

Title: “Transforming the Study of Australian Literature through a Collaborative eResearch Environment”

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Abstract:

A unique collaborative eResearch programme has been transforming Australian literature research activities in Australia over the past eight years and is breaking new ground in the methodologies being used to interpret, analyse and disseminate data within a wide array of print culture and literary history projects. This paper will present a case study – illustrating how e-research is being enthusiastically embraced by literary scholars in Australia through the *AustLit* (www.austlit.edu.au) portal. It will demonstrate the techniques that AustLit employs in data management and collaborative data analysis and authoring, that ensure the authority and reliability of the content. It will also describe how a sense of ownership has been established by the scholars participating in building AustLit, and how this has led to the widespread adoption and success of this collaborative eResearch environment.

The screenshot shows the AustLit website interface. On the left is a red sidebar with the AustLit logo and navigation links. The main content area features a search bar at the top, followed by search options (Keywords, Author, Title). Below this, the search results for 'WHITE, PATRICK' are displayed, including a portrait photo, a list of works, and a biography section.

AUSTLIT
The Australian Literature Resource

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AustLit is a not-for-profit education and information resource
Database size:
- 888,875 works
- 103,690 agents
- 26,298 subjects
Last amended: 14 Mar 2008
Users are advised that AustLit contains names and images of people who have died.
Logged in as UQ library
AustLit Feedback

QUICK SEARCH
[input field] GO

KEYWORDS AUTHOR TITLE
Guided Search
Advanced Search
Thesaurus Search

GUIDED SEARCH > RESULTS > AGENT DETAILS COMMENT?

WHITE, PATRICK (188 works by all writing names)
(a.k.a. Patrick Victor Martindale White)
Also writes as: Gray, Alex Xenophon Demirjian (1 work)
Born: 28 May 1912 London, England
Died: 30 Sep 1990 Sydney, New South Wales
Gender: Male

Archives:
Search for literary archives for White, Patrick

Biography:
Patrick White is the first and, to date, only Australian writer to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature (1973). He was born into a wealthy Australian grazing family with strong ties to England, and received his school education partly in Australia, partly at Cheltenham College, England. He then lived a few years in Australia, working as a jackaroo and preparing for university. At King's College, Cambridge, he studied French and German languages and literatures (1932-1935) and spent considerable time in France and Germany (particularly Hannover, the fictional *Heimat* of Voss and of Himmelfarb in *Riders in the Chariot*). The experience of the Australian landscape on the one hand, and European literature and thought on the other were to become two major sources of influence on White's writing.

White had realised early in life that he was not cut out for a grazier's life but rather for that of an artist and writer. He wrote his first poems at Cheltenham (later privately printed in Sydney as *Thirteen Poems*), and soon started writing plays (some of them staged in Sydney and London), short stories and his first novel *Happy Valley*. After graduating from Cambridge he went to London where he moved in artists' circles, making friends with painters, musicians and writers. While on a visit to the USA he wrote his second novel *The Living and the Dead* (1941).

AustLit is a partnership between 12 universities and the National Library of Australia. It is arguably the most important resource for scholars undertaking foundational research into many aspects of Australian literary heritage and print culture history. Led by the University of Queensland, AustLit supports the activities of numerous separate and distributed research communities around Australia and, in some cases, internationally. AustLit serves the research, teaching and general information-seeking communities as both **a source of basic and enhanced information** and as **a mechanism for the extraction and dissemination of research data** which is now becoming mandated by Australian funding bodies. AustLit is also central to an emerging trend in Australian literary research called the “new empiricism” as its large data-set of over 1 million analysable data elements allows the types of empirical research only dreamed about by earlier generations of scholars. It is now becoming possible

to answer simple questions such as “how many works of fiction were published in a particular period of Australia’s history” or more complex questions that require both full-text and empirical analysis such as “how many articles containing the phrase “tyranny of distance” have been published since 1966”. Such questions reveal the value of literary culture to a nation across time.

The model, already partially implemented, of enabling research communities to create, annotate and collaboratively author scholarly content within the database is being expanded and new tools to extend and simplify these capabilities are being created. These are being developed alongside the implementation of novel data-visualisation methodologies using geographical mapping, topic mapping and other graphical interface options. These innovations will quite radically transform the way Australian literary history can be understood. It is a showcase example of an evolving knowledge base built through collaborative and active participation by the communities it serves.

More specifically, within this paper we will identify both the current and emerging aspects of AustLit of relevance to eResearch. In particular we will discuss aspects that are critical to ensuring its success and sustainability including:

- Its low barrier subscription-based model that balances open access with sustainability;
- The collaborative distributed nature of the content development and its peer review;
- The underlying data/metadata model (based on IFLA FRBR [1] and RDF) that ensures extensibility and support for evolving layers of knowledge and detailed provenance capture;
- Querying tools that support quantitative analysis of historical patterns in Australian literature (e.g., graphical reports showing the annual no. of publications of each genre)
- Usage monitoring services that identify recent updates, frequency of access and those areas of the database that are the focus of most recent activities;
- Filtered collection subsets, tailored services and support for sub-communities in topics such as indigenous and children’s literature, using Google Apps.

We will also describe enhancements to AustLit being developed through a National eResearch Architecture Taskforce (NeAT)-funded project. These include:

- Integration with external related repositories (e.g, SETIS [3], PictureAustralia [4], NDBD [5], National Film and Sound Archives) through a federated search interface;
- Advanced querying and browsing services that support full-text, metadata-based and empirical-based searches as well as time-map and topic-map based browse interfaces;
- Hosting of annotation servers for specific communities and the subsequent harvesting of annotations and social tags to enhance discovery services [2];
- OAI-ORE [6] authoring tools for generating compound objects that encapsulate related records and digital objects and comply with the IFLA FRBR model.

References

- [1] IFLA Study Group on the Functional Requirements of Bibliographic Records, "Functional Requirements of Bibliographic Records: final report", 1998.
- [2] J.Hunter, I.Khan, A.Gerber, “HarVANA – Harvesting Community Tags to Enrich Collection Metadata”, accepted JCDL 2008, Pittsburgh, June 2008
- [3] SETIS The Sydney Electronic Text and Image Service <http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au/>
- [4] Picture Australia <http://www.pictureaustralia.org/>
- [5] Australian National Bibliographic Database www.nla.gov.au/libraries/resource/nbd.html
- [6] Open Archives Initiative Object Reuse and Exchange <http://www.openarchives.org/ore/>