

10 Writing wonders

Poetry as archaeological method?

K.E. Kavanagh

Introduction

When I first mooted to colleagues the notion of fiction as a mode of archaeological investigation, I was met with some bewilderment, particularly when I mentioned the addition of poetics. The practices of archaeology and poetry were perceived as intrinsically incompatible, other than as a second-order respondent (Carroll 1998). This is curious when one notes that most archaeology departments across Europe are located within the Arts and Humanities, not the Sciences. In practice, archaeology is a discipline with such breadth that it sits neatly between the two (Figure 10.1). The diversity of its many specialisms is so extensive that no archaeologist today can possess a comprehensive skill set. This chapter explores some of the challenges of working across this sprawling field, starting with theoretical considerations and moving on to examples drawn from my own practice.

Definitions and delineations

Archaeology is the search for fact. Not truth. If it's truth you're interested in, Dr. Tyree's Philosophy class is right down the hall.

(Indiana Jones 1989)

Fact, fiction, truth. The definitions, delineations and correlations between these concepts have been an increasing focus of debate for over a century (Frege 1892; Kripke 1972/1980; Meinong 1904; Vaihinger 1911; Prentice 1999), with the Philosophy of Fiction being a distinct area of enquiry in its own right (e.g. Currie 1990, 2011; Lamarque & Olsen, 1994; Friend 2011, 2012). It is also a territory in which archaeology walks a tightrope; whatever Professor Jones may assert. For surely, lifting (supposedly) factual data out of a multitude of potential (alleged) fictions in search of a ('true') past is archaeology's *raison d'être*? Definitions therefore matter.

Truth: That which is [...] in accordance with [...] reality.

(OED)

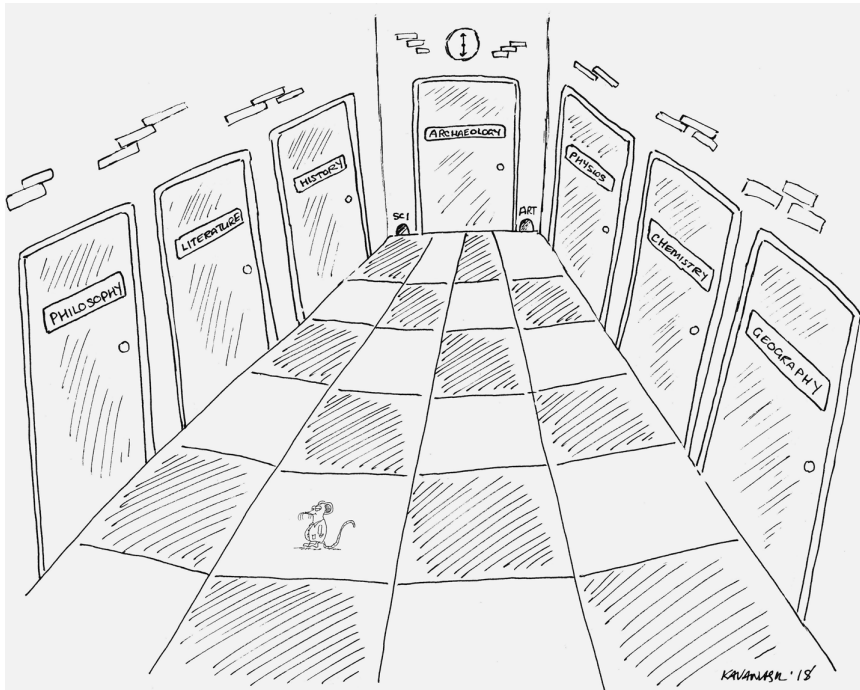


Figure 10.1 Across the hall, doors/open with different keys/which all look the same (drawing by Erin Kavanagh).

Without launching into a Heideggerian discourse on the nature of reality, let us take ‘reality’ to be the physical world as perceived through empiricism. Therefore, truth is the quality of those propositions that accord with empirically verifiable experience. Regarding fact and fiction, for the sake of this argument I shall adopt the stance of literary critic Dorrit Cohn (1999), from whom I take the distinction between fact and fiction to be that the former is referential (to reality) and the latter is not. That is, fiction is something invented and, as such, it is therefore today often imbued “with a degree of covert negativity and frivolity” (ibid.: 3) because invented or conceptual things are weighted with a lighter degree of truth value than that of a tangible or material thing.

Poetry bridges these divides. It can be a fiction in that it is always conceptual, whilst also being referential. Likewise, it can be total make-believe. This brings us to science versus art:

Science: the intellectual and practical activity encompassing the systematic study of the structure and behaviour of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment.

(OED)

Art: works produced by human creative skill and imagination.

(OED)

Art and science are not mutually exclusive. A work can be produced with human creative skill by deploying the scientific imagination (Holton 1998; Wright Mills 2000; Stuart 2017), and it can also be done through observation and experimentation in the physical and natural world. If the latter were not the case, then we would not have landscape artists such as J.M.W. Turner or Thomas Gainsborough, nor would botanical and biological illustrations like those of Leonardo da Vinci, Charles Darwin and Haeckel Ernst have ever been able to exist.

The same applies to poetry as to painting. There is an entire genre of poetics that falls under the headings of Natural Science, Mathematics or Geology (Brown 2013). We need look no further than James Clerk Maxwell (1854) or James Joseph Sylvester (1870) for examples of scholars who excelled in combining two or more of these fields, along with those earlier and since, such as John Keats, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and J.H. Prynne. A fascination with the relationship between the sides of the alleged divide extends much further than C.P. Snow's (1959/2001) infamous claim that science and the arts are two opposing cultures (see Mallory 1989; Brown 2001; Finn 2004; Zimmerman 2012; Bhatt 2016; Firth 2016).

Most of these, however, contain examples wherein science is contained *within* the poetry, not where the poetry itself is possibly scientific. For "poetry is not science, it does not aspire to be science, and it cannot be thought of rationally as a replacement for science" (Brady in Prendergast 2009: xiii). If we look at the definitions, though, then we can see that while they can be distinguished easily one from the other, "they overlap to a great extent and do not differ absolutely in any particular" (Fry 1983: 168). Science does not have a monopoly on intellectual acuity. Nor does poetry have the only frame in which figurative language can be deployed—and, contrary to popular opinion, it does recognise both correct and incorrect form, content and interpretation, containing the systematic study of both object and subject. The conscientious poet will have been as analytical in their wielding of a pen as the most conscientious of scientists. As Mererid Hopwood (2004: xiii) states, regarding the Welsh *cynghanedd*, people sometimes "forget that art relies on the mastery of craft". Craft, in turn, relies upon the application of method.

Method: a particular procedure for accomplishing or approaching something, especially a systematic or established one.

(OED)

One of the accomplishments of poetry is to allow us "to see ourselves freshly and keenly. It makes the invisible world visible" (Parini 2008: 181). This, surely, is what archaeology does too? Archaeology can reveal that which was



Figure 10.2 The tightrope between/fact and fiction is balanced/by seeking the truth (drawing by Erin Kavanagh).

invisible. It can reanimate a space, an artefact or an action that may have lain still and hidden for centuries, if not millennia. Archaeological practice draws us ever more deeply into dialogue with both the ground upon, and the traditions within, which we walk. It can reveal wonders. When therefore we walk the fine line between all of these definitions and delineations, where do we arrive? (Figure 10.2).

Poetry as method: context

Poetry as method is not as improbable as it may, at first, appear. It has been extensively applied for research purposes within social science and anthropology with substantial results (Langer & Furman 2004; Longenbach 2004; Faulkner 2005; Neilsen 2008; Rosaldo 2015). In such work, poetry has been both product and process, wherein the poetics have been applied for a multitude of purposes (see Faulkner 2009: 21; Prendergast 2009: xx, xxi). It was also, of course, a staple of classical and antiquarian writing through the use of lyricism as narrative form.

The poet and the historian differ not by writing in verse or in prose. The work of Herodotus might be put into verse, and it would still be a species of history, with metre no less than without it. The true difference

is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen. Poetry, therefore, is [...] more philosophical [...] than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular. By the universal I mean how a person of given character will on occasion speak or act, according to the law of probability or necessity; and it is this universality at which poetry aims.

(Arist. *Poet.* 9)

In this passage, Aristotle refutes Plato's assertion that the arts are the lowest form of expression, positioning himself against his teacher, rating the emotional content of poetry to be as commendable as its intellectual rigour and as representational as science. Aristotle's argument acknowledges that poetics adheres to a different set of truth values to that of science, answering to the human through being personal, passionate and porous. In this, the medium expresses embodied experience in a way that archaeology often avoids (Brady 2004). Let us, for example, consider site reports, the bread-and-butter of archaeological discourse. Their purpose is to convey data with maximum clarity, attempting to present as objective an account as possible. In so doing, they are necessarily dry, dispassionate and depersonalised. The authoritative voice is authorless; the contents are unpeopled. What we read are the results of an experience, but we have no inkling as to the phenomenological practice that led to those conclusions nor the breath of the landscape documented.

Whereas "a poem's power inheres less to its conclusions than in its propensity to resist them [...]. Rather than asking to be justified, poems ask us to exist" (Longenbach 2004: 10–11). It is simultaneously scholastic and self-illustrative. One defence for conventional archaeological prose is that it offers objective conclusions to bring about a comforting closure. I find the opposite to be the case: it restrains and limits the truth; it can suffocate. In contrast, poetry does "not close anything down" (Leggo 2008: 168), consequently giving voice to missing fragments, paying attention to process as well as product. These different methods do not require reconciliation; they simply fulfil different criteria.

Allison Mickel has argued that in being hung up on results rather than process, "standard site reports fundamentally misrepresent the character and complexity of the research and reasoning process that generates these findings" (2012: 108). It decontextualises by distorting the authenticity of representation by removing the presence of those who are making the assertions. As the cultural anthropologist Renato Rosaldo (2015) observes, in academia we tend to tell what it is we are about to tell, then we tell what it is, then we tell what it is we have just told. We do not cut to the chase; we do not show—but why? "Why do we as researchers and scholars whose work needs to have more community currency than ever before, remain wedded to telling rather than showing or imagining?" (Neilsen 2008: 99). Instead, why do we not "seize back the creative initiative" (Eshun & Madge 2012: 1)?

There is a plethora of ways in which we can do this through fiction, as other chapters in this volume demonstrate. More often than not, however, when we place value on creativity in archaeology, we tend to do so by looking only to its output, by using it as a conclusion; its position as a point of outside engagement with an inside process. Other than for that purpose, poetry is mostly peripheral to archaeological vision, being no more than useful ornamentation. From the poet's stance, however, it is slightly different, as everything is relevant. All is potential content, the landscape in particular, in which we poets wander, wondering.

We see this in exceptional writing, from Seamus Heaney and W.B. Yeats to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Thomas Hardy, Robert Hass, Kathleen Jamie and George Mackay Brown, where land and artefacts find immortality in verse with an enduring clarity that allows us to recognise features and material culture with poignant accuracy. The purpose these poems serve, though, is essentially one of aesthetics, not empiricism. This is not to say that aesthetics is without epistemic agency (Gadamer 1982), but it is not the only value that poetics may provide.

It is worth noting at this juncture that, just because a poem is published or performed, it does not necessarily follow that it bears critique. The requirement of specialist training is often overlooked within interdisciplinary concerns. It is common, for example, to hear the assertion that a scientist can write a novel and that a novelist is not actually required for this end, which brings to my mind W. Somerset Maugham's (1938: 176) observation that "there is an impression abroad that everyone has it in him to write one book; but if by this is implied a good book the impression is false".

We are, of course, harking back to Hopwood's comment about the requirement of craft, which is far from being a solitary assertion. Revision, a refusal to lapse into licence and the ability to exceed a resistance to difficulty are all demanded of both the effective poet *and* the reader (Prynne 1961; Piirto 2002; Finch 2005). The problem with efficacy is that it requires expertise, and the problem with expertise is that it requires experts. Efficacy demands a certain level of skill to collate data, to disseminate them and to ken that of others. It also requires criteria for judging quality, which can be a minefield of its own. Nonetheless, every poet has to begin somewhere, be they attempting research through poetics or simply indulging the muse.

This is where consilience—agreement—between poetry and archaeology can fall into a trench of its own making. Just because somebody is skilled in understanding one area, it does not follow that they are skilled in another. When faced with an unfamiliar medium, they may therefore not possess the necessary skills required for comprehension. Compare, for example, the skills required to read a geophysical figure or a sonnet.

The result is that as narrow a field as site reportage is, poetry is not likely to be any broader. Let us not therefore claim that all archaeologists should attempt to produce literature. Or that we should all be capable of appreciating literature when it is placed before us, even if it pertains to our area of

scientific interest. Not all archaeologists can use graphics software, create a pollen diagram or even record a test pit. Why should they be expected to be able to write or understand fiction or poetry? The reverse, of course, is also valid. As Melisa Cahnmann (2003: 30) states: “If poetry is to have greater impact on research, those engaged in poetic practices need to share our processes and products with the entire research community and the terms of its use must be clearly defined”.

Which is what follows here, without any claims towards excellence, merely the personal satisfaction of fulfilling a research requirement through the use of poetry rather than prose. All of these examples are personal proofs of concept, but hopefully they will also inspire others to begin the journey of acquiring the qualities and qualifications of an effective archaeopoet, or, at the very least, to be able to recognise one by page or ear.

Poetry as method: practice

The uses to which poetic enquiry can be put are multifarious, such as we find with the social geographers Eshun and Madge (2012). Ostensibly, they explored the use of poetry as a method for interpreting data collection in postcolonial geography research, but they also utilised it as a means of analysis, for uncovering the previously unheard voices of participants and as art in its own right. Their data consisted of extensive interviews within rural Akan communities. Their poetic representations of these interviews then reflected the local tradition of oration. It was therefore both a result *and* a method. While their work walks a politically charged path between imperialist and ethically sentient approaches, I suggest we take one step back. Let us consider how writing, reading or hearing a poem in response to the experience of working in the field can be of assistance in shaping knowledge, leading us beyond those austere conclusions so often required by funding bodies.

In my own explorations into this practice, I have noted that poetics can be deployed within archaeology in ways that reflect the prosaic agenda of Mickel’s “fictive narrative” in tandem with Monica Prendergast’s three forms of poetic inquiry:

Mickel (2012):

- 1) Expressing a narrative voice that is not the opinion of the writer (Joyce 2002; Lamarque 1994)
- 2) Inviting free-form thematic interpretation (Deetz 1998; Pluciennik 1999)
- 3) Engaging the reader in a manner that transcends standard representation (White 1987)

Prendergast (2009):

- i) Vox Theoria; literature-voiced, responsive
- ii) Vox Autobiographia/Autoethnographia; researcher-voiced, overtly self-reflexive
- iii) Vox Participare; participant-voiced, from scripts (where the “participants” have engaged in the research but are not the researcher)

I can make a match between each of these (author-ordered) demarcations via my own case studies:

- (1) (iii): participant voices, poetry from scripts, are not the opinion of the writer
- (2) (ii): autobiographical/autoethnographical poems can be completely free form
- (3) (i): engaging the reader with archaeological material in a manner than transcends standard representations (and in response to those representations)

The second of Prendergast’s identified forms is somewhat problematic because it could be said to refer to all poetry, as will become apparent. Ditto with the third of Mickel’s forms, in that the purpose of poetry as a scientific narrative is that it transcends standard representation, alleviating some of the dehumanisation. It is simply a matter of degree. These pairings are loosely illustrated in the following examples, depicting three forms in which poetry can be employed as archaeological method.

(1)(iii) Expressing a narrative voice that is not the opinion of the writer/participant voiced, from scripts

I do this by applying a technique called ‘cut out’ or ‘found’ poetics. This is where one takes a piece of someone else’s writing (a ‘script’) and by cutting sections out, one is left with a more concise version. This can be done with any text. None is more predisposed to the method than any other, from highly technical observations of an auger core to extremely erudite fantastical descriptions. I find the form helpful in summarising the content of a piece for my own point of reference. By way of example, here is an excerpt from a paper on communicating geoscience, within which I have ‘found’ a poem:

Earth Stories: Context and Narrative in the Communication of Popular Science

Every UK geologist knows that the nation has a natural history that spans over three billion years of Earth’s existence. Few supermarket

checkout assistants have that appreciation. That its **history has left its clues in the rocks underfoot**—producing one of the richest and most varied stretches of geological real estates on the planet—is a revelation lost on your postman. Amateur rock hounds may be only too well aware of how that diverse geological underlay shapes the scenic grandeur of our land, but few investment bankers have that familiarity. And those that read the pages of this journal keenly appreciate how our nation’s rocks have contributed to a cultural legacy that instilled some of the scientific principles which guide our modern understanding of how the planet works, **but such enlightenment is unlikely to be shared** by your hairdresser. Even the fact that rocks, courtesy of the minerals within them, powered our country’s industrial development is a thought too far **for most**.

The point is that most ordinary members **of the public**—even taxi drivers—lack any firm acquaintance with the bedrock on which they live. They **are** for the most part **blissfully unaware** that unassuming railway cuttings or riverside bluffs are listed as Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS) because they preserve fragile vestiges **of our geological inheritance**. Or that, by the same token, the holes in the ground from which our modern urban fabric was once quarried are similarly **portals into the past, and hence are protected** as Sites of Special Scientific Interest. For those who are not geologically minded, this apparent indifference to terra firma is arguably more an issue of detachment. **No one has told them** that such places are important. Or at least, no one has told them **in a way that makes them care**.

(Stewart & Nield 2013: 699)

Earth and Communication

Every UK Geologist knows
that history has left its clues
in the rocks underfoot—
but such enlightenment
is unlikely to be shared
for most of the public
are blissfully unaware
of our geological portals into the past
and hence are protected.
No one has told them
in a way that makes them care.

This is not intended as a performative piece or a literary gem. It is simply how I have taken notes for the last 30 years. It is a type of shorthand, utilised both for self-reflection and also when translating academic text for those beyond the field. The influence of my own interpretation is unavoidable but not overt (otherwise it would render the purpose invalid). It is an



Figure 10.3 Excavating words/is the task of the midnight/archaeologist (drawing by Erin Kavanagh).

intellectual excavation, where the finds tray is a mound of small words (Figure 10.3).

Recently, the notion of poetry in relation to abstracts seems to have gained traction. Sam Illingworth (2016), for example, engaged in qualitative and quantitative analysis in an attempt to ascertain whether a poem can offer an alternative summary of an academic paper. The conclusion was that to an informed reader (regarding the science, although not the topic), the orthodox abstract was sufficient, but that to an uninformed reader (regarding the science), the poem was more useful. While these results are both interesting and encouraging in relation to the interest generated, they were, of course, only to be expected. This is because what this study did not do, was to examine explicit and implicit bias in the readers, that is, the poetic expertise of both sets of readers in tandem with their scientific knowledge and the inherent preference for one field against another. One would not expect a scientist without training in poetics to prefer a poetical

summary of a paper over a standardised prosaic one. Likewise, one would expect non-scientists to be more comfortable with text that did not utilise specialist language with which they were unfamiliar.

Illingworth's analysis thus usefully elucidates the importance of these factors. It does not, however, argue for poetry as method and therefore takes a different but complementary approach to that advanced here. What the approaches share is an awareness of empathic engagement. In the found poem from Stewart and Neild, the line "In a way that makes them care", is significant in a wider sense because by reinstating emotion, we create a route by which people can connect, can care about a place, an artefact, a period or a person past. The poem heightens the act of thinking, accessing what one is intuitively ruminating but has been unable to articulate through conventional means, or due to hermeneutical distraction (Gadamer 1960: 242). It replaces what the standard academic method removes. This is often a disquieting reaction to what some might call the 'ghosts' of a place; it reinhabits the bereft but working landscape. In this way, it facilitates poetic encounter (Harding 2017).

(2)(ii) Inviting free-form thematic interpretation/researcher-voiced, overtly self-reflexive

Some years ago, I was working on a prehistoric site in Essex where the ground took on the consistency of a wide platter of different confectionaries. It did not matter who in the team came to our test pit. If we referred to a layer as being "gingerbread" or "nougat", it was instantly identifiable. At one point, as the pit began to flood and the sediments became saturated, we even stood and held a serious discussion on whether we were dealing with ice cream or halva, a discussion that included not only the archaeologists but also the digger driver and landowner as equal contributors. That was not science, it was poesy. Metaphor and simile were being shared, not literalism. It was invaluable as a means of expressing the researcher voice whilst working in a trench that was 4m deep and collapsing in the rain. That was because there can be an immediacy to poetic thought that allows us to show, to make present and focus in such a way that the reader or listener is taken into the heart of a topic from the off.

From an unnamed continent
 A forgotten lake responds with an iron jaw
 Revealing untold silences
 In the layering of clay.
 (Kavanagh in Bates & Kavanagh 2015)

This example shows one of the ways in which I use research poetry, as a Polaroid in words, synchronic sentences that render what may be unrelated concepts or images into a single, ever present, moment. In this instance, the

verse accompanies the cover image of the report on the test pit in question, a palaeolake, being dug by machine. Steps of clay were briefly revealed before flooding, and the iron teeth of the machine ate into the past with a relentless rigour. Those moments of visual revelation, from aeons past, would contain a silence, as if the ground were holding its breath. Then the stratigraphy would be gone in a slide and infolding groan. The brevity of poetic form is able to reflect the transience of those moments, of the stage behind the report to which it became the cover page, summarising the content to those who understand neither the subject nor the site in question.

Of course, this also does more than nod to Prendergast's third form (iii) because it engages the reader in a manner that does not conform to the standard model of the site report, although in every instance in which I have done that it has not been the primary purpose of the poem in question. To specialists unfamiliar with a specific site, it provides sufficient information for them to understand what took place. To those both unfamiliar with a site and without specialist training, it exists as a simple aesthetic, or a glimpse into another world. This layering is what all poetry should do; it speaks on different levels to readers without loss of density. The advantage of this technique is that it can have a dual purpose in the field and for representation. I can be working on site, or in a workshop or conference, and be required to provide outreach through transparency, in a very short space of time. A simple way of achieving this is to tweet a verse alongside a photograph or drawing.

In addition to providing a simple sound bite for marketing and outreach, this method also serves as a diary entry, akin to a virtual site notebook. My physical site notebook is full of these stanzas—although they tend to be more complex. The concision and precision that the form demands sharpens one's attention, demanding a clarity often neglected during the physically arduous acquisition of data. Thus, when I am working in an area with which I am unfamiliar, it will also bring to the surface questions I did not know that I had no answer to. In so doing, it has triggered awareness of assumptions made through habit. In this way, a short poem can tighten thinking and create two-way traffic between product and process, for both the poet and the reader—including when they are one and the same person.

(3)(i) Engaging the reader in a manner that transcends standard representation/literature-voiced, responsive

In 2015, I launched a project called "Layers in the Landscape" (LitL 2016; Kavanagh 2018), sections of which have been funded by the Independent Social Research Foundation (ISRF). Stemming from my previous (and ongoing) research into stories about the Irish Sea, this proof of concept is a deep map of Cardigan Bay, combining many different 'points of view' and situating itself as academic research that is also in itself a method and a product to be used for tourism and heritage. One part of this has involved my

need to bring together many scraps of mixed data into a single, overarching, narrative. Naturally, I chose to do this through poetry.

The result is a nearly 1,700-word epic with a series of additional satellite poems. The epic is entitled “King of the Sea Trees” (Appendix) and features a mythical creature who has earned royal status due to being the genius loci of a series of submerged forests. He has a crown of antlers, the same antlers that were found on Borth beach in 2016 and which date from the Bronze Age. He has cloven hooves, which leave hoof prints in the clays and peats of the shoreline. He walks in the mist at low tide, like Herne the Hunter in a ghost world of lost trees, protecting the people on land from the sea and the sea from the people on land. He is a deluge spirit, a paradigmatic object of make-believe and shamanism, an archaeological voice.

This metaphysical entity contains elements of empirically verifiable fact: the antlers, the hoof prints, aspects of his history. His account also contains elements of literature from other writers, such as Taliesin, Dafydd ab Gwilym and R.S. Thomas. The mimesis is unsubtle and thus easily recognisable by those familiar with the relevant references, following in the footsteps of Hugh MacDiarmuid (1934). The initial ‘story’ narrates 125,000 years of climate change and is direct in the information it portrays. It is also an imagined experience, presenting information about the coastline, where the facts are factually true and the fiction is fictively true, in that both are referential to propositions that exist in their own ontologies. Whether this makes the resulting piece a work of fiction or a work of nonfiction is a topic for elsewhere (see Cohn 1989; Currie 1990, 2014; Walton 1990; Davies 2001; Friend 2008). Certainly, my intention is that the narrative’s function is to serve didactically as nonfiction, platformed through a necessarily fictive narrator, unless one subscribes to the concept of supernatural beings, in which case the debate becomes somewhat more complicated.

Regardless, the “King of the Sea Trees” remains at once a creature from magic and a scientist speaking about data from the past through the medium of structured poetics, some of which is the poetry of the past. It is represented as an artwork, a booklet, a recording, in a film (Kavanagh & Whittaker 2016), through a song, online as verse, as a live performance and now in print. Transcending standard representations of both archaeology and poetics, it is literature voiced and responsive to changing data, participants and environment. It is quintessentially poetry as method.

The writing of this piece demanded much research by a team of experts. In defining the chronology, gaps in the evidence became apparent that otherwise would have been overlooked. In making the narrator’s testimony coherent, other gaps and anomalies surfaced, requiring a combination of educated guesses and further research. It reflects a cultural palimpsest and the demotic position (Pluciennik 2015) that we inhabit as living beings, regularly having to shift and change like the tides as new pieces of information are revealed and amalgamated because “all

encounter with the language of art, is an encounter with a still unfinished process and is in itself part of this process” (Gadamer 1960: 88). To have attempted this in prose, would have taken up an entire novel or/and monograph. These, in turn, would have taken a considerable amount of time and expense to produce, along with a great commitment on behalf of the reader. They would also be impossible to exhibit and resistant to multiple modes of adaptation. Applying poetry was therefore the most flexible and economical method.

Conclusions

This chapter has offered examples that show how poetry has served as a route to learning. In each case, the meta-methods have brought forth productive results, both through the act of creation and the output created. Prose requires more details to be provided than poetry does, for the latter flourishes on a diet of fragmentation. It can skip over unknowns without loss of coherence. This enables verse to step in where paragraphs cannot tread. Like poetry, archaeological prose is created in a culturally mediated context. It is time-bound, and we as the creators select what we include. We do not—cannot—analyse everything, and our writing is about presenting the opinions we have formed through the act of being trained, then applied to data collection and interpretation. Our objectivity is more limited than we tend to pretend, however hard we try. The more closely we position ourselves to empiricism, the more closely we move to the simple reporting of lists (measurements, artefacts, dates, lists of lists) and the further we get from communicating their significance. This is where poetry may help. Like prose, it can communicate propositional knowledge (‘knowing that’, as opposed to non-propositional knowledge, ‘knowing how’). That is, poetry can offer us truths or facts about the world. What it can also do, is to offer phenomenal knowledge (Broad 1925; Feigl 1958; Nagel 1974), an insight into the possible experience attending those lists, which includes the phenomenological and emotional content that archaeological physicalism denies. With the addition of fictive utterances, such as an imaginary narrator, it is able to suggest, or even reveal, conceptual edges to our thinking. This then facilitates an extension to our epistemic comprehension.

“King of the Sea Trees” typifies this: it is a list of geoscientific data that is empirically verifiable, contained within a fictive point of view through an archetype (Jung 1928; Greene et al. 2012). The fiction positions itself as a series of segues between the facts, bringing fractured information into a coherent narrative that had otherwise proven to be impossible. It is also simultaneously accessible as outreach and as a point of reference for ourselves while we continue to check back, to be reminded of detail, to identify areas that require further investigation, questioning opinions relating to tangible material.

Ultimately, science, the humanities and poetry do not present reality. Each is, itself, a method of enquiry. Each is also in the realm of representation. The first is in the business of what the poet and philosopher Emily Grosholz (in Brown 2001: 71) calls “ontological neutralisation”, treating different things as if they were the same, based upon a shared concept of mathematical structure. In so doing it pertains to a notion of universality in the opposite direction to that of poetry, which strives for universality through experience. As Phillip Sidney asserted in 1549 (and published in 1579), poetry is the experience of living. It purifies the wit, enriches the memory, triggers catharsis. Poets are Roman ‘prophets’ (*vates*) and Greek ‘makers’ (*poiein*), existing, it would seem, on every continent and in every language. This is a universality that is every bit as rich as the ground within which we dig. What archaeology can gain from this approach is a succinct form of recording, dissemination and communication through the application of densified language. This is extremely useful when resources are particularly sparse. Due to its figurative nature, the multiple meanings offered can be directed with as much precision or ambiguity as is required, which can engage the imagination and thus provoke extended comprehension (Currie 2016). Whether this involves an emotive reaction to, or participation with, the data in question through the use of fictive utterances, is open to further examination. Nonetheless, how it can be integrated as an accepted mode of (commercial) practice will be entirely down to usage. If people use it, then it will be included; if not, then it will not. Some of us draw sketches of our fieldwork as we go along not because we are told that we must but because it works for us. A poem is no different. If I have had no problem working it into research, or in gaining a receptive audience, then I see no reason why other people cannot do so also. Yes, that may depend upon both interest and ability, but so does everything.

On a personal level, my investment in poetry as archaeological method has yielded far more than anticipated. Akin to when writing a poem, I had a hunch, a feeling, I followed it like a child chasing a balloon. There is nothing complicated about this, but the path has not yet reached a final destination. There is substantially more to be examined, not least, the qualia debate and notions relating to empathy. Thus, whilst I do not offer here a definitive framework, I ask the reader to consider allowing him or herself a small platform on which to regain and express the wonder we feel when we hold a pot, discover a mosaic or make a leap of interpretation that could be every bit as useful as the rest of the words and images that we create (Gibbs, 1994). For if we are so enraptured with the wonder of it all that we lose our gaze in the heavens and fall headlong into a ditch, would that really be so bad? Who knows what we would find there. If we are to write about these wonders, let us at least try to do so, wonderfully (Figure 10.4).



Figure 10.4 An ode to a stone/is an attempt to wonder/at past encounters (drawing by Erin Kavanagh).

Appendix

Kavanagh, K.E. 2016. "The King of the Sea Trees". Produced for "Layers in the Landscape"; includes numerous other poets, such as Shakespeare and Taliesin.

KING OF THE SEA TREES

Prologue

...And from the storms
In this bay a new tale goes, that The King of the Sea Trees,
Once a keeper here before the forest was submerged,
Doth in the spring time, when tides are low,
Walk 'round about the ruined oak, with great ragg'd horns;
And there he tends the trees and fairy cattle
Makes dry the flood and cuts a drain
In a most considerate and patient manner.
You may not have heard of such a spirit, but now you know
The land has born a myth
Received and delivered in our age!
Although he is older than the King of Longshank's woe and wears
many a layer,
If we listen, close as thieves,
We may yet hear his voice, calling above the waves...

The King Speaks...

Labourers and minstrels!
The hymns of angels
Shall raise dreams out of your drunken sleep.
Let me entreat you from before the beginning began...

The keeper of this present shore
Ere I became a returning stag
I was but a spirit of the place
125, 000 years' yore.
Born and reborn from the last interglacial
With hippos and lions I wandered here
Until the high coastline began to fall
And a chill took hold of fur and fold.
By a weathered horizon
The water's chest rose and fell
White gleaming through the busy scud
Unseeming in her quiet abode.

For 85,000 turns the climate dithered
Over musk ox and antelope, boar, elk and bear
With mammoth and rhino woolly
Against the ever changing cold
And the two-legged beast
Who had beside us roamed

Heavy browed and flaming
Faded with passing thought
Leaving barely a trace
Replaced by a modern face
With smaller heads and a rapid gait
Treading shadows into the shifting ground.

Then over their retreat
came the ochre-less ice...
The sea dropped to its knees
At her gelid and stealthy approach
The land grew pale in its demise
And my brethren turned back towards the east
Leaving me a throne. I took no form
But travelled in the patient wind
Over tundra hard and white as bone
The stars revolving in an old dance
Until I became but a sigh
In the moonlight of an empty age.

From my sleeping thus beside a nascent sky
At last I saw the ice pick up her restless feet
Waking with only one glance back
To her glacial bed
Trailing river gravels
In her wedding's wake
Plaiting stone with lingering fingers
She cast a deluge as her entourage
At the birth of a new world
Where the sea climbed from sediments
Some 20,000 years ago
Into the first discovered flood.

Slow to start
Seeking assurance from the emptiness
No ark came to carry me beyond
No more than a haze I was
Blown on Devensian backs
Like the breath of a dragon
Twisting in the arms
Of a young valley
Cradled by hesitant silt
I waited
For sunshine to unlock
The Holocene's unguarded door.

But when the way opened
My sight beheld a smaller place
Tidal flats and mud held sway
A salt marsh and reed swamp carried
Freshwater and a brackish taste.
Gravels took a cliff top view
And company began to gather
By seven and by two...
I welcomed them
As sovereign in my ancient state.
For I am the imperial lord
Of this forsaken land.

Six thousand years from where I now speak
The sea ceased her washing
And settled into heaven's rags
Of marsh, bog and scattered heath
Acorns sinking on the stem
Before the un-fragmented contentment
Of a mountain
Smaller in her green old age
Collecting memories
That gossip in shells
And the paper thin snail
Of a library who has hidden her books.

None else remembers
But the wild tenant moon
Who like the gritless sky
Keeps all his secrets safely locked away.
Under that glittering gaze
I became the picture of defence
A watercourse
An eagle grey
An albatross of glimmering eye
As dry manor faded from the day
I saw the song
The salmon knew

For I have been a coracle on Rhys Ddwfn's field
I have been the alder rain.
I have been an arrow and a spear
I have been a songbird on the breeze.
I have been a torrent from the hills
I have been the rainbow in every shower.

I have been a cat with speckled head
And a goat in the elder alone
I have been the reed and oaken leaf
And the sleeping peat they made.
I have been a butterfly
Bluer than the waters deep

I have been the howling of a wolf
And the silence of an owl.
I have been the blackest bee
Whose grave lies in the future
From where I watched the rivers spread
And swam like the seal.
I grazed as ungulates graze
And flew like the crane
Spilling language in my wake.
The years drowned.
I drank as aurochs' drink
And suckled like the swine

I ran amok with ass's legs
And my feathers wore a scaly shine.
I dressed in cloth of fragile foam
My breast as coiled as an exiled snake
A knife I carried to shear the storms
And my hooves left prints behind.
The antlers were a pride I wore
In reflection of my earlier glen
(Being not of meat for petty men
Neither will I disclose my secrets to slaves
Or sing wrong poetry into a battle fray).
Disguised for near three thousand years

Under cover of the salt and clay
Beneath the folding of a channel bronze with tears
Where children stood on shifting ground.
My span is measured in your mortal fears
—Oh but I tell you now—
I am still younger than my antlers betray
My bones are older than any caught remains.
The tines were but a crown I gave away...
But their shadow on my head does stay
For I know nothing—and everything—of being dead
I am but two days' old – my name is Hedd
I chose to live when all else fled.

There were more tales once
 Beneath the ocean's whispering wave
 But cultured acres have become
 Reduced to misremembered myth
 The names nought but a knot on thickening tongues
 From the cradle of curlews and a fickle age.
 A mermaid of layers
 Mererid tends the underwater reign
 And I the space between her unfenced lea
 And the realms of tunnelling and iron
 From where the fairies and a cut fire came.
 They brought heather with them in their shoes

And juniper berries—pleasant strands
 That bled onto skin like woad
 Marking a pilgrimage on straight roads
 War cowping around them like crows.
 Stranger fists followed their course
 Into a steely dusk
 From which the Morgan stretched her onslaught out
 To flood again—again—the folly from which her role is shamed.
 The seasons passed
 With thirteen ships and a headless state
 The pattern of grasses turned
 (As all life must) to dust.

I care now for what is left behind
 When tides are low
 The beaches have become my will
 To tend the peace
 And make dry the blood
 In stories
 Where I keep you still
 Hungering for the sound
 Of history breaking on a fledgling shore.
 You litter the way with boulders
 Of your own making
 And rail at the forgotten apple

As if your cellars inherited this fragile earth
 Spreading your own dreams
 Upon another's wound.
 But it is I—and I alone—who keeps sweet Mererid safe
 From the wreckage of her rage.
 I gave her my crown

A lover's gift
 A token to appease her sorrow
 Between the living and the grave
 Sitting in the perilous seat of time
 Above her silent bells
 (that ring only when the dead are brave)

Upon the herbs of forgotten lore I bring to her still
 A lullaby of echoes
 Into the mist of every dawn
 And the listening poet's rhyme.

Epitaph

Fair things are slow to fade away,
 Bear witness all, that as of yesterday
 Out of the sea trees a King with ragg'd horns
 Did entreat you with an age bowed head
 A tempest in his palm.
 If, while my passion I have thus imparted,
 You deem my words untrue,
 Then place your hand upon the ruined bark
 And feel how it remembers peace for you,
 You are not men of sin, but Destiny
 That hath to instrument this lower world
 And what is in't, the never-surfeited sea
 Hath cause to drown your walls; and on this island
 Where man doth inhabit; you listeners
 Being most decided to make amends, I have made you a truce;
 For part of every year She will not hang or drown
 Your proper land.
 And, by the salt, I and my fellows
 Will bring you gifts: the elements
 Of whom your breakers are afar'd may as well
 Build from the sky, or with little bags attempt
 To kill the still-closing waters, as diminish
 One tear that's in her frown; there are none of us
 Who are invulnerable. I beseech you, build no more
 Out of respect of weather's range?
 Your culture is now too massy for your strengths
 And cannot be uplifted... Your battles will submerge...
 Lean not against this change but remember—
 For this be my business to you—that you all
 Who sit beside the castles here
 Exposed unto the sea, which hath requit it,

You and your innocent child, for which foul deeds
 The powers, delaying, not forgetting, have
 Incensed the seas and shores, yea, all the creatures
 Against your peace. By thy own abuse,
 Thou art bereft; and do pronounce for me
 A lingering perdition, worse than any death
 Can be at once, I shall step by step attend
 You and Her ways; whose wrath to guard you from—
 Which here, in this Ceredigion end, all else falls
 Upon your heads—or 'tis nothing but storms
 And a rising tide ensuing.

References

- Bates, M.R. & K.E. Kavanagh. 2015. *Investigation at Coleman's Farm, Rivenhall, Essex: Palaeolithic evaluation and sampling of the Hoxnian lake sediments*. Lampeter: University of Wales Trinity Saint David.
- Bhatt, Z. 2016. The love affair between science and poetry. *NewStatesmanAmerica*, 10 June. Available at: www.newstatesman.com/culture/poetry/2016/06/love-affair-between-science-and-poetry (accessed 15 January 2018).
- Brady, I. 2004. In defence of the sensual: meaning construction in ethnography and poetics. *Qualitative Inquiry* 10: 622–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800404265719>
- Broad, C.D. 1925. *The mind and its place in nature*. New York: Humanities Press.
- Brown, D. 2013. *The poetry of Victorian scientists: style, science and nonsense*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, K.B. (ed.). 2001. *The measured word: on poetry and science*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Cahnmann, M. 2003. The craft, practice and possibility of poetry in educational research. *Education Researcher* 32(3): 29–36. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X032003029>
- Carroll, N. 1998. Art, narrative and moral understanding. In: Levinson, J. (ed.) *Aesthetics and ethics: essays at the intersection*: 126–60. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cohn, D. 1989. Fictional versus historical lives: borderlines and borderline cases. *Journal of Narrative Techniques* 19: 3–24.
- Cohn, D. 1999. *The distinction of fiction*. Baltimore (MD) and London: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Currie, G. 1990. *The nature of fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Currie, G. 2011. *Narratives and narrators: a philosophy of stories*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Currie, G. 2014. Standing in the last ditch: on the communicative intentions of fiction-makers. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 72: 351–63. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jaac.12109>
- Currie, G. 2016. Models as fictions, fictions as models. *The Monist* 99(3): 296–310. <https://doi.org/10.1093/monist/onw006>
- Davies, D. 2001. Fiction. In: B. Gaut & D. Lopes (ed.) *The Routledge companion to aesthetics*. London: Routledge.

- Deetz, S. 1998. Discursive formations, strategized subordination and self surveillance. In: A. McKinlay & K. Starkey (ed.) *Foucault management and organization theory: from panopticon technologies of self*: 151–72. London: Sage.
- Eshun, G. & C. Madge. 2012. Exploring poetry as a method for postcolonial geography research. *Antipode* 44(4): 1395–428. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2011.00968.x>
- Faulkner, S.L. 2005. Method: 6 poems. *Qualitative Inquiry* 11(6): 941–49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800405276813>
- Faulkner, S.L. 2009. *Poetry as method: reporting research through verse*. Walnut Creek (CA): Left Coast.
- Feigl, H. 1958. The mental and the physical. In: H. Feigl, M. Scriven & G. Maxwell (ed.) *Minnesota studies in the philosophy of science II: concepts, theories, and the mind-body problem*. 370–497. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Finch, A. 2005. *The body of poetry: essays on women, form, and the poetic self*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Finn, C. 2004. *Past poetic: archaeology in the poetry of W.B. Yeats and Seamus Heaney*. London: Duckworth.
- Firth, N. 2016. Verse in the universe: the scientific power of poetry. *NewScientist*, 20 January. Available at: www.newscientist.com/article/2073697-verse-in-the-universe-the-scientific-power-of-poetry/ (accessed 15 January 2018).
- Frege, G. 1892. Über Sinn und Bedeutung. *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophische Kritik* 100: 25–50. Translated by M. Black. In: P.T. Geach & M. Black (ed.) 1980. *Translations from the philosophical writings of Gottlob Frege*: 56–78. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Friend, S. 2008. Imagining fact and fiction. In: K. Stock & K. Thomas-Jones (ed.) *New waves in aesthetics*: 150–69. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Friend, S. 2011. Fictive utterance and imagining II. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 85: 163–80.
- Friend, S. 2012. Fiction as a genre. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 112: 179–209. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9264.2012.00331.x>
- Fry, P.H. 1983. *The reach of criticism: method and perception in literary theory*. New Haven (CT) and London: Yale University Press.
- Gadamer, H. 1982 [1960]. *Truth and method*. New York: Crossroad.
- Gibbs, R. 1994. *The poetics of mind: figurative thought, language and understanding*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Greene, R., S. Cushman, C. Cavanagh, J. Ramazani & P. Rouzer. 2012. *The Princeton encyclopedia of poetry and poetics*. Fourth edition. Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press.
- Harding, S. 2017. Encountering another being. Access Oneness, 7 October. Available at: www.accessoneness.com/encountering-another-being-2/ (accessed 15 January 2018).
- Holton, G. 1998. *The scientific imagination*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press.
- Hopwood, M. 2004. *Singing in chains: listening to Welsh verse*. Llandysul: Gomer.
- Illingworth, S. 2016. Are scientific abstracts written in poetic verse an effective representation of the underlying research? *F1000Research* 5(91). <http://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.7783.3>

- Joyce, R. 2002. *The languages of archaeology: dialogue, narrative and writing*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Jung, C.G. 1928. *Contributions to analytical psychology*. Oxford: Harcourt, Brace.
- Kavanagh, K.E. 2018. Re-thinking the conversation: a geomythological deep map. In: M. Gillings, P. Hacıgüzeller & G. Lock (ed.) *Re-mapping archaeology: critical perspectives, alternative mappings*. London: Routledge.
- Kavanagh, K.E. (dir.) & J. Whittaker (filmographer) 2016. *Layers in the landscape*. London: Independent Social Research Foundation. Available at: www.isrf.org/about/fellows-and-projects/fg2-7/
- Kripke, S. 1980 [1972]. *Naming and necessity*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Lamarque, P. & S.H. Olsen. 1994. *Truth, fiction and literature: a philosophical perspective*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Langer, C.L. & R. Furman. 2004. Exploring identity and assimilation: research and interpretative poems. *Qualitative Social Research* 5(2).
- Leggo, C. 2008. Astonishing silence: knowing in poetry. In: G.J. Knowles & A.L. Cole (ed.) *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research: perspectives, methodologies, examples, and issues: 165–74*. Thousand Oaks (CA): SAGE.
- LitL (Layers in the Landscape). 2016. Available at: www.geomythkavanagh.com/layers-in-the-landscape
- Longenbach, J. 2004. *The resistance to poetry*. Chicago (IL): University of Chicago Press.
- MacDiarmuid, H. 1934. *Stony Limits and other poems*. London: Victor Gollan.
- Mallory, J. P. 1989. *In search of the Indo-Europeans: language, archaeology and myth*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Maugham, W.S. 1938. *The summing up*. London: Heinemann.
- Maxwell, J.C. 1854. *A problem in dynamics*. Available at: https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/A_Problem_in_Dynamics
- Meinong, A. 1904. Über Gegenstandstheorie. In: A. Meinong (ed.) *Untersuchungen zur Gegenstandstheorie und Psychologie: 1–50*. Leipzig: Barth.
- Mickel, A. 2012. The novel-ty of responsible archaeological site reporting: how writing fictive narrative contributes to ethical archaeological practice. *Public Archaeology* 11(3): 107–22. <https://doi.org/10.1179/1465518713Z.00000000011>
- Nagel, T. 1974. What is it like to be a bat? *Philosophical Review* 83: 435–50. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2183914>
- Neilsen, L. 2008. Lyric inquiry. In: J.G. Knowles & A.L. Cole (ed.) *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research: perspectives, methodologies, examples and issues: 93–102*. Thousand Oaks (CA): SAGE.
- Parini, J. 2008. *Why poetry matters*. New Haven (CT): Yale University Press.
- Piirto, J. 2002. The question of quality and qualifications: writing inferior poems as qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 15(4): 431–45. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390210145507>
- Pluciennik, M. 1999. Archaeological narratives and other ways of telling. *Current Anthropology* 40(5): 653–78. <https://doi.org/10.1086/300085>
- Pluciennik, M. 2015. Authoritative and ethical voices: from diktat to the demotic. In: R.M. Van Dyke & R. Bernbeck (ed.) *Subjects and narrative in archaeology: 55–81*. Boulder: University Press of Colorado.
- Prendergast, M. 2009. Poem is what? Poetic inquiry in qualitative social science research. In: M. Prendergast, C. Leggo & P. Sameshino (ed.) *Poetic inquiry: vibrant voices in the social sciences: xix–xlii*. Rotterdam: Sense.

- Prentice, D.A. & R.J. Gerrig. 1999. Exploring the boundary between fiction and reality. In: S. Chaiken & Y. Trope (ed.) *Dual-process theories in social psychology*: 529–46. New York: Guilford.
- Prynne, J.H. 1961. Resistance and difficulty. *Prospect* 5: 26–30.
- Rosaldo, R. 2015. How I write: http://web.stanford.edu/group/howiwrite/Transcripts/Rosaldo_transcript.html
- Sidney, P. 1968 [1595]. *The defense of poesie*. London: Ponsonby. Reprinted in facsimile by the Scolar Press, Menston.
- Snow, C.P. 2001 [1959]. *The two cultures*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Spielberg, S. (dir.) 1989. *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. Hollywood (CA): Lucasfilm.
- Stewart, I & T. Nield. 2013. Earth stories: context and narrative in the communication of popular geoscience. *Proceedings of the Geologists' Association* 124: 699–712. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pgeola.2012.08.008>
- Stuart, M.T. 2017. Imagination: sine qua non of science. *Croatian Journal of Philosophy* 17(49): 9–32.
- Sylvester, J.J. 1870. *The laws of verse: or principles of versification exemplified in metrical translations*. London: Longmans, Green & Co.
- Vaihinger, H. 1911. *Die Philosophie des Als Ob: System der theoretischen, praktischen und religiösen. Fiktionen der Menschheit*. Leipzig: Meiner.
- Walton, K.L. 1990. *Mimesis as make-believe*, Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press.
- White, H. 1987. *Metahistory*. London: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Wright Mills, C. 2000. *The sociological imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Zimmerman, V. 2012. Time seemed fiction. *Journal of Literature and Science* 5(1): 70–82.