

WRITERS IN CONVERSATION



Mapping Forgotten Worlds: a conversation with Danielle Clode

Gillian Dooley

Danielle Clode is an Adelaide-based author who has written on prehistoric megafauna, Pacific exploration, killer whales and bushfires. She writes children's books, essays, fiction and popular zoology, which have won awards, fellowships and prizes too numerous to mention. Her latest book, at the time of writing, is The Wasp and the Orchid, a biography of Australian nature writer Edith Coleman. Danielle and I have known each other for some years, and we are currently working together on an edited book about first contact between Australian Aboriginal people and explorers. For details of her publications and career, see her website at danielleclode.com.au

A graduate in zoology from Oxford University, Danielle has worked as a zookeeper and a museum researcher. Growing up on the Eyre Peninsula, South Australia, she spent some of her childhood travelling coastal Australia with her family by boat. Danielle teaches creative and academic writing and in all her work she is conscious of the importance of form and voice. In this interview I asked her about style, genre and technique in her writing, particularly The Wasp and the Orchid (2018), Voyages to the South Seas: In Search of Terres Australes (2007) and A Future in Flames (2010).

We spoke at her home in the Adelaide Hills in June 2018, and I first asked her about the combination of styles in A Future in Flames, her book about the history, science and future impact of bushfires in Australia.

GD: Reading *A Future in Flames*, I felt it was quite journalistic in the way it's structured. In the little vignettes, sometimes I was holding my breath – is this child going to survive or not? There's that kind of drama, but always with the solid scientific basis. Do you know of other

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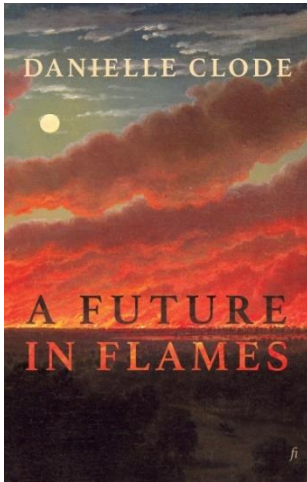
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authors who write in that sort of register? Because often there's quite a divide between the scientific writer and the one who actually gets you interested.

DC: I think I'm always struggling with form, I have been for a long time, because I've been doing it for a long time and the science/nature non-fiction writing field has changed dramatically in the time I've been publishing. When I first started I very clearly aimed to model myself on Stephen Jay Gould because he was the only sort of natural history writer I was particularly familiar with and that was how I thought you had to do it. So the first book I wrote (although it was published later), *Continent of Curiosities* (2006), is a book of essays, very similar to his. Of course the reason he was writing like that was that he was writing for *Scientific American* and he was combining all of his articles into books, so it was a completely artificial structure, very specific to him. Not a model for all writers at all.

GD: So you set out to write it like that because you were modelling it on Gould.

DC: Because that's how I thought science writing/nature writing worked. I wasn't really thinking much about it to be honest. I guess I was only familiar with science writing as a form of journalism, which is something I've struggled with ever since. People say you're a science writer because you write about science but in actual fact science writing is a very journalistic form and it's very specific. There are elements of reportage and journalistic style in my writing, but that's not what I do. I think my writing is much more analytical and also driven by storytelling more than just reporting.



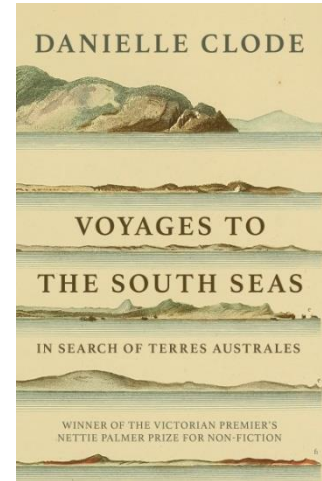
GD: Yes, true. I didn't mean journalism in the sense of news reporting. I meant more like feature writing, that kind of register, where you're appealing to people's curiosity about what happened.

DC: Yes, effect and impact. And that's a feature of new journalism, I guess, which is much more influential in creative non-fiction now. Although I didn't recognise what that was until relatively recently. But I'm constantly searching for new models and ways you can do non-fiction and tell stories and tap into those stories. I think a lot of the models, especially for scientific stories where people are trying to get human interest into them, involve putting the personal in, but often that can feel really contrived – I remember a colleague of mine who's a very good academic writer saying how he was sick of

reading these books where the writer would say, 'I was jogging around the park with eminent neuroscientist blah blah'. And it's so forced, and so awkward, but that's a very common form. I really didn't want to write that kind of thing. So I'm always looking for new models, and I think that's pretty apparent in the different ways that all my books work.

GD: In *Voyages to the South Seas*, the first question for me is, why the French explorers? Is it to redress the balance?

DC: Yes, it was to redress the balance I guess. I think growing up in South Australia you've always got quite a strong interest in French exploration because of Baudin.¹ I was always frustrated as a kid at school that we learned lots about Flinders and never anything about the French explorers even though I knew they had been there at the same time. So that was a source of frustration. And because my family has a line of French ancestry that also made it particularly interesting. So I just thought it was something that hadn't been written about very much and it's really quite fascinating.



GD: Yes, it is. And I like the way that you threaded the narrative through, from character to character – it was like a spotlight.

DC: Yes, it was quite a challenging book to structure.

GD: I can imagine.

DC: Initially I had planned just to do one voyage. I proposed doing just the Baudin voyage, and the publisher said, hmm, how about you do all of them? Oh, OK, no problems! So I did have to reconsider that. Then the question becomes how do you pull all those together? And I also wanted to make them come to life, so I didn't want to tell a retrospective account. Also, people had often asked me about the science that these French scientists produced – how important was the science they did. And looking back you might think, well it wasn't that interesting really. They discovered a few new species – they actually discovered a lot of species – but from today you look back and you think, well, we know a certain sum of knowledge and of that only a small proportion was from those French explorers. But if you look at them at the time, the proportion of knowledge they knew about Australia in comparison to everything else was enormous – they were the only ones doing scientific research. The English research was very minimal and very patchy and often didn't happen till a lot later, whereas the French tended to do the work at the time and get the material out, and document it, so they had a much more structured scientific approach. So therefore to tell that story it's not helpful to tell it from the present looking back. You really need to tell the story from the point of view at the time, which is quite hard to do from a historical point of view. So that's why I focussed on vignettes in the different voyages, to get that voice at the time happening. And because most of the French voyages were so well documented and they wrote such a lot, it made it a lot easier to do, because I had a lot of detail.

GD: Sometimes the more there is the more complicated it becomes.

¹ Nicolas Baudin (1754-1803) was the leader of the French expedition in Australian waters 1800 to 1803, who famously met British explorer Matthew Flinders in Encounter Bay on the coast of South Australia in 1802.

DC: I guess that's also a benefit of doing the vignettes, because you don't have to do the whole voyage and the whole context of everything that happened and everybody that was on it. You just do this one particular scene and it becomes an exemplar for the voyage.

GD: I love the way you saw the different personalities from different viewpoints – from inside and then from outside.

DC: The personalities were huge – there are some really big personalities and some of them are really difficult to contain. I mean, Péron in particular was a very difficult character to control.²

GD: He's been dead for over 200 years and we still can't contain him!

DC: Yes, that was quite a challenge. That required a lot of fictional devices to achieve – just techniques. Developing character was quite important. I spent a lot of time working on character development and trying to flesh out what I knew of them from the record and what everybody said about them and what else might I use to build that character.

GD: And creating the voice, because that was what I think was the real key to that book, the voices.

DC: Well, fortunately they did leave their voices in their writing. Although picking up on those is not all that straightforward, given that I'm reading the English translation of the French version which is actually an amalgamation of different texts, because the captain would often compile the narrative from a whole heap of different sources. So the voice you end up with I'm not entirely convinced is the right person. But they were distinctive. You can hear the different voices in the texts. And you tell when they're not translated well, as well. The language changes.

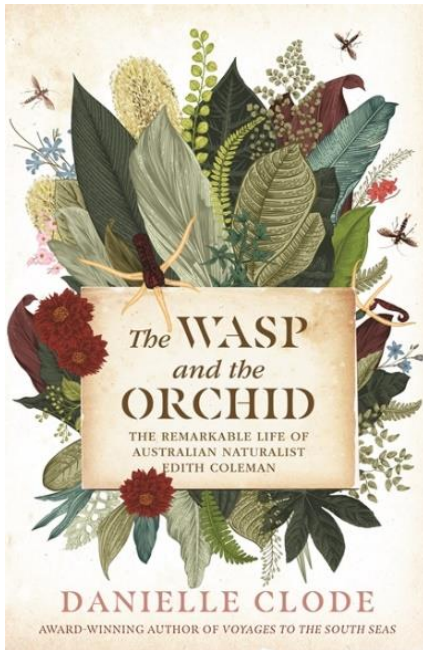
GD: There's the official accounts and then there are the journals.

DC: Sometimes you have their individual journals, like Baudin – we have his actual unpublished journal. But you're using the official narratives in most cases, so I was quite struck by the fact that I would often come across fragments of officers' journals which repeated what the captain had said, in his own words! So they weren't actually his words – he'd just combined them – he'd thought, that's a good turn of phrase, I'll use that.

GD: Well, that's quite legit, because that was their job.

DC: Yes, that was their job. And some of them we didn't have voices for, Josephine for example. But fortunately there's so much written around her that that gave me material I could use. But it is tricky. Especially for the Baudin voyage where there are a lot of journals.

² François Péron (1775-1810) was a scientist on the Baudin voyage who wrote the official account of the voyage after Baudin's death.



GD: It's clear that throughout what you write, getting the voice right – as with any serious writer – is the key. In *The Wasp and the Orchid* I was struck by what you said: 'I don't know what to call Edith now, now that she's married.' And it's a problem which not many people acknowledge. It was nice to see it acknowledged.

DC: It's really interesting, isn't it? The naming issue. And that came up a lot – I was debating the whole issue of what should she be called. Should she be called Mrs Coleman? That might have been what she preferred to be called because it was more formal in those days. She wouldn't have called herself Edith with someone she didn't know. So there were layers of social etiquette. But if you call her 'Coleman', which is the standard scientific kind of approach, well, there's a whole heap of Colemans and I'm going to get confused doing the family history. So yes, it was quite a tricky issue.

Then of course later on that became an issue when I realised that some of her specimens had been mis-ascribed to her husband because they'd been recorded in the database as 'Mrs JG Coleman' and then the 'Mrs' had been lost. So because they were just JG Coleman they'd been registered under her husband's name. But they weren't her husband's, they were hers. So there's a lot of complexities in naming and you can see how easily women's stories and materials get subsumed under their partners' names. In her case it was just fortunate that her husband wasn't remotely interested in collecting, so it was clear cut, but if he had been, that would have been a completely different story.

GD: As you say, in her writing the only Jameses mentioned by name are kings, poets or gardeners.

DC: Yes, she never mentions him by name. She mentions him obliquely.

GD: Another thing that I found interesting was the way you use maps as a metaphor. You talk about maps to Edith's life, and her public persona, and her family, and maps of her specimens. It struck me that that metaphor kept coming up.

DC: I guess I was using maps a lot of the time to work out where she was and what she was doing. I was always trying to find out where she'd been, and often her writing was the only guide I had. I guess there were spatial maps, and there were also temporal maps, trying to work out when things happened as well.

But I guess maps for me are quite important in writing, I use that metaphor a lot and I use geographic information systems maps as a metaphor, where the different layers are overlaid, so you may have a historical map but then you might have a scientific map and a climate map, so that layering of information is something that I'm particularly interested in doing – not necessarily revealing everything that's on a particular layer but diving through a

layer to see all the different levels of information that are operating. That's what I think gives writing its richness, is that ability to do that layering. So I do spend a lot of time preparing those maps, even if I don't use them.

GD: So is it actually a physical thing, a spatial thing, or is it a conceptual thing?

DC: It is conceptual but sometimes it's spatial. I do spend a lot of time with maps and spreadsheets and things like that, laying it all out, so that I can see what the distribution is.

I think all my books are ways of mapping my environments, history and places. It's a way of finding out where I belong. All my books change the way I look at the places I live and give me a better connection to them.

GD: Sometimes I think that now that we're using screens all the time it's a bit harder. Sometimes you think, I've got to get bits of paper and lay them out on the table – even with something as non-spatial as literary criticism you do sometimes need that spatial element to plan things.

DC: I have a big roll of brown paper that I roll out on a table when I come to something that I'm stuck on. Commonly it's a structural issue. I can lay out the story and see how it's flowing.



I'll often sort of graph it onto a big piece of paper and that will help me work out what the structure is and what the problem is. I think that spatial stuff is really important – it helps me, anyway. As well as maps. I also map things. You can't do it on a little map. Maps have to be big. And a screen's not big enough.

GD: No, no screen is big enough. I loved the bit when you were in Western Australia and you/we were driving down the coast. I was there too! I found it really fascinating being on that little research trip with you.³ How many of those little trips did you have to do? Were there other field work visits?

DC: Yes, the location research kind of thing is quite important. Trips to locate Edith's old home, the trip to find her house in Healesville. I would have liked to have done more. I would have liked to have gone to Hermannsburg, and followed that journey, for example. And sometimes I'd draw on trips that I'd done in the past rather than going and redoing them. I guess you

³ In 2016, I accompanied Danielle on a 2-day research trip to the south-west coast of Western Australia retracing Edith Coleman's visit in 1929. The photo shows Danielle in the marri forest near Mammoth Cave, Margaret River, WA.

have to call on a mix of experiences, but it is helpful to go to and see the places, just in terms of the houses and the architecture. Going and seeing where she stayed in Perth made a difference to understanding what the setting was.

And you do find traces. For example when I went to her old property in Blackburn and finally located exactly where it was and thought that it was all gone because it had been demolished, and then realising that the pittosporum hedge along the front fence was still there. And then realising that the back fence was all still intact, because you could see it was exactly four blocks long, and it was all the same fence, and so it had obviously not changed or been replaced. And then realising, literally as I was driving away, that I was outside the Field Naturalists' Club, which I'd been to before – but I hadn't twigged. It wasn't there when Edith lived there, but it was just that synchronicity of discovering that the organisation that had been so important in her life was now just over the back fence from where her old home was. It was just lovely. Again, it's like the mapping, historical mapping, you're putting layers over the top. So the Field Naturalists have come and popped themselves down next to her.

GD: Do they know that?

DC: Yes, well they do now! They knew she was in the area, but I don't think they realised she was that close. It was just literally down the back lane.

GD: I recognised what you were saying about that 'dismissive half smile' when you tell people about your research – I know that so well.

DC: Yes, it's really irritating.

GD: But if you go beyond those stereotypes, the things that you've found that have been disregarded in the past

DC: Yes. I think it's quite damaging. I know it's very characteristic in Australia, though I'm not sure how characteristic it is in other English-speaking countries, but it's not a feature of European research in this field. For a lot of the European researchers, nature writing encompasses everything right down to government legislation, so they will analyse that as well. And to me that seems to be a much more honest approach. It's not making value judgements about the quality of the writing; it's just saying this is the writing, let's analyse it for what it's doing. But I think we tend to be so much more focussed on high literature and art ...

GD: Whereas you're really just a 'bastard breed of mongrels'!⁴

DC: But I do think writing is like that. We steal stuff. We're magpies. And I think it's so artificial ... I remember reading about the origins of the essay, and they just make up a lineage of people whose work they like, but it's not where it comes from. It's getting

⁴ 'There is no taxonomy of nature writing. We're all just a bastard breed of mongrels. There are no heirs, no lineages, no inheritances.' *The Wasp and the Orchid* (Sydney: Picador, 2018) 257.

information from all sorts of places. It's arising independently. You can't construct a family tree out of that, because it just pops up everywhere. And people will do the same type of thing at the same time in completely different places independent from one another. It all moves together and becomes a single entity, but it didn't start that way, so I think it's a flawed metaphor that people use, inheritance and family trees, speaking as someone who's quite interested in how that actually works biologically, it does not work in literature, and I think it's a poor metaphor to use. Trying to set up those genre boundaries is pointless and it's not helpful at all.

GD: There's a passage (around page 244) where you discuss your anxiety about avoiding extremes, and there are very short paragraphs and sections – and thought it was almost as if that anxiety you're feeling is mirrored on the page.

DC: Oh yes. The personal and autobiographical verses the objective factual. Yes, I think that was an inherent conflict in this book, because I'm writing about a form of nature writing, and about a nature writer who never discusses the personal, who completely excludes the personal. And that's probably a style that I'm quite comfortable with, and yet I'm writing an intensely personal version of that story and I'm bringing myself into the story constantly. So it's a tension within the book I think. And I do that partly because there isn't a way of telling the completely objective factual version of events because we don't know what they are, and also because I'm not prepared to leave myself as the biographer out of the story knowing that to do so would make it seem like I knew more than I did.

GD: Yes. Exactly.

DC: So I want to acknowledge the bits that I don't know and the bits that I'm making up and the bits that are speculative and the bits that are probably based on my biases and not on something else, because I think that's what all biographers do, but we often don't get told about it. But if you read two biographies you'll see it because you'll see how they differ using the same source material. So that was my reason for putting the personal stuff in.

But also it's a decision based on what's going to make the best story and what's going to draw the reader on, and I think that personal stuff is very appealing. It does give an impetus to the story that it might not otherwise have. So that's an inherent conflict. And the fragments – it's a stylistic device, and it's also to stop myself from trying to do a coherent narrative, because I think, especially coming from a science background, but also in any sort of academic writing I suppose, there's always a tendency for me to want to smooth everything out and make it all coherent and neat and clean and make a simple argument. And I wanted to keep the material complicated and unresolved, because it is, and that's where the fragments are coming from. I've just got to be happy to let things sit unresolved and move on. Because if I try and resolve them I'll start weaving things in that shouldn't be woven in. Sometimes a fragment will just sit by itself and it doesn't go anywhere. But that's because that's the way it works.

GD: And then you sort of model nature writing, too, with the passage about frowning at butterflies, and ants on illicit business. Do you feel as though that was the sort of thing that Edith was doing? – but it sounds much more like you – that's *your* voice.

DC: Yes, I think I'm probably much more judgemental about nature than Edith was! I was keen to incorporate nature writing into the story as well as writing about nature writing – make sure I did some nature writing as well, so I try to weave in those sorts of anecdotes into the stories and it was really fascinating how often they led back to Edith's work in any case. I think there's one example when I was talking about hoverflies, or trying to identify the hoverflies, or what I later found were hoverflies, in the garden. I wrote a description of them, and I went to the museum and I got them to identify what they were, and they weren't sure what they were, and then a gardening friend of mine said, of course they're hoverflies, they're everywhere, so OK, fine! But the really interesting thing is that I went back to Edith's work and searched her articles, and found that she'd written a paper on bees pollinating the specific flower I had written about, completely coincidentally. It's just interesting how you've got that serendipitous connection between her work and what I was thinking about, which I think just comes about because you're working in a similar environment and noticing similar things.

GD: So what do you think your relationship with Edith is now? Is she a role model?

DC: She's definitely a role model, an inspiration, for me, for sure. The fact that she started what she did so relatively late in her life, and she did it with such absolute confidence. And there's no appearance of concern about what other people think. She just does it because she knows she's good at what she does, and that's all there is to it. It's really admirable. And her work ethic was extraordinary. I'm not sure I'd take too much inspiration from that though – it was a prodigious amount of work that she did. But I think just being willing to back herself in her observations, and when other people say, no that's not what's going on, she wasn't put off by that, she just knew that there was something going on and she would pursue that line of investigation until she'd sorted it to her own satisfaction, and I think that's why she made such interesting discoveries.

GD: And it's also interesting how well-regarded she was in her lifetime.

DC: It is interesting, because you often hear about how sexist science is, and I think in a workplace environment it is, in terms of getting jobs, it is – has been – quite sexist. But I think intellectually it's not actually very sexist. I think intellectually it's quite a level playing field. And of course that's the great advantage Edith had, as an amateur, is that she wasn't competing for jobs or position. I think she would have encountered a lot more difficulty if she had been. But she was an amateur scientist mostly communicating with other amateurs.

GD: And amateur wasn't such quite a pejorative word then?

DC: No. In lots of fields it's recognised that amateur scientists are the experts. In orchidology, it's mostly amateurs who are the experts. While it's true that initially when her articles were sent overseas, it was male orchidologists who were consulted with. As soon as they said it's

all great, then that was it, she was in. And after that there was no dispute. You'd have people who were initially a bit sceptical, then a year or two later writing to Edith, saying I'm so grateful for your words of confidence in my paper, because you know so much. So tables turned very quickly. And I think that's because people like that recognise talent and expertise when they find it, whoever they find it in. But professionally that would have been a different story – certainly at Melbourne University I think she would have encountered a huge amount of opposition if she'd tried to get in there – well she wouldn't have because she didn't have a degree. But the only person who I found any evidence of treating her disrespectfully was Wilfred Agar.⁵ She sent him the specimen of the gynandromorph grasshopper and while he acknowledged her as the collector, when he wrote the paper he didn't cite either of her papers on that species. She was the only person who'd ever written a paper on those species. And her papers were large and comprehensive and thorough. There can be no reason why you wouldn't cite them. Yet he chose not to. I think that was because she was an amateur, and she was a woman, and he was notoriously sexist. And I don't think he liked amateurs much either. So there was definitely demarcation going on there.

GD: So what's changed?

DC: Not enough!

GD: Would someone in her position be acknowledged today?

DC: I think there is a push for citizen science to be recognised more overtly. There are a lot of conversations happening, certainly in scientific circles, about making sure that you acknowledge non-academic collaborators. That's been a big push in any field that involves Indigenous knowledge, that co-authorship is important. In the past you might have just put people in the acknowledgements, but now there's more recognition that you actually have to put them up the top. So that's becoming much more common, I think. In lots of other fields, like astronomy, amateurs are hugely important, but in environmental work amateurs also play a huge role. I don't think that it's necessarily that they've been unappreciated, it's just a matter of formalising appreciation.

GD: Formalising it and therefore perpetuating it, I suppose.

DC: Yes, because if you don't put it in print it gets forgotten. And it's not that you didn't appreciate it, but you need to actually write it down and record it.

GD: You've rediscovered Edith in a way. There's the scientific paper side of it, but there's the nature writing side of it.

DC: Well, her scientific papers were always known, and scientists are good at citing their source material, so she's remained known in narrow fields. Particularly in orchidology she is

⁵ Zoology professor at Melbourne University from 1917.

known: she wasn't really lost from there. But her nature writing is different, because it happened in newspapers and magazines, which are completely ephemeral, and that was really difficult to trace. It would still be impossible to do if it wasn't for Trove. Trove is what made that possible, largely – though some them aren't even on Trove.⁶

GD: So it's more the nature of how she published – how she disseminated her work, because if she'd written books ...

DC: If she'd written books she would have stayed as a figure, she'd be much less likely to be forgotten, I think.

GD: Are there others who are comparable who were writing at that time?

DC: There were a lot of women writers writing natural history articles in the newspapers. It would be interesting to actually look at that. Some of them were also known as fiction writers, Amy Mack and people like that. I haven't really looked into them in any detail. But there were quite a few whose names kept popping up. So no doubt they're out there. I know people are doing work on some of the people who wrote fiction in newspapers – some of those writers also have been lost because they wrote in newspapers. And I think Trove is doing something at the moment, running a book club reading stories that were published as serials in newspapers. That's another interesting approach. Because of course those things were hugely influential, and newspapers don't play that same role any more, so we've forgotten about them.

GD: Unless they actually ended up being put into covers and published ...

DC: And that's what really comes across in those studies, I think, is how important it is to have somebody backing you up and making sure your work stays in print. Somebody like Kate Baker, who famously restored Joseph Furphy's work and promoted it religiously, and got Stella Miles Franklin involved and then they wrote a book together. And actually she's the only one who wrote any biographical work about Edith Coleman, so even though Kate's work wasn't published, it was still a hugely useful archival resource for me. A figure like that is quite crucial, and if you don't have somebody doing that for your work, it just disappears. And Edith's daughters were quite private people who didn't particularly want to promote themselves, so they didn't promote their mother either, in a way. So that material just fell away.

GD: And then you come along.

DC: Edith actually did a better job than her daughters – she did prepare her material for an element of posterity, I suspect. She's got her scrapbook with all her published articles in it, so that's survived, and her grandson has it. And the notes she wrote, which I think are Kate

⁶ Trove is the National Library of Australia's online resource, containing a large corpus of open access digitised newspapers and magazines. See trove.nla.gov.au

Baker's raw material, she wrote out all that material herself. A carefully curated view of letters of support.

GD: Oh well, good for her! Finally, there was the remark you made at the end, about why you write. And why anybody writes, I suppose. To understand, and belong, and connect. Why do we write? To leave something, to capture something?

DC: Sometimes I write because I can't contain everything in my head. So you have to write in order to make sense of it – it's an external brain, writing, so if you don't write then you can't actually explore any issues in depth. That's a kind of a practical reason for writing.

GD: I wonder what it must be like to be not literate, because I think they must have had that capacity for making sense without writing.

DC: Oral storytelling – recitation and those sorts of things – memorisation would have been really important. But yes, I can't imagine what it would be like. I was just thinking that watching *A Handmaid's Tale*. In the last few episodes they were dealing with her being able to use a pen because the women are not allowed to read or write. I just can't imagine how horrific that would be. That would just be *unbearable*.

GD: Knowing about it and not being allowed to do it.

DC: Not physically being able to – it would be incredibly difficult. If I go on holidays and I don't take a computer or anything to write on I get a physical urge to have to write. It's a physical compulsion. I'll write out recipes, I'll write out anything as long as I'm writing something. It's ridiculous. I can't not write. I think there is sometimes an element of memorializing, but I think mostly though I write to clarify things for myself, for *me* to understand. So *The Future in Flames* is very much me working through something and coming to a reasoned position at the end. And I'm happy to leave it there.

GD: It's actually in its way quite a terrifying book.

DC: I suppose. I feel less terrified having written it.

GD: Yes. I suppose to understand is to take control, even though sometimes you realise that you're not going to be in control.

DC: So it is to understand, and if other people come with you on that process, then that's a great joy, and that's certainly what keeps me going.

GD: It's quite an individual thing, then. I know you've done co-authoring ...

DC: Yes, not so much for books, but they're always collaborative. Yes, you do have to do ninety percent of it yourself I suppose, but I do always work with publishers, with a team, and some of them are more collaborative than others. But they're always a team effort, that's for sure.

GD: But it's still your own vision.

DC: Yes, it certainly feels like that. Once they're published you know it's all going to come down on you. You don't feel like you're sharing that burden. If people don't like it, that's just going to be your fault. So yes, in that sense it is.

GD: But you have fairly good reviews? Have you ever really had a big controversy about your books?

DC: No, I mean some people don't like them – you can't write books that are going to appeal to everyone. I've certainly had reviews of *Voyages*, where people objected to it because I didn't talk enough about Cook. That wasn't actually what the book was about but there we go. So yes, some people did object to *Voyages* because of the Anglo bubble, we have a very Anglo version of history. Also, the French don't write about this aspect of their history, so they don't promote it. They're often not aware of it themselves. It's not something that's been taught or encouraged and so therefore there's nobody putting it out there, so maritime history is very very English-focused. And American. The other former powers don't say much about it. Which is interesting.

GD: Is that something you're interested in – telling those less well-known stories?

DC: Very much so, whether it is stories about killer whales co-operating with humans, or long extinct Australian animals, or French explorers or forgotten naturalists, I'm very much interested in telling the stories that don't usually get much attention. I'm not very interested in mainstream stories – what's happening behind the scenes, or where we are not looking is so much more fascinating and revealing.

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