

## Confabulation

**Title:** An English lecturer, a palliative care practitioner and an absent poet have a confabulation

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**Biographies:**

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**Abstract:**

The possibilities for developing the poet Douglas Dunn's archive (which includes the drafts and manuscripts for his collection *Elegies*, dealing with the terminal illness and death of the poet's wife from cancer), for therapeutic benefit are explored by an English lecturer (CJ) and a palliative care practitioner (CM). This has led us to explore the potential benefit of this resource for health practitioners working with those affected by cancer and other life-limiting conditions.

This paper offers a 'written conversation' (an acknowledged oxymoron of genre) about working with the themes of death and loss: a conversation which includes Douglas Dunn, who was not actually there. We reflect on the value of this 'confabulation' as methodological inquiry, and its potential influence on practice. Thus, an example of 'creative writing' (the confabulation) becomes a piece of research into methodology regarding the use of 'creative writing' resources (the poetry archive) in palliative healthcare.

**Keywords:** cancer; collaborative writing; dying, death and bereavement; Douglas Dunn; literary archives; palliative care; poetry; therapeutic writing.

## **An English lecturer, a palliative care practitioner and an absent poet have a confabulation**

### **How to meet around these drafts...**

...fragments, erasures and cancellations and make something coherent and whole? We are three. From different backgrounds, training, culture and personal history: an Anglo-Welsh academic of medieval English poetry and frustrated performer, shipwrecked on the shores of Fife far longer than he expected; a Scottish, humanistic, NHS palliative care practitioner, prone to stomps and rages about what “they” are doing to our National Health Service, but is naturally awkwardly private; and a purse-lipped, west-coast poet of the post-Larkin generation, recalcitrant in temper, reluctant about the ‘over-sharing’ of emotion, probably suspicious about our project, and in one sense absent from it in person, although in another also the very ground and fabric of it.

Our agreed question was “Might this archive have any use beyond the academy?” Yet we soon realized our understanding of the word ‘research’ can mean several different things within our respective fields, as well as to each other. Two of us (Chris and Catriona) understand collaborative writing as a way of investigating such differences in background and discipline, of foregrounding potential rifts of misunderstanding and mutual incomprehension, and attempting to bridge them - to turn difference into complementary research strengths, rather than leaving them as fault-lines (Reed & Speedy, 2011, p. 111). One of us (Douglas) probably regards such a method of self-knowledge as ‘touchy-feely’ and indulgent, but Chris speaks for him here, even as he speaks about him. Nevertheless, Chris likes to imagine Douglas mocking him somewhat, if only to keep him honest. Catriona and Chris come from different countries, both literally and figuratively. We teach in different classrooms. We saw this opportunity to make a co-written ‘assemblage’ (Wyatt, Gale, Gannon & Davies, 2011, p. 4-5) as a way to meet at the border of our two territories, to dismantle passport control, and to open our homelands to each other.

We take it as a by-now given of the evolving field of collaborative writing (which is already departing from its parent discipline of narrative inquiry?) that the reification of the subject as a privileged point (starting or end) is to be resisted, that the resulting writing should be a step into the spaces between - a becoming, not a being - nomadic and rhizomatic (Deleuze & Guattari 1988, p. 21; Reed & Speedy, 2011, p.107-8), and an attempt to ‘get free of oneself’ (St Pierre, 1997, p. 405). We wonder about this as an actual realizable possibility, preferring to think of our experience as an opening up of our subject positions to each other, rather than seeking to leave them both behind. Here, in some semblance of a beginning, we wish only to point out that any journey, even if it is away from pointillism and linearity, must acknowledge its starting point if it is to keep itself honest. And so, where are we? Or where were we? Or...

**...from where have we always already been departing?**

Chris: In some senses my work with the Dunn archive<sup>1</sup> could not be more linear. I carry out textual research with the manuscript and typescript drafts of *Elegies*, a volume of Douglas's poems concerned with the death of his wife from cancer. My research involves comparative analysis of each poem in different states of its composition, found within notebooks and on loose leaf pages, in order to build up a picture of the process of composition, from first draft to published poem, or to point of abandonment. I say this work could not be more linear – and in the sense that it aims to plot the journey of a poem from A to B, that is true. In another sense though, it is quite 'open-field', concerned not with the final state or destination of the text, but with writing as process, with the text and its attendant avant-textes as nomadic, messy, unfinished and unfinishable. In the archive we see Douglas building a first-person, lyric persona, what MacLure would call 'the humanist voice': 'The humanist voice seems to emanate from a subject who knows who she is, says what she means and means what she says. It is a well-intentioned, well-modulated voice that speaks for/from an intact self, or a self who is seeking to restore its intactness, who hopes for redemption or at least reconciliation.' (MacLure, 2009, p. 104) Yet, at the same time that voice is evident only in provisional fragments – its fictionality laid bare in the workshop of its construction. I work not with poems, but with 'becoming-poems'.

Catrina: My work concerns supporting parents and carers preparing themselves and their children for parental death, and subsequent bereavement. In the process of this I may come to know a patient and their partner very well prior to the death, so that I too feel deep sadness following the death. On other occasions, when the disease progresses with unexpected rapidity, I only meet a deeply shocked partner at the point of death or immediately following it.

Storytelling is recognised as a major strategy used by families to make sense of grief (Nadeau, 1997, 2006), and women and men who would never have imagined attending a support group, meet together in our local Maggie's Centre,<sup>2</sup> because, even with the practical and emotional support of parents and siblings, they feel nobody really 'gets' it. It can be a relief to tell the story with people who honestly do. The use of poetry as a medium with healing potential has been recognised in palliative care for some time (Berger, 1988; Downie 1994): such expression may facilitate the recognition of personal experience, the language for which has hitherto proved elusive. Thus the reading and writing of poetry may be a way of offering spiritual care (Robinson 2004; Gordon, Kelly & Mitchell 2011), opportunities for personal understanding (Bolton 1999; Pennebaker, 1990, 2000, 2004, Jurecic 2012), or contribute to the process of 're-narrativising one's life' in the light of altered external circumstances (Neimeyer 2006; Neimeyer et al, 2006). This may be more accessible to some people at particular times in their life. *Elegies*, belongs to the category of literature I might feel comfortable offering someone who has already shared a love of poetry, or who articulates a need to find something which expresses the layered, inexplicable and contradictory depths of complex human emotion which may arrive unbidden as a response to

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<sup>1</sup> St Andrews, University Library Special Collections, ms 38640.

<sup>2</sup> Maggie's Centres were developed initially in Scotland, attached to cancer centres to provide support for people affected by cancer, their families, carers and friends.

profound experience. Thus it can sometimes be useful with clients struggling to express their experience, or feeling alone and misunderstood in their grief.

Dying of cancer is generally a difficult process, with emphasis on minimising, and often hiding, the unpleasant symptoms and shocking impact of bodily function failures for all involved (Lawton, 1998). Yet, what is so exceptional about this work is the daily witnessing of acts of the most profound tenderness: breath-taking expressions and gestures of love, also usually regarded as private behaviour, but here simply offered, in front of another human being, as Douglas does.

### **A confabulation**

Chris: I remember my first encounter with the Dunn archive quite clearly. Shortly after our library had acquired the papers I booked a place in the basement reading room of Special Collections, thinking I'd have a quick browse and get back promptly to a pile of marking on my desk:

*Lifting a red, hard-back A4 unruled notebook out of the box-file crammed with typescript and manuscript drafts, it dawns on me that I am holding the birth-text of Elegies in my hands. Drawing back the cover, neat handwriting confronts me - the kind taught to a generation schooled to take care with fountain pens, and to curb and channel the messiness of unruly black ink into beautiful, blot-free calligraphy. It reminds me of my PhD supervisor's handwriting. My hands feel clumsy in comparison as I turn the leaves. There is a dignity in the self-disciplined page markings, which I know to be in direct contrast to the personal chaos of the lived situation that they inscribe. I keep thinking of how the ink marks, unlike printed fonts, bear witness to the physical presence of Douglas's body to the same page I am touching. Separated by time and geographic space, we are both joined here at the page surface. Here and there, among the many broken starts, crossings out, changes of mind, and abandoned poems I spot the odd fragment of one of the published poems, like familiar faces glimpsed in a crowd.*

*I look up at the clock on the reading room wall, and suddenly see that more than an hour has passed, when I had only intended to be here for thirty minutes. It's mid-semester and there is other work to prepare. I also realize that a tear has run down my nose and is in danger of falling on the notebook. This would not be good conservation practice. I'm concerned too that the skin-headed, string-vest-and-kilt-wearing reader opposite me, an independent researcher, whom I know to be midway through an extended project on medieval witchcraft, and whose command of medieval Latin sources I find quite intimidating, might see me becoming unprofessionally emotional on the other side of the reading desk.*

*More importantly I realize in those moments of losing myself that this notebook is one of the most astonishing literary artefacts I have been privileged to handle. I have to return, to read more of it, and try to find a way of working with it that will allow it to*

*affect readers who do not enjoy the same ease of access to it that I do. The notebook has converted me.*

Catriona: I don't think it had ever occurred to me that there might be a set of unseen handwritten, almost tear-splattered notebooks behind my Faber paperback. That there was a process in the writing, yes; but not that I would ever come to witness the messy text left as a footprint. My first silent encounter with the 'Elegies notebook', which I came to regard as a book-behind-the-book, silenced me. Being permitted to see Dunn's personal working through was intimate and visceral, not least because it connects emotional responses and ideas by real ink in an individual and pleasing script, forgotten in these times of Calibri font, size 11. In one sense, it was a meeting with the author in his past. In another sense it feels like eavesdropping: intruding on private words from Dunn to his beloved wife; spying on mourning concealed in a private journal. The notebooks narrate a grief, writing through mourning, and survival. I suspect this might also have felt like a form of betrayal. To somehow manage, is to prove one can go on without the attachment, and to have weathered the despair. In the notebooks, mourning may lie as much in the gaps between the writing and the pages. I imagine days where nothing is written spent in pacing and sorrow; that terrible, cloying, yearning preparing itself to be voiced.

To witness this is also a privilege, made pleasurable in the sharing of small discoveries, like this stanza in his notebook, which brings us into the space of the continuing bond (Klass, Silverman & Nickman, 1996) between the living poet and his wife, Lesley;

Douglas:     *I hear salt, sugar, rice and lentils move  
                  Among their grains, the ant-step of a hair  
                  In the window-draught.  
                  These sounds compose her presence now.*<sup>3</sup>

Chris: A small discovery Douglas makes in his unpublished notebook, but does not share: that the memory of Lesley seems not recalled, but overheard in the suddenly audible sounds of the usually mute, micro-world of the inanimate. Her memory not the object and effect of Douglas's grief, but an actor in its/her own right. *Seems* overheard. But is actually 'composed' ('constructed' in Foucauldian terms: Foucault, 1989, p. 28) in and through words. He understands entirely in this choice of word the ethical dilemma of writing that he cannot keep Lesley in language without also making her in language. (Josselson, 1996) Even as he writes Lesley, he also writes her up: the poet's dilemma scarcely different from the ethnographer's dilemma. (Atkinson, 1990, p. 61) These lines come from an unpublished draft towards the poem that became 'Reincarnations'. But the lines were abandoned, were not published, remained private. Until we place them here on the page, presuming to 'let Douglas speak for himself', even as we editorially control a voice originally meant only for himself to hear.

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<sup>3</sup> St Andrews, University Library Special Collections, ms38640/2/42, p. 148.

Catriona: What does it mean to select and reconstruct Douglas' own intentionally private process into a fictional collaboration? We have received legal permission to write about Douglas, and we have presumed a right to extend this to Lesley. I have never met him. And never can meet her. Douglas' journals command a certain type of presence. Through them you "fell in love again" with Douglas' poems. I didn't want to meet Douglas when the opportunity finally arose, in case I fell out of love. I wonder if he ever considered that snippets might be cut and pasted from this archive into a document authored by others, one of whom is not a scholar. It is clear from his writings that he sees poetry partly as a form of self disclosure, and abhors being misunderstood and misinterpreted: a reaction not in the exclusive domain of the artist! Yet here I am, reading his private ponderings and talking and writing about him behind his back (Josselson, 1996). In some dimension, Douglas has become a research participant, consenting to any use of an intimate part of his life story. Josselson (1996) regards the notion of informed consent as an oxymoron because participants are unlikely to fully know what they are consenting to in advance, and moreover are unable to foresee the impact of reading in print what has been written by someone else about themselves. Douglas is not naïve as a subject, but still this is challenging ethically because I think the adaptation of his work for bereavement support, and this type of writing, to be outwith his anticipated use of the archive. Thus the emotional consequences for him of reading this are unpredictable. The result is that I feel a debt to a person I do not know, and a duty to be reflective and respectful whatever that means in his absence.

Douglas: *writing poems exposes you to yourself, and to others. The gall of writing poetry arises from being misunderstood and being characterised by strangers. Obviously the danger's greater when what you write touches or draws from the personal life, or reflects a society like ours, which is divided and rancorous.*<sup>4</sup>

Chris: Ethical concerns around revealing archival secrets usually arise only after the death of the author (literal, not Barthesian), but our author is not dead! Indeed, in his teaching he would give students permission to essay such 'characterisation', despite the anxiety he expresses in the note above about being misunderstood. (Douglas was a senior colleague of mine for a few years, here at St Andrews.) Even though the so-called 'turn from the author' of high literary theory has now become a near orthodoxy, we often find that students still arrive at university with a very intentionalist view of literature: 'yes, but is that what he really meant when he wrote it?' they often want to know. Douglas, I remember (or do I compose?) would give lectures to our first year in which he would anecdotalise his experiences of reading literary criticism about his own work that would 'find' (compose) meanings which he himself had never imagined at the time of writing, but which nevertheless, on reflection, he would sometimes find convincing: 'yes, in a way the poem was about that too' he would admit. I find it encouraging to encounter two contradictory positions to the same problem within the same self (albeit at different moments in time). It seems very human.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., ms38640/2/45, p. 45.

A slightly different ethical issue that I observe arising in a number of different ways throughout this confab is also to do with voice, control and editorial authority. I'm aware that I have edited my contributions several times, revising false starts, and removing the 'content-less' discourse markers of a real conversation; in that sense my writing about the drafts and manuscripts is at odds with their own spontaneity and contingency! Even as an oxymoronic 'written conversation', this piece is, in a sense, a lie. As a 'genetic' critic it is very easy to offer a convincing explanation based on formal and aesthetic grounds for changes made during the composition of a text that may, in fact, have due to accident or chance. The temptation to create a narrative that coerces acceptance and participation is strong, and my anxiety about such issues as I work on the Dunn papers seems to chime with that which you have privately expressed to me about healthcare workers rushing clients into well-intentioned, but nevertheless pre-constructed narratives of grief. The exercise of collaborative writing itself is in part a defence against this, for the very simple reason that I cannot predict what you will write. Some of the processes and attendant issues foregrounded by our confab are analogous to what we see in the archive. Dunn is concerned not to misrepresent Lesley, and he has to work collaboratively with editors. Confabulating as inquiry therefore improves my understanding of the material; I am involved in producing a socialized text, not just in analysing one. And while we can only ever select (and so control) Dunn's voice from the material in the archive, if we do so carefully, we can also ensure that Dunn will 'talk back' at us, as he does sometimes on the subject of writing as therapeutic (although he also self-contradicts). We should allow its resistance to stand.

Catriona: I have to confess that the idea that there might be one reading or interpretation of a narrative is not seductive only to students. When working with families, I try to make a coherent story of the patient or family I am trying to support. We may call this "doing an assessment", but it involves a particular kind of reading of the situation and interpreting it. That interpretation then involves a re-writing of the story we have gathered together into medical jargon, and into our own language in oh-so-many subtle and not so subtle ways. Often we don't even notice that we have constructed a 'confabulation', which once written becomes the accepted version of events. So, in my world, what the original author meant *is* very important - and its intended form is precisely what we need to try not to lose sight of. Dunn's qualitative inquiry, in some ways a collaboration with his deceased wife, reminds us that the individual's own interpretation of his/her story does not need to be generalized in order to conform to dominant theories of bereavement. Dunn himself questions the relationship of the general to the particular as his punning phrase 'the crippledom<sup>5</sup> of loss' tells.

Douglas: *As a widower whose wife died of cancer at 37, I might be expected to know something both of grief and of the fears and fortitude of the dying. Were I vulnerable to habits of generalizing, I might make such claims; but death is too big a subject, the sharing of love and life too particular and idiosyncratic to risk big statements of allegedly acquired wisdom in the context of personal experience... or a specific candour, both of which would be*

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<sup>5</sup> St Andrews University is located in the Kingdom of Fife.



*fictional, one ponderously so, the other a garrulous shambles dejectedly blowing the cover of reticence. One learns a great deal in the crippledom of loss, or one thinks one does.*<sup>6</sup>

Chris: I admire that last qualification - the constant shying away from assuming a privileged position of knowledge. Yet it is in the particulars and the personal idiosyncrasies he composes that a shared knowing of human loss is ventured, often successfully. I remember looking together at a rough draft of 'Thirteen Steps and the Thirteenth of March'. (Dunn 1985, 13-14) You commented on that poem's portrayal of a middle-aged man feeling locked out of the circle of female friends and carers forming around his dying wife, and of the complicated emotional response that can arise around the performing of domestic roles traditionally associated with 'woman's work'. You recognised those feelings in men that you meet at work, although, you said, those men are rarely able to articulate them as Douglas does in that poem. I don't naturally think like this about poems and that's a problem. English Studies has become rather divorced from what non-specialist, or non-professional readers do with books. We're divorced from what literature is *for* outside universities and that means that we've narrowed the importance of our discipline unnecessarily. Reading and writing still matter enormously to many people who never study it formally. And that mattering, in the case of a book of poems like *Elegies*, does include asking questions about the authorial experience. Douglas's own self-contesting attitude to being read (and to writing as therapeutic, come to that) models for us the possibility that our work can contain and embody author-centred, as well as author-de-centred attitudes at the same time.

Writing that, I'm struck by the interesting paradox that while, of the two of us, I'm the one who knew and knows Douglas personally, I'm also the one most used to avoiding talking about him (the living, breathing human) in my writing and teaching. You, on the other hand, are the one who has never met Douglas, and you're also the one of us whose approach leads you directly into the personal, lived experiences of the man.

Catriona:

*I am sitting in Maggies, facilitating the parents group. I am sitting next to Paul whose wife died some months ago of melanoma. Paul mentions that he did look at Elegies after our last meeting. We had been talking about books because Rebecca mentioned that she had just finished reading Natascha McElhone's 'After you'. "It was a bit disjointed" she said, "But I knew what she meant". I had asked about poetry. Nobody had read any, but June remembered John Hannah reading 'Stop the clocks' in 'Four weddings and a funeral'. Everybody vehemently agreed that, just like that bereaved partner, they hadn't been able to believe that the world just kept going on as if nothing had happened. I placed Dunn's book on the coffee table before I left.*

*Paul says "I only read one, just the page the book opened at. It was called 'Kaleidoscope'." I had to get out to the car quick so that people out there wouldn't see me crying". His tears course now, but he is not uncomfortable. He tightens his mouth*

<sup>6</sup> St Andrews, University Library Special Collections, ms38640/2/45.

<sup>7</sup> Dunn 1985, p. 20.

*trying to get back control. In the stillness of our waiting, it feels like we all lean towards him. "It was just that line" he struggles to continue "about offering my skin". I ask if I should read it out to everyone and he nods. I read the whole poem which recalls the up and down the stairs of nursing a dying loved one at home. I slow slightly at the line 'My hands become a tray/ Offering me, my flesh, my soul, my skin'. Paul nods. "I'd have done anything to take the pain off of her. I remember thinking I wanted to rip off my skin and give her it. I know it's daft, but I'd have done it if I could".*

Douglas: *I don't value the writing of poetry as therapeutic, except, perhaps, as meagre and coincidental. How therapeutic it might be to read depends, I suppose, on your mood and the effect on it of what's being read. I've read poems that added to my fortitude, and poems that illuminated my feelings.*<sup>8</sup>

Chris: If therapeutic means 'comforting', then I resolutely agree; writing is not necessarily therapeutic at all. But therapy is more often challenging and discomfoting. Healing can involve substances that are painful and toxic. I found myself a little out of my comfort zone in following your suggestion, Catriona, that I begin our confabulation with a personal 'testimony' of my first encounter with the Dunn papers. And I found myself *very much* out of my comfort zone when our editors' suggested that I re-write that testimony to sound more like a short story (which involved a switch from past tense to narrative present); it's not how I normally write about my primary materials! Elsewhere you encouraged me to write in the first person instead of the third – almost the exact opposite change that Dunn performs on his writing during the course of the drafting process, in fact. In getting me to write such a piece, I began to have the suspicion that perhaps you were working with me (and even 'on' me) in a manner similar to that in which you work with your clients, whom you encourage to talk about their story: to find out, as it were, how people arrived and what they're carrying with them.

And that really foregrounds the biggest methodological difference between us, the sense in which our native lands are foreign to one another. For my disciplinary praxis encourages me to avoid the most directly personalized of responses to poetry, and to display caution when it comes to speculation about authorial intention. Your practice positively depends on the former, and when you use literature in your work, does not make the latter some kind of taboo.

Catriona: except, of course, that when I encourage you to tell your story, I am also prepared to share mine. When I encourage a patient it is, very largely, a one way street; I don't tell mine because it's not my time for that. Within the spaces you and I are confabulating, we bring other spaces. For me that includes my sense of frequently being stranded: between alive and dead, partnered and single, mothered and motherless; between the wordless thought and the inexpressible metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson 1981, Rosenblatt 1983, Nadeau 2006), and in the gap between a pre-existing, but superseded life narrative, and the reality of change, between loss- orientated and restoration- orientated grieving (Stroebe, Stroebe & Schut

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<sup>8</sup> St Andrews, University Library Special Collections, ms38640/2/45, p. 44.

2001). There is always a starting point for the relationship (when I meet the family), and an ending point (when we stop meeting), but those points are a joining together of ongoing journeys and processes, sometimes meandering sometimes crashing. Patient, family and I always meet at a certain time and context, the work always on the threshold (Mazzei & Jackson 2012) of continual evolution. Of course this is true of any counselling, but facing dying brings the business of being alive into high relief. Even when one or other of us wish to rest in certainty (and I often do for the sake of a little peace), the process of leaving our world, leaves that world in chaos. So being nomadic, always becoming and finding it hard to simply be, in my working world is not an aspiration but something from which I seek relief.

*I am sitting beside the hospice bed of a man (let's call him Davey) as he is dying. I have known Davey for some months and I know a great deal about him. He has told me that he doesn't care about dying, but he does care that he is leaving behind his son, and his son's drug addiction, which he has stated, is worse than death. I know he is aware of my arrival, as he lies completely alone, because when I say my name and take his hand he grips it back. And so, since I have some "not doing anything" time, and he has nobody to be with him, I sit for a while. How can I accurately describe what it is like to sit with Davey, how will I be able to describe it later in his medical notes? Every minute counts because it is one nearer to the last. What I say, how we hold hands, what eye contact there is between us as we are together, him leaving, me staying. The small moving around together in the silence we inhabit.*

Of course every metaphor both illuminates and conceals (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Nadeau, 2006). So this nomadic space that I claim to inhabit, and at times share with those far more overtly close to dying than I am, obscures the anchors and stabilities which I regularly seek. "Any idea how long he's got?" I ask the palliative care consultant "twenty four hours or longer?" I ask even whilst I know the answer is "I don't know", so we make a best guess; hours to days we say until we are sure it might just be hours. Attempting to sit, simply, but fully present, with profound powerlessness in the face of dying is phenomenally difficult (Lair, 1996; Schmid, 2001; Katz & Johnson, 2006), and there is often no convenient gap in which to reflect, erase, or restate.

And there we have the problem. All practitioners are extolled to be up to date with current research, to make decisions based on the findings of those whose business it is to understand how we come to know, and to then translate what is known into doing, in the form of empirically informed evidence based guidelines and quality standards (NICE).<sup>9</sup> Those of us at the practitioner end are a target audience for social science and health inquiry (van Maanen 2006) and further, are deeply impacted by what scholars argue knowledge to be. So, how does the process of collaborative writing help me to sit next to Davey, where nothing very much seems to be being done and where the silences are data? (Speedy, 2013) Re-visiting this by practising writing might mean the next time I am 'not doing', I can be more open to the becoming. Writing can be about trying to make some sense out of chaotic experience, not to ship-shape it (Speedy, 2013), but to open it out, in itself a struggle, and always with the

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<sup>9</sup>[http://www.nice.org.uk/aboutnice/whatwedo/what\\_we\\_do.jsp](http://www.nice.org.uk/aboutnice/whatwedo/what_we_do.jsp) accessed 17.03.2013

knowledge that even as we construct a sentence we risk losing something greater than it (Lieblich, 2013). Even here, trying to write through and between junctures, opening out can be an aspiration, but that, in itself, may not be illuminative when the words don't quite reach and make meaning (Van Maanen, 2002). Thus sometimes writing, like sitting with not knowing, in the 'dark' might be the appropriate 'intervention'.

Chris: That risk reminds me of a discarded fragment of Douglas's:

*Two or three days married (but hear that 'or':  
I've lost a youthful day of her)  
We touched down in America*<sup>10</sup>

The drafts in the archive constantly obsess over what the writer keeps losing of Lesley even as he attempts to memorialize and keep her in language. Writing is always as much a giving up and a giving away as it is a hanging on to something: forgetting as well as remembering. But choosing what to forget more than failing to recall. That's almost perfectly emblemized by the fact that this fragment, too, is eventually given up and let go, rather than published.

It seems to me that your last piece both reveals and masks an obstacle you wish to place in the path of our wandering. As methodological enquiry into itself collaborative writing has clear benefits. On the other hand, if writing-as-a-way-of-knowing is the object of enquiry as well as the method, the inbuilt circularity is obvious. Are you asking whether linearity is always to be thought undesirable (almost an orthodoxy of contemporary theoretical thought)? To where might this confabulation lead beyond and outwith itself? You are not a theoretical researcher, but a practice-led one. What can collaborative writing effect in the world beyond itself? Your asking of that question seems simultaneous with one possible answer. But I am also intrigued that your answer involves silence. Something to which, except in leaving pages blank, writing (collaborative or otherwise) is not well suited.

Douglas: *A blank page can seem like a friend.*<sup>11</sup>

[Pause. Wait.]

*'Translation'*  
*The wind in the leaves sings of sadness*  
*In this and in every country.*  
*A thousand miles away,*  
*Men and women are trying to decode*  
*A flutter of poetry as they walk*  
*Among their emotions.*  
*It is the verse of leaves rattling;*  
*It is the poetry of being neutral.*

<sup>10</sup> St Andrews, University Library Special Collections, ms38640/2/41, p. 81.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., ms3860/2/42, p. 113.

*Something has persuaded me  
The world is bigger than its maps.*<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Unpublished poem, loose leaf. Ibid., ms38640/1/6/59.

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