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ABN: 39 802 500 356

ANNUAL REPORT 2009
To be presented at the ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
11.00 am - Saturday 27th February 2010
Rex Centre, Kings Cross

1. Chairperson's overview

Introduction

2009 has been as busy as any other in the Poets Union's history and, under sometimes trying circumstances, we have carried out our core functions, made some necessary changes to our procedures, and spent a lot of time planning for, and fighting for, the future of poetry and poetry funding in Australia.

The Poets Union has produced five issues (in three books) of the journal *Five Bells* in the new format, instituted a weekly e-newsletter to replace the old *21/2 Bells* (which only came out quarterly and was therefore sometimes out of date), significantly improved the content appearance and accessibility of the website, conducted monthly readings at the Brett Whiteley Studio, presented a Headline Seminar on 'Poetry and Time', sponsored and presented five events at the Sydney Writers Festival, promoted the events of other poetry groups, combined with the Red Room Company and *The Monthly* to present an evening of poetry in NSW Parliament House. All these matters will be reported on later in the report by the committee members who co-ordinated them. I would like to place on record at the beginning of this report my thanks to the committee for all the volunteer work they have undertaken and to Cathy Bray for doing five days work in two days in the office. Given our financial and human resources the Poets Union achieves more than many much larger organisations.

It is acknowledged that change is difficult and disadvantages some members and we apologise. Increasing use of the website and email has resulted in a slightly lesser service for members without access to these facilities. We have produced the occasional hard-copy newsletter but not as many as we would have liked. We hope members who are disadvantaged understand that we just could not continue to provide two parallel services.

Arts NSW

Arts NSW has undergone a restructure and there has been an overhaul of procedures. This resulted in late notification of funding and a shock for the Poets Union in that it was not awarded a grant for 2009. Much of the first half of the year was spent fighting to regain this grant. We were successful in securing a grant but it was less than we had initially expected. We have had extensive discussions with Arts NSW. The funding environment has changed and grants are now very competitive and tied to strict priorities and criteria. The funding climate is one of the major reasons why we have entered merger negotiations with the Australian Poetry Centre (APC). More of that later. We have recently received notification that we have received a grant of \$40,000 for 2010 but we have to re-write our program and Key Performance Indicators before



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the money will be released. We also received \$8000 to conduct a residential poetry workshop in collaboration with APC but this will have to be re-scheduled for later in the year.

Virginia Judge, NSW Minister for the Arts.

Virginia Judge is genuinely interested in poetry and has involved herself in poetry affairs to a greater extent than any Minister I can think of. She launched *Harbour City Poems* at the Sydney Writers Festival and she sponsored a hugely attended and highly successful poetry soiree at Parliament House which was presented by the PU, the Red Room Company and *The Monthly*. It is hoped there will be another event this year and I'm hoping the Minister is available to open the Australian Poetry festival.

City of Sydney

We continue to occupy premises within the Neighbourhood Service Centre at Kings Cross under an accommodation grants program sponsored by the City of Sydney. We are grateful for this and for the co-operation we receive from Council staff. A successful launch was held for the second issue of *Five Bells* in the Kings Cross Library. We thank Librarian Steve Mitchell for his help. The City of Sydney also awarded us \$5,000 for outreach projects associated with the Australian Poetry Festival. The Poets Union continues to lobby for a dedicated Poetry Centre in Sydney or space in a literary hub. We look with envy at the premises provided for the APC in Melbourne at the Wheeler Centre as part of that city's commitment to being a UNESCO City of Literature. Victoria is about to announce the appointment of a State Poet.

Australia Council for the Arts

We have received a grant of \$13,500 from the Literature Board for the conduct of the Australian poetry Festival on 3, 4, 5 September 2010. The Literature Board have also been very supportive in other ways and it is certainly trying to find ways to improve the situation in Australia for poetry. One of these ways has been to encourage the PU and the APC to collaborate to create a single Key Organisation. Most of the remainder of my report will concentrate on this collaboration as it represents the biggest change in the poetry landscape in my memory and will mean big changes for the Poets Union.

Poetry Australia

Much of 2009 has been spent in negotiations with APC with a view to collaborating to form a new national poetry organisation tentatively called 'Poetry Australia'.

Given the funding climate at both national and state level it was put to both organisations that our best chance for survival into the future and our best chance of securing reasonable funding, given that we offer similar services, was to stop competing and put in an application to become a triennially funded Key Organisation.

It was agreed by the Board of APC and the Committee of the PU that this was the only sensible course of action. A number of planning meetings were held by negotiating teams from both organisations and we have kept members up to date with developments through the website and newsletters.



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An Expression of Interest to be a Key Organisation was submitted in May 2009. This was accepted and we were invited to become an Emerging Key Organisation and submit a formal application and program in May 2010. If this is successful (we will be notified by July) we will be funded from, and begin operations in, January 2011. In June 2010 Poetry Australia will make funding applications to Arts NSW and Arts Vic. Initially, funding from the Australia Council will be annual but will continue for three years if we meet our targets and satisfy the Australia Council of our progress. At the end of 2013 the trainer wheels would come off and we would compete with all other Key Organisations for triennial funding.

This does not put an immediate end to funding worries and Poetry Australia is not a universal panacea. There will be pressure for the organisation (and poetry) to be more sustainable and to seek funding from sources other than government. The emphasis will be on collaborations and partnership in service delivery. The key things to know about Poetry Australia at this stage are:

- An Interim Board has been appointed. Its members are: Chris Wallace-Crabbe and Brook Emery (co-chairs); Martin Langford, Anna Kerdijk-Nicholson, Margaret Bradstock (PU); Virginia Proud, Nell White, Grant Caldwell (APC)
- Paul Kooperman from the APC has been appointed interim CEO
- The likelihood is that the Head Office of Poetry Australia will be located in the Wheeler Centre for Books and Ideas in Melbourne – accommodation, facilities and support are much better than we have in Sydney. There is a determination that Poetry Australia be seen as a new, genuinely national organisation which delivers services in all states. This will necessitate the winding up of both existing organisations and the creation of a new legal entity.
- Initially, there will be a NSW Director and a Victorian Director and a State Office in NSW. Poetry Australia will successively reach out to establish Directors in other states (this follows advice we were given by the Australia Council).
- There should not be any diminution in services to NSW members but the services may be different and delivered in a different way.
- Some of the Australia Council's priorities include: professional development of established poets; promoting young Australians; promoting poets overseas; digital arts.
- The following issues remain to be determined: membership structure and fees; structure of the website; nature and frequency of the journal; committee structure to support state directors.



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- Legal Officers from both organisations will oversee the transition and ensure that all legal and financial obligations are met.

Members will be kept up to date of developments as they occur by newsletter, on the website and via hardcopy where possible.

Looking Forward to 2010

The Poets Union will be conducting the seventh Australian Poetry Festival on 3, 4, 5 September in Sydney and with umbrella events in regional areas. This will consume much of our energy in 2010.

Very soon we will be launching:

- The Poets Union Poetry Prize for 2010
- The Scanlon Prize for a published volume of verse by an Indigenous writer
- The Poets Union Fellowship for a Young Poet

We will also be announcing details of the Poets Union Members Anthology 2010.

We are committed to these projects but we will be simultaneously launching an appeal for additional sponsorships to allow us to expand them even further.

Brook Emery.

2. Office Administrator's report

The office has been staffed on two days (Tuesdays and Wednesdays) in 2009. The main achievement has been the systematic financial recording and categorising of every financial aspect of our work at the Poets Union Inc. My thanks to James Wu our accountant for his training and support. The committee agreed to my recommendation to rationalise memberships to one Due Date making all memberships based on the calendar year and due on 1 January. (The due date was extended to Feb 1 2010 to allow members to take in this change). I am very grateful for the tolerance and encouragement various members have shown with this change. For 2010 the main aim will be to implement the MYOB Accounts receivable with our membership database so that we can finally have MYOB/Members/Outlook and the website all integrated. This will lead to immediate receipting which has not been possible up till now. All members will receive receipts before the 2010 Financial year in June. My thanks to the volunteering of the entire committee and additional volunteers John Carey, Norm Neil and Julie Chevalier for being available at short notice for mailouts and other updates. Members have received a weekly e-



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newsletter and the website content has been kept current and a new Poets Union Inc blog is now up and running. New memberships are being generated from interest on the website.

Cathy Bray

3. Five Bells

2009 was a year of change for *Five Bells*. We moved to the long-awaited A5 format, with typesetting in InDesign, implemented by freelance designer Margaret Whiskin. The first issue (Spring/Summer 2008/2009) was a double issue, including papers from the 2008 Australian Poetry Festival and Sydney Writers' Festival. A skeleton of the old *Five Bells* format was also maintained. The next issue (Autumn/Winter) was also a double, as papers from the 2008 Creative Reading Seminar had been held over and were included, as well as articles on our scheduled theme of Poetry and Art and regular submissions. Responses to the new *Five Bells* have been mixed. Overall, most members are positive about the handy, pocket-sized A5 format, but there is some dissension about the resultant smaller font. Prose articles on 'academic' topics were welcomed by many readers, and seen as 'raising the standard.' Others would like to see the inclusion of more poetry.

Our final issue, for Spring 2009, was typeset by John Sheppard in InDesign, as Margaret Whiskin is no longer resident in Sydney. We wish to record our gratitude and admiration for John's splendid efforts. This single issue, on the theme of Poetry and Music, featured, amongst other fine articles, a piece on 'Poetry and Song' by Peter Goldsworthy.

For 2010 the first issue will be a double: including the papers from the 2009 'Poetry in Time' Seminar and themed articles on Poetry and History (with a featured contribution by Professor Elizabeth Webby on 'Australian History in Poetry'). Again, we are reliant on the dedication, health and well-being of John Sheppard (who has recently undergone a shoulder-replacement operation) to get this issue to press. The final issue for the year will feature papers from the 2010 Australian Poetry Festival.

With the proposed amalgamation with Australian Poetry Centre in sight, we do not know what the future holds for *Five Bells*, but are committed to serving our membership, in whatever form that may take. Many thanks to our new Office Manager, Cathy Bray, in her capacity as go-between with the editorial committee and unruffler of (members') feathers. Welcome to Lyn Vellins, who joined John Sheppard, Tom Thorpe, John Batts and myself on the editorial during 2009.

Margaret Bradstock.



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4. Sydney Writers' Festival

Sydney Writers' Festival accepted five Poets Union proposals for events in 2009.

- Harbour City Poets presented a reading called *Conversations from the Bottom of the Harbour*. Harbour City Poets is a group which has been performing for several years, developing readings in which the poems are selected for the way in which the poems themselves “talk” to or interact with each other. The group is comprised of Margaret Bradstock, Joanne Burns, Kerry Leves, David Musgrave, Jenni Nixon and Louise Wakeling. A chapbook of the poems was made available to the audience.
- At the S.H. Ervin Gallery, another poetry group, DiVerse, also presented a group reading and compiled a chapbook of the work which was distributed among members of the audience. DiVerse specialises in ekphrastic poems – work which responds to paintings or other art-forms. In 2009, they were lucky enough to have the Margaret Olley exhibition, *A Life's Journey*, to work with. The group, which is facilitated by Robert Kennedy, is comprised of Margaret Bradstock, Carolyne Bruyn, Marcelle Freiman, Jill Jones, Paula McKay, Sheryl Persson and Louise Wakeling.
- At the Tap Gallery, over a season of five nights, Wordjammin' presented *An Evening of Darlinghurst Nights*. This show had developed out of an earlier presentation at the Australian Poetry Festival at Bar Me, where Ashley Chatto and other musicians provided an improvised response to the *Darlinghurst Night* poems of Kenneth Slessor. For the 2009 SWF, music was composed for the poems by Ashley Chatto, and a visual interpretation was provided by Dave Young. As well as the lighter poems, the show included some of Slessor's more serious work, such as *Five Bells* and *Metempsychosis*, presented by John Carey. Singers and poets were John Carey, Kath Ellis, Tara Resch, David Stephenson, and Angela Stretch, and the musicians, Ashley Chatto, Scott Leishman, Jeff Crawley – with sound by Geir Brilliant.
- At the Bangarra Mezzanine, there was a reading and launch of *Harbour City Poems: Sydney in Verse 1788 – 2008* (ed. Langford; published by Puncher and Wattmann). The anthology was launched by The Hon. Virginia Judge, Minister Assisting the Minister for the Arts. There were presentations of historical poems by actors, Pearl Pan and Roderic Byrne, followed by readings of contemporary work by some of the poets who figured in the anthology: Adam Aitken, Pam Brown, Paul Dawson, Kate Lilley and John Tranter.
- Again at the Bangarra, there were two presentations in the ongoing series, *The Sydney Poetry Readings*. The aim of this series, begun in 2008, is to draw attention to Sydney as a city which nurtures and hosts poetry of a high quality. In the 2009 readings, Stephen Edgar, Judy Johnson and JS Harry presented the first event (facilitated by Rosemary Huisman), while



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Robert Adamson, Anthony Lawrence and Devin Johnston (US) read in the second session, which was chaired by Anna Kerdijs-Nicholson.

This series of events was supported by a grant from the Sydney City Council Cultural Fund, and the Poets Union wishes to express its gratitude for the support of that body.

As the PU committee member in charge of liaison with the SWF for these events, I would also like to thank the various event facilitators for the considerable organisation which goes into mounting them, and Wendy Were and the SWF staff for their support of poetry in Sydney.

Martin Langford.

5. Brett Whiteley Studio readings

2009 was a milestone for the Poets Union readings: a decade of featuring poets local, national and international at the Brett Whiteley Studio.

In February 1999 Deb Westbury was the first poet to present at the Sunday readings in Surry Hills. Since its inception the monthly readings have featured 126 poets including six international and 28 interstate readers. Only four of those poets have featured twice. A total of 53 were female and one indigenous poet with a presentation of the Scanlon prize in September 2007. In the coming year we will be giving more consideration to representing different community voices.

The Gallery has been undergoing significant change including the recent installation of *Iconic Whiteley*. We are grateful for the support of the Art Gallery of NSW which has been able to continue to offer free entry which will continue at least until mid-year 2010. Rosanay wines have continued their support. This year's sponsorship is currently being settled.

Increased online communications in the e-newsletter and website updates assisted in getting the word out. Cathy Bray has been the beacon for this promotional technology and we will be realising more of the readings activities online next year.

2010 looks to be a stimulating year of poetry. I am grateful for the well-founded assistance of front-men Brook Emery and John Batts, who kindly took charge when I was unable. I would like to extend a thank you to Alec George, Coordinator of the Brett Whiteley Gallery at AGNSW, Zoe Cooper, Administration Assistant and to gallery staff with particular acknowledgement to the stoic services of Kevin & Catherine for their artistic arrangements of chairs.



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The poetry event would not have been possible for the continuing support of you who come regularly. A special acknowledgement to those who assist in setting-up, your presence is my reward. I invite you to join us in 2010 : come along to 'go out in a poetry mood!'

Poets featured in 2009: Miles Merrill, David Gilby, Mohsen Sultany Zand, Mark Tredinnick, Michelle Cahill, Andy Quan, Carol Jenkins, Kim Cheng Boey, Queensland Touring Poets (Rob Morris, Kristin Hannaford, Zenobia Frost), Les Wicks and Andy Kissane.

Angela Stretch

6. Headline Seminar

In 2009, the Poets Union Headline Seminar was held on Saturday September 12th, at the Sydney Mechanics School of Arts, Pitt Street, Sydney. We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of a grant from the Australia Council for the Arts, through which we were able to invite interstate poets Marcella Polain (Western Australia), Philip Salom and Elizabeth Campbell (both from Victoria), together with Brook Emery from New South Wales, to speak to the day's theme, 'Poetry in Time - the poem spoken and heard'. The day included poetry readings as well as papers and a workshop (with Rosemary Huisman); material from the seminar has been edited for publication in the first issue of five bells for 2010. The day was enjoyed by some 40 participants.

Rosemary Huisman

7. Scanlon Poetry Prize

Being biennial, the Scanlon Prize for the best published volume of Indigenous Poetry was not offered this past year. In view of the declining value of the initial prize of one thousand dollars biennially, underwritten half a dozen years ago by the Scanlon Foundation (originally Brencorp Foundation), the Poets Union has seen fit to match that sum, so that when the Scanlon Prize is offered in 2010 the value of the prize will be \$2,000.00. The original agreement with the Scanlon/Brencorp Corporation will expire at the close of this financial year. Meantime the Poets Union looks forward to offering the enhanced Scanlon Prize in 2010; the winning volume will be announced in September, 2010, during the Festival.

John S. Batts



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8. Legal Compliance Report

We have complied with our legal obligations during 2009. Five separate areas need attention over the course of any given calendar year.

1. Incorporated Association

We submitted the Form 12 and audited accounts to the Office of Fair Trading.

2. Public Trust Fund

Our auditor, Kumar Ratnakumar, is approved to audit the Public Trust Fund A/cs – for which there are some stiff conditions.

3. Income Tax Exempt Charity and Deductible Gift Recipient for the purposes of the ATO I self-assess our status each year and record the results in a workbook provided by the ATO. I will do so in the week after the AGM and keep the results for our records.

4. Office of Charities, Department of Gaming & Racing

We have an Authority to Fundraise for Charitable Purposes valid to 20.1.2011. Generally our fundraising activities are only our Festival raffle.

The sub-committee which manages Public Trust Fund comprises Margaret Bradstock, Rosemary Huisman and me, in line with the Office of Charities guidelines. We did not end up arranging for a supplementary account to be opened at ING Direct for the trust money and have simply retained the funds in the existing CBA account at a respectable, if not breathtaking, rate of interest.

5. ABN & the BAS

We are not registered for GST and so we do not collect GST and pay it to the ATO; nor are we required to submit a BAS quarterly.

Summary: It is my aim to maintain the compliance work in a way which will assist the ‘merger’ of the Australian Poetry Centre and the Poets Union Inc, and in particular, oversee the transfer of the public trust fund and perform the role required to wind up the current entity or transfer its assets, as required.

Anna Kerdijk Nicholson
Solicitor, Public Officer.



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