

# The Budget is in. And we are out.

From our start in 2011 we've had Australian Government support. That has ended. As a not-for-profit service with the aim to better inform the community, we now turn to you. Please make a tax deductible donation to secure The Conversation.

[Make a donation](#)



Academic rigour, journalistic flair

[Arts + Culture](#) [Business + Economy](#) [Education](#) [Environment + Energy](#) [Health + Medicine](#) [Politics + Society](#) [Science + Technology](#) [UK](#)

[Election](#)

[Follow Topics](#) [Religion + Mythology](#) [On playwriting](#) [Arts reviews](#) [The "Dreamtime" series](#) [Creativity series](#) [Books](#) [Visual art](#) [Morality series](#)

6 January 2015, 6.24am AEDT

## An experiment in collaborative writing: day ten

### AUTHORS



#### Marguerite Johnson

Associate Professor of Ancient History and Classical Languages at University of Newcastle



#### Camilla Nelson

Senior Lecturer in Media and Communications at University of Notre Dame Australia



#### Chris Rodley

PhD candidate in Digital Cultures at University of Sydney



#### Claire Corbett

Writer and PhD candidate, Writing & Society, at University of Western Sydney



#### Dallas J Baker

Adjunct Fellow at Southern Cross University



#### Donna Hancox

Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing & Literary Studies at Queensland University of Technology

#### Jane Messer

Senior Lecturer in Creative



Many hands have helped author The Conversation's first collaborative writing experiment. hawkeexpress/Flickr

*We're starting 2015 with an experiment in collaborative creative writing. What happens when you ask ten academics to write a story together? Taking our cue from the [Exquisite Cadaver](#) game played by Surrealist artists and poets in the 1930s, we've asked our authors to contribute to a story in progress. We gave them free rein: no restrictions on style or genre. Just file 300 words that continues the story.*

### REPUBLISH THIS ARTICLE

We believe in the free flow of information. We use a [Creative Commons Attribution NoDerivatives](#) license, so you can republish our articles for free, online or in print.



Writing at Macquarie University



**Julian Meyrick**  
Professor of Creative Arts at Flinders University



**Michelle Smith**  
Research fellow in English Literature at Deakin University



**Nike Sulway**  
Lecturer in Creative Writing at University of Southern Queensland

*Marguerite Johnson, a classicist, gamely volunteered to start the experiment, followed by novelist Claire Corbett, creative writing lecturer Donna Hancox and digital cultures researcher Chris Rodley. Our literature columnist Michelle Smith came next, then theatre director Julian Meyrick and creative writing scholars Nike Sulway and Dallas Baker. Chapter nine was from novelist Camilla Nelson and today's final instalment is from creative writing lecturer Jane Messer.*

## One

The exquisite corpse floated. The golden head bobbed as the water moved beneath it. Blood seeped from its chest.

The exquisite corpse was a man minutes ago. He had swum with his mate. Bathed in the heat. Caressed by the coolness. Blessed by the gods.

He stared at it. Naked and without its dog tags. The body never looked as beautiful alive as it did dead.

The exquisite corpse is composed. Adjective, noun, verb, adverb. Bloody body sinks swiftly. Adjective, noun, verb, adverb. Corrupted corpse falls fast. Sonnets printed. Songs penned. And cut-up scraps. To make sense of the senseless.

The exquisite corpse was foreseen by the blind bard. Blasted amid the catastrophes on Troy's plains. Once past. Once future. He knew of the man who screamed to the heavens and shook the earth. He warned of his return. He knew of the man who now held the cadaver and kissed its lips.

The exquisite corpse began to sink. Air in the lungs gave way to water. It rolled. Faced the sand. Looked blindly for the portal on the ocean floor. That which leads to Hades.

The exquisite corpse is bathed in moonlight, glorious. The ghosts of corpses past and present swim up to greet him. Surrounded now by thousands like him. Death, in glory and in vain.

Perpetual cycles of bloodshed. Act one: one hero mourns, keening and wailing through the night. Act two: another returns to the trenches.

Keep calm and carry on.

The exquisite corpse drifts out to sea with the dawn. Mourning

Republish

### SHARE

<input type="checkbox"/>	Email	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Twitter	106
<input type="checkbox"/>	Facebook	5
<input type="checkbox"/>	LinkedIn	0

56 Comments

Print

### TAGS

[Fiction](#), [Creative writing](#), [Creativity series](#)

### ARTICLES BY THESE AUTHORS

15 May 2015

[The arts minister has wrenched our culture away from the artists](#)

12 May 2015

[Australian plays: how to persuade a nation to question its own soul?](#)

1 May 2015

[Playwriting doesn't get better or worse – but it does evolve](#)

15 April 2015

[We can't get those two hours back – drama works as time unfolds](#)

13 April 2015

[Should authors Rushdie to judgment as book reviewers?](#)

### RELATED ARTICLES

### DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors do not work for, consult to, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article. They also have no relevant affiliations.



THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

Provides funding as a [Member of The Conversation AU](#).  
[sydney.edu.au](http://sydney.edu.au)



Provides funding as a [Member of The Conversation AU](#).  
[qut.edu.au](http://qut.edu.au)



Provides funding as a [Member](#) of The Conversation AU. [deakin.edu.au](http://deakin.edu.au)

waits. Waits for the news to be told in a faraway land. Tea and sympathy in the kitchen. Tears at the six o'clock swill.

The exquisite corpse becomes iconic. Progeny from faraway come in droves. They pour regenerative ales to cleanse the earth. To honour the fallen. To claim the land and proclaim to all: "The exquisite corpse shall drink new wine".

*First instalment by Marguerite Johnson.*



Provides funding as a [Member](#) of The Conversation AU. [flinders.edu.au](http://flinders.edu.au)

## Two

But my task is not to be dazzled by the exquisite corpse.

My task is not be drunk on new wine or old ale.

My task is to search the steep sandstone under the white sun. My task is to explore the trenches, to find tin plates here and bayonets there.

My task is to swim the green waters, to duck my head under and see what he saw, what they all saw on the other side of the world, that moment of peace under the transparent skin, pierced by shells fizzing down into the gloom, the crump and thud of high energy explosives muffled by the weight of sea.

My task, like the blind bard's, is to sing, Muse, of the rage of Achilles. But who is this Achilles? This new Achilles, the one we never knew. My task is to find him, to reconstruct all that his exquisite corpse cannot tell me. To find the objects and possessions that speak louder than his drifting naked body: uniform, rifle, knife, a letter from a sweetheart, a sister, a mother, a souvenir, a naughty postcard, a tile of hard biscuit. Sing, Muse, tell us what these objects say. Make me a singer for the Dead.

There is a thing that does not fit. I am looking for that object. This photograph. This newspaper clipping with the headline: Pathetic Domestic Tragedy.

Enlistment papers that say: Hair: Gold. Eyes: Brown. Complexion: Half-caste.

And in that parcel of possessions sent home, among the handkerchiefs and letters: four books. One is the Bible. Three are not. I turn them over, rub the sand and dirt away from

Fictional seven-party politics: who would win a battle of the best on-screen leaders?

Who needs teachers when computers can mark exams?

Creativity in the workplace: what we know and what we do

The creative process is more than one giant leap for humankind



Provides funding as a [Member](#) of The Conversation AU. [newcastle.edu.au](http://newcastle.edu.au)



Provides funding as a [Member](#) of The Conversation AU. [nd.edu.au](http://nd.edu.au)



Provides funding as a [Member](#) of The Conversation AU.

[usq.edu.au](http://usq.edu.au)



Provides funding as a [Member](#) of  
The Conversation AU.  
[uws.edu.au](http://uws.edu.au)

their jackets. What are their titles? What did they mean to him, three he brought from Westralia, one souvenired from Egypt?

Shall I tell his story, the story of one man?

*Second instalment by Claire Corbett.*

## Three

The book outlived him, they always do.

It is given by a woman, really a girl, with faraway eyes and a sharp wit. They both know she will not wait for him. In a corner of a crowded office she is already forgetting him while she hands over a book poems by W B Yeats. The possibility of them, however, is in the pages of the book that is wrapped in brown paper smudged with sweat from her hands. The first time they'd spoken, in the lunchroom after weeks of smiles and heavy glances, she rested one of those hands on his arm. Firmly and for a long moment. Anchoring him finally and it seemed that perhaps he'd found someone. But that hope is gone now. The present slipping immediately into a memory, with only the book remaining to tell their story.

This boy on borrowed time. Who both knows and can not know that death hums around him already while receiving cards and well wishes on his last day at work before shipping out to fight in a country he didn't know existed six months before. To fight for a country that barely acknowledges him but is happy for him to die for it. His corpse hovering like a shadow behind him, getting ready, as he stands uncertainly in the middle of an office watching a girl and a life that may have made him happy for while sway away. Only the heft of the book in his hands feeling real.

He flicks through the pages, line after line blurring into each other until he see the words:

*A shape with lion body and the head of a man  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun.*

The future opens up before him like a gaping hole.

*Third instalment by Donna Hancox.*

### DEAKIN UNIVERSITY JOBS

[Post Doctoral Research Fellow](#)

[Senior Lecturer or Lecturer in Nutrition and Dietetics](#)

[Lecturer in Planning](#)

[MORE JOBS](#)

### MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY JOBS

[Lecturer Or Senior Lecturer, Health Professions](#)

[Research Fellow](#)

[Project Coordinator](#)

[Professor In Security Studies and Head of Department](#)

[Executive Assistant To The CIO](#)

[MORE JOBS](#)

### UPCOMING EVENTS

[VIVID IDEAS-David Raskin Lecture: Hiroshi Sugimoto's inhuman photographs — Camperdown, New South Wales](#)

[VIVID IDEAS-The Future of Music: how interactive technologies are changing music experience — Chippendale, New South Wales](#)

[VIVID IDEAS-The Obesity Epidemic: Can Design Help? — Camperdown, New South Wales](#)

[Democracy Futures: Beyond Lifestyle Politics in a Time of Crisis?: Comparing Young Peoples' Issue Agendas and Views of Inequality — Camperdown , New South Wales](#)

[VIVID IDEAS-I'm Not Racist, But...](#)

[MORE EVENTS](#)

## Four

The next book in the neat pile, after the Bible and the volume of Yeats, is *Stories from Herodotus* by Rev. Alfred J. Church (author of *Stories from Homer, &c.*). Pasted on the flyleaf is a bookplate with an inscription that reads “Prize for Good Conduct and General Proficiency”. He did not, strictly speaking, deserve to win, for although his Conduct was typically Good, his General Proficiency was not at the standard of two or three of the others, and for this reason he is visibly surprised when his name is called. But after all the boy has suffered, the master thinks to himself, he deserves some encouragement.

Years later, he passes his old pupil walking down Adelaide Terrace and his face breaks with joy at the recognition. They go to a tea room and share a currant cake as the boy, his past ordeals gone like presents on Christmas morning, tells him the book is his proudest possession, and that, despite his aversion to the classics, he has read it from cover to cover, many times.

“It’s coming with me to the front,” he says, and quotes Dienekes’ boast of how, if the Medes blotted out the sun with their arrows, he would merrily fight in the shade. The master joins his game of dressing up the new war in the clothes of old ones, and they speak of Marathon and Miletus and the flight of Artabazus until the cake is finished and it’s time to wipe his moustache and wish him well on his glorious adventure. And in his bunk on the ship, the boy reads of how “great reward is, in general, gained by the running of great risks” and smiles, not knowing that Herodotus, the Father of Lies, was wrong about most things, and especially wrong about this.

*Fourth instalment by Chris Rodley.*

## Five

The final book was a gift from his mother. She had slipped coins from his father’s trouser pocket for months, burying them in her dresser drawer, behind costume jewellery that she never had the occasion to wear. It was a volume of Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tales illustrated with sombre watercolours. He knew that he ought to be more taken with boys’ adventures, but he wanted to relive the tragedies of the steadfast tin soldier and the little mermaid through repeated

readings. The gilt on the cover and spine had been almost entirely worn away by his clutching hands. He knew what it was to have a heart torn between two worlds but to belong to neither.

She had not said a word, but his mother was terrified that he had enlisted. She stared at the steaming kettle, focused on pouring the boiling water into the cups with determination, and then lost herself in the darkening liquid as the tea steeped. He explained that it would be good for him. It would be important for more men like him to contribute. A nod implied that she agreed it probably would be. But she really did need to clean out the pantry at some point, as she was having real trouble finding the packet of biscuits he liked.

He had asked her for a handkerchief and she gave him one of the embroidered kind she insisted was “too good” to use. It had been tainted by the stale lavender sachets that she had placed cheerfully in the drawers as a newlywed. If he pushed his nose right up to the centre fold where he’d kept the memento – part-way through the Snow Queen – he could smell her in the pages of the book. He made sure that none of the other blokes saw.

*Fifth instalment by Michelle Smith.*

## **Six**

Later, in recovery, his head full of marble, the word that takes hold of him with a fierce, inhuman heat is: back. Memory seizes up, and finding the threads of how he used to feel, when he used to feel, is a slow chipping through dull rock. Outwards, on the transport, it was a different story, the Age of Lark, peppering postcards from a foreign port reeking of ancientness.

“Water is china blue, bumboats everywhere as we disembark for nnnnnnn.” “What an adventure. Talk is we may not be going to nnnnnnn after all.” “Missing home already! Say hello to Francis and the twins”. This irenic period is unimaginably short, later simply unimaginable.

He buys: a new watch with a dark green face; a leather wallet that has pockets too small to keep anything in really; an embroidered sleeve which fits his bible nicely. He slips it into his breast pocket, where it sits awkwardly, but he feels it is the right thing to do. Later, he takes it out and fits his finger down to the first knuckle into the perfect hole punched

through the cover. Around the edges is a smear of char so delicate it might have been painted by a master.

He frowns, tunnelling back through unending blankness. Hard to believe he has a past. No postcards now, thanks. He regards the bible with an appraising eye. Swiftly, and for the first time, he opens it to the page where the sharpshooter met his match. He reads: "Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death. The righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way: but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness".

"Which one am I?" he wonders. He spreads his two hands before him, like a man contemplating a difficult dance step. But in truth he knows he does not care.

*Sixth instalment by Julian Meyrick.*

## **Seven**

Those books. To be constantly misunderstood as a paper man; a thing made almost entirely of the stories he carried with him. To be always cut and pasted. Rearranged from the parts of other stories.

His mother's stolen coins would have been put to better use bribing someone to keep him alive. Or placed beneath his tongue to pay his way across the river to where the dead wait.

Better to have been lion-headed Donestre than Dienekes, and spoken with strangers in their own tongues. Walked together on some Alexandrian frontier. And then to have consumed each companion, limb by limb, until only their head remained.

To have taken his severed head into my arms, in my post-prandial splendour, and wept.

The problem with the dead is that they know nothing. They have forgotten everything, even themselves. Even the ones who died in a war, or a siege, or their lover's arms. Who were eaten by cancer or went mad.

The problem with the dead is that they are not. You cannot speak with them. They do not listen, let alone converse. A corpse is to the lost beloved as a spoon is to the sun. You can say five thousand times to the dead: Come back, I love you. But they do not exist; they cannot hear.

Standing here, in the shade of a tree (no arrows blot out the

sun in Queensland), it is only my loss that hovers, waiting to be felt. It is only my grief that insists that he (that we) should be remembered.

I may be dead when you read this. Or I may be caught, as he is now, in the space between being alive and being dead. No matter. If I am dead, then I am no longer mourning him, or you, or myself, or any of the others.

*Seventh instalment by Nike Sulway.*

## **Eight**

How to tell this boy's story? How to give him back his name?

We are separated by death and distance, he and I. Me, here in my comfortable life in Queensland, and him, well, who knows where he is now, if he exists anywhere at all. He is just a silence to me. He is in the place where I am heading, the place of forgetting. In remembering him, I hope not to die into that place, where I will go unremembered. But, who is he?

My only evidence: the body and a pile of possessions left on the shore.

On the body are two wounds, both in the chest. One healed, but the scar, right over the heart, is not the white of an old wound, but pink. It had happened only weeks before death. So the boy had spent time in recovery, perhaps in a military hospital close to the front? The second wound, fatal, is like a flower blooming in the boy's chest, its petals flaps of skin, its roots plunging deep into the boy's ribcage and puncturing his lungs.

The boy's possessions were abandoned at the high water mark when the two men went in to swim, one of them to return, the other to bleed out into the cove, making a red eddy of his life that, heavier than the water around it, sank in spirals to the sandy bottom. Among the possessions, four books and a pile of clothes.

The clothes are standard issue. The dog tags missing, perhaps sunk to the bottom of the cove, or possibly taken by the other man. The one who left a bloody fingerprint on the book of fairy tales, right on the first page of *The Little Mermaid*.

Why, after watching his mate die, hit in the chest by a random shell, had he come out of the water and handled that book,

possibly taken the dog tags, definitely ripped the boy's name tags out of his clothes. (There was a smudge of blood on the inside collar of the boy's shirt, where a fragment of the name tag remained.)

Inside the books: an old movie ticket in the collection of poems; in the Stories of Herodotus the calling card of a teacher from Perth; and in the book of fairy tales two things – a handkerchief and an empty envelope. The name on the envelope, presumably the boy's, is unreadable, smudged, either by rain or the tide. It was hand-delivered, there's no stamp or address, but there is another smudge of blood on the back, where the letter writer's name is clearly written: Jack. Next to the name is a childish drawn mermaid with a love heart pierced by an arrow. Is this a reference to The Little Mermaid?

The second swimmer had removed the letter, but why? What did it reveal? Why rip the boy's name from his clothes? And what of the mermaid with the pierced heart? An unusual thing for one soldier to draw on a letter to another. Isn't The Little Mermaid a story of forbidden love?

*Eighth instalment by Dallas Baker.*

## **Nine**

I tore the page off the printer. Crumbled it, tossed the ball into the growing pile in the waste paper basket under my desk. This story was never going to work.

It was clear that I needed a new protagonist. Somebody edgy and urban – a woman named Violet with red lips and jet-black hair cut into a blunt bob.

Violet who lived large, talked big. Violet, who liked to drink; who was not the solution, but part of the problem.

I could also bring the story closer to home. Set it right here, in subtropical Queensland. Or maybe back then (in those days) when everybody was big on panic buttons, gated communities and car alarms, when men in white shoes made pots of money in cocaine and real estate. Back then (before real-time broadcast and reality television) when you never really knew.

The corpse would no longer be a military cadaver, but a maker of Big Pharma – or else, a manufacturer of plastic; a creator of deadly toxins.

They found his body on the first Tuesday in May. It came floating down the river on the day after the Brisbane floods.

They thought at first that he'd been swept off the riverbank and washed up downstream with the rest of the debris. A piece of broken pipe was caught in his trousers, with a length of garden hose. He smelled of fish.

He carried no identification, except a set of dog tags that were far too old to have belonged to him. He had a copy of the Histories of Herodotus in his pocket (or maybe, Hans Christian Anderson's The Little Mermaid with a thumbprint of blood). His Rolex watch was still ticking.

It was Violet who noticed that he wore white shoes.

I woke up my computer. Finally – I really thought this could work. I started writing, "Narrative Writing, Assignment One".

*Ninth instalment by Camilla Nelson.*

## Ten

Hi Camilla,

Thanks for submitting this assignment on behalf of your writing group. Prof. Kroll has asked me to peer review the marking for reasons of transparency and overall workload management. Apologies for getting this feedback to you a day late: I have had some urgent student matters to do with enrolment to attend to.

Could I raise a minor point before moving into the substance of my feedback: there seems to have been a mistake during the upload process to Grade Book, as the last line reads "Narrative Writing: Assignment One", and it should be included on page one as the heading with the correct assignment title, "Narrative Writing: Collaboration One".

Your group has been very fortunate to have had an articulate and independent focus audience, with more than a dozen responses and interactions. A couple of the other collaborative writing groups working at other journal sites have received no response at all, other than from stooges who I know to be friends of the student contributors.

The group has grappled well with the theme of war and death, and the waste of life – particularly of the young male soldier – who staggers through the text, dying, brought to life

again for the next section, then wounded and dying again in a terrible refrain. Nevertheless, for Collaboration Two, the extension assignment, I'd suggest the group expands on the character of Violet and the contemporary urban Brisbane setting. Is she a soldier? The theme of water brought out in the first section and maintained throughout really finds strong focus in the latter sections set in Queensland: here there were hints that the narrative would engage with national issues relating to rising sea levels and Australia's defence force being utilised in emergency coastal reparations.

You will probably have discerned for yourselves, based on the responses from your focus audience, that the more lyrical and associative sections have been the least compelling. The principal issue raised by the focus audience group is for a stronger narrative thread, and less repetition in the first four or five sections. I'd suggest considering working with those poetic strengths but also defining the key narrative earlier in order that the work doesn't only "sparkle" on a line by line basis, but as a narrative whole.

Though not specifically identified by the focus audience, those same sections are loosely in the genre of "historical narrative" and freely utilise classical allusions to historical texts and myths; even the reference to "white shoes" is reaching back some decades. With books and literature less and less studied in our universities, you'll find fewer readers familiar with the classics and mythical references. Consider your audience: how often do you expect them to be using Wikipedia?

The narrative steadily shifts to a more contemporary time and setting, and from Europe to Australia: from ancient wars (for e.g. Troy), to references to Shakespeare ("the bard"), through to what could be world war one (or earlier – references to "bayonets") and world war two with the references to "trenches", the mother's lavender sachets, and forward again to what might be the Iraq war with mention of the film, *Snow Queen* (released in 2002?). This is a vast span of time and events to cover in a few thousand words: very ambitious for a group working on a short collaborative fiction.

The image of the white shoes, which I mentioned above: is it too obscure a reference to the era of Joh Bjelke Petersen, former premier of Queensland and his cronies? Clearly located, regionally-focused writing can speak to universal themes that cross readers' cultural boundaries (think for

instance, of E. Annie Proulx's Wyoming stories). However, could the group explore ways to open these elements out to readers who may not be familiar with the original events and personalities? Remember, your focus audience is national and international and believe it or not, many of these readers are less than 50 years old.

I look forward to reading the next iteration of this narrative – or if the group chooses to, an entirely new theme - in Collaboration Two.

The group's and individual grades are available for download from Grade Book, along with the detailed rubric mapping.

Marker: Jane Messer

*Tenth and final instalment by Jane Messer.*

SHARE

<input type="checkbox"/>	Email	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Twitter	106
<input type="checkbox"/>	Facebook	5
<input type="checkbox"/>	LinkedIn	0

Like us on Facebook

Follow us on Twitter

Sign up to our free daily newsletter  
Australia

**Job Board**  
Find career opportunities from intelligent institutions.

## Join the conversation

[Sign in to comment](#)

56 comments sorted by

Oldest  Newest



**Mike Jubow**

Retired Forestry nurseryman at The Yakapari Hilton Rest  
Home for Foresters

It's just a lot of flowery nonsense to me, devoid of any real story-telling flow. If the other authors follow in this line, I reckon we are going to have a page of gibberish.

4 months ago • report



**Jane Middlemist**

citizen

In reply to [Mike Jubow](#)

I think it will be interesting, Mike, in a rather strange way. Perhaps it is too early to judge? The introductory chapter will be a hard act to follow, so I'm looking forward to the next chapter.

4 months ago • report



**Glen Donaldson**

Shiner

In reply to [Mike Jubow](#)

You speaketh truth honourable Mike. I am in concurrence with your misgivings but Day Four brings hope!

4 months ago • report



**Ken Dyer**

Knowledge Seeker

A fine beginning. Almost a contender for The Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest <http://www.bulwer-lytton.com/>

4 months ago • report



**Beth Mantle**

logged in via Facebook

For me, it's too soon to judge if this will be a success or not, but I am not enjoying the switching of past and present tenses in this first instalment. However, I do like the nod to the method of story creation (the "exquisite corpse"). I'd forgotten about this game. I used to play it as a child with drawings, leaving just a little of what I'd done exposed for the next person to work on.

4 months ago • report



**Lise Baker**

Learning Research and Evaluation Coordinator

Great idea! I'll be intrigued to read the final product.

4 months ago • report



**Angela Noel**

Writer

In reply to [Lise Baker](#)

The original modern version of this idea, of course, was the entertaining parlour game called Consequences albeit a more rudimentary version.

It was popular in the twentieth century with children who enjoyed the absurdities which they concocted and adults who played after dinner and used wittier and occasionally smutty components!

Written on paper which is then folded and passed to the next person, it can also be done verbally to enliven a car trip.

4 months ago • report

**Rosemary O'Grady**



Lawyer

In reply to [Angela Noel](#)

...and it harks back to a day when people played together after dinner, instead of (you know what)...

They even ate dinner together...

4 months ago • report



**Rhys Tyers**

Lecturer in English for Academic Purposes at University of Melbourne

Publishing creative writing on the Conversation website is a great idea; however, this is not a great way to start.

4 months ago • report



**Kate Marley**

Student

In reply to [Rhys Tyers](#)

Not exactly an easy entry

4 months ago • report



**Ben Marshall**

Writer

Hi Marguerite,

You've certainly written a literary beginning that will make any follow-up an, ahem, interesting challenge.

I suggest the next writer opts to continue your opening with rhyming couplets in the style of *The Good Ship Venus* (aka 'Friggin' in the Rigg'in') to maintain the maritime theme.

Cheers.

4 months ago • report



**James Jenkin**

EFL Teacher Trainer

I don't get the 'adjective, noun, verb, adverb'.

Is this something about how the corpse is 'composed'?

4 months ago • report



**Marguerite Johnson**

Associate Professor of Ancient History and

In reply to [James Jenkin](#)

Hi James, it's a playful nod to a requirement that sometimes accompanied the game; namely, the instruction that a 'player' must include certain grammatical or syntactic rules like 'adjective, noun, verb, adverb.'

4 months ago • report



**James Jenkin**   
EFL Teacher Trainer

In reply to [Marguerite Johnson](#)

Gotcha, thanks!

4 months ago • report



**ANDRE OTHENIN-GIRARD**  
RETIRED

In reply to [Marguerite Johnson](#)

A corpse waiting to decompose?

4 months ago • report



**Pat Moore**  
gardener

Depending upon the respective academic disciplines of the contributors the joint creation will at least be a garishly colourful, if not a seriously uncoordinated Frankensteinian monster with his parts retrieved from such various cemeteries.... unlikely to be "exquisite" in the commonly understood meaning but etymologically ("carefully sought out" from quaerere to seek) literally true? What will be the theme that galvanises him besides creativity is the question? Destined to talk only gibberish thinks Mike.

[Read more](#)

4 months ago • report



**Marguerite Johnson**  
Associate Professor of Ancient History and  
Classical Languages at University of Newcastle

In reply to [Pat Moore](#)

Dear Pat, thank you for your response. As a Classicist, I am almost always inspired by antiquity when I write creatively. I was alluding to Achilles and Patroclus in part.

4 months ago • report



**Rosemary O'Grady**  
Lawyer

In reply to [Marguerite Johnson](#)

It's a matter of taste but I prefer 'the wrath of Achilles...' - to 'rage'.  
Rage suggests the Monash Freeway to me. Or I'm just an old stick-in-the-mud - of course.

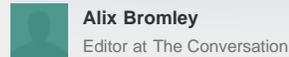
4 months ago • report



Professor

I have one question about this project: Have any academics who teach creative writing and are published been asked to contribute? If not, why not?

4 months ago • report

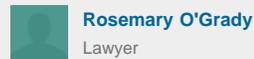


Editor at The Conversation

In reply to [Jeri Kroll](#)

Hi Jeri, Yes we've asked academics from the disciplines of literature, creative writing, performing arts to contribute. Tomorrow we'll publish an instalment from fiction author Claire Corbett and day 3 will be Donna Hancox. Cheers, Alix

4 months ago • report



Lawyer

In reply to [Jeri Kroll](#)

Or, in the alternative, Why?

4 months ago • report



logged in via Facebook

A friend and I have been doing this, on line, for a couple of years. Sometimes a couple of new chapters appear every week, sometimes nothing for months. Characters die, get sacked, or, worse, sent to Tasmania or South America, only to reappear in a subsequent chapter.

It's great therapy for both of us (cheaper than a psychologist) and, most of all, great fun.

There are also Facebook pages that one can join, and take turns about writing sentences, paragraphs or chapters. I found that, to my surprise, friends and relatives could be quite salacious!

4 months ago • report



Senior Research Assistant at Griffith University

My colleagues and I did this with a mystery story a few years back.

On the plus side, we managed to keep it going for several weeks and cobble together about 40,000 words.

On the minus side, everyone had unique ideas about where the story should go and kept changing the flow of the storyline to suit themselves. Consequently, it became a load of nonsense and had to be abandoned.

I will say, you are very brave to attempt this in a public forum!

4 months ago • report

---



**rick davies**

Evaluation consultant

In the early 1990s I carried out a light-hearted experiment in collaborative story writing with a group of high school students in Wales. I used a Darwinian process, whereby each writer could chose to add their new story segment to any one of any of the previous story segments written by any of the authors including themselves. The game proceeded through a series of generations with each writer adding a new story segment to one of the story lines that was still in existence in the previous generations. Some storylines died out because no one subsequently added to them, and others proliferated with many new storylines

[Read more](#)

4 months ago • report

---



**Rosemary O'Grady**

Lawyer

In reply to [rick davies](#)

...an important Idea on the day Charlie Hebdo was blasted...?

4 months ago • report

---



**Damien Westacott**

Programmer

On the off chance that anyone interested in collaborative storytelling hasn't already tried it I heartily recommend old-fashioned pen-and-paper role playing games.

I've run games for groups with storylines that have stretched out for years.

D&D has just released its 5th edition (and for those still smarting over the 4th edition I encourage you to take a new look - there's legit free cut-down versions

[Read more](#)

4 months ago • report

---



**gabrielle daly**

writer

My sister Joan Kerr and I have written 5 novels using this method. We were living in different countries so we did it all by email. We took it in turns to begin, 1500 to 2000 words per day, and we were able to write a substantial novel in 6 weeks. The editing and shaping of course took much longer.

We had grown up reading the contents of our father's library which ranged from S J Perelman through G K Chesterton to Dickens and feel that helped. But for academics steeped in the same literature this should be a piece of cake.

I think one problem with this first piece is the tone is overdetermined, limiting where the next author can go.

4 months ago • report



**Doug Hutcheson**

Poet

An interesting experiment in creative writing. What is not being said speaks louder than the words we have read so far. More! Give me more!

4 months ago • report



**Jane Middlemist**

citizen

In reply to [Doug Hutcheson](#)

It seems to be getting somewhere at last - with this 4th instalment a. I'll be checking back tomorrow: Doug - could we play this game on the Oaty Sea? What do you think?

4 months ago • report



**Doug Hutcheson**

Poet

In reply to [Jane Middlemist](#)

Jane, "could we play this game on the Oaty Sea?" I don't see why not. The Oaty Sailors are all good sports and I'm sure they would enter into the game. "8-)

4 months ago • report



**Cory Zanoni**

Community Manager at The Conversation

In reply to [Doug Hutcheson](#)

I support this.

4 months ago • report



**Jane Middlemist**

citizen

In reply to [Cory Zanoni](#)

Thanks Cory. It could be fun, if we all took turns as the authors here have done, thus allowing a linear development of story line.

4 months ago • report

 **Rosemary O'Grady**  
Lawyer

Oh Mo! Not another Gallipoli fantasy!!!

4 months ago • report

---

 **Rosemary O'Grady**  
Lawyer

In reply to [Rosemary O'Grady](#)

Oh No! Not another Gallipoli fantasy!

Trouble with the Keyboard this heatwave!

4 months ago • report

---

 **Susan Geason**  
Writer

God help us all. Why not ask 10 real writers to write an academic paper. It would be a lot funnier.

4 months ago • report

---

 **Rosemary O'Grady**  
Lawyer

In reply to [Susan Geason](#)

Thanks Susan - you said it. This is - de trop, as they say in Le Marais.

4 months ago • report

---

 **Glen Donaldson**  
Shiner

In reply to [Susan Geason](#)

You said it and you said it perfectly Susan. These 'boy stood on the burning deck' -laden descriptions are underwhelming and have the constitution of wet tissue paper for my liking. Every word smacks of 'Look at me!'.

Some use of 'come hither' phrases can enhance but this stuff (with the exception of Day 4) is right up there with literary grant application letters and third party life insurance policies for readability. Sorry to wheel out the cliché cart but these bits take themselves way too seriously!

4 months ago • report

---

 **Glen Donaldson**  
Shiner

Totally agree with what Mike Jubow wrote 6 days ago (very first comment posted). Day Four (written by Chris Rodley) is the first installment I can discern that has attributes of traditional storytelling - something you can 'sink your teeth into', if you will. Onward and upward for Day 5 I say - and here's hoping the dreamy poet's prose that characterised the first three chapters isn't allowed to take over again!

4 months ago • report



Um, maybe this is nitpicking, but were biscuits actually sold in packets 100 years ago? As late as the 1950's, I remember my mum sending me to the grocer to buy biscuits, which were doled out from a large tin into a brown paper bag. You could also buy broken biscuits for much less cost. So the mother in the story looking in the pantry for a packet of biscuits didn't quite ring true.

4 months ago • report



In reply to [Lynne Black](#)

Unlikely, but perhaps the author wrote "packet" but really meant to write "bag" (brown paper bag). As you say, Lynne, a minor point.

I really enjoyed this chapter and look forward to Instalment 6.

4 months ago • report



In reply to [Lynne Black](#)

Good spotting. Incidentally, may I refer to by what I would assume to be your full name -

'Pumpkin spice latte sipper'? I'm a caps guy myself..

4 months ago • report



Most enjoyable for the story to rest in the cherished books! A delightful way of telling our corpses story. Looking forward to more.

4 months ago • report



This is very like bad science writing. Those people, like these, are only interested in talking to each other. There is no sense of necessity here..that the story had to be written, that the second sentence is demanded by the first and

vice versa, that the author/s had to write it and most importantly, that I have to read it. Having looked at a bit, I don't think I could. You are free, of course, to consider that my failing...but I couldn't care less. An argot and an attitude are not enough. No wonder people have stopped reading 'serious' novels. 'Only connect' ....a forlorn thought. Mike Jubow, first comment above, was right.

[Read more](#)

4 months ago • report



**Glen Donaldson**

Shiner

In reply to [Robert Nowak](#)

You're a straight shooter Rob and God bless ya for that. Agree with everything you said. You ran it up the flagpole and I for one am saluting.

4 months ago • report



**ANDRE OTHENIN-GIRARD**

RETIRED

It could be a style for the Oulipo enthusiasts. I think it would be more interesting if more people contributed one sentence each. Interestingly, I found it easy to pick the writers' gender. Maybe authors should be even more disruptive of conventions.

4 months ago • report



**Jane Middlemist**

citizen

I hope the final instalment will somehow tie the threads together instead of just going off on an unrelated or barely related tangent.

4 months ago • report



**Glen Donaldson**

Shiner

Whooshka!!!!

Camilla Nelson has just lobbed a handgrenade into the fish pond just when things were looking all pretentious and meandering and injected an ocean full of interest. This 9th chapter is brilliant! C'mon Robert Nowak, Susan Geason and Mike Jubow ( and anyone else who's expressed their misgivings about this project) - surely this installment is, to quote the cliché, 'a gamechanger'.

Well done Camilla Nelson. This is creativity with a purpose that manages to keep both feet on the ground.

Love your work!

4 months ago • report



**Robert Nowak**

Publican

In reply to [Glen Donaldson](#)

Well, gosh, thanks, Glen. Normally, we curmudgeons are only right posthumously when no-one cares, no-one notices and our toxic, benighted views are no longer relevant if they ever was. I agree, Camilla was a breath of fresh air. Well done Camilla! Honest verbs, not an adjective in sight, steaming along like the ignorant 1930s crime books I look at the covers of (gun, broken ladder, torn dress, scowling face under a hat) used to be.

Alas, the relief was brief. Poor Camilla was grabbed by the hair by a proto-humanoid academic type and dragged back to a tutorial room for high moral purposes. I am sorry I have to get back on The Big Horse because they even dared to mention Annie Proulx, a person who actually knows something. PS Glen: mind if I call you Shiner in future, if there is a future?

4 months ago • report



**Jane Middlemist**

citizen

I've been looking for signs of collaboration, and there are some signs; but much of it seems to me more like a competition than a collaborative effort.

4 months ago • report



**Dotti Simmons**

logged in via Facebook

Seems to me the basic problem is that this is a story with no specific need to be told... a construct rather than a concept... narrative by intellectual group - grope? - rather than by conviction. So... game play? But we don't know the rules...or each have a different idea of them... so find the game lacking somehow.

4 months ago • report



**Jane Middlemist**

citizen

Thank you, Jane Messer for the tenth instalment, for me, the best one.

Your subtle 'hints' made the other episodes "plausible". A very enjoyable episode. I hope there will be an "experiment" Mark 2.

4 months ago • report



**Lynne Black**

Latte Sipper

The last two "episodes" remind me of one of those ongoing soap operas, where suddenly everything that's been happening turns out to have been a dream!

4 months ago • report



**Doug Hutcheson**

Poet

What an interesting exercise in psychology this has been. Each author has picked at the fabric, pulling a single thread but not sure if it is the same thread others have been pulling. Any collaborative writing of this form is impossible to squash into a single narrative container, as if it were a novel by a single author. I will be keen to follow Semester Two, if it comes to pass.

4 months ago • report



**Peter Anderson**

Independent writer & curator

While this experiment takes its cue from the game of exquisite corpse, it is not clear that it plays the game by as rigid a set of rules as might have been imposed by the Surrealist method. In that context one would expect that each writer would only be aware of the text at the point at which each section is joined to the other - in effect the final line of one section becomes the first line of the next, with each new writer unaware of what has been written by the previous writers until the process is complete. Played as a simple drawing game, the drawing might begin at the top with the first person drawing the corpse's head,

[Read more](#)

4 months ago • report



**Jane Messer**

Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing at Macquarie University

Dear me, Peter Anderson, do creative writing scholars have to take a deep interest in the Ern Malley history? I wasn't aware that had been the process used in the writing of the poet. And, no "lfs", for writing is not "50 years behind painting, as Brion Gysin apparently argued in 1959". Did he argue that? 1959 is an awfully long time ago now...

Is this the canon of ideas which we are meant to know? Not for me...

Perhaps for the next collaboration, the 'group' could have a more organised approach to spontaneity through an as yet unidentified collaborative tradition - or newly invented method. And more interaction with the focus audience could work well with some pre-planning.

4 months ago • report



**Peter Anderson**

Independent writer & curator

In reply to [Jane Messer](#)

Jane, thanks for your response.

I guess my comment on The Conversation's experiment and its link to the Ern Malley case was based in part on the fact that as an investigation of a compositional/ collaborative technique, it carried echoes of the approach taken by McAuley and Stewart. But the point of their 'experiment' was to seek to demonstrate that such techniques did not produce good literature - perhaps could not produce good

[Read more](#)

4 months ago • report

## THE CONVERSATION

### Community

[Community standards](#)

[Republishing guidelines](#)

[Friends of The Conversation](#)

[Research and Expert Database](#)

[Job Board](#)

[Events](#)

[Our feeds](#)

[Donate](#)

### Company

[Who we are](#)

[Our charter](#)

[Our team](#)

[Our audience](#)

[Our blog](#)

[Partners and funders](#)

[Contributing institutions](#)

[Contact us](#)

### Stay informed

[Subscribe to our Newsletters](#)

Australia



[Follow us on social media](#)

