

‘The Elephant Has Left the Room’: *Jacket* magazine and the Internet

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Where I Came From

In 1973, the U.S. Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency began a research program to link packet networks of various kinds, aiming to develop information-exchange protocols to allow computers to interact across networks, a program that became known as the ‘Internetting project’. ‘To internet’ was a verb. What emerged over the subsequent two decades is known today as the ‘Internet’, a noun.

That year I returned to Sydney from Singapore, started work on my third book of poetry and sent in my first application for a Literature Board grant. I had already travelled through Europe and Asia, abandoned a promising academic career, published two books of poetry, an anthology of new Australian poetry for *Poetry Australia* magazine, two issues of the aptly-named *Transit New Poetry* magazine, and had written and published a small hoax magazine printed on a Gestetner rotary silk-screen machine titled *Free Grass*.

I learned lettering and design in the early 1960s and photo-litho printing in the late 1960s, and when my wife bought a typesetting agency in the 1970s I learned to use the computerised photo-typesetting equipment that came with it. And in the 1970s I designed and printed silk-screen posters for rock bands to make money.

Growing up on a farm, I had learned to fix machinery—farmers had to—so computer technology was little more than an interesting challenge to me. My training in English literature, art, design, photography and typesetting all converged on book and magazine publication, which computers had so recently made relatively cheap.

My first two poetry books were typeset in metal type, as was common in the 1950s and 60s. But the 1960s saw a move to lighter, cheaper and cleaner typesetting machines—fancy typewriters, initially—and the move from metal type to cheap and ubiquitous photo-lithographic reproduction led to a flood of little magazines and schools of poets. That was a significant shift in print technology, and made print production much more widely available. But this shift didn’t solve distribution—getting the material into the hands of its readers. You can solve all the other problems, but that one is intractable. Or it was, until the Internet.

What Was *Jacket* Magazine?

The Internet has changed everything; in particular it has made the creation, research, supply, publication, discussion and academic study of poetry inexpensive, voluminous, and widespread. People compare the impact of the Internet with the impact of Gutenberg’s movable-type printing press around the middle of the fifteenth century. This is mistaken; in the few decades it has been with us, the Internet has created more important changes

throughout the entire world, more deeply and far more quickly, than the invention of printed books has done over five hundred years.

The invention of email alone has transformed how we relate to others, involving more than 200 thousand million messages per day; the spread of music and movies across the Internet, involving millions of downloads a week, is astonishing. More than two thousand million people now use the Internet; more than 36 thousand million photographs are uploaded to one popular social network each year. These figures are literally incomprehensible.

The history of *Jacket* magazine makes up an informative case study, within the limited realm of writing and literature, of what can be done and how best it can be done with this new research and publishing tool. *Jacket* magazine was founded by John Tranter in 1997 as a free online literary magazine and closed in late 2010. Though *Jacket* published over 500 pages of Australian material, the greater part of its content and its readership was North American, British, European or South American. *Jacket* quickly became the most varied, powerful and wide-reaching poetry magazine in Australia, if not the world. The *Guardian* called it ‘the prince of online literary magazines’, the US edition of *Publishers Weekly* said it was ‘the first (and best) large-scale Inter-net poetry journal,’ poet and critic Ron Silliman in Philadelphia said that *Jacket* was ‘the best online poetry publication’.

This international focus made it ineligible for Literature Board grants. This is not just a peculiar irony; it is a corollary of parochialism. When you publish a parish newsletter in an Australian community, it will not be widely read in that community if most of the articles are about events in Rome or Canterbury. You need to draw your material from the local parish if you want the local parishioners to take an interest in it.

So the greater *Jacket’s* success on the international stage—and it was successful immediately—the less ‘Australian’ it was, and the less interest it held for Australian scholars and cultural bureaucrats. In the thirteen years of its existence, *Jacket* never had a grant from the Literature Board, and was never the subject of a paper presented at an Association for the Study of Australian Literature conference, for example. *Jacket*, however, was the subject of a lively and well-attended panel discussion at the 2011 US Modern Languages Association convention in Los Angeles.

Another Failed Grant Application

Other magazines based in Australia paid their contributors: *Island Magazine*, *Westerly*, *Southerly*, and many others, mainly from grant money provided by the Literature Board of the Australia Council. I felt I owed it to *Jacket’s* contributors (and to my own dwindling bank balance) to apply for a Literature Board grant, so when the first issue of *Jacket* received so much acclaim, I translated the online issue roughly to the format of a print journal—not an easy task, as I had to give every printed page a page number, build a Contents page, and print and bind the sheets. I did all that and sent *Jacket* 1 in to the Literature Board with a grant application in 1998. The grant was unsuccessful.

At the time I was inclined to attribute this to the stacking of the board with conservative journalists and others by Richard Alston, the then Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts under the Howard Government. But now I am not so sure: the problems of properly supporting the most widely-read literary magazine ever published in

Australia go deeper than mere politics into the bureaucratic structure and the perceived responsibilities of the Board itself.

Some years afterwards, in 2004, I was approached by a new member of the Board with the suggestion that I might consider applying again; Board membership had changed, and the Board was now not so recalcitrant. I looked at the Board's guidelines. They state that the Board will not support editor's salaries (a grotesque decision in my view), only payments to contributors. They support the salaries of their own bureaucrats very well, and they don't write poems. They will not allow any of the grant money they supply to be used to pay contributors unless contributors can prove Australian nationality: goodbye to any international content. And the Board forces granted magazines to make Australian writing a majority of the magazine's content: goodbye to your international readership.

The guidelines do not actually forbid the export of Australian magazines out of the country, but frankly they might as well: no one in New York or London is going to want to read the kind of small-town Australian magazines funded by the Literature Board the way they flocked in their tens of thousands to read *Jacket* for over a decade.

It was clear that the Literature Board had set up regulations designed to prevent any assistance for magazines like *Jacket*, and I never sought to apply for assistance again. I did try to obtain advertising income for the magazine, in my own inept way. I wrote to a dozen poetry publishers asking them to advertise in the magazine; not one replied.

As a member of the Australian Society of Authors, I believe that writers should be paid for their labours, but it seemed that *Jacket* would never be able to offer to do so. The hundreds of noted writers who willingly offered their work to the magazine seemed not to mind.

A Cash-Free Economy

So, bereft of funding assistance, *Jacket* sailed on into the cash-free economy, sans subsidy, sans advertising, sans editorial or contributors' fees. By late 2010 it had reached issue 40, containing some eight to ten thousand pages of poems, interviews, book reviews, photographs and other material. Apart from the fact that most of the 800,000 visits to the homepage were North American and European (as was much of the material in the magazine) two other themes persisted through the magazine's history: British poetry, and Australian poetry. The first issue of the magazine contained a detailed interview with British poet Roy Fisher, an interview with Australian indigenous poet Lionel Fogarty, and a hundred or so pages of other Australian material. *Jacket* 20 consisted solely of material dealing with literature in Cambridge, from the 1930s to today. Issue 24 consisted of over 200 pages of prose analysis of the poetry of Cambridge poet J.H. Prynne, edited by Kevin Nolan. Australian material appeared throughout.

The Speed of the Internet

The process of publication was similar to the process of publishing a magazine like *Meanjin* or *Southerly*, except that as everything was done utilising the Internet, everything happened much faster.

Despite my long experience of editing print magazines using metal type, photo-litho and rotary silk-screen, the sheer speed of the Internet surprised even me. Let's imagine that in my

role as editor of the print journal *Easterly*, I had the idea of reprinting an article I had heard about by US poet Robert Creeley on Charles Olson: a preface to a biography of Olson by US poet Tom Clark: *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life*. I check with Tom Clark in Berkeley by air mail; he replies, giving Creeley's address in Buffalo, New York State. I write to Creeley; he happens to be on holiday, and after the mail is redirected he eventually replies and says that yes, I can use the article, but he doesn't have a copy with him on vacation: try a friend of his at the University of California at San Diego Library, who will have a copy. I write an air mail letter to the fellow, who kindly replies, sending me a photocopy of the article. It is suitable for *Jacket*. I check it and proof it and send it off to the typesetters; it comes back typeset a week later, and I publish it in the magazine. Total time: eleven weeks; expense: considerable.

In real life, using the Internet, I had the idea to reprint the article at about 9:20 one Saturday morning ten years ago (that is, on a Friday afternoon in the USA). After a flurry of emails to and from Berkeley, Vermont, San Diego and Sydney I had a scan of the article from Robert Creeley's librarian friend. I converted it from a scanned image to Rich Text Format using optical character recognition software, converted that to XHTML format, and edited and published it in *Jacket* number 12 at about 1:30 that Saturday afternoon. Total time: four hours; expense: essentially nil.

You can read the article here: <<http://jacketmagazine.com/12/olson-p-cree.html>>

The Problem of HTML

Publishing *Jacket* involved researching and designing a readable format for the appearance of typeset pages. Using HTML is much more difficult than it looks. Hyper-Text Markup Language is not computer code, but a kind of typesetting markup code. With a print magazine like *Easterly*, to refer to my invented example, the page size is more or less set by the folded sheet size of the kind of paper the printer can economically provide, say the book size known as C Size, 234 millimeters by 153 mm, or about nine and a half inches by six inches. A Contents page and copyright information goes at the front, page numbers are centred at the foot of each page, the typeface is, say, Adobe Garamond 11 on 12 point for easy legibility and some sense of literary style, and the cover is say two-colour (four-colour or full colour is expensive) and cello-glazed to prevent the cover picking up dirt. The magazine is perfect bound.

None of this applies to a magazine on the Internet. There are no page sizes and no page numbers on the Internet: in HTML, each 'piece' of material—perhaps a two-page poem, perhaps a fifty-page article—forms one long scroll, which the visitor reads by scrolling it upward 'behind' the 'viewport' of her or his computer screen.

There is no Adobe Garamond font in 11 point size on twelve point leading. You can specify that font in your Cascading Style Sheet file that determines the 'look' of your pages, but unless the visitor has purchased that font and installed it on their computer, it won't appear: you cannot 'send' the font to each visitor, as most fonts are copyrighted. (This is beginning to change, in 2011.) So you choose a commonly-owned font that looks reasonably attractive and specify a sequence of other fonts in descending order of popularity and attractiveness, and hope for the best. For a serif font *Jacket* specified this string of font-families: Georgia, Times, TimesNR, "Times New Roman", "New York", "MS Serif", serif;, and this string of fonts for

sans-serif: Trebuchet, "Trebuchet MS", Tahoma, Arial, Geneva, Candara, Calibri, Helvetica, "lucida sans", "MS Sans Serif", sans-serif.

Jacket also demanded the development of a simple, intuitively useful and efficient navigation system within the pages and between the issues of the magazine (there is no real Contents page for each issue, just an Index page with lots of links.) It also involved researching and contacting new contributors, converting submitted material to Rich Text Format and editing for accuracy, prose style, spelling, grammar, and bibliographic style; converting the material to XHTML format, editing XHTML material to fit into *Jacket's* page and text formats, checking the syntax of each document as valid HTML code, uploading to and maintaining an ISP server, and obtaining, cropping and scaling photographs. Thinking to lighten the workload, I asked poet Pam Brown to become an Associate Editor in 2005, and my workload immediately doubled: Pam sent in a large variety of fresh, mainly Australian poems, which I then had to typeset, edit, convert, and so forth. Drat!

Why not post PDF pages (Adobe Acrobat's 'Portable Document Format' pages) to the internet, as JASAL and many other online journals do? The advantages of PDF files are that you can present exactly the typesetting you wish in whatever font you wish, with contents pages and page numbers, which can then be used to publish a print version of the magazine. They can also be print-locked to protect the pages from being copied or printed out; but *Jacket's* contributors have never seemed worried by that lack with HTML. The disadvantages of PDF files: the text they present is not editable, and not easily searchable as text by Internet search engines such as Google, which are essential to the general running of the Internet. PDF files are usually much larger than HTML files, and make for slow loading, especially over slow connections, and the visitor needs to have a program to decode and present a PDF file, either Acrobat Reader (historically, a dangerously insecure program) or Mac Preview, or some other program. But every computer comes with a free Internet browser like Firefox or Safari or Explorer, and any web browser can read HTML: that is what they do. And the HTML format developed and stabilised much faster than the PDF format, a vital factor when *Jacket* began in 1997.

The Reach of the Internet

When the first issue of *Jacket* went live, I felt I had compiled a fairly interesting magazine of contemporary poetics. It had Philip Mead's long interview with indigenous poet Lionel Fogarty from 1994 with three poems by Fogarty; a long interview with British poet Roy Fisher; an article on cyberpoetics; a feature on Australian hoax poet 'Ern Malley' (later moved to *Jacket* 17: try doing that with a print magazine!); poems by Charles Bernstein, Elaine Equi, Alfred Corn, Carl Rakosi, Susan M.Schultz, Paul Hoover, and Ron Koertge from the US, and from Pam Brown, Joanne Burns, Tracy Ryan and Peter Minter from Australia. There were reviews of John Berger's *Photocopies*, and Les Murray's *Subhuman Redneck Poems*, a feature on the late Martin Johnston (the main part of my Introduction to the UQP *Selected Poems and Prose*, a group of sonnets, an essay by Martin on Jorge Luis Borges, five late poems, translations of Greek folk songs and some photographs of Martin when young), a short piece on the remarkable movie star Hedy Lamarr (a.k.a. Hedwig Keisler Markey) who, away from the MGM studios, worked in the field of radio physics during the Second World War, and with a colleague invented the 'spread spectrum' technique of radio communications; an article on Postmodernism by Beth Spencer

and one on Poetics at the State University of New York at Buffalo by Susan Schultz from Hawai'i.

I had tried to advertise this inaugural issue of the magazine by writing to lots of people, but I knew that the Internet was crowded with millions of homepages and thousands of literary magazines, and I feared that *Jacket* would remain undiscovered. Then I received an enthusiastic e-mail. The fellow was grateful for the chance to read an interview with his favourite poet Roy Fisher, he said: 'It's hard to find material on Fisher, up here in Nome, Alaska.' I knew right away that *Jacket*, thanks to free search engines like Google, would find its audience.

Keep It Simple

As *Jacket* developed, many technologies appeared which had a seductive appeal. A decade ago there were ways of making type dance and blink on the virtual page, and Adobe Flash allowed for mind-bending typographical contortions. My training in typography inclined me to view these developments as little more than 'eye-candy', irritating children's toys, though a real artist can make something beautiful from them. Brian Kim Stefans' Flash project *The Dream-Life of Letters* is such a masterpiece; you can view it here:

http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/stefans__the_dreamlife_of_letters.html

Audio and video promise much; most of us have heard the audio recording from the late 1930s of Yeats reciting for the wireless 'The Lake-Isle of Innisfree' (at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hGoaQ433wnw&feature=related>). *Jacket* has made sparing use of audio: 'Popeye and William Blake Fight to the Death' is a very funny audio recording of a public rhyming contest between Kenneth Koch and Allen Ginsberg at St Mark's Poetry Project, NYC, 9 May 1979. You can hear it here:

<http://jacketmagazine.com/15/koch-popeye.html>

The insights it provides are sharp: Koch, stocked with razor wit and a thousand brilliant rhymes, dances like Muhammad Ali around Ginsberg's stumbling but good-natured confusion. Also available is an 18-minute audio interview with Kenneth Koch, recorded in New York City in 1989, in *Jacket* 5:

<http://jacketmagazine.com/05/koch89.html>

Video is more attractive and revealing still, as the massive success of YouTube shows. But these technologies have their price: bandwidth. A single audio interview, like the one with Koch, takes up as much space on an internet server and uses up as much bandwidth (the time it takes to download something from the Internet) as a whole issue of *Jacket* magazine, with its hundreds of poems, articles, interviews, and photographs. Even in *Jacket's* early days, American students demanded broadband connections in their dorms, but students in Africa and bus drivers in Peru and readers in many other parts of the world still have to make do with old telephone lines to bring them whatever Internet they can afford. I kept *Jacket* slim and simple for that reason, focussing mainly on well-presented text and still photography.

Gone to UPenn

Towards the end of 2010 I gave *Jacket* to the University of Pennsylvania. *Jacket* is now *Jacket2*, published by a team of editors, publishers and interns at the University of Pennsylvania at Philadelphia, and linked to Kelly Writers House and the PennSound audio archive.

The elephant has left the room.

Of course *Jacket* will never be quite the same. Now, working with *Jacket2*, a score of American university students, teachers and administrators are doing what I did more or less alone, for my own pleasure, for thirteen years. I am a poet, rather than an academic, and the old magazine reflected that. In its new incarnation it has to provide assistance in building a career path for hundreds of bright and ambitious scholars: it needs to fit into the U.S. university system and become a peer-reviewed journal of research and review.

In 2011 I visited Melbourne, the Edinburgh of the Australian South, and ran into an old friend, the New York essayist and translator Eliot Weinberger. ‘Boy, you’re going to cop it,’ he said. ‘Why did you give *Jacket* to the academics? People are complaining that there’s no poetry in it any more.’ ‘But all the old issues are there,’ I replied. ‘All forty of them.’

And UPenn will look after them and preserve them. I couldn’t afford to do that alone, and after considerable research it seemed to me that no other place in the world had the resources or the will to invest in it.

Of course more than poetry has gone missing. The USA is vast and various (and as Auden writes ‘God bless the U.S.A., so large, / So friendly, and so rich’), but its insularity is widespread, casual and profound. Would any American magazine have turned its attention to postmodern British poetry and postmodern Australian poetry with the persistence that *Jacket* brought to the party? And will *Jacket2* continue along that path, by—for example—publishing anything like the entire issue of *Jacket* devoted to Cambridge University, or the issue full of essays on the poetry of British don J.H. Prynne? Or anything like the large feature on the life and work of the Australian poet the late John Forbes in *Jacket* 3? Or the feature with 25 Polish poets in *Jacket* 29? Or the features on Turkish poetry and Canadian poetry in *Jacket* 34? What about the gigantic supplement of modern Russian poetry in *Jacket* 36? Or the quarrel over Seamus Heaney in *Jacket* 37? Or the two features on the poetry of the Low Countries in *Jacket* 31 and *Jacket* 40? Not likely.

Why Philadelphia?

Why did I give *Jacket* to UPenn? Mainly, to keep the thing alive. I am not getting any younger, and I have lots of other things to do – travel, photography, reviewing, not to mention writing my own poetry. Over the last decade I have completed a doctorate degree, published two large books of poetry (some 360 poems), edited two anthologies of Australian poetry and established the Australian Poetry Library, and on top of all that there was *Jacket*, which had become a thirty-hours-a-week obligation. After I had solved the main problems of publishing it well on the Internet, I felt I needed a break. And UPenn agreed to preserve all forty issues of *Jacket*. As the English novelist Evelyn Waugh wrote in his diary after his doctor had told him that he had at last gone completely deaf: ‘Such a relief!’

But, I hear you cry, surely all issues of *Jacket* have been preserved in amber, just the way they were when they first went up, by the National Library of Australia’s excellent Pandora

Project. Indeed, I once mildly queried the usefulness of Pandora to one of the staff: ‘It’s kind of you to archive every issue of *Jacket*,’ I said, ‘but you don’t really need to, you know. I’ll always keep it up there somehow.’ ‘I don’t think you quite understand,’ the lady replied sweetly. ‘The time-scale we have in mind is five hundred years.’ I think I blushed. Of course no individual could preserve anything like *Jacket* for five hundred years; but maybe the University of Pennsylvania could, and develop a lively community around it, to help it grow into the distant future.

I had read my poetry there once, in March 2005, and liked what I saw. For years the University has supported Kelly Writers House where I read: a thirteen room cottage built as part of a Victorian suburban development project in 1851 that was once the Chaplain’s residence, now filled with a team of staff and student volunteers, which hosts more than three hundred events and projects annually: readings, art exhibits, lectures, seminars, film screenings, manuscript exchanges, tutoring programs, and literary celebrations.

Poet and critic Bob Perelman has been a noted teacher of contemporary poetry and poetics at UPenn for decades. Poet and teacher Charles Bernstein, a noted contemporary poet, was recently appointed Donald T. Regan Professor of English and Comparative Literature at UPenn. Al Filreis also teaches there, and is the new Publisher of *Jacket2*, as well as Director of the Center for Programs in Contemporary Writing, which in 2003 brought together all of UPenn’s writing programs. And he is founder and Faculty Director of the Kelly Writers House. With Charles Bernstein, he co-founded and co-directs PennSound, the world’s largest archive of recordings of poets performing their work.

There is no other institution on earth with that kind of decades-long solid commitment to all these aspects of innovative poetry, and I feel very lucky that UPenn agreed to take over the running of the magazine.

Other Internet Projects

Jacket is only one of the many ways I have found to use the Internet to connect large audiences with literary projects; here are some others.

In 2000, inspired by *Jacket*’s early success, I applied (with the assistance of the English Department at the University of Sydney) for a small Australian Research Council grant to publish an internet edition of my first book of poems, published in 1970, which had gone out of print. The appearance in 2004 of the text on the SETIS pages of the internet site managed by the University of Sydney Library found a wide readership. The book was given a context by many contemporaneous reviews and a large amount of other secondary material. See <http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au/tranter/index.html>

While the physical book had been borrowed from Fisher Library at the University of Sydney perhaps thirty times since its publication as an issue of *Poetry Australia* magazine in 1970, the free electronic edition was visited fifteen thousand times in the first year. That extraordinary difference in audience reach is a measure of what the Internet does every day.

It seemed worth investigating whether the work of other Australian poets would find a response like that on the Internet. I applied for and secured a grant for typesetting and to pay for copyright clearances for three books of poems: substantial collections by Christopher Brennan (1870–1932), Kenneth Slessor (1901–1971) and Lesbia Harford (1891–1927).

With the grant from the Literature Board of the Australia Council and with support from the literary agency Australian Literary Management and the University of Sydney Library, these important texts were typeset and published on the SETIS site in 2004. The Harford had gone out of print; the poems now live on, available to all.

When Philip Mead and I compiled the text of the *Penguin Book of Modern Australian Poetry* in the early 1990s, Penguin allowed us around 300 pages. The typescript we turned in amounted to nearly 500 pages, and Penguin, to their credit, agreed to wear it. But there was no room for the usual author notes that tell the inquisitive reader how the poets lived and what job they did for a living or what food they ate for dinner. I had struggled for years to find a way to publish those notes; by 2002 it seemed I might have found way to do it.

To put them on the Internet would make this useful background information freely available to a large, world-wide audience. The notes could be ample (space is not a problem on the Internet, as it is in print). Poems, reviews, interviews, memoirs, and bibliographical and biographical information, all this would give the poets (and their critics and reviewers) more space to address their public in different ways, and would supply those readers with an extra range of background material to enrich their responses to the poems. And notes like this would also be particularly helpful to teachers and students.

So I began to compile material for an internet site featuring notes on some 70 or 80 poets, on a web site kindly made available for the purpose by the Sydney literary agency Australian Literary Management (ALM). It seemed to work well, and found many readers. In 2004 I applied for and the Literature Board offered a grant to enable ALM to publish samples of the writing and also author notes and extensive background material for sixteen Australian poets, with a fee payment to each of the poets.

That part of the project was completed in June 2006. At that point the material added up to over a thousand printed pages, making it the largest anthology of poetry and secondary material yet published in Australia—and, thanks to the Literature Board's largesse, it was free.

But why limit the range of poets to those 86 we had fitted into the procrustean bed of Penguin's printed poetry anthology? The internet makes page limits, printing costs, distribution costs and retail price irrelevant. Surely several hundred poets would be a more useful number.

Of course it was too much for any one person to take on.

The APRIL Project

Again I approached the English Department at the University of Sydney. Professor Margaret Harris suggested an application to the Australian Research Council (ARC) for a Linkage Grant. A Linkage Grant involves a commitment of active long-term support by a business partner, and would be more likely to succeed than a request for a plain research grant. Now to find a partner: some wealthy business who wanted to throw tens of thousands of dollars away on a poetry project.

I had been on the board of the Australian Society of Authors when we founded the Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) in 1974, to manage the collection and redistribution of photocopying fees to authors and publishers. CAL sagged and struggled for decades, and finally began to make a serious difference to the world of Australian writing and publishing.

Nearly three decades after its founding I attended a seminar organised by CAL at the University of Sydney to promote the understanding and use of Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs) as a means of tagging and identifying pieces of text on the Internet when they were used or printed out, so that a large number of small fees (similar to the photocopying fees CAL was so adept at managing) could be efficiently collected and remitted to the copyright owners.

I felt that CAL would make an ideal business partner for an ARC grant application for my poetry author notes project, as DOIs would provide an essential means of managing the material we wished to publish on the internet, and the exercise of assisting in the project would add to CAL's expertise in the area. So it proved. CAL joined the team.

Dr Petra Nolan helped Professor Elizabeth Webby and I to put together a 47-page grant application to the ARC, which was successful. After a difficult year struggling with the University of Sydney to clarify the issues surrounding Intellectual Property (IP) ownership in the project, funds were released in 2006 and work on the project began.

Readers of this article should be warned that IP ownership can be a serious stumbling block to university research unless properly cleared first, though since only a small proportion of ARC grant applications succeed, it is hard to see how this could be managed in the real world. I suggested 'Australian Poetry Resources Internet Library' as a name for both the project and the website. The name provided a pleasing acronym with the requisite qualities of being easy to pronounce, easy to spell and easy to remember. But during the design phase, under pressure from the designers hired to make the site work cleanly, we changed that to Australian Poetry Library, as more people would search the Internet for that phrase.

The project launched in May 2011. It now has over forty thousand poems digitised and available for anyone to view, free of charge: <http://www.poetrylibrary.edu.au/>

The site works like a library: anyone can walk in and read a book for free. If you want to print out or photocopy some pages, you have to pay a small amount to have that done. Some of that payment goes back to the publisher and the author, (through the collecting agency CAL), the share depending on the publisher's contract with that author.

A serious problem that I failed to foresee is that when the grant money ran out, in 2011, the project would stumble to a halt. I had unthinkingly assumed that some party interested in Australian Literature would pick up the ball and run with it. The project is after all an extraordinary asset.

A lot remains to be done: eleven hundred audio interviews with writers were generously offered to the project by the National Library of Australia, and will now not be added to the resource, as there is no staff to perform the extensive editorial work that is needed. Audio and video interviews were part of the application, and now will not occur. Many younger poets, and one or two older poets, should have their work added to the collection; again, without

funds, it is hard to see that happening. Extensive additional secondary material, reviews, photographs, diaries and memoirs were planned, but are unlikely to appear.

Without funding, and without the establishment of an organisation to take care of the project, it remains fragmented between a few people each (with other work to do) at the University of Sydney Library, the University of Sydney Press, and the Copyright Agency Limited, with no manager to oversee its future growth. In fact, with cuts to all areas of university funding, it is hard to see any future development for the project at this time, late 2011.

The Figure in the Carpet

Towards the close of my 2009 doctoral thesis for the University of Wollongong I pondered the matter of motivation. These thoughts below are taken mainly from that source. My thesis can be read here: <http://johntranter.com/theses/tranter-thesis.pdf>

By sheer perseverance my writing output has become extensive: over a thousand pages of poetry, and as much again of prose in the form of reviews, interviews and journalism. But I have gathered, edited and published more work by other writers than my own: thousands of pages of Australian material, listed on my homepage at johntranter.com; around eight thousand pages of Australian, British and American poetry, prose, reviews and interviews in *Jacket* magazine; hundreds of hours of radio programs for the ABC; and those hundreds of pages of Internet projects I have alluded to here. Why?

This would all be a fine boost to an academic career in Aust Lit, except for the fact that I have no academic career. I did all this other stuff instead. There are certainly rewards: a few royalties, a more salient reputation, lots of new friends, and the pleasure of a job well done; but these are hardly enough to justify a lifetime's effort on behalf of others.

There are clues, perhaps, in my relationship to my father, who had been a dedicated and much-appreciated primary-school teacher in a country town for many years, and in later life part-owned a company that managed three dairy farms and a soft-drink factory. He was a hard-working, worried man who never said much. Rather like me, now that I think about it.

When I was nineteen my father died, disappointed in his only son's failure to follow in his footsteps as a farmer. Perhaps I am still trying to make up for inflicting that disappointment; or perhaps the father's concern for helping others to learn and grow has found a faint reflection in his son's career.