:30 for 4 in a central London pub.

Anyone googling "Writers Forum" would be forgiven for being confused. I think they want to be known as the only "innovative" workshop. I think they want to destroy what exists and replace it using its name.

They have no right to the name. They have just stolen it. O brave new world.

I used to hear moans about "3:30 for 4", being told that "lots of people" didn't like being told when to turn up though no one who thought that ever spoke for themselves! but they have adopted my formula — presumably to pass themselves off, like a Nigerian 419 scam.

They met on 18th September 2010 whereas *Writers Forum* met on 25th;

but only because I changed the date: it had first been advertised as 18th. We both met on 9th October and 30th October to the best of my knowledge, in confusing competition. And it goes on.

The dates were set in the spring and accepted. To duplicate them now is clearly deliberate and therefore, in the circumstances, I think, malicious.

I see no good will. Only worldly ambition.

There are other groups in UK using the name – it's a fairly obvious name – but those groups tend to be obviously not us.

Superficially, this lot are interested in the same areas of poetry as *Writers Forum*, though *Writers Forum* always has been wider than they think; and some of their pronouncements sound to me like warmed over Futurism. Anyone not au fait would be confused and I suspect that is the intention. Passing off, as I say.

On the 9th, I know now, they welcomed our founder's widow. That's fine. She may go where she wishes; and she may well feel torn because Adrian and I have argued. I regret my part in that in that context; I feel for her divided loyalty.

It was cruel of them and not a little calculating, I believe, not to remind her that *Writers Forum*, which they were pretending to be, was launching a reprint of her late husband's book that day, a book she had particularly wanted to see published. That event cannot happen twice. It is lost to her. What a trophy for limited minds. Their behaviour compares poorly with some of what was said, sanctimonious stuff, at the time of her celebration

The book itself seems to be of no interest to them. They pay Cobbing's work lip service.

It seems to me that they want the NAME "Writers Forum" for its kudos. They want the reputation and its power.

One of them has expressed to me "confusion" about what has happened, although he signed the letter.. Others tell me that they wish to attend both workshops and complain that I am, they have been told, somehow, stopping them.

I have undertaken not to let it be known who among them is speaking to me. The desire for secrecy suggests a degree of coercion though it may not be overt.

One of the signatories to the letter had attended the workshop of 28th August 2010 and showed no sign of the deep and troubling concern for the future of the workshop he expressed only a week later. What happened?

Is it good and necessary to destroy what exists when they say they value it? They seem to be trying – telling people not to go to the original, making people choose, scaring their own not to speak out – and,

presumably, will soon have the imprimatur and advertising power of Birkbeck's website and Birkbeck's CPRC behind them.

I conclude that they are trying to destroy the existing *Writers Forum* just because they do not control it as they obviously hoped they would.

I had been feeling a little weary. What they have achieved is to make me feel that I must carry on because I am surrounded by... let's say by people who are not yet ready for the responsibility.

The apparent desire to enfold ALL poets seen to be doing "important" work is troubling. *Writers Forum* always has been an option and has never sought to be all in all. Again it reminds me of the totalitarian slant of the Futurists.

I never saw it as my job to be a personal trainer to help, ex officio, poets realise their full potential. I hope I wouldn't show such arrogance.

They have *Veer*; and I thought the *Centre for Contemporary Poetics Research* had a workshop. It did have.

Had they wanted to discuss the issues with me, all they had to do was speak. I have missed very few workshops in the last ten years. They say it was difficult to raise the issues with me. I don't see why.

I see deep flaws in their analysis. But they never tried discussing it with me. Discussion is not the way to power.

Q Power?

The *Writers Forum* which I have known and which I now run is to do with ambition for poetry not for one's career as a poet. That's a separate individual matter; and an ethical matter.

Yet, one cannot edit or curate without acquiring power. The way, however, is not to accumulate it unnecessarily and to let it go frequently.

I have done that throughout my poetic career.

For 8 years I have sought to co-run and run *Writers Forum* without too much nonsense and without self-seeking. (Before, if I wanted to add something to my c.v. I asked Bob's permission.)

I think that **what is being done is plagiarism**, posing as if they are responsible for a major part of the activity that has built the name *Writers Forum* for decades, on the back of very limited attendance in some cases. They have participated in some workshops and a few have been published by it. That's it.

Some are a small part its aesthetic product; but no more than that. They have not contributed much if anything to its "vision". They have not done any of its work.

The act of taking somebody else's effort and presenting it as your own is an act of **academic dishonesty**.

According to the Birkbeck website, Birkbeck takes academic dishonesty

very seriously, saying, for instance, that plagiarism and any other form of intellectual dishonesty can result in students failing the degree.

I reference Birkbeck because that is where Mr Mooney is based and from where *Veer* Publications is funded.

I imagine that a similar attitude applies at Roehampton University where Jeff Hilson is a senior lecturer or at Museum of London or at British Library where one will find others of this group. I cannot believe that such centres of intellectual professionalism support intellectual passing off. We shall see.

Q Is that it?

There is the character assassination gossip. I am told, I have said, that I am "difficult to work with" – this is always someone else's opinion, without names, whispered to me that it is being whispered. They need that, of course, as an excuse, otherwise one sees what they done in its true light.

Some found me difficult, when they went behind my back and undermined *Writers Forum* and I found out. I don't think they could believe my anger. Perhaps they do not understand why anyone would be angry at **intellectual dishonesty**.

Apart from that? I am a professional collaborative artist. I work solo and in teams. I get on with people. I always have done.

Q You can't go on for ever though

I have no choice at present. I shall go on until there is no need for it or until I have had enough fighting mediocrity or there is someone else who can take over or I am too old or drop dead.

I may say and do more if this theft and character assassination continues. It would not make anyone look that good. Disagreement is rarely impressive.

There is a world of difference between being rude in private and on principle and dirtying someone's name in public to undermine them. My enemies have sweet voices and do the latter.

I cannot equate the behaviour of the "alternate workshop" (including trying to steal the glory attaching to someone dead who cannot now tell them what I think I know he would tell them, someone they don't even mention), with the people who wrote patronisingly: "yours is a towering contribution to *Writers Forum* and to poetry in general"

I call upon them to behave as if they have some decency and to start earning a reputation for their workshop instead of trying to steal it.

Q What do you want them to do? Is that it?

Get themselves a room and start working. That's how Cobbing did it.

Let them find their own and completely different name. Let them stop implicitly falsely claiming the decades of work of others who have gone before them. And let them meet at other times than WF so that people can attend both.

Get yourselves a separate name, get yourselves your own schedule and start working.

Work at poetry instead of schemes of deception.

Those who want to come to both workshops should do so and not be prevented or intimidated from doing so. One of my "towering contributions" has been to plan ahead; so they know the dates not to book.

Am I to believe that their "collective impetus" could not identify a Saturday in October that is not 9th or 30th without my help? Are these innovative poets of the future unable to think of a name?

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Theft

Monday, October 11th, 2010

I regret that "New Writers Forum" has recently announced itself.

I regret it because they are no such thing. They are new grouping, with a history, trying to steal the name. I dealt with this matter in a recent email to the WF email list saying that I hoped the new group would just get on with it and that there would be no need to mention it again.

Unfortunately, they ignored my reply to them and have gone ahead using the name *Writers Forum*. They seem to think that having turned up a few times, in some cases, many times in one case once, they **are** Writers Forum.

I feel there is no choice but to defend what was given into my charge by the man who ran the organisation and to which the secessionists have no claim. [Their argument seems to be that it should be "democratic" and that, as they are in a majority though self-appointed, they are in charge.]

The world at large may ask: Why are you arguing about who owns a poetry series?

Indeed. The sad answer is: on their side, Careerism. There is apparently a tremendous kudos in being attached to Writers Forum. I found out over the summer that there are a number of poets who never turn up who at least allow people to think they attend. They do nothing for WF.

I feel that I have no choice but to speak out. What is the point of working on a project — and I have spent hours today — if you do not defend it?

Personally, as opposed to the convenor of wf, I ask What is the point of writing poetry if you cheat and tell lies?

The newbies seem to think What is the point of setting something up when you can pretend to be / steal what exists. Very 2010

I'll try not to let this swamp the work of WF and will make some brief remarks in the forthcoming emailing.

The following is the response I have made to the announcement. I imagine now that the excreta will fly. I have seen it before. I have been hit by it before.

"I am very upset to note that a new series of Writers Forum Workshop has been announced by people who are in no position to do so.

Some ex-attendees and non-attendees of the Writers Forum workshop wrote to me after the series started and announced that they were worried about the future of the series, that they were taking over elsewhere and did I want to talk about it.

I wrote back at some length explaining why I had been available to discuss BEFORE they took action but saw no point in talking after they had decided to leave.

I object to being mugged

I chided them for spreading disinformation about the existing and persisting series having closed. I asked them not to fight for the title of WF.

I wished them all the best for the new workshop and suggested that they follow the principles which Writers Forum has followed and developed over many years. But would they please use a title of their own?

It would be a pity if they are unable to think of a new title of their own.

It is a shame if they are hoping to fool people into thinking that they are legitimate in using the title.

We are so few. Can we not avoid another poetry war? The last one was a shambles and failed because of, amongst other things, personal ambition.

I understand the desire to be known for what one has done; but to be known for what other people have done and pretend you did is more than sad. It is dishonest. But very zeitgeist.

It is a tribute to Writers Forum that my ex colleagues want to pretend to be it; but it will make the whole thing look foolish

Couldn't they, at the least, call themselves _Real Writers Forum_ or _Continuity Writers Forum_?

How about _We're more innovative than you are_?

Writers Forum is to be found at wfuk.org.uk/blog

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