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The poetry of survival: The shifting landscape of poetry in the Australian publishing industry

Abstract

It has been repeatedly claimed – even before the global financial crisis – that literary publishing is entering a shaky chapter. Opportunities for established writers are narrowing, and opportunities for new writers are scarce. This article explores the state of poetry in the Australian publishing industry. It argues that far from being a spent force in publishing, poetry is surviving better than many writers imagine. It argues that reinvention and adaptation are crucial if poetry is to use advances in technology to survive.

Key words: Poetry, digital, publishing

I stand beside my internship supervisor in ‘the warehouse’; a double garage attached to his home, where copies of the 100 plus titles his company has published since its inception lie in dusty cardboard boxes awaiting sale and distribution. Between the boxes are his children’s bicycles, tubs of winter clothes and racks of wine. I am hit with the impression that the development, creation, sale and distribution of these titles is much more than a hobby for this three-person company. What surprises me is that almost half of the titles are collections of poetry. Later, I will find out that most of the eBook titles his company produces are also poetry. Without knowing much about the sale of poetry in Australia, my first reaction is confusion. As a tiny blip on the face of the Australian publishing industry, fighting tooth and nail for the attention of buyers against the enormous resources of mainstream print publishers, why would this company choose to publish books of poetry; a declining if not dead genre?

My subsequent research into the business of publishing poetry led me to discover that the poetry market in Australia, as well as internationally, is not as dead as I first imagined. Rather, poetry is in a state of tenacious survival, helped in part by the increase in the technologically mediated consumption of this art form. In Australia, the digitisation of publishing poses exciting possibilities for poetry, though an explosion in the popularity of poetry is not likely, or paradoxically, according to David McCooey (2009a), even necessary to its survival. The existence of poetry in Australia depends on poetry authors, readers and publishers being willing to innovate, reinvent and adapt to new writing, reading and marketing strategies, but this tenacious struggle, the ‘marginality’ of poetry, is nothing new to its practitioners.

Poetry and the Literature market

Poetry and literary fiction are closely associated in studies of the sales of books in Australia. Ken Gelder argues that this association is a product of the distinction between ‘high cultural forms’, defined by ‘art, creativity and originality’, and the genre fiction they oppose which is seen to represent market values, including industry, entertainment and

imitation (Gelder 2004: 8). Poetry and literature are associated by the common conception that these forms are produced for the sake of art, rather than being motivated by sales. In 2002, *AustLit* conducted a historical study which compared the approximate Australian sales results of genre fiction novels and books of poetry between 1860 and 2002 (*AustLit* 2002). (A table representing this data is available in Figure 1.1.)

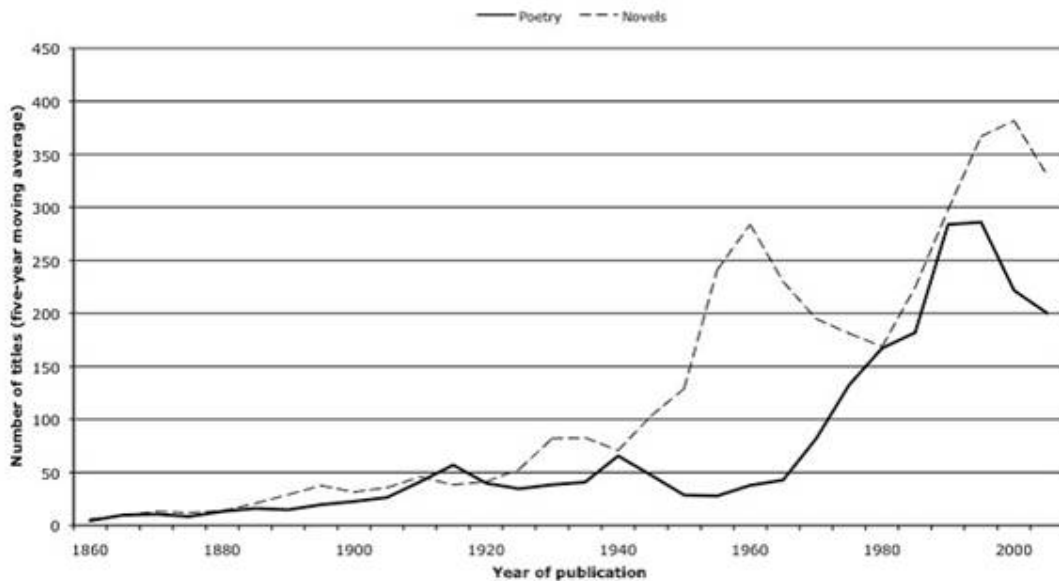


Figure 1.1 *AustLit* (2002 in Bode 2010: 33) ‘Australian Poetry and Novel Sales, 1860-2007’,

The Australian Literature Resource, www.austlit.edu.au

Interpreting the data provided by the *AustLit* study, Katherine Bode argued that poetry’s 1915 overtake of novel sales is associated with Australia’s involvement in the First World War and that this ‘reinforc[es] the idea that publishing is influenced by political and social upheaval. But instead of having a detrimental effect on literature *per se*, war appears conducive to publication of Australian poetry’ (Bode 2010: 33). In 1940 and 1980, the gap between sales of poetry and novels widened and then narrowed almost to parity. Elizabeth Webby argues that the steep rise in poetry sales in the 1970s represented a ‘golden age of publishing and the promotion of Australian literature’ brought on by the 1972 Whitlam victory and maintained through the 1980s by the financial generosity associated with the celebration of the 1988 Bicentenary of Australia (Webby 2000 in Bode 2010: 30). Prime Minister Whitlam, also former Minister for the Arts, supported a ‘progressive, nation-building government, devoting comparatively large amounts of funding and assistance to Australia’s literary community’ (Wilding 1975: 105). This cultural support and government funding of literature and poetry would slowly begin to decline after the 1990s.

The decline in the sales of poetry and literary titles from their peak in the 1990s has been attributed to a number of factors, including a change in readership, a decline in government funding for the arts, and a change in market practices. Davis suggests that the ‘death of the literary paradigm’ in Australia has in the past been blamed on ‘declining editing standards, changes in literary taste, the rise of marketing departments in publishing houses, changing leisure patterns, [and] the advent of *Nielsen BookScan*’ (Davis 2006:3). These are narrow concerns, however. Davis suggests that the decline in sales of literature and poetry in Australia ‘can be understood in terms of broader social and governmental shifts related to globalisation, such as the decline of post-war consensus (‘welfare state’) politics and their supplanting by a new consensus based around free-market notions of deregulation, privatisation and trade liberalisation, and the rise of the global information economy’ (Davis 2006: 5). For Davis, it is not only the reader who has changed, but the context within which books are funded, sold and marketed. As Australia’s book market became flooded with international authors and global chain book

stores, publishers sought an approach to selecting and supporting books which favoured competitive risk management, seeking stability through statistics and formulas. Under these new practices, Davis argues, publishers were forced to acknowledge that genre fiction has always been a strong but unacknowledged seller (Davis 2006: 1). Malcolm Knox suggests that changing marketing practices and the uprise of the *Neilsen BookScan* caused a culture of 'meekness' in the print publishing industry, whereby publishers strayed away from supporting statistically unproven authors and genres (Knox 2005: 2). This has affected the uptake of literary and poetry titles in Australia, as they are characteristically slow sellers and rarely feature as blockbusters on the market.

Yet another reason for poetry's decline in the Australian poetry market may be the individual's relationship to this artistic genre. David McCooley has suggested that there is a disjunction between poetry as something which is produced, and poetry as something worth consuming. He states:

Everyone, it seems, is a poet. No-one, apparently, reads poetry... The idea that poets want to write but not read or buy poetry is a hyperbolic expression of the marginal status of poetry in the public sphere: its decline as a type of public speech, the withdrawal of mainstream publishers from the field, and the declining presence of poetry in secondary and tertiary curricula. (McCooley 2009a)

Students, McCooley argues, want to produce poetry, not study it. While poetry sales amongst academic institutions are surviving due to poetry's worth as a teaching resource in literature studies, Australian poet Dorothy Porter told Kate Torney in an interview with the ABC that, 'In the popular mind, poetry is either excruciatingly emotional, like the sort of stuff that you write in secret as an adolescent and put in a drawer, or it is pretentious and for wankers' (Porter in Torney 1999: 2).

This negative perception of poetry as excruciating or elitist comes, Porter argues, from the exposure of Australians to poetry in their schooling years. The teacher's role as the facilitator of poetry study and appreciation is crucial to understanding public perceptions of poetry. In documenting the reminiscences of adult poetry lovers, Haynes and Philip (cited in Travers 1984: 367) argued 'some influential teacher had often led to that interest'. A teacher's failure, then, to teach poetry in a way that inspires a love of the genre in children – and indeed in university students – can affect the way in which the general public consumes poetry as a product of the publishing industry. For Burroughs, this failure occurs in two ways. The student understands the poetry in a way which does not reflect the desired curricular outcomes and thus is 'wrong', or the student fails to understand the poetry at all, which is due in part to the teacher's mode of transferring this knowledge to the student (Burroughs 1977: 49). Burroughs argues that students learn to love poetry either by successfully expressing a pre-determined interpretation or by being allowed to interpret poetry in diverse ways. Teaching that does not favour individual expression and interpretation may account for a lack of enthusiasm for poetry in adult readers.

Poetry today

So where does poetry currently stand? The status of poetry in the Australian publishing industry is one of contention. In the September 2008 issue of *Bookseller + Publisher*, a discrepancy between the Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] records of book sales and those of the *Australian Books in Print* database was identified (*Bookseller + Publisher* 2008: 1). While the ABS reported that 8,602 titles were published in Australia in the 2003-2004 period, the *Australian Books in Print* database recorded 14,258 titles, approximately 60 per cent more. The *Australian Books in Print* data indicates that 3,937 publishers published 'at least one book' in 2007. About 70 per cent of them (2,782 publishers) published only one book in this period, while a further 876 publishers published between two and five books (*Bookseller + Publisher* 2008: 1). This phenomenon is called 'The Long Tail'. Ben Eltham describes The Long Tail as the bulk of published works on the market that reach the public through channels outside successful

chain stores and bookshops. ‘The unpopular and obscure titles that never used to get published – but that can none-the-less sell in small numbers online... everything that isn’t a commercially-viable proposition: in other words, most writers, bloggers and poets’ (Eltham 2010: 4). Brynjolfsson and Smith produced a graph which visually represents The Long Tail as present in sales by Amazon.com, in Figure 1.2

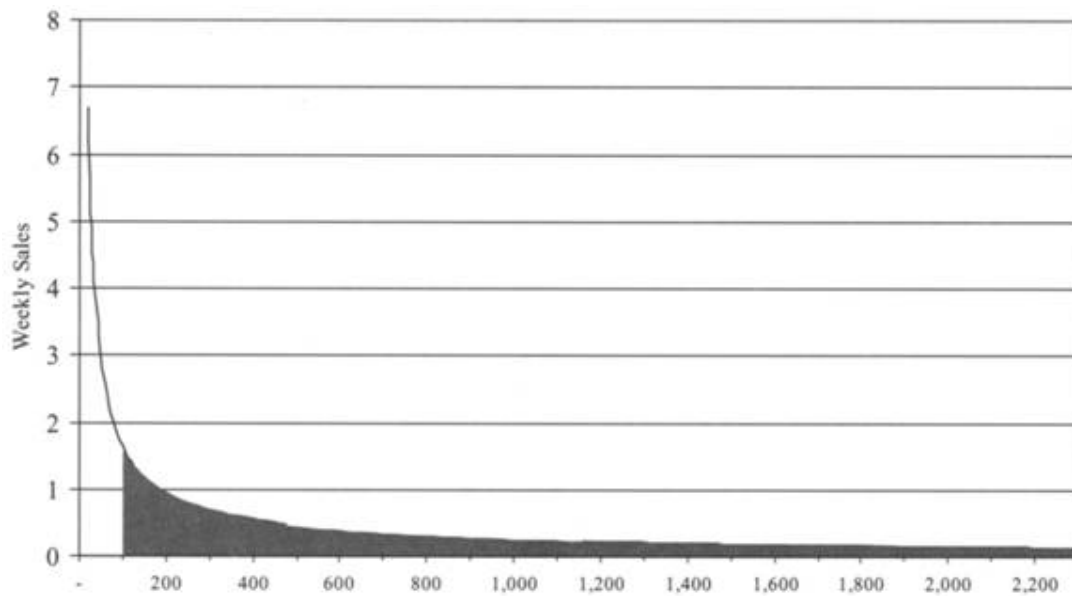


Figure 1.2 YH Brynjolfsson, J Hu & MD Smith (2003), ‘Consumer Surplus in the Digital Economy: Estimating the Value of Increased Product Variety at Online Booksellers’, *Management Science* 49, 11 [1]

The Long Tail, made longer and stronger by the increase in the technologically mediated consumption of books, is changing the way in which readers purchase and value what would have once been considered ‘unsuccessful’ books and genres. Eltham argues small publishers are able to gain attention cheaply, distribute books widely and accept authors more easily than ever before using the Internet, and that the Internet makes a dramatic change in the types of products which are profitable (Eltham 2010: 4). He states:

In a world where only products with mass-market appeal make it to store shelves, producers have strong incentives to focus on mass-market tastes, to the exclusion of niche audiences. Expanding the types of products that can be profitably sold by retailers may provide artists and other producers with incentives to create products to serve more varied tastes. (Eltham 2010: 4)

So at present, Australian poetry, by all accounts, is not dead. It has declined considerably due to the end of the golden age of government funding for the arts and a ‘meekness’ in Australian publishing franchises following advancements in global sales practices. Poetry publishing exists now in The Long Tail of independent and niche publishers, many of them poets themselves producing poetry and supporting other poets in an insatiable loyalty to the art form. But is this enough?

David McCooey argues that the idea of poetry as a reaction to social upheaval, as resistance, protest or as a political movement, is fundamental to its place as a legitimate form of public discourse and it is only as a ‘marginal’ form, a form that never actually returns to a mainstream place in literature and publishing in Australia, that this is possible. McCooey argues that a state of never being fully returned to popularity, of clinging on ‘in pubs, poetry slams, bush poetry, and so on, implies the endless deferral of poetry’s return to mainstream public culture... Poetry’s role in public culture (as both essential and eternally deferred) is to exemplify marginality, to remain as a trace of the pre- or early-modern that can be neither rejected nor incorporated’ (McCooey 2009b: 1). Dominique Hecq (2005 in McCooey 2009a), adds: ‘...poetry can only stake out its proper place for itself resisting today’s media-saturated world by creating unconforming forms that ceaselessly raise the question of how meaning is articulated in language’. If an integral

understanding of the practice of poetry in Australia sees it as ‘eternally deferred’ from the mainstream, is its current place as being neither rejected nor incorporated, as an exemplar of marginality, actually an indication of its ‘health’ as a genre?

McCooley suggests that Australian poetry is surviving ‘underground’ in a relatively unrecognised ‘golden age’ (McCooley 2005: 67). He suggests that Australian poetry responds ‘in various material ways to the difficulties of publishing in a niche market’ by reinventing its mode of delivery, and through the efforts of individuals, many of them poets funding poetry journals or small publishers (McCooley 2005: 67). This is the way in which Australian poetry continues to be ‘a poetry of survival’. The changing of modes of delivery are the movement of poetry from newspapers and single volume forms into anthologies, collections and verse novels in the 1990s. McCooley suggests that for Australian poetry to survive, it requires the poet to be ‘loyal to poetry and disloyal to allow it to continue’ – that is, loyal to the art form and disloyal to the ways in which it must be produced to reach the reader (McCooley 2005: 8). Australian poetry, then, the ‘survivor’ and exemplar of marginality, has produced poets who tenaciously cling to an art form that appeals to a small and select market while fostering the willingness to change and respond to movements in genre and to evolve as users of new technology to allow their work to reach the intended audience. Digital publishing has explosively widened the possibilities for renewal, reaction and survival, yet the effect of this new smorgasbord of format and distribution forms may not necessarily bring poetry to the forefront of Australian publishing. However, as McCooley has compellingly argued, being at the forefront of mainstream publishing is unnecessary – if not counterproductive – to poetry’s legitimacy as an art form.

A New Digital Order?

Digital publishing offers a vast array of possibilities for the reinvention and adaptation of poetry, easing the time and cost associated with providing access to the reader. Eltham argues that technology, in the form of the internet, in the rise of the popularity of eBooks and in the movement of published books into the mobile phone and tablet platform are some of the ways this process has changed (Eltham 2010: 4). The major aspect of these technologies that appeals to the aspiring poetry author is the ability for the author to gain ‘direct access’ to their readers without the use of a publisher. Describing this ‘direct access’, Eltham states:

New technologies can also help once-obscure writers and bloggers to connect directly to audiences, and even allow them to make a modest but sustainable living from their craft... cheap and easy access to blogging engines globally makes this easier than ever before. (Eltham 2010: 4)

One of the ways poets are circumventing traditional modes of publishing is through online societies or ‘fandoms’, where readers of niche genres gather to consume and share their works. In 2000, poets.org had archived 220 poets, and was recording 4 million page hits a month, 80,000 of these being first-time visits. Two years later the site included over 500 poets, logged over 28 million page hits a month and nearly included 400,000 first-time visits (Weinberger cited in Wadsworth 2002: 1). These figures demonstrate that what is considered a specialised or niche genre in traditional Australian publishing has a possibly strong online consumption rate.

Using direct access via the internet, the author can potentially profit from their art without concern for who the readers are, how many times the work will be read for free, or what critical success the art may have. As Kelley and Schneider assert, ‘In this case “publish” simply means “make available”, not “bind and distribute through bookstores”’ (Kelsey & Schneider 2008: 4). In this case also, ‘publish’ does not mean that the work has been selected by a publisher, edited, funded and checked for factuality, quality or even appropriateness. While The Long Tail, which allows independent authors publishing themselves and independent publishers ‘direct access’ to readers through technology serves niche genres such as the poetry well, this also creates a downward pressure on

prices and an increase in competition (Eltham 2010:4). It also creates a fear in some writers that the market will be flooded and glutted with badly crafted and simply unreadable works.

Another of the ways poetry may use advances in technology is through the consumption of books on phones or tablets. While the growth in popularity of the eBook is as advantageous for niche writers as it is for writers in popular genres, the growth of mobile phone consumption of books serves poetry well because of its style. Padley argues digital publishing will cause publishers to take into account how books are consumed on screen and on hand-held devices when selecting, editing and presenting material (Padley cited in Wood 2011: 1). He states that in a digital age:

Publishers should examine their lists and prioritise the areas that have a natural affinity for mobile and then re-imagine them in new ways. Our reading habits are changing and people aren't going to invest a huge amount of time in content. (Padley cited in Wood 2001: 1)

Arguably, poetry is the ideal genre for consumption on mobile phones. With exceptions, its short, vertical style and ability to be consumed in chapters makes it ideal for reading without the requirement of the huge investment of time of the sort described by Padley. Poetry, which McCooley argued found sales safety in producing 'bulk products' such as the anthology in the 1990s, may now find success in producing short, individual works for consumption in this medium. For example, a reader waiting at a bus stop might download a single poem onto their mobile phone for a small fee, perhaps ten cents, or might pay a one-off subscription fee to a mobile app that provides a daily poem for a higher fee, perhaps ten dollars. These poems earn a small amount of money, which they might never have earned in a paperback poetry anthology on a bookshop shelf. They might also reach new readerships composed of people living in, for example, Hong Kong, Lima, Zagreb and New York, that they would never have reached in a physical format. The poet has circumvented the necessity for a publisher, an editor, a printer, a distributor and a bookstore to place their work in the reader's hand for a modest fee. Taking into account set up costs such as website or app design and maintenance, the profit gained from a single poem is made easier and larger by means of technology, specifically the consumption of books on mobile phones.

The leading poetry application on mobile phone in 2012 is produced by *The Poetry Foundation* and *Poetry Magazine*, Chicago. The free app boasts the ability to turn one's phone into a 'mobile poetry library' and caters to lovers of Shakespeare, Vallejo and McHugh, as well as everything in between. The app allows the reader to: 'Give [their] phone a shake to discover new poems to fit any mood' as well as 'Save [their] favourite poems to read and share later – through Facebook, Twitter, or e-mail' (The Poetry Foundation 2012: 1). Closer to home, *Australian Poetry Ltd* (a merger between the *Australian Poetry Centre* and *Poet's Union*) has created a paid application to 'excite all Australians about Australian poetry by delivering an innovative national program of events, workshops, activities, festivals and publications...' (Australian Poetry Ltd 2012: 1). The app, which features a comprehensive library, as well as news and current events in poetry, seeks to connect with, and keep connected with, the Australian poetry enthusiast and offer opportunities for new poets to publish.

McCooley's recent critique of mobile phone poetry apps, 'Poets, Apples and Androids', refers to three main classes of poetry app:

informational apps (such as databases and reference books); media apps (which include audio, video, e-book, and e-journal content); and compositional apps (which include apps that offer writing spaces with built-in tools such as rhyming dictionaries, apps that generate text for recombinant composition, and apps that offer both of these things. (McCooley 2012: 98)

He argues that digital poetics has moved the composition and consumption of poetry from the hands of the 'specialist' pursuing an educational or professional relationship with poetry to the 'generalist', and that this is due mainly to the invention of the mobile phone,

the Internet and the home computer (2012: 98). Poetry apps not only offer the everyday reader access to out-of-print canonical poetry but encourage the writing of poetry from chance-related lists or libraries of words and are marketed ‘in terms of traditional ideas about what constitutes poetry, or in terms of poetry as a game. Rather than avant-garde proceduralism, then, the analogue equivalent of such compositional apps is more often “fridge-magnet poetry”’ (McCooley 2012: 104). Despite mobile app poetry’s presentation of poetry as ‘a game, associated with a self-styling that is allied to either juvenile or middle-brow forms of literary subjectivity’ (2012: 106) McCooley does not, however, encourage the underestimation of such facilitators of poetic composition. He acknowledges the cultural newness of these forms of art and suggests that despite their apparent naiveté and limitations, they may force us to consider further what creativity is, and the structures in which creativity can happen (2012: 109).

Social media has also changed poetry consumption and composition possibilities, and like mobile poetry apps, uses the poetry consumer’s desire to be a practitioner rather than a passive recipient of the poetic process. Australian social marketing specialist and part-time poet Gavin Heaton created the Twitter poetry community ‘TPoet’ (@twitterpoetry), which boasts over 3,000 followers. Heaton states, ‘The thing about Twitter is that it is highly collaborative, and it is this that has interested me. So I thought I might try a little experiment: collaborative poetry’ (Heaton 2012: 1). Heaton invites amateur poets to log into the account under a shared username and password and contribute to ongoing tweeted poems. The success of Heaton’s project is evidence of the notion that modern poetry readers, students and practitioners are increasingly interested in trying their hand at poetry, rather than being passive receptors. Menchaca (2006) explores this idea further investigating the consumption of poetry that favours the unique individual experience and reader intervention in the experience of poetry. He cites ‘Conversation’, an online poetry collection featured on poemsthatgo.com, which seeks to make use of the reader’s choices through a filtering system that decides which poems to amplify and which to silence in the conglomeration of potential poetry readings to create an individualised reading experience (Menchaca 2006: 2). The reader ‘decid[es] which narratives to bury and which to expose, determining the nature of the experience of the work by allowing it to be a cacophony – all voices speaking at the same volume – or a duet’ (Menchaca 2006: 2). Menchaca argues that digital publishing brings to an end the reign of power of the stationary white page and black text and invites the reader to join the poet in composition. He asks, ‘If the Internet is the largest crowded room in history, why shouldn’t web poets and readers engage in an essentially dialogic relation to one another? Why not make data verse and verse data? Why not have a little fun?’ (Menchaca 2006: 3). Matching the poem’s text with overtly non-poetic peripherals, he argues, is critical to the success of poetry and has been for some time:

The most beautiful poem suggests experiences that are highly inattentive and unwritten, and the most beautiful are merely superficial indicators for other sorts of peripheral, coded, programmatic, functional or directional information that is applied to the surface of things like postcards, flat panel displays, parking lots, brochures, street signs or other depthless objects. (Menchaca 2006: 3)

In making their art, he argues, web poets and publishers may well be remaking and renewing the art form of poetry itself, ‘...with collaboration redefining the notion of originality, orchestration becoming the dominant mode of composition, and what is at first seemingly noise transforming our perception of music’ (Menchaca 2006: 4).

It seems that the main offerings of digital publishing to the poet are direct access to the reader and a circumvention of the cost, selection criteria and time required by traditional publishing. To the reader is offered the opportunity to actively participate in the experience of the poem, whether it is collaboratively adding to a Twitter poem in motion, or selecting how a visual poem is viewed or listened to. Strickland extends on this, adding that what digital media can do that print can’t is to:

...explore multiple spatial layers and multiple time codes that present simultaneously; explore live performance whether or not this occurs as a result of a reader’s physical input; explore interaction and networked

experience; explore 'gaming' as a possibly poetic mode; explore literature as a physical installation; explore interchangeability of sense representations, i.e., the same 'data' can display as text, as visuals, as sound. (Strickland cited in Menchaca 2006: 4)

Packer and Jordan argue that there are five new hybrid forms available to the online poet that constitute a renewal of poetry as an art form. Firstly, 'integration' is the combining of art forms and technology into a hybrid form of expression, which might include video, sound, photography or a combination of all. 'Interactivity' is the ability of the user to manipulate and affect their experience of media directly, and to communicate reactions to the work with others through social media. 'Hypermedia' links separate media elements to one another to create a trail of personal associations, such as news stories, multiple poetry websites or video channels. 'Immersion' is the experience of entering into the poetic simulation or suggestion of a three-dimensional poetic environment. Finally, 'Narrativity' uses aesthetic and formal strategies that derive from the concepts outlined in the previous four elements, which result in non-linear story forms (Packer & Jordan 2001: xxxv).

Compared to forms of digital media used by poets and poetry organisations that do not favour reader participation, but simply advertise opportunities for traditional reading or performance-based poetry, the lack of collaboration seems undesirable. At the time of writing this article, for example, *Australian Poetry Slam* (@auspoetryslam), which offers news and event information about live poetry performances and competitions, boasted only 5 Twitter followers (Australian Poetry Slam 2012: 1).

What will this new arsenal of digital weaponry in the fight for the survival of poetry mean? Are we set for a poetic uprising? The answer, this essay will argue, is possibly no. This is because a renewal of form, the diversification of appreciation and the advance of 'direct access' of poetry has nothing to do with the production of poetry itself, its quality and merit. To this end, in a sobering if not overly pessimistic essay, Bantick argues that: 'Some digital poetry, lacking critique but enthusiastically welcomed by the online generation, fits Stephen Fry's withering description of modern poetry, being "arse-dribble". It adds little, if anything at all, to the advancement of poetic awareness other than a virtual experience. It is not the real thing' (Bantick 2011: 1). Bantick goes on to argue that modern poetry is just as popular as a practice and just as unpopular as a form of reading material as before the Internet (2011: 1). This reminds us of David McCooey's earlier assertion that: 'Everyone, it seems, is a poet. No-one, apparently, reads poetry'. Bantick states:

Random associations, clever, arty imagery, soundscapes and innovation do not take the place of knowing why something has merit, why it can be defined a poetry and why fluidity of interpretation is a danger to meaning. It is not something that is likely to endure beyond the transitory digital world. (Bantick 2011: 2)

Isakhan et al (2006) ask whether the Internet should be regarded as an 'Aladdin's cave' for possibilities of poetic renewal or a 'Pandora's box' of new, not necessarily worthy, not necessarily good poetic formats that threaten the literary worth of the art form. What is certain is that the Internet is distributing more poetry and generating more poets. It includes opportunities for poets to distribute and receive feedback on their work faster, more cheaply and more widely than before. New poetic forms are emerging, both interactive and non-interactive, and poets who established their credibility before these new opportunities, those traditional masters of the genre, have a presence alongside their modern counterparts.

Considerations of the 'health' of poetry in Australia must be broader than measurements of popularity, sales and economic viability. Susan Hawthorne argues that understanding whether an art form is thriving or dying requires a study much like that of environmental biodiversity; nature's reaction, adaptation and self-management in response to changing conditions (Hawthorne 2011: 87). 'Biodiversity', she argues, occurs when 'both the deep soil of culture is nurtured and the multiplicity of epistemological stances is encouraged' (2011: 87). In order for an art form to survive, rather than becoming stagnant

and a part of history, a ‘network’ between traditional forms of publishing (which can be thought of, in Hawthorne’s example, as a deep-rooted, ancient tree) and new and dynamic art forms (the ‘wild seeds’ and marginal, short-lived and vastly diverse life forms in and around this tree) must exist. She argues that ‘Traditional knowledges pollinate contemporary artworks, while contemporary work feeds back into cultural knowledge’ (Hawthorne 2011: 93). In this way, new and even initially unpopular forms, for example mobile phone poetry, arise from traditional forms of poetry and with success as a contemporary reinvention become traditional over time, ‘pollinating’ new poetry as a means of survival.

Back in ‘the warehouse’, my confusion over my supervisor’s motivations in supporting poetry as a genre in Australian publishing is somewhat resolved. As a poet and a publisher of poetry, my supervisor is both loyal to his craft and disloyal to the form it must take in order to be a successful sales product. This is evident in the ways in which he publishes the works. The paperbacks which pack ‘the warehouse’ are produced for his loyalty to poetry as a viable art form in Australian print publishing – he believes in poetry, believes in its place on bookshelves, in bookstores, edited and printed and distributed by a publisher. He also believes in poetry’s reinvention in digital media for consumption on the computer, tablet and mobile screen, so he produces the works digitally also, and makes them available for downloading. My supervisor’s actions are part of the tenacious survival of Australian poetry, and the adoption of new forms of writing, selection and publishing which continue to renew it.

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Note 1: Figure 1.2 reprinted by permission. Copyright 2012 INFORMS. The Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences, 7240 Parkway Drive, Suite 300, Hanover, Maryland 21076, USA. return to text

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