Rodinsky comes to Eastside

Eastside recently presented an evening of readings from ‘Rodinsky's Room’, the much acclaimed new book by Rachel Lichtenstein and Iain Sinclair (pictured).

Rachel and Iain presented extracts from the book and answered questions from the audience. The well-attended event took place in the Eastside Bookshop, with people spilling out onto the pavement.

Professor Bill Fishman also spoke about his own memories of Rodinsky and the culture of the Jewish East End.

(see Review).

Voices 2000

Voices 2000 is the proposed title of a new collection of writing by young people in secondary schools in Tower Hamlets. Their poetry will explore their thoughts and feelings on what it means to be young and living in East London at the turn of the century. The project is being coordinated by Eastside and Mark Webster at Swanlea School.

Further details including the other participating schools will be featured in the next issue of ‘What's the Word’.
Transmission

Are you interested in taking part in the following?
Transmission is a special project organised by Eastside. Fifteen young adults (between the ages 16 - 25) resident in Tower Hamlets and Hackney will be invited to work in a group with two facilitators. The group members should have an interest in writing for and working in film, television and radio. Under guidance they will set up links and meetings with organisations such as the BBC, commercial radio and independent film companies, as well as with individual practitioners.

The group will arrange regular planning meetings at various locations in and out of Tower Hamlets. Through a practical hands-on series of workshops and events they will gain direct knowledge of the media industries. As a result of this project, an accredited training course in writing for film, TV and radio will be established.

The Transmission project aims to attract young adults who will be self-motivated and able to display commitment towards this project. Are you interested in taking part? Do you know anybody else who might be? Contact Roger Mills at Eastside, 178 Whitechapel Road, London E1 1BJ Tele: 0171 247 0216.

Goodbye to Gladys

The sad news that Gladys McGee (The Bard of Stepney) had passed away was reported in the last 'What's the Word'. The send off given by Eastside, her friends and family however was far from solemn.

The venue was the newly refurbished function room above the White Hart 'Murphys' in Whitechapel. Many of her poems were read aloud by fellow Basement Writers and others including ex-local teacher Chris Searle. Live music added to the atmosphere. The reading concluded with a video of Gladys herself in performance mode. The photos here (by Eamonn Duggan at Picture This) show one of Gladys' daughters Kim McGee and members of the audience.

Eastside's Future Plans: Community Consultations continue

Thanks to everyone who has contributed to our development plans so far, either by returning the questionnaire or by joining in one of our discussion groups. We've had lots of feedback, and we still want more. So if you have a questionnaire waiting to be returned - it's not too late! And there are one or two more consultation meetings planned for September in case you missed the others. Please contact us for details.

We are now starting to analyse the questionnaires and collate the contributions from the meetings - and there are some wonderful ideas coming out. The full report on this 'feasibility' stage will be available in the autumn to anyone interested. It will include advice from our architect Zana Davis at Ann Thorn Architects on the kind of space we are likely to need, some interesting market information on the future of bookshops in the twenty-first century and other supporting material, as well as the consultation process and its results.

We will summarise the report here in 'What's the Word'. So far, the message seems to be that there is overwhelming and enthusiastic support for a Centre of the Written and Spoken Word in East London. That gives muscle to the next stage: fund-raising to make it all happen. Now we want to keep up the momentum.

We have recently received support from the Esmee Fairbairn Charitable Trust and are currently waiting to hear whether we have continued funding from the European Regional Development Fund (which have paid for all the consultation meetings and questionnaires so far). We will also be going for a lottery grant and other funding possibilities are being looked into.

We are asking for your help and support too - whether you have a practical skill to offer (we've already had some marvellous offers) or advice and ideas. We will continue to keep you informed - and please keep in touch with us.

Young News

Young News is a new newspaper written by and for children of 8 - 11 years in Tower Hamlets.

Send in creative writing, news, puzzles, photos, drawings and any information about events for children to YOUNG NEWS, c/o Eastside, 178 Whitechapel Road, London E1 1BJ. Young News is available FREE from the Eastside Bookshop (address as above).
Apart from the new Hannibal Lector brain-chomping saga I can't think of any book in recent times which has attracted as many favourable reviews and articles as Rodinsky's Room by Rachel Lichtenstein and Iain Sinclair (Granta £20).

The difference is that this is a true story. David Rodinsky lived in virtual isolation above the Princelet Street synagogue in East London - until one day in the late 1960s, he simply vanished. All his belongings were left to gather dust for a further twenty years. The annotated books, maps and writings that he left behind showed a man steeped in East European Jewry and languages. Not surprisingly, the story had become legend even before Rachel Lichtenstein heard about it.

On becoming artist-in-residence at the synagogue however she realised that she wasn't prepared to see the real man obscured by myth. Her quest for the real Rodinsky took her to Israel, Poland and, of course, the streets of East London.

The chapters in the book by Iain Sinclair add another dimension, tantalising excursions featuring a host of other characters (many of them crying out for books of their own). The book itself however is just one of several relating to the Rodinsky legend. Also available is Rodinsky's Whitechapel by Rachel Lichtenstein (Artangel £6.95).

This small book focuses on those traces of the Jewish East End which remain. It's amazing how much we miss as we hurry along the crowded streets. A glance above the shopfronts may reveal what is now a wine bar or estate agent to be an abandoned synagogue or old soup kitchen.

Another book which can be used as a guide is Iain Sinclair's Dark Lanterns (Goldmark, £5.00). An annotated London A-Z was discovered amongst Rodinsky's belongings, urgent red lines indicating travels he had embarked on outside his usual East London patch. This small volume sees Sinclair retrace Rodinsky's steps. He even manages to come up with some plausible guesses at the purpose of the original journeys. The book is a fascinating object in itself, thin and stiffly bound so that like Rodinsky's life, the secrets contained need to be prised apart.

Iain Sinclair makes yet another appearance as collaborator in Liquid City (Reaktion Books £14.95) with photographer Marc Atkins (pictured looking dodgy in dark glasses in the previous book). Rodinsky gets a namecheck here too but it's Atkins black and white photos which take centre stage.

Wonderfully atmospheric shots of the London that don't find their way into the tourist brochures - disconcerting, furtive, slightly anxious. With regards to Iain Sinclair, there can hardly be a spot in East London that he hasn't now been to. If he hasn't visited your street yet then watch out. He's bound to sooner or later.

- Roger Mills
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Selling Well at Eastside

Writers Groups in East London

Apart from the Rodinsky books (see front cover feature and review) there are others which have been selling very well.

By the Light of my Father's Smile
Alice Walker
Women's Press £10
Described by the publisher as 'A story of Requited Love, Crossing Over and the Sexual Healing of the Soul'. This is the author's first novel for six years, set in the remote sierras of Mexico.

Say it Loud
Various
Phoenix School £2.00
Poems by the children of Phoenix Secondary and Primary School. Written in the memory of Blair Peach who died during a demonstration in 1979. "It is a tribute to Blair that we can hear and see the phrase 'We are different... We are equal' around our school," says teacher Peta McFadzean in the book's introduction.

The Restraint of Beasts
Magnus Mills
Flamingo £6.99
If you are reading this on a bus then it's possibly being driven by the man who wrote this funny and unsettling book. An author who knows that despite being shortlisted for Booker and Whitbread prizes the publishing industry can be a fickle one - and that its not always wise to chuck in the day job.

STOP PRESS.
(Barry Turner, Macmillan £12.99) is now in stock in the Eastside Bookshop. A must for everyone with a manuscript in their bottom drawer!

Eastside organises and runs several regular writers workshops for all sorts of writing. The groups are informal and encourage discussion and constructive criticism. New members are welcome.

Eastside Writers - A long standing Eastside group encouraging writing of all sorts. Poetry, prose, short stories. Meetings are held fortnightly on Thursday evenings.

Eastside Novel Writers Group - Specially for people working on or attempting to write a novel. The group mixes writing exercises with readings from work in progress. Meetings are held monthly on Thursday evenings.

'Words' Writers - Eastside's writers' group for adults with learning difficulties. The group took a break in the first part of the year but has now returned with a new convenor, Tina Poyzer.

For details and dates about the above contact Roger Mills on 0171 247 0216.

Other creative writing groups in and around East London include...

The Basement Writers - Poetry and prose. Meetings are held on the last Tuesday of every month in the evenings at 7/9 St. Margaret's House, Old Ford Road, E2. Contact Francis Lane for details and dates on 0171 613 1203.

Approach Poets - 'Old or young, new readers and listeners - all are welcome.' Meetings are the second Sunday of each month. This group has a new venue, upstairs at the New Globe pub, Mile End Road, E3 (Near Mile End Tube). Contact Michael Aitkin for details and dates on 0171 538 0970.

Writing for Pleasure/Writers Workshop - Two sessions on Wednesday evenings and Thursday mornings respectively, organised by the Tower Hamlets Education Service at the Bethnal Green Centre. Contact Sergio Dogliani for details on fees and dates on 0181 809 1352.

Writers Wanted - Writing of all sorts. Aimed mainly at residents of the Aberfeldy Estate in Poplar. Every Thursday at 7.30pm at St Nicks Centre, Dee Street, E14. Contact Mark Gower 04325.383.706 ( pager) for details.

Survivors Poetry - Workshops and performances by and for survivors of the mental health system. Various gigs and venues throughout London. Contact Clare Douglas for details and dates on 0171 916 5317.

London Voices - Poetry & prose. Everybody welcome, especially young people. Meetings are held at 8.00pm on the last Friday in the month at the London Spa Pub, Exmouth Market, EC1. Nearest tube: Aldgate & Farringdon.

A CHANCE FOR A FIRST TIME NOVELLIST TO WIN £1,000 AND HAVE HIS OR HER WORK READ BY A LITERARY AGENT.

By the time you read this the deadline of September 3rd will have passed for award entries. But keep watching this space for news of the winner and details of next year's 'Eastside Stories'. The award is intended to offer some measure of financial support to a new writer in the boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Newham or Hackney. The first prize is £1,000 and there are a further nine runners-up awards of £100. This year, the award is also open to people attending writers groups in those boroughs even if they live outside the area.

The winner's chances of finding a publisher will be boosted by the involvement of the Wylie Agency, who have kindly agreed to read this year's award-winning entry. The very first winner of the Bursary in 1995 was Ben Richards, whose book 'Throwing the House out of the Window' was published as a direct result. Ben has gone on to have a series of books published by Hodder Headline and is now working on a screenplay.

Phone Roger Mills 0171 247 0216 for further details.