Poetry and the Creation of Relational Space: Conversations for Inquiry and Learning

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Abstract

This article proposes that poetry provides a method for doing and writing inquiry that is potentially dialogical. Whilst much postmodern scholarship is written in a way that still privileges a monological author, it is argued that poetry contributes to dialogical inquiry in three ways. In foregrounding poetic form, the use of tropes and poetic license with word order and completion, poetry provides a more spacious writing medium for readers to join with writer in joint construction of meanings. In attending to how writing touches and affects people, poetry provides a written forum that is not governed by linear argument or conclusion. Finally, Poetry provides a written medium that facilitates moving around and about a subject in surprising and illuminating ways.

Introduction

John   Morning Caroline

Caroline Hi there, what's happening in your world?

John   Oh, I've just been given the MBA, Management of Change course…

C   Isn't George doing it this year?

J   No, He's moved on to chairing the Strategy team… moved on to greater things, so I'm left with 3 weeks to prepare a major course. Debs says "just use George's slides and get going; easy", but it isn't. I can't abide the kind of checklist of steps to take or tool kit of possible methods, and those were George's speciality. But I don't know how to set up the conversations about the topics I think should be part of an MBA course.

Caroline smiled at this point for, as the author of this conversation, she spotted with delight that John wanted to talk about the very subject that was on her mind for a journal article, she leant back and with full authorial power at her elbow determined to take the conversation where her own thinking was going…

C   Funny you should mention that… I'm just wrestling with the very same issue in an article I'm working on about writing research … I'm suggesting that it's not so much to do with the content of your research or teaching but more

to do with the medium. I'm suggesting that poetry, or writing poetically, offers a far greater scope for writing and thinking dialogically.

J Poetry! In management research or on an MBA!? Dialogical?! I thought poetry was the great expression of the authentic self, a great outpouring of the poet's soul… how can it be dialogical?

C Golly, where do I start? Have you got the time for me to think out loud with you? I'd appreciate it.

J If you've got the coffee, I've got the time!

Poetic Form as Other

C (smiles, points to the just brewed coffee next to John and starts) Well, I reckon that poetry has two inherent others to 'talk with' in writing: an 'other' of poetic form and an 'other' of readers. Then, there are certain features of poetry; I call them dialogical shifts, which provide space for a different kind of conversation between writer and reader.

J Uhuh, I recognised all the words there, but you're going to have to do more to make them sensible!

C OK. First, when a poet is writing, she's always in 'conversation' with poetic form. Ever since Coleridge there's been a debate as to whether poetic form is a structure or a process of writing poetry (Conte, 1991). Historical forms, such as Sonnets, Sestinas or formal rhyming and metrical schemes shape how a poet can write a particular theme. More recent, post-modern or open poetry still has its forms, but Olson argued that different energies drive the relationship between form and content, and rather than seeing form constrain the content of a poem, he argued that form and content are inextricably linked (Conte, 1991; Olson, 1966).

  So, rather than seeing poetic form as a constraint; I find it's like a dialogical partner in creating a written practice. Richardson (1994) argued that our self is always present in our writing; or rather that part of our self is always present. A relational constructionist (Shotter, 1993) perspective suggests that self and *other* are always present in our writing and so exploring ways of writing that, in Sampson's (1993) words, "celebrate other" is likely to enrich a postmodern research conversation. My experience in writing poetry is that poetic structure – be it rhyme, metre or some other trope – acts as a conversational partner. I find myself writing something that often surprises me and find that my thinking is provoked by another voice vying with my authorial voice.

John Can you give me an example of how that works?

C ok, recently I was writing a poem for a friend's book (Hosking and McNamee, 2006). I was really struggling with it and kept a record of the different versions until I arrived at one that I liked. Here's an early attempt:

  (A)

  The band played on with intensity of ear;
    each instrument enfolding others
    or if standing proud, apart,
    accented by the rest.

  An audience, attending to a whole of blended parts,
    enjoy each separate and the whole,
    as each enriches each
    in making more with all:
    a rhythm of a joint and mutual heart.

  I felt that this poem was interesting, but at the time it wasn't working for me. I liked the images and the use of improvised jazz as a metaphor for organizing (Barrett, 1998) and as I say, I'd promised some poems to Dian, so I tried again (B) but made a huge leap by using one of the great, classic forms of English poetry: the sonnet.

  (B)

  The band played on and so, within their ear,
  attend to many stranded stories told.
  As each and ev'ry tone another enfold
  within, throughout and pervading clear;
  the wrapping of the whole by each I hear.
  As each enriches each, as given not sold;
  a greatness found in following, the truly bold
  now drift behind, and cede control to steer.

> And so the many into one do blend
> as crowd makes space to show the separate,
> the troupe move around to play their part
> as solo weaves with set to ensure the end
> that all and each, with acknowledged weight,
> empower the beat of joint and mutual heart.

John   Hang on, you've not only changed the way the poem reads; you've introduced new ideas and themes altogether!

C   That's my point, that's what I found so interesting. I suddenly realised how the poetic form of the sonnet had changed some of the themes of the poem and introduced new ones into it. There's a new metaphor of narrative; I liked the phrase "many stranded stories" but wondered if it was one metaphor too many? But the major problem for me was that the sonnet form was shaping my writing in a very contrived manner; it's a bit tortuous isn't it? What I found more generative, however, was in the lines:

> a greatness found in following, the truly bold
> now drift behind, and cede control to steer.

For in those lines, the metre and rhyming scheme of a sonnet had pushed me into expanding how I worked with improvised jazz. In particular, I suspect that you'd be interested in improvised jazz's concept of shared leadership. "A greatness found in following" and "the truly bold now drift behind" wouldn't be images found in popular treatments of leadership.

John   No I can't see Bennis (1989) or Kotter (2001) making that point!

C   Ok, so as I drew on images from elsewhere, the poetic form worked in dialogue to produce more than I, as the poet, originally intended or expected. The writing had become excitingly dialogic. There was no certainty as to where the poem was going and what ideas, agendas and possibilities might arise in constructive relation between the self (poet) and other (form). Conte (1991) quoted an interview with the poet John Ashberry on this generative potential of poetic form:

> "The really bizarre requirements of a sestina I use as a probing tool rather than as a form in the traditional sense. I once told somebody that writing a sestina was rather like riding downhill on a bicycle and having the pedals push your feet. I wanted my feet to be pushed into places they wouldn't have normally have taken."
>
> (Ashberry, as cited in Conte, 1991, p. 174)

Readers as Other

John   Ok, I can see your point there, but you said there that the reader acted as an 'other' in the writing of a poem.

C   Well I think that poetry changes the relationship between writer and reader and gives more space for the reader to 'play' with the writer's ideas, rather than being pushed into accepting the writer's own setting of an agenda.

John   Right, how do you see that happening?

C   Well, I think that poetry provides a forum, or in Barthes (1977) words "a multidimensional space" for different ideas, themes or potentials to interrelate, and instead of a writer being given author-ity to determine the value being put on those ideas, themes or potentials; poetry facilitates a meeting place where multilogue (Hosking, 1999) between writer and readers can co-construct meaning, inference or future action. If we take Barthes' "death of the author" seriously and explore the potential of such a suggestion, it follows that we should seek to write in such ways that connect the reader and writer in co-constructive ways rather than privilege one (writer) over other (reader). Poetry provides such a generative processual, nexus.

Academic writing, indeed all writing, creates relational processes between self and other. For Richardson (1994), as for Poindexter (2002) and Becker (1999), that relationship is centred on the relationship between researcher and respondent. Richardson and Poindexter both use the term "poetic transcription" to capture how they use poetry to capture the rhythms of people's talk. For both these researchers the key issue was how they wrote *for* 'other', how well they evoked what the respondent was saying. Where the reader was considered, it was in terms of how the writer could best present their material for different audiences. The reader, as target audience, would shape what was written. So the article aimed at a conservative journal would be different to the article aimed at practitioners.

John	Hang on, this is 'other' in the hands of the author, positioned as recipients to be pleased or antagonized by the writer's style and genre in presenting their material. That's still a monological relationship.
C	I agree. The difference I want to highlight lies in a shift from poetry being evocative (Richardson, 1994) to being provocative of new relations with reader-as-other. Shotter and Katz (1996) suggest that research writing is directional, in that it draws the attention of the reader to particular points that may be of interest. They talk of writing that 'strikes' the reader rather than informing them. As I said before, this shift is not exclusively available to poetic writing, but poetry can provide a spacious arena for joint meaning making between reader and poet. I'll mention in a moment some dialogical shifts that I think facilitate this spacious arena. Whilst I do not want to argue with Richardson's use of poetry, it doesn't capture this spaciousness opened up in poetry for dialogue between writer and reader.

Bernstein (1986) wrote of poetry as a process of writing that is "tangible, palpable". He contrasted it with writing that attempts to be transparent, where stylistic techniques attempt to render the writing invisible; so that all you have are the contents of the thinking. Elsewhere (Bernstein, 1992), he suggested that poetry is an artifice and agreed with Olson's argument that poetry, by its very opaqueness, moves the self from being ego centric "observing, accounting for" to being in the world, in relation. Making the writing opaque in this way emphasizes its world making with the reader.

> "the making invisible – inaudible – of these forms/structures/shapes gives the sensation of a world beyond the page/the language that is already given, assumed; whereas the acknowledgement of these forms as materials to by worked with, as an active part of the writing, suggests 'our' participation in the constitution of nature and meaning."
>
> (Bernstein, 1986, p71)

Treating research writing as an artifice gives space for more constructive relations between reader and writer.

J	So what you're saying here is that the really interesting conversation you're having here is not with me… but with the reader.
C	Yes, err… hope you don't find that too offensive.
J	Oh, don't worry about me; I'm just an authorial artifice!
C	No! ***You're*** not the artifice! Ok, you're a rhetorical device, but the artifice I'm speaking of is the newly (re)created relating between myself and any reader who's got this far! Poetry as artifice is in contrast to a sense of writing being an authentic representation or the writer's thoughts and intentions. As poetry interlinks form and content, so the process of poetry writing/reading is made available for a reader to construct alternative meanings, possibilities and consequences to the research.
John	So you've got a different emphasis here. Rather than writing being an evocation of a research respondent's comments or of a researcher's ideas, an account of what happened; it becomes the creator of a new constructive relationship between writer and reader?
C	Yes, it's almost as if research material plays the role of a pander in bringing together different parties. Rather than being the substance of the writing, it's an invitation and contribution to relationship. Shotter and Katz (1996) speak of a difference between monological-retrospective-objective writing and dialogical-prospective-relational writing. The former allows the writer to adopt an authoritative 'god's eye' position, whilst the latter reflects ongoing involvement and as a result: "our style of writing must be more tentative and open, and less definitive and authoritative, couched in terms of possibilities rather than claimed actualities."
J	But, you're not arguing that only poetry offers this co-constructive writing/reading?
C	No, I'd agree with Barthes' (1977) point that this joint meaning making process is an unavoidable part of writing. However, a writing genre that ostensibly and stylistically expresses an author's voice in terms of a beginning (defining what is to be written about), middle (constructing a coherent logic) and ending (if not providing a conclusion then some form of resolution) will unavoidably provide less scope for joint meaning making than a genre where metaphors, imagery and rhythm are offered for the reader to relate to.

If, as I suggest, poetry provides an arena where self and other can construct a way of going on meaningfully in relation, then we are offered an active space for co-ordination. Potential co-ordinations a reader might make with a poem include: resonating, responding, provocation, invitation or passing on to yet another (Herd, 2002). In each of these cases the response is potentially active; it opens new space for generative, active theorizing (Gergen, 1994b). Rather than posing questions of accuracy or truth, poetry poses the reader questions such as "what are you going to do with this?"

Dialogical shifts in poetry

J   Hang on, let me think this out; what you're suggesting is research as a generation of possibilities, an incomplete but insightful contribution to a conversation. Now you mention it, I can remember Daft (1983) using poetry as a metaphor for teaching, rather than as a practice of research, but his point is relevant here none the less. He argued that there is a terseness in poetry that allows for a different view of any topic, that gives a brief view of *a* whole rather than *the* objectively viewed whole.

C   Yes, I think you're right. What excites me is this; poetry provides 'others' with whom I, as a researcher, can co-create an engagement with ideas. Whether it be with the poetic structures of rhyme or metre in formal poetry, or as Olson argues in syllable, breath and line in open verse; still what I can write, say or discuss or explore on the page emerges from a co-production. Strangely, it's almost exactly the opposite to romantic notions of poetry you mentioned earlier. The 'other' of poetic form denies self-expression afforded to prose writers. This is Olson's point (Olson, 1997) when he argues that poetry rather than describing *enacts* the human universe, and that enacting involves engagement with other. Poetic form celebrates 'other' and in the very process of writing draws attention to process and 'other' in a way that prose draws attention to logic, argument and conclusion, or narrative draws attention to a "valued end point" (Gergen, 1994a) or coda (Mishler, 1986). In doing so the reader is drawn into the creative process rather than being left to appreciate the end result.

J   … so, no conclusion?

C   hmm, that needs a longer answer, but there are times when reaching a conclusion ends a conversation, when reaching a conclusion silences the reader. If we're serious about conversation, then research writing and 'teaching' that complete a topic will provide much less spacious ground for dialogue than poetry. An avoidance of conclusions is but one dialogic shift available to a poet that provides space for dialogue rather than monologue.

I remember a while ago visiting Paris. Like many others I had fallen in love with impressionist painters in the 80's, so I was really looking forward to visiting the Musée D'Orsay. I found it strangely disappointing, but the next day I went to the Pompidou Centre to see the Musée National d'Art Moderne and loved it. I tried to make sense of it all in a poem, here are a few lines

> D'Orsay did everything for me
> > presented the artwork complete;
> > and I spectator, supporting, redundant;
> > my only role to admire:
> > > nothing expected of me.

> And if nothing expected, so nothing achieved.
> > If nothing required so nothing essayed,
> > but I want to attempt, and I want to engage.
> > I want to take part, make a start to an art,

> .. but D'Orsay did it all for me, so I just wandered around.

> Now a line of grey bricks, or bold coloured square,
> > that I could do, that could be me
> > and maybe I'd add an idea here and there,
> > and so for a moment, an exhilarating moment,

I'd be an artist there too![1]

J   You mean, that the way modern art refuses to tie things down gave you more space to explore, think and feel outside 'your box' so to speak?

C   Yes, that's it, that's what I was trying to get at there. If we argue that post-modern research writing is less of a pursuit of truth and more of a contribution to an ongoing conversation, then is it possible to pursue a genre of writing that is not constrained by discourses of description, linear argument and conclusion?

J   You're not saying that that linear argument, with the presentation of evidence has no worth are you?

C   No, I don't think that would be wise, but isn't there space for a different form of academic writing? Isn't there room for an alternative form of publishing and engaging with research material? It's more a question of whether the academic celebration of linear argument denies us the ability to 'hear' other ways of constructing realities. Poetry provides one such genre of communicating, as attention is focused on the relational process of meaning *making* rather than meaning *understood*.

J   How does it do that?

C   Well by using the dialogical shifts I mentioned earlier. First, poetry allows a moving around and about a topic, secondly a use of different voices and finally a greater freedom to end without closure.

Moving Around and About a Topic

J   Sometimes, Caroline you leave the English language behind! Could you flesh that all out for me?

C   Ok, first Bernstein (1992) suggested that poetry seeks to embody thinking in writing with its "possibilities for leaps, jumps, fissures, repetition, bridges, schisms, colloquialisms trains of association, and improvisation" (p63). I find that poetic form allows me as a writer to contrast, indeed to jar ideas, against others in surprising and perhaps absurd ways. In so doing, themes are thrown into stark relief or the obvious rendered as problematic. Secondly, poetry allows me to move around and about a subject by revisiting themes and images. Finally, by allowing different voices to be heard poems can move in surprising directions and embrace a diversity of writing that might look out of place in a more conventionally written, academic-research prose,

J   Another example would help me here.

C   ahh, ok … take a look at this poem that I wrote a few years ago.

> *Message to a young man: with an interjection from Africa Unmasked*
>
> There is no tomorrow;
> > it is not ours.
> > Its deeds are held by others
> > and we are left with now.
>
> Today is our land
> > today and no other
> > Tomorrow:
> > > that thief who takes away our hope,
> > > the charlatan who pledges
> > > more than we could ever dream
> > > and then defrauds our every plan.

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[1] An extract from my poem "The Exhilarating Moment".

> There is no tomorrow, only today,
>> only the current hour,
>> only the moment
>> and that we're told to seize..
>
> And I'm left wondering
>> if in seizing the moment
>> we took the tomorrow
>> from somebody else?

C   What do you think that poem's about?

J   golly, I don't know… it sort of fits together but it seems to contradict itself.

C   I agree; I'm not at all sure what it's about! And if I, as the poet, am not sure where this poem has taken me, then I am in no position to stipulate to any reader what I meant. I wrote it after watching a television programme about Africa that explored why that continent, so rich in resources, had been caught in such endemic poverty. It was then muddled up with worried thoughts about my nephew who was struggling at work. I didn't know what I thought about his situation, so my pen just followed my anxiety.

J   Yeah, I noticed that as the poem unfolds, what initially seems clear is challenged by the last stanza. I felt a real disjuncture in the meaning-flow of the poem that almost commanded me to stop and think about it. It was as if, for a moment, I could 'see' different logics that wouldn't normally be thought about at the same time. I wondered if the wisdom of the initial advice to a young man was wrong. Then I thought about complexity, butterflies and… that got me thinking of differences between micro and macro level problems and how our solutions in the north are problems for the poor southern hemisphere?

C   Wow! I hadn't made some of those connections, but any of those readings is perfectly possible. Poetry has a potential to handle post-modern provisionality of knowledge claims. A conversation is opened between a self (the poet) and other (reader). Crucially, I wasn't able to take a position in the poem, so the trajectory of the conversation will not be one of defence (reasoning and evidence) and attack (critique and faultfinding) but of tentative exploration. I think that offers researchers an exciting contrast to the common experience of reading an academic research article, where conversations are typified by contest.

Another example of this moving around a topic is the Sestina. Now this is an odd poetic form, where each line-end word is reused in the six stanzas in a preset order. I once wrote a sestina as an exercise. In it I explored concepts of control, work, managing, shaping, action and thought. In teaching management from a conventional, managerialist perspective such ideas would cause no problem. However, as I was forced to re-use the words in different orders they moved from being verbs to nouns and back again. A question of who, or what, was controlling who became apparent and posed the question is it ever thus for managers? Pound (as cited in Drury, 1995) once suggested that a sestina allows for a "folding and unfolding" of a topic. Hacker described a sestina as "A camera on a rotating boom/six words spin slowly round and pan the room."(Hacker, as cited in Drury, 1995).

That was very much the experience I had when I wrote the poem. I chose six words that I thought I could use but as the poem progressed I found that I was constrained almost as if the words were 'using' me. I remember an outburst of frustration and exasperation as I struggled with a stanza towards the end and that frustration is visible in the poem. There's a sense here that, although I was doing something very different to Poindexter (2002) I am, like her, finding that poetry gives an immediacy to the emotion and humanity of research. What became apparent with "Managing Sestina Managing Me?" was the emotional involvement of a researcher in exploring a topic, and that there was, especially for an organisational researcher, an intriguing reflexivity of analysis where researchers themselves become a part of the subject under investigation (Hosking, 1999).

A Contribution of the incomplete?

J   hmm, I don't think that writing in prose, especially a research article type prose would have allowed you to link and

interweave those different themes into a whole.

C   No, you see, in Shotter and Katz's (1996) term, I want to "to strike" my readers, to invite them to attend to possibilities of constructive relation that might not have struck them without the poetic writing of these ideas.

J   Of course if all research refused to reach a conclusion that would be absurd…

C   …but isn't there a place for academic endeavour that seeks to provoke, raise or move around and about without delineating closure on a subject?

Gergen (1994a) and others (e.g. Mishler, 1986; Reissman, 1992) have written of what goes to make a well formed narrative. I would suggest that there are similar accounts of what goes to make a well formed academic paper (e.g. Sutton & Staw, 1995), and the leaving of issues incomplete would not be applauded. In a poem however, that is possible, indeed incompleteness becomes one of the joys of poetry. Metaphor, imagery and form can open for a reader a spacious environment to develop ideas and practice. Of course another researcher might validly argue that I have not developed and built a coherent argument in the poem.

J   Yes, the points you raise in your poems are incomplete, any thoughtful reader would be able to counter them with robust rejoinders.

C   But that is exactly my point: a poem is a contribution to a conversation not a completion of it. In writing a poem I do not seek to convince or overpower alternative treatments of this subject. Instead I invite response in a dynamic form: a conversation.

J   But hold on a moment, remember where we started this conversation. I've got to do this course on the management of change. What you're saying seems to me to be an archetypal 'ivory tower' pursuit.

C   No, I don't think so. Shotter and Katz (1996) outline a "social poetics" which points out distinctions that we commonly overlook. A social poetics, they argue, creates new ways of inquiring through use of images, analogies and metaphors; lifting current 'grammars' of understanding by use of similes, similarities or dissimilarities. The work of a manager or professional in any field is always incomplete, always needing to notice other ways of 'knowing', other language games. In this way a social poetics facilitates social and generative ways of going on in relation, be it between teams of mangers, other collaborating professionals or academic readers and writers. In effect incompleteness offers, along with the contribution of poetic form and reader a consciously dialogical method of writing or engaging in academic, managerial or professional action.

Space for Multiple Voices

J   Have you seen the time? I'd better hurry soon, I'm meeting up with George, but you said there was a third dialogical shift that enabled poetry to create space for dialogue.

C   OK, I'll try to be quick. Bernstein (1999) wrote that "contemporary poetry remains an indispensable site for the exploration of the multiplicities, and multiplicitousness, of identities" (p305). Just as poetry provides space to circle an issue or theme, so it also provides a medium in which multiple voices can be heard.

J   But there are prose methods that achieve that use a second voice device to allow a reflexive manner of writing, for example Woolgar and Ashmore (1988) or Smith and Gergen (1995).

C   Yes, I've read those as well, but I would argue that poetry has an especially creative potential in facilitating a dialogue to appear. For example, and I'm sure that there are many more, alternative moods can be given different rhythms in a poem; doubts can be allowed to interrupt a flow of argument and plays on words highlight absurdities.

J   ok, so what might those look like?

C   Oh, (looking through her untidy, 'desktop' filing system) here's one…

Learning

Building a wall to hide, safe within,
     the things that I have gathered.
     Things from all over…
     deep things

and trivial too;
complicated, simple…

Building a wall around the things of mind
that I would call my learning.
Things and things to keep;
things packed, stacked and tracked
through microchip memory control.

And you assist with my building:
shadowing,
reflecting,
complementing
moves of mine
in building that wall;
to keep the things I have in mind
in mind and not escaping;
the unlearning run of a prisoner escaped.

Yes you build with me a wall
to keep my learning mine
(But walls keep out as well as in.
What is without? I wonder,
what didn't get in?)

And we two, in concert, work
never realising how
we, who build anew,
learn as we *do*
and things that *are*:
(that is: not built, not shared)

are not the learning,
but the rubble we use
who build and learn to hide.

J   Ha! You like Robert Frost don't you! What's his poem, Mending Walls?

C   Do you know it? Yes there's a sort of a hat tip in there. But, for the most part the poem's an attempt to explore the topic of learning, using each of the three dialogical shifts I mentioned just now. The poetic choice of words highlights themes or questions. Is learning really a process of packing, stacking and tracking "things of mind"? Is our understanding of learning from this poem different because those words are used rather than, say, studying or analyzing?

J   Yes, and I noticed different voices or perhaps tones of voice. The different line lengths led to an audible emphasizing of certain ideas.

C   Isn't the idea of learning being like a prisoner that might escape absurd? Yet it makes some kind of sense within this poem.

J   That's exactly what I thought, but then I started wondering if treating learning as packing, stacking and tracking "things of mind" is equally absurd unless it is positioned within a particular intellectual context. So if "the unlearning run of a prisoner escaped" makes sense within the context of this poem…

C   … might it be your MBA course is nothing more than a packing, stacking and tracking and is that learning? Does the poem 'strike' you in ways that provoke a search for new models of learning; perhaps learning being a process of building or changing, rather than the stacking 'things'?

J   Slow down a bit, I need to work through this. So, with no clear single meaning privileged in a poem (or classroom), the reader (or student) is consciously encouraged to perform 'possibilities' with the poet (or teacher), perhaps "to build anew/ learn as we *do*"?

C   That's the way I would respond to the poem. So, rather than a monotone of persuasive argumentation, poetry allows for shades and tones of doubt and uncertainty. As Richardson writes "we find ourselves attending to feelings, ambiguities, temporal sequences, blurred experiences, and so on; we struggle to find a textual place for ourselves and our doubts and uncertainties." (1994, p. 521). Poetry provides such a space for reader and writer. It is in allowing for the uncertainties, in permitting tentative writing or in promoting possibilities that poetry provides spacious environments for dialogic, academic exploration of issues within social sciences. There is something carnivalesque and unfinalisable in the poem and relationship between poet and reader (Bakhtin, 1984). In the classroom or at research conferences, poetry helps to create polyphonic learning (Ramsey, 2008).

J   Well, that's given me something to think about, thanks Caroline. I'd better get to that meeting.

Concluding moments

As John left the page Caroline felt a momentary stab of guilt. She was conscious that she had used him to help write this article and she was aware that the dialogic form was, in many ways the contrivance of a monologic author. Had she been disingenuous? Then she glanced at the editors' comments. They had written more about the relationship of poetry to teaching, but she had meant the focus to be on research.

Caroline smiled ruefully. She had invited John into the paper as a poetic form to help her write her ideas down. She had thought he was a devise for her to control, but blow me if he hadn't gone and shifted the focus of the article on her! She sighed, "it's that wretched sestina all over again… her fingers reached for her poem *Managing a sestina managing me?* She still didn't really like it, but smiled as she read it again.

Managing a sestina managing me?

Can you manage, command or control
the actions of others who around you would work?
Are you able, within space, to provide them with shape
that surrounds them with boundaries on action
and promptings to thought?
And after your choice, will others too manage?

If I pressure you hard will you manage
to keep going? Will you keep your emotions under control?
Will the way you go on demonstrate thought
or merely a frantic search for a work
-able next step that imitates action;
less concerned if that option has shape?

As I pause to consider contexts that shape
how I can act and which goals I can manage
to attain, can I claim choice in action
that puts others under control,
if uncertain what will work
and connect my own action to thought?

Now here's a conundrum that merits some thought:
a linking of mind moves and intentions to shape
what occurs in a moment at home or at work.
Do I claim that my planning will manage

my actions, and if so; what controls

that planning – any different to action?

Good grief I'm oh so bored, just give me some action.

Allow me to escape from this twisting of thought.

I'm playing word games with rules; losing control.

I'm searching for flight from regulations that shape

what I can write and how I can manage

to run for freedom and rhythms that work.

Thank goodness; at last the final stanza of this dull work

and now I can lay down my pen and change my action

this Saturday morning. I'm done trying to manage

these words that have constrained my every thought

and instead of being my tools to shape

have mastered me and shared with me control.

So, Sally your home work and I did manage

to complete each other's shape and thought,

Control contended and word actions produced.

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