

**Griffith University**

**Stephanie Green**

**The Edge: notes for a wiki narrative (short fiction)**

Biographical note:

Stephanie Green currently teaches with the School of Humanities at Griffith University. Her most recent writings include an essay about experiencing the Egyptian uprising in February 2011, 'Passengers of history', *Griffith Review* (37, 2012) and a paper about the popular television series *Dexter*, 'Desiring Dexter' in *Continuum Journal* (26.4, 2012). Stephanie's collection of short fiction, *Too Much Too Soon*, was published by Pandanus Books in 2006. She is currently working on a biography, 'The Public Lives of Charlotte and Marie Stopes'.

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The Edge Group is the moniker for a semi-anonymous group of writers founded by literary cult figure Douglas K in 2008. Douglas K says the idea for the group emerged during a drinking session with his co-founder, the now deceased author Dylan Morgan. When the wine ran out they opened the Talisker whiskey; his only lasting regret.

The Edge Group members share an interest in random texts and experimental techniques. Their motto is 'Between hand and mind', a metaphor taken from musical or theatrical improvisation. One metaphor links their work, the curve of fine blonde coastal sand that lends the group its name.

The Edge is also the name of the group's internationally acclaimed digital studio project where each writer improvises, edits and then publishes responses to randomly generated words, images or themes. While the project has been called a complicated prank, others see it as radical innovation.

Digital poet Jeremy N describes it as: 'the stuff of mythic voyages to faraway islands, light caught in a stream of shadows, hardcore filaments of text and metaphor, ethereal drifts of meaning'. An American, Jeremy's favourite food is the Australian meat pie.

The Edge has also become a catchword for the literary scandal in which three Edge writers accused literary magazine *The Boat* of libel.

### **Edge membership**

Membership is the condition of unfilled longing, a system of being alone. (Douglas K)

The current Edge Group members are Douglas K, Jeremy N, Electra B, Nina C, presumed to be lecturers at Xenophon University, but this has never been officially confirmed. Membership is not restricted. The group is philosophically opposed to any formal code of belonging. They describe themselves as a collection of individuals with different motivations, who share an interest in writing. However, access to The Edge web studio project is only granted by special consensus. The Edge Group has been accused of discrimination by the dissident blogger and former Xenophon University student, Mono Heron. Since its formation, only one member of The Edge Group has ever been lost: the dramatist and poet Dylan Morgan, who swam out from a sandbank island after drinking half a bottle of Talisker whiskey and never returned.

### **The Edge Group founder: Douglas K**

Douglas K is a prize-winning novelist and travel writer. He refuses to reveal personal details or speak in public about his work. A blurry group photograph taken at a book launch in 2009 was once posted on The Edge website, before Douglas K shaved off his experimental ginger moustache. Like the moustache, it was immediately removed.

In spite of his personal reticence, Douglas K has drawn media attention for his furious

public outbursts. In 2006, during a legal dispute with his former publisher, literary king-maker Barton Barton, bystanders heard shouting and glass breaking in the men's bathroom at the Supreme Court. Two men emerged with their jackets covering their heads while photographers followed them into the court. In 2007 Douglas K was arrested for punching news reporter Mike Minum at a writer's festival after Minum alleged that his media shyness was a publicity stunt.

Douglas K has won three State Premier's Literary Awards. His novels explore themes of travel and solitude, always set in famous tourist destinations. *Face to Face* (2000), about a disastrous honeymoon, takes place on a Caribbean voyage. *The Longest Pause* (2003) is set in Venice. *Line Drawn* (2008) is about a couple recovering from an unusual addiction on the Great Barrier Reef. Abandoning his long-time publisher Barton Barton in 2007, Douglas K has published exclusively with The Edge web studio project.

### **The Edge manifesto and Douglas K's other writings**

Writing is the loneliest business among communication industries, but writers all inhabit the same medium, ebb and flow of language that keeps us alive. (Douglas K)

Douglas K has published travel essays in magazines all over the world. The magazines, not the novels, have made him wealthy. He lives at the northern end of a stretch of beach protected from oceanic turbulence by a chain of sandbank islands. His apartment has cream marble floors, a mushroom felt feature wall and elegant Venetian wall lamps – an unexpectedly feminine touch. At night, their coral glow softens his thoughts. In the mornings he walks along the waterfront path, sometimes as far as The Point, where the summer scent of drying Norfolk Pines mingles with the hot salty air and the sea laps at the sky. The walks create a kind of rhythm for his writing that often lasts throughout the day.

Douglas K imagines himself swimming across to a sandbank island as a change from beachside walking. He's sure he could do it. In his youth he swam the Hellespont. Maybe it's the death of Dylan Morgan, or the oil slick smearing the Broadwater, or simply middle-aged inertia, but so far he has never tried. Divorced, he lives alone and makes up for the fact of his solitude through his erotic friendship with Dylan's widow, Sandra M. When she wraps her lean brown legs around his body between slippery linen sheets, Sandra M assures him that Dylan would be happy for them.

For many years Douglas K did not have a Wikipedia entry of his own, until one of his colleagues at the Xenophon University wrote a short story about him and some anonymous wiki-editor took the bait. Only then did Douglas K notice that a Wikipedia page for Jeremy N had already existed for some time.

## Jeremy N

It's no secret to his friends that Jeremy N detests his birth name. He's taken a pseudonym that he finds stronger, more true to himself. He came to the Gold Coast escaping a girl he tried hard to forget. Whenever he looks in the mirror, though, he's reminded of how she ran her fingers through his wavy hair. He can still feel it, years later, that tingling through his scalp and spine. He wonders if it's possible he'll really never see her again. He feels marooned, as if surrounded by flood tides. In fact his house is literally surrounded by artificial moats and water lanes. It's a grand house, owned by his wealthy new girlfriend. They each have an en suite bed room of their own. She's older than him. He tells her often that her age doesn't show, and is privately relieved that it actually doesn't.

Some things still shock Jeremy N, things like the emptiness of the plague islands or the loneliness of digital orphans. His work is a dazzling puzzle of text meets image. Words float inside frames in evanescent fragments, or move across a plane in multiple directions: energetic enigmas without a home. His words are like spectres or pollen scattering the surface of a lake, they take possession wherever they fall. He feels he is one of them, or has become like them, a figure of constant movement, without other purpose, constantly drawn back to an ill-defined locale. Their motion seems random but he knows in his heart they correspond to his own careful design. It worries him that someone in the group might one day think of him as a traitor.

## Electra B

Electra B once said that beauty was the root cause of her suffering. She has one of those classically symmetrical faces, so perfect that people stare at her, rudely looking for flaws. Her skin is pale and clear, her hair and eyebrows naturally black. Although her first novel hasn't yet been released, the publisher's PR department has made sure that she is already famous. As a girl she darkened her eyes with kohl, razed her hair and tore her clothing. None of it worked as disguise.

Now she is the kind of woman with whom lovers and friends become obsessed. Since she broke off her wedding to a property developer, her mobile phone has been stolen three times. She doesn't know why. She lives on the twentieth level of a new high rise apartment, with floor to ceiling windows that look out to sea. It's like an invisible island surrounded by blue. The walls are so thick that the building seems empty, as if she is the only one in this silent tower of glass and sky, the only one who sees. It's a contrast to the building she lived in as a student, where she wrote down the conversations of invisible neighbours for her stories.

Electra B dresses expensively, thinking that others will take her more seriously if she looks the part. Her students long for more of her attention than they can get. She knows just how much to give, and just how much to refuse. When she gives public performances of her work, there's always an audience. Three of her former students have already

published stories in which she is the model for the central character. She doesn't recognise herself in any of them.

As a writer, Electra B strives to find beauty in things and people that others fear or disdain. Her stories are exquisite journeys through ugliness: drug deals in high-rise apartments, salacious masseurs, charismatic thieves, corrupt real estate operatives and savage knife-fights in back rooms that only the narrator survives.

Electra B was once a student of Douglas K. She assumes, wrongly, that he desires her and thinks of their relationship as an unrealised promise. It was hard to give it up: the hope of approval. She used this scenario in her novel, about a young woman and an older sexual mentor. Now, the promise of success gives her freedom, an excuse to forget. She's already stepping into his shoes, taking on the role of mentor herself. There's a man-boy in her life, to whom she imagines herself giving suck, a wild genius she tries to get close to, but can't control.

### **Nina C**

Nina C is the newest member of the group and the one who has been closest to the centre of the Edge controversy. A short story writer, Nina C has packed so many other things into her forty-five years that she forgets sometimes that writing is what she does best. Although she's a widely read journalist and has won prizes for her stories and poems, it makes her cringe to think anyone actually reads what she writes. She published a collection of her short fiction, *The Huntress* (2008), which a reviewer described cruelly as 'too well-written to do well'.

Like Douglas K, Nina C is secretive. She put herself through university by working for a high class escort agency where she met a lot of people she didn't have to work hard to forget. Sometimes a face snatches her attention at a restaurant or on the street, like a pop-up hologram that reminds her of the hard dark rooms of her past, but she is never sure. Understandably, Nina C has kept this fact hidden, partly to protect other people in her life, but more because it's something she can keep for herself, until she is ready to let go.

### **Dylan Morgan**

No biographical sources are available at this time. The complete writings of Dylan Morgan can be accessed via The Edge web studio.

### **The Edge project**

The Edge is an online studio project where members of The Edge Group improvise textual responses to words, images or themes which are published randomly on The Edge website. Their work can take the form of prose or poetry, or interactive mechanisms

designed to allow the viewer to participate in the meaning of the image/text.

The concept emerged as a reaction to the linearity of standard literary forms. The group is philosophically opposed to principles of regularity and singleness of purpose. Their writings explore themes of transition and transformation. In the words of founder Douglas K, the project celebrates ‘the randomness of creativity’. This notion has been widely ridiculed, but the prominence of The Edge Group, with its international awards and global youth cult following, has assured its recognition.

### **The ‘Edge2’ scandal**

‘Edge2’ is a short story that was first published anonymously in 2010 in the sixty-third edition of *The Boat* magazine. ‘Edge2’ tells the story of a group of writers who develop an online writing game. After the game is published on The Edge website, each writer tries to steal copyright from the others. One character in ‘Edge2’ disappears, a presumed suicide by drowning. The others each fall to a curse: illness, debt, loss, and defamation. It is implied at the end that the suicide is really a murder perpetrated by a member of the group, but the murderer’s name is never given and the story is presented in the form of a puzzle that the readers themselves are expected to solve. There is an unofficial pact amongst readers who have solved the puzzle not to reveal the solution.

Nobody knows who wrote ‘Edge2’. The editors of *The Boat* claim that the story was sent to them under the name ‘Anastasia Xenophon’ and they published it in good faith as a work of fiction. The story became famous when the magazine was contacted by three members of The Edge Group accusing the unknown author of libel. A letter issued to the media by The Edge Group stated: ‘the work you have published is libel in the most classical sense, in that it tells a story that implies a negative truth.’

The libel accusation allegedly relates to an event which occurred early in the life of The Edge project when, according to bystanders, Dylan Morgan accused Jeremy N of stealing his idea for a poem writing game. The allegation has never been substantiated.

The publicity surrounding the case has led to a flurry of counterclaims, including that The Edge Group wrote the story together and published it as a publicity stunt. However Douglas K, Jeremy N and Electra B have denied publicly that it was written by any of them. All three have written about their own perceptions of the ‘Edge2’ controversy in the form of an improvised and continuing series of poem/dialogues entitled *Bridge*, produced in The Edge web studio and published in 2010. This is the second most frequently visited page on The Edge website.

The short story writer Nina C is the only member of the group who has never spoken publicly about the ‘Edge2’ scandal. For this reason, she is often assumed to be the author of ‘Edge2’, but this was never proven. Although she has never participated in the *Bridge* dialogues, Nina C remains a contributor to The Edge web studio project. Her personal experimental project, involving text fragments tattooed and projected across her naked

body, is now the most frequently visited section of The Edge website, with over 862 million web search hits logged.

## **Research statement**

### ***Research background***

This work investigates the problem of reconceptualising narrative in an era of digitised communication (see, Egan 2010).

### ***Research contribution***

*The Edge* explores questions of narrative coherence, discontinuity and loss by recruiting web-based concepts and techniques for writing fiction. Borrowing a popular online textual mode, the ‘wiki’ page, the story is composed of interrelated fragments or vignettes. Its themes are enmeshed with its methodological frame: fragmentation, isolation, the randomness of loss and the pursuit of literary form.

### ***Research significance***

*The Edge* responds to Muecke’s call for writing that finds ‘a form that answers to its urgency’ (2010). In this sense, *The Edge* employs the wiki as a textual referent, an ‘objective correlative’ (Eliot 1921) against which the characters and their stories intersect and unfold, linking disparate textual elements. The wiki structure provides an innovative approach to the methodological and conceptual investigation of narrative writing within the context of contemporary communication. The story is not presented here as an actual wiki page and does not contain active hyperlinks, but this is a feature being explored in the development of the work as a novella.

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