or the past, or to imagine an end to
the anguish. But Dickinson places the
word Blank within a defined poetic
form, thus lending “Pain” a shape.
“While pain has no structure,” he con-
cludes, “metaphors of pain” do.

The utility, and immense challenge,
of creating a structure for pain is fam-
iliar to any health-care provider. In my
own experience working with women in
labor, I found that in spite of the regu-
larity and finite nature of contractions,
time seemed to stop for many women in
the midst of such jolting pain. With
one patient I watched the tracing of
the contraction monitor—which, like
Dickinson’s poetic form, gave literal
shape to her pain. By simply reporting
to her each time she passed over the
hump of a contraction, I invited her to
“see” the pain concretely, to speak of it
as a recurring shape, and thus to antici-
pate it in exactly the way a rhyme might
be predictable in a sonnet. It helped her
tolerate the suffering.

Such moments of pain, Biro suggests
provocatively, provide a unique oppor-
tunity to incite in us a reawakening of
language.

“By forging novel ways to think and
speak through metaphor, we ordinary
people become creators,” he says.
Language, through the act of voicing one’s
pain and therefore finding a way to con-
ceptualize its elusiveness, “becomes truly
therapeutic—a form of medicine that has
the power to relieve our suffering.”

Biro devotes a great deal of the book
to close readings of literary and philo-
sophical texts and to analyzing the
mechanics of metaphor. (He also men-
tions the stories of actual patients,
though to a lesser extent.) His empha-
sis on literary texts is both pragmatic—in
that writers provide us “the luxury of
seeing from multiple perspectives in
a less hectic time frame”—and also aes-
thetic. Literature can “elaborate and
stretch the metaphor in ways that may
enhance our understanding of pain’s
aversiveness.”

He divides the lengthy section on met-
aphor into three parts, each one delving
into a different “metaphorical strategy.”
In the first, “the weapon,” Biro analyzes
the mechanics and utility of the most
common pain metaphor, that of an
agent moving toward the body. He
points to Jack London’s description of
the pain caused by a fierce wind, imag-
ined as an air current composed of mil-
ions of particles of sand, and notes
London’s tactic of using metaphor to
etimize the pain by making the (invis-
ible) wind’s force visible and tangible—a
large force composed of an infinity of
tiny points of contact. In the second sec-
tion, “the mirror,” Biro describes projec-
tion metaphors that enable the sufferer
to imagine “objects onto which he can
project his feelings and desires.”

The final section, “the x-ray,” is devoted
to examining anatomic metaphors that
allow patients to “create images of the
inside of the body with words.” When
Biro underwent his transplant and the
lining of his gastrointestinal tract began
to slough, leaving him “with a string of
ulcers from the mouth to the anus,” he
says he found himself picturing a “forest
fire sweeping down the long convoluted
piping network” of his digestive tract.

Biro presents an overwhelming num-
ber of sources in these sections, from
Leo Tolstoy to Frida Kahlo to Ludwig
Wittgenstein, and the book is weighed
down by the heft of these readings. Biro’s
most profound insights, drawn with suc-
cinct beauty in the introduction and
postscript, are blunted by the excessive
number and length of close-reads.

That’s a shame, because Biro treats
language with refreshing seriousness.
In spite of the theoretical nature of his
arguments, he aims to impart practical
advice. He believes that language can
literally transform the way we handle
pain as individuals and as a communi-
ty, and his book encourages patients to
work harder at expressing themselves
and challenges physicians to ask bet-
ter questions.

“Should we start speaking like [Jack]
London and Tolstoy in front of our doc-
tors?” he asks. “Yes ... If we want to
communicate effectively, we must rely
on the same strategies employed by
our best writers.”

For physicians and patients, and their
families, healing begins in the robust
use of words.

Kayla Rosen, a fourth-year medical student at Penn,
received the William Carlos Williams Poetry Prize for
best original poems by a graduate student.

POETRY

Online Poetry in Motion

It was one of the first online
poetry magazines, and it
came from Down Under.

Jacket magazine was the product of
a “rash moment” in 1997 by
its founding editor, Australian poet
John Tranter, who sustained his literary
rashness with flair and energy for 13
tears. The Guardian
called it the “prince of online poetry
magazines,” and while the value of that
sort of encomium is debatable (the same
reviewer also called Jacket’s design
“beautiful,” which is even more debat-
able), its description of the contents as
“awesomely voluminous” is spot-on.

Jacket was crammed with interviews
(more than 100); book reviews (upwards of 650); feature articles on everything from
cyberpoetics to a tribute to Kenneth
Rexroth; and, of course, poems—lots
and lots of them, by authors ranging from
John Ashbery and Penn English Professors
Charles Bernstein and Bob Perelman to
Marjorie Perloff and the late Carl Rakosi
SW’40. (There was even a special Haak
issue revolving around a fabricated
poet named Ern Malley that included
forged poems and letters, a radio interview, even a
movie poster of The Ern Malley Story—
starring, among others, Dennis Hopper
in the title role, Kim Novak as Sappho,
and Galway Kinnell as Hugh Hefner.)

“The Internet broke it all open, and
Jacket was the first massive from
Down Under—though it didn’t feel like it
was from Down Under,” says Al Filreis,
Kelly Professor of English and faculty
director of the Kelly Writers House.
“What set John apart was the persistence
and the capacity to spend all the hours
doing his own HTML, huge amounts of material.”

When Tranter announced that he was
retiring in 2009, Jacket’s fate was uncer-
tain. Into the breach stepped Filreis and
assorted members of the Writers House
and PennSound staff.

“When John was looking to retire, and
he wanted to make sure the old Jacket
would survive, it seemed vitally impor-
tant to us, just because we believe in
archives,” says Filreis. “We’re academics.
How could we let Jacket disappear?”
The short answer to that question is that Jacket is now moving to the Writers House, to be reborn (any day now) as Jacketz. Its entire archive—thousands of Web pages—will be moved to servers at Penn. The venture will be jointly hosted by the Writers House and PennSound, and given the overall literary dynamism of the former, and the latter's "vast and growing archive of audio recordings of poetry performance, discussion, and criticism," Tranter and Filreis noted in a joint announcement, the "synergy in this three-way relationship has great potential."

So far, the response has been extremely positive, says Filreis:

"My first reaction was, 'No way—we have too much we're doing right now,'" he says. "This is a major project. It's going to require staff and funding and focus and my time, none of which we have in great supply. So I said to John, 'Look, this is intriguing, and we will consider moving all the stuff over to our servers."

But it's one thing to take on the archives; running a vibrant international literary magazine is another altogether. In January 2010 Filreis convened a group of about 15 trusted faculty members, staff, writers, and students (including two undergrads)—at the Writers House, and laid out the challenges.

"I can't snap my fingers and have a full-time staff of a magazine," he explains. "So we're depending on volunteerism, people paid part-time who are youngish and on their way elsewhere." The excited response convinced him to proceed.

"I went into high gear and appointed some editors and recruited a team," he says. "And then we were able to write to John and say, 'We're going to do this. We don't know the details, but we're going to do it.'"

In addition to Filreis, who will be the new publisher, KWH director Jessica Lowenthal G'o7 will take on the associate-publisher duties. Michael Hennessey (manager of PennSound) will be the editor, while Julia Bloch G'o9 will serve as managing editor. Tranter will still hold the founding-editor title, and long-time associate editor Pam Brown will stay on in that capacity, from a considerable distance.

Though the nature of the magazine's contents will stay "more or less the same," there will be some significant changes to the format. For one thing, there will no longer be individual issues.

"We're going to be running it more like a Web newspaper, or a non-issue Web magazine," Filreis says. "It will be updated regularly, and the newest article will be the first thing you see in the large space in the center. There'll be departments—a commentaries department, a reviews department, a new-media department. There's going to be symposia and features, such as on one poet or one theme. And we're going to have commentators that we recruit for six-week stints that will report every other day or so."

He promises that it will be well edited, noting that despite all the contributors, there will be "one central editing area where a few of us will be looking very closely at everything that gets published."

At some point, "everything in Jacketz will be available for searching and reading in Jacketz," Filreis notes. "That's a huge job—thousands and thousands and thousands of pages that have to be coded."

But the old Jacket eventually will all be tagged. And tagging is a very powerful way of searching.

In addition to augmenting the pedagogical offerings of the Writers House, Jacketz represents "the perfect instance of what I call the 'gift economy' of the university—which is a hidden gift" to the world, Filreis says. "There's no way of measuring it."

And, he adds pointedly, it's about time something like this happened at this university in particular.

"Let's face it—how many literary magazines have come out of Penn?" he asks. Years ago there was the Penn Literary Review, which was published in association with the English department, and more recently the Center for Programs in Contemporary Writing has been publishing Peregrine. But that's about it.

"So why is it that the birthplace of the poetics of [William Carlos] Williams [M1906 Hon'52] and [Ezra] Pound [C1905 G1906], and H.D. by adoption, I guess, has never created a real literary magazine?"

Filreis asks. "It's time, you know?" -S.H.