Walking Between Worlds

in defence of experiential research

Kevan Manwaring

ABSTRACT
This article explores the benefits and challenges of experiential research for a PhD novel in the contemporary fantasy genre and how this has significant qualitative impacts upon the "early drafting" stage of the creative process (Neale 2018). Drawing upon the extensive field research undertaken in the Scottish Borders, with its rich palimpsest of oral tradition, traumatic historicity, and touristic gilding, the article shows how this informed the emergent multimodal approach, resulting in a transmedia novel – one that 'performs' the liminality experienced according to a reader-response model. The Scottish Border ballad of 'Thomas the Rhymer' (Roud 219: Child 37) is used as a map – both in the field trips to associated locations, and in the creative-critical process itself. Within the ritualised landscape of the ballad three roads offer three ontological choices for not only the protagonist, but also the researcher-writer. Layered over this is Walter Benjamin's three-step model of the musical, the architectonic, and the textile. How does one negotiate the various tensions of different disciplines? How does one avoid displacement activity in a protracted research project that embraces different modes of enquiry? When and how does one 'return' from this crossed threshold? And in what form can one's findings withstand critical scrutiny, while retaining faith with the initial vision, the demands of the narrative, and the expectations of the reader?

Introduction

> *TRUE Thomas lay on Huntlie bank;*
> *A ferlie he spied wi' his e'e;*
> *And there he saw a ladye bright*
> *Come riding down by the Eildon Tree.*
> 'Thomas the Rhymer', 12/13th C. Anon.

From 2014-2018 I worked on my Creative Writing PhD at the University of Leicester, the focus of which was to be (ultimately) a transmedia novel, *The Knowing: a Fantasy* – a form which was to emerge as a result of my extensive research into the psychogeography of the Scottish Borders, and the diasporic translocation of tale- and song-cultures to the Southern Appalachians: the palimpsest of history within the Borders, and its cross-fertilisation with North America, I sought to represent through a multimodal approach (Barnard 2019). The challenges of writing an (innovative) genre novel within the academy was part of what pushed me. The inherent tensions of producing a creative artefact within a critical framework is at the heart of creative writing as a discipline in the academy and has been discussed widely (Kureishi 2014: Self 2014: Vanderslice 2011: Webb 2015: Whitehead 2013). To produce something within a *genre* amplifies these tensions: can it withstand the scrutiny? Can such practice-based research result in the production of new knowledge? Though informed by this continuing discourse, my intention here is to focus upon the actuality of my experience.

During the research, composition and editing of my project I have discovered a creative-critical methodology and voice that have been fine-tuned through the by-products of my research, in conference papers, articles, and commissions. This hybrid approach, while growing within an ecosystem of post-colonial discourse (Said 1978: Spivak 1988: Bhaba 1994), was fed in a more intuitive way by 'taproot texts' – i.e. pre-18th-century literature that displays significant elements of proto-fantasy (Clute and Grant 1999: 921-922) – and embodied, experiential research. By drawing upon the rich, troubled history of the Scottish Borders I found not only inspiration in specificity – or 'placiality' (Casey 2013) – but also an extended metaphor for the creative process itself in the examples of liminality, transgression, and retrieval. Like the Border Reivers whose legacy I was to witness first-hand (the defensive architecture of the Peel Towers and Bastle Houses; the place-names and surnames; and the regional terms and phrases: *blackmail; insight; reiving; hew and cry*, et cetera) I felt that my annual 'raids' into these Debatable Lands produced much plunder. The real challenge, though, was to find a suitable methodology and form to corral my stolen cattle. Which road to take with these riches?

"The steed gaed swifter than the wind": testing the boundaries

> *O they rade on, and farther on,*
> *The steed gaed swifter than the wind;*
> *Until they reach'd a desert wide,*
> *And living land was left behind.* (ibid)

The Knowing has attempted to push the boundaries of both form and content – finding fertile ground in the creative tension between the 'Actual and Imaginary', as Nathaniel Hawthorne terms it (1850). I argue that true Fantastika (Clute 2007) the umbrella term for Fantasy, Science Fiction, Horror, Weird, and other writing that foregrounds the imaginative over the mimetic, lies within the negative space of these apparent extremes. I certainly choose to pitch my flag in this liminal zone where the magical and the mundane rub shoulders, finding neither straight realism (so-called mimetic fiction) or high fantasy to my taste. I have dramatized this transitional space as 'The Rift' within my novel, a place between the Iron World of humans and the Silver World of the fey – ever widening after the cataclysm of the Sundering, when the Borders were sealed. Yet in my novel there are irruptions on both sides: characters and contraband slip through; and in the trickster figure of Sideways Brannelly, a 19th-century Ulster-American who has become a 'Wayfarer' – a trader between the worlds – I have someone who acts out the synaptic cross-fire between these hemispheres. He smuggles the lost journal of Robert Kirk out from Elfhame, metaphorically mimicking the production of the actual text itself. And in my career as a writer-academic I continually straddle the apparent creative–critical divide, finding it a place of intense creative generation – a Mid-Atlantic Ridge for the black fumers of my mind. Gary Snyder captured this perfectly: 'A frontier is a burning edge, a frazzle, a strange market zone between utterly different worlds' (1990: 15).

"The narrow, the braid, and the bonny": ontology junction

> *'Light down, light down now, true Thomas,*
> *And lean your head upon my knee;*
> *Abide ye there a little space,*

And I will show you ferlies three.' (ibid)

Instrumental in my experiential methodology were field trips to key sites associated with the folklore (-song; -tale cultures) I was researching. As Robbe-Grillet says: 'Nothing is more fantastic, ultimately, than precision' (1965: 165). These field trips afforded me that precision – the telling detail won through an embodied epistemic. Much of my research focused around Aberfoyle, in the Trossachs (the parish of the Reverend Robert Kirk, 1644-1692, whose 1691 monograph, *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies,* is at the heart of my project), but I also spent a significant amount of time in the Scottish Borders – a place of historical tension that has a remarkable cluster of song, story and lore. Primary among these taproot texts is the supernatural ballad of 'Thomas the Rhymer', attributed to the 13th-century Thomas of Erceldoune but recorded in numerous versions from Sir Walter Scott (1806) onwards (Farrell 2009). The earliest version of this was transcribed by the singer Anna Gordon Brown at the request of collector Alexander Fraser Tytler in 1800 (NLS, Acc. 10611 (2)). Apparently learned from her mother and aunt (Between Worlds exhibition, Durham University, 2017), the ballad appears to have existed exclusively in the oral tradition until Brown was encouraged to write it down for her father for the Musical Society of Aberdeen. At the time (late 18th century) it was fashionable to record ballads, chiefly thanks to the popularity and success of Robert Burns's output, which bestowed upon this oral folk form in the eyes of society, a tinge of respectability.

In the ballad in question, the young Thomas meets the 'queen of fair Elfland' as he idles by the Eildon Hills, near Melrose. Tempted by her offer of a kiss, he is bound to go with her to her otherworldly realm and serve her for seven 'mortal years' (coincidentally the upper limit of a part-time PhD). Crossing through a gloomy, liminal zone where they see 'neither sun nor moon', they pause by another tree where the Queen shows Thomas three roads to choose from:

'O see ye not yon narrow road,
So thick beset with thorns and briers?
That is the path of righteousness,
Tho' after it but few enquires.

'And see ye not that braid braid road,
That lies across that lily leven?
That is the path of wickedness,
Tho' some call it the road to heaven.

'And see not ye that bonny road,
That winds about the fernie brae?
That is the road to fair Elfland,
Where thou and I this night maun gae.'
(Skelton and Blackwood 1989)

These three ontological choices ('ferlies three') chart a metaphorical landscape that resonates with my project and my approach. The 'narrow road' could be read as the critical one – of academic discourse and the minute analysis of literary criticism. The 'braid braid road' could be seen as the purely creative path – expansive, lateral, unboundaried. The former needs the synaptic leap and appeal to the aesthetic of the latter; the latter, the discipline and rigour of the former. Either extreme by itself can be ultimately lacking – too dry or too indulgent. This is a crude distinction, and possibly a false dichotomy, akin to that of left/right brain function myths (Gilchrist 2012), but it will serve our purpose for now. However, there is a third way, as suggested by the Queen of Elfland's choices – the 'bonny road/That winds about the fernie brae'. This is the road that takes the travellers to 'fair Elfland', a place of testing and transformation, gifts and geasa (taboos). And this, I posit, is my path across the creative/critical divide.

In actuality, I have physically experienced this liminal landscape whilst walking the Southern Upland Way, a 212-mile footpath that runs across the Scottish Borders from coast to coast, during the summer of 2017. After several days walking eastwards I reached the Ettrick Valley (home of writer Thomas Hogg, the so-called 'Ettrick Shepherd', and a key setting for my novel). From there I climbed up over the hills into the neighbouring Yarrow Valley, traversing a lonely but lovely moorland: this 'inbetween space', miles from anywhere and anyone, seemed to me to be the most numinous and inspiring I had traversed in two weeks of walking. No doubt enchanted by the psychogeography of the place, with its rich peat of balladry and folklore, social history and the sublime, and by my fugue state of epiphanic exhaustion, it inspired an impromptu song and, later, one of my self-styled 'illuminated poems' ('Between the Yarrow and the Ettrick', unpublished), demonstrating how conducive such liminal spaces (between two places, two states of being) can be: 'bonny roads' of creativity and insight.

"The tongue that can never lee": practice-based research

Syne they came to a garden green,
And she pu'd an apple frae a tree:
'Take this for thy wages, true Thomas;
It will give thee the tongue that can never lee.' (ibid)

To qualify practice-based research's validity as a core methodology in my discipline, it is worth citing the NAWE Benchmark Statement: 'original creative work is the essence of research in this practice-led subject' (2008). Emphasising this, Jen Webb, in her analysis of research in creative writing, has said, 'Research in or through creative practice can provide a way to bridge these two worlds: to result in an output that undeniably adds knowledge, while also producing a satisfying work of literature' (2015: 20) My wish here, through the creation of my novel and this accompanying thesis, has been to attempt this. I have endeavoured to do so by drawing upon an embodied and multi-modal approach. My creative practice extends *beyond* the page but feeds *back* into it. To return to the Benchmark Statement: 'Research into content may include **experiential learning**, whereby creative writers put themselves in a particular situation or make an experience happen for the sake of Creative Writing' (2008: 13). The experiential method is at the heart of my creative practice and this project.

As a long-time storyteller, performance poet, host of spoken-word events and (more recently) fledgling folk singer, I have used the performative aspect of my practice to inform my prose fiction, field-testing material to live audiences. In 2002 I co-created and performed in a commissioned storytelling show for the Bath Literature Festival called *Voices of the Past*. In that I performed a monologue as Robert Kirk, the 'fairy minister' of Aberfoyle. I could not have known then that I would undertake a PhD with him as a major focus, or that this kind of 'method-writing', as I call it, repurposing Stanislavski's system (1936: 1948: 1957), would become a central practice of mine. In my subsequent four years of research I explored different iterations of this (long-distance walking; spoken word performance; song-writing; illustration), while self-reflexively challenging such an approach – why not just get on with it? Any of these could so easily become displacement activities *unless* they resulted in actual output or insight. Interrogating my own methodology was critical – although not always easy to achieve. How does one perceive one's blind spots? By starting with an analysis of others, I hoped to be able to gain a perspective on my own.

"My tongue is my ain": taciturn wordsmiths

'I dought neither speak to prince or peer,
Nor ask of grace from fair ladye!'—
'Now haud thy peace, Thomas,' she said,
'For as I say, so must it be.' (ibid)

In an introduction to her best-known poem, 'Not Waving, but Drowning', Stevie Smith (1966) said that trying to describe how and why you write poetry is 'like digging up plants to see how they're getting on … we all know what happens to the plants – they die'. Smith seemed wary of brooding too much on (the often hidden) creative process of a poem – its inspiration, gestation and development. She did go on to provide some context for its genesis, so perhaps she was merely playing coy.

This wariness, however, is not uncommon among writers. Hemingway, when interviewed by George Plimpton for the *Paris Review* about his writing, responded with a customary growl: 'It is not the writer's province to explain it or to run guided tours through the more difficult country of his work' (1965: 230)

Amy Tan also warned against revealing the hidden workings behind a novelist's legerdemain when discussing her 'writer's memoir', *Where the Past Begins* (2017). Finding herself reflecting on 'how I write and what inspires me', Tan regretted the disclosure upon publication: 'once it was done I realised you shouldn't explain the magic tricks. Writing shouldn't be dissected and pulled apart' (Tan 2018).

In his discussion on authorial 'intentions' Philip Pullman (2017a: 113-121) bemoans the 'occupational hazard' of the writer continually asked about their ideas at book festival events, 'where the task at hand is that of entertaining an audience rather than revealing deep and complex truths' (2017: 114). The experienced writer will often have 'instant stories about telling a story' (ibid) at their disposal – pat answers that elicit a crowd-pleasing response.

When I asked Liz Lochhead about her 'creative process' at the Bath Literature Festival in 2003 she quipped, 'a pen and a piece of paper'. Was she being deliberately disingenuous? Another magician not wishing to reveal her stage secrets? Just playing to the

crowd (a large packed Guildhall)? Or was she truly unaware of her own methodology? And does that matter?

As a self-reflexive writer in the academy I do not have the luxury of fobbing off such interrogations, but must scrutinise my process, searching for 'deep and complex truths' (ibid). What is often instinctual and chthonic – arising mysteriously from the depths of the subconscious, written in a fugue state, a first draft groped towards in the dark – as Philip Pullman (2017b) also articulates – must now be examined in the harsh light of the laboratory. In such conditions I hope it will not whither, but flourish – the laboratory becoming a greenhouse.

It is tempting to speculate that writers struggle at, or are resistant to, articulating their creative process because the creative act occurs in one part of the brain, the critical in another – the classic left/right brain split. However crude this distinction – one that is a false dichotomy (Gilchrist 2012) – it provides a useful metaphor. These two 'sides' of the brain are in continual communication – lightning fields of synaptic firings across the hemispheres – but sometimes the communication breaks down (Sachs 1985). The 'zone' we are in when we write (creatively) *may* be a very different one from the editing or critical space. This methodological schizophrenia seems endemic to the academy: Tolkien critiqued the Lit/Lang divide in his 1959 valedictory address to Merton College (1997: 224:240); and in many modern English faculties there seems an unbridgeable gulf between the disciplines of creative writing and English literature, although clearly they are part of the same ecosystem (Harper/Kerridge 2010: 1-5). Personally, I have found the creative and critical approaches to be not mutually exclusive; indeed they cross-fertilise in productive ways. For me, their shared border is the 'hot zone' of emergence. If one is able to hold the tension between these approaches, straddling the place of negotiated territory, a Debatable Land of creative reiving and insight, then great things can emerge.

In my own creative-critical practice I have found field trips to relevant, resonant locations, combined with archival research, and the resultant narrativizing of my experiences (a grafting of the historical and the Fantastic) especially effective. Adopting what Barnard discusses in her exploration of multimodality, citing Webb and Brien (2019: 124) as the '*bricoleur*-bowerbird approach', my methodology is an imaginative weaving together of materials, influences, and experiences. This echoes an aspect of Walter Benjamin's triadic approach to the production of good prose.

Warp and weft: the musical, the architectonic and the textile

Walter Benjamin suggested that to 'Work on good prose [one has to follow] … three steps: a musical stage when it is composed, an architectonic one when it is built, and a textile one when it is woven' (2015: 61). To extend the metaphor of these points in relation to my practice-based research: I would argue that the 'musical' stage has involved the composition of my work as informed by my research into folk music (English; Scottish; Appalachian), folk dance (Border Morris), ballad-singing and learning to play an instrument (guitar/mandolin). The 'architectonic' stage encompasses a month spent in Hawthornden Castle as a writer-in-residence, where I worked on a second draft, informed by the physical experience of staying in a castle that was the former residence of William Drummond. This was complemented by my visits to Edinburgh (with its many levels and wynds, the latter suggesting 'portals' from one 'textual layer' to another); and to Appalachia, where I visited 'old' timber-frame buildings and modern Asheville. The 'textile' stage has been enriched by the numerous talks and seminars I have attended on the craft of creative writing, by detailed feedback from my supervisor, by close readings from a select peer group (including American friends), by the study of particular authors (Graham Joyce; John Crowley; Robert Holdstock; Susan Hill; Elizabeth Hand; Philip Pullman; among many others), by visits to exhibitions (e.g. Appalachian Women, aSHEville Women's Museum, Asheville, NC, September 2015; Alice in Wonderland, British Library, March 2016; Certain Wytches: Fear, Myth and Magick: Anne Jackson, Museum in the Park, Stroud, October 2017; The Lost Words: Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris, Compton Verney, October 2017) and by reading interviews with writers (chiefly 'The Art of Fiction' in the *Paris Review*, 1953–2018).

In actuality, Benjamin's triad relates to the formation of the text and to extend it beyond this to justify my wide-ranging activities and interests risks punishing the metaphor. So, to augment Benjamin's process, it is necessary to apply Christopher Frayling's useful demarcation of arts research into three modes of enquiry: 'Research … *for* practice (activities

supporting the artist in her or his work), *through* practice (creative drafting and editing), *into* practice (e.g. observations of artists at work)' (1993). Any artist worth their salt will engage with these at different stages, often flowing organically between them: they are, in my mind, part of one continuum. But rather than reject them as a redundant taxonomy I would also argue for their validity as a lucid parsing of this process (the splitting of the spectrum that does no harm to its source-light). *For*, *through* and *into*, my practice-based research strove to cast light into every corner. If blind spots occurred, it was through no fault of this multi-modal method of enquiry.

An otter's-eye view: fishing for qualia

> *O they rade on, and farther on,*
> *And they waded rivers abune the knee;*
> *And they saw neither sun nor moon,*
> *But they heard the roaring of the sea.* (ibid)

Complementing archival research and the practical application of craft, my preferred method of research, when it comes to bringing alive the world of my characters and their settings, is an experiential one. I find that by visiting actual locations connected to my story (wherever possible) or having analogous experiences, I soak up atmosphere in an immersive, multi-sensory way (which no amount of text research could replicate), creating a reservoir of experiences and associations that I can draw upon in the recreation of the setting or characters' perceptions. And I stumble upon telling details, things I would only notice in situ, which often influence my creative decisions. This form of 'qualia-capture' (Lodge 2002: 14) is intrinsic to the performance of authenticity that follows, rather as a method actor draws upon childhood memories, past traumas and triumphs, importing them into their performance to give it the ring of truth.

There are counter-arguments to this approach. Geoff Dyer's excoriating deconstruction of an experiential method in his attempt to write a biography about D.H. Lawrence (2012) proves, at least, that it did not work for him; but that does not invalidate it as a methodology. Some writers relish field research; others prefer to do research from the comfort of their study. What matters, ultimately, is the writing. The embodied method provides me with a visceral experience to draw upon and allows me to inhabit the zone of my characters. The imported affect helps to create an ambience of authenticity within the prose. However, the notion of 'authenticity' in a piece of creative writing has been increasingly problematized in recent years (Whitehead 2010: Baker 2014: Darwin and De Groot 2014). James Frey's controversial 'memoir' of alcoholism and recovery, *A Million Little Pieces* (2003), has achieved notoriety for its initial claims to be a genuine memoir of recovery from addiction (Wyatt 2006). The device of verisimilitude is as old as storytelling itself, but first modernism then post-modernism have challenged that – the unreliable narrator (Hobsbaum 1995: 37–46) destabilizing the omniscient claims of the Grand Narrative (Lyotard 1979). Any claims of truthfulness seem increasingly slippery in a post-truth age. And mimetic fiction's traditional claim to realism has been increasingly destabilised by the bot-generated fictions of 'fake news'. What seems real can no longer be trusted. As Chabon observes, fictional truth 'is under siege by spurious fact in so many ways' (in Clark 2017). And there are plenty of examples of novels that have been written without any experiential research. Stef Penney's award-winning debut novel, *The Tenderness of Wolves* (2006), convincingly evokes the Alaskan wilderness despite the author having never set foot there. Exhaustive research does not guarantee the 'success' of a literary project, as Iain Sinclair pithily articulates:

> You can make as many charts as you like, plot graphs with different-coloured inks, predict movements, the arguments of ungrateful characters. You can spend years ploughing through biographies, reminiscences of tourists in search of the pastoral; libraries of geology, church histories, mythology. You can visit every site a dozen times, live on the road. It makes no difference. The first sentence on the page and the game's up, the story goes its own way. A fly that refuses to buzz. (2001: 307)

Yet even Sinclair, the flâneur par excellence, acknowledges the efficacy of both the physical act of walking (2013) and what he calls the 'trance of writing': 'The trance of writing is the author's only defence against the world. He sleepwalks between assignments, between welcoming ghosts, looking out for the next prompt, the next milestone hidden in the grass' (2006: 362).

Haruki Murakami is a strong advocate for running and writing, not necessarily for inspiration, but to balance out the sedentary life-style, clear the mind and inculcate what he sees as essential qualities

for the (novel) writer: focus and endurance (2009: 76–83; 96–97). For him, running is an intrinsic part of his writing practice, a way to counteract the loneliness of the long-distance writer: 'Writing novels and running full marathons are very much alike. Basically a writer has a quiet, inner motivation, and doesn't seek validation in the outwardly visible' (2009: 10).

Whatever other authors refute (Dyer 2012) or advocate in their methodology, I find that experiential research does help *me.* It affords me an 'otter's-eye view' (Macfarlane 2005) of the terrain of the novel I am inhabiting, as Macfarlane describes in the approach of Henry Williamson:

> Williamson's research was obsessive-compulsive – writing as method acting. He returned repeatedly to the scenes of Tarka's story as it developed. He crawled on hands and knees, squinting out sightlines, peering at close-up textures, working out what an otter's-eye view of Weest Gully or Dark Hams Wood or Horsey Marsh would be. So it is that the landscape in Tarka is always seen from a few inches' height: water bubbles 'as large as apples', the spines of 'blackened thistles', reeds in ice like wire in clear flex. The prose of the book has little interest in panoramas – in the sweeps and long horizons which are given to eyes carried at five feet. (2005)

As a keen walker, my experiential research includes, like Williamson's, literal fieldwork. As part of my way into the world of my novel I have walked long-distance footpaths: Hadrian's Wall (2014), West Highland Way (2015), Offa's Dyke (2016), Southern Uplands Way (2017) – a collective distance of 568 miles – walks exploring borders and debatable lands, And I have discovered my enjoyment of singing in the process … While walking the West Highland Way solo I started to pick a song each day to keep me going (Manwaring 2015). For Offa's Dyke I created a deliberate songbook. These walks gave me an embodied sense of geography, of psychogeography – following mindfully in the footsteps of great walker-writers like Thoreau, Leigh Fermor, Solnit, Sinclair, Sebald, Macfarlane, Shepherd, et al., and plenty of time to think about borders.

So, what did all this effort actually result in?

"He has gotten a cloak of the even cloth": some conclusions

> *He has gotten a coat of the even cloth,*
> *And a pair o' shoon of the velvet green;*
> *And till seven years were gane and past,*
> *True Thomas on earth was never seen.* (ibid)

All these "researches" *for*, *through* and *into* practice (Frayling 1993) have enriched the "diegetic universe" (Scott and Roffey 2017) of my novel – the world-building, visualisation of scenes and depiction of characters. The response from audiences, discussion generated and comments garnered in my spoken-word activities have helped create a fertile feedback loop (text-to-stage/stage-to-text). My archival research has uncovered invaluable details (marginalia; poems; diary entries), which have directly fed back into the novel – through characterisation, plot and the paratextual.

In terms of the impact of this multimodal, experiential approach on my creative-critical practice, and the production of an 'original contribution to knowledge' (my PhD novel and commentary) I can summarise the following three main outcomes: embodiment, form, and performance. In terms of embodiment, experiencing the liminality of the Borders physically made my depiction of such settings and states viscerally more authentic – importing the telling detail, the view from the ground, and the muscle memory of the long walk, its rhythm and moods, the cumulative ambient affect of such 'storied' places. In terms of form, this liminality fed directly into my adoption of a transmedia approach to my novel: creating a hybrid form that contains text and image, and (on the website) audio and video recordings, photographs, micro-narratives, articles, artwork, comic strip, poetry, and folk tales. And finally, in terms of performance, the field research resulted in both a poetry collection, *Lost Border,* performed at the Cheltenham Poetry Festival; and a storytelling and music show, 'The Bonnie Road', performed at several venues including a Scottish castle. Individually, such outputs may not qualify as 'original', but the *combined range* of them creates something unique – their warp and weft a plaid of Benjaminesque texture.

Benjamin's triadic structure provides a practicable 'arc' for the creation of any long prose project. It provides useful reminders of the focus for each stage: the expansiveness of the musical, the application of the architectonic, and the exactitude of the textile. Intersected by the experiential, the textual field created is enriched by the nutrients of practice-based research. Reified by this mulch of methodological

layers, the abstract becomes embodied. It is these three 'threads' which I argue are the true 'ferlies three' of any good prose.

In conclusion, I have found my writing develops through experiential research, performance, illustration and engagement with the world (via panels, commissions, workshops, residencies and social media) – from having an expansive, outward-looking practice. All of this has helped to ground my contemporary fantasy novel in a convincing milieu, the all-important texture without which any prose fiction is threadbare.

Each reader who chooses to wrap themselves in my cross-world plaid must, ultimately, make up their own mind, but early reviewers suggest all of this exhaustive experiential research might have paid off:

> Manwaring's novel feels true in the way that certain stories do, as if the author hadn't written it so much as discovered it, already complete and ready to be revealed.
> (Penny 2017)

References

Anon., 'Thomas the Rhymer'. Available from: https://mudcat.org/thread.cfm?threadid=78992 [accessed 29.10.2019]

Baker, T.C. (2014) Contemporary Scottish Gothic. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Barnard, J. (2019) The Multimodal Writer: creative writing across genres and media. London: Red Globe Press.

Benjamin, W. (2015) Illuminations. London: Bodley Head.

Bhaba, H. K. (1994) The Location of Culture. London: Routledge.

Casey, E. S. 2013, cited in Richardson, T., (2015). 'The New Psychogeography', Walking Inside Out: Contemporary British Psychogeography, London: Rowman and Littlefield International, p.241.

Clark, A. (2017) Interview by Michael Chabon. The Guardian, 27 January. Available from: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jan/27/michael-chabon-interview-books [accessed 23 March 2018].

Clute, J. (2007) cited in Fantastika Journal, http://www.fantastikajournal.com/ [accessed 18 January 2018].

Clute, J. and Grant, J. (1999) The Encyclopaedia of Fantasy. London: Orbit.

Darwin, E. and De Groot, J. (2014) Experiments in the Past. Open University Contemporary Cultures of Writing Seminar Series: New Historical Fiction. Senate House, University of London, 18 November.

Dyer, G. (2012) *Out of Sheer Rage: In the Shadow of DH Lawrence*. Edinburgh: Canongate.

Farrell, M. (2009) The ballads of *Tam Lin* and *Thomas the Rhymer*: transformations and transcriptions. In: Poetry and Childhood Conference, British Library, London, UK, 20-21 April 2009.

Frayling, C. (1993) *Research in Art and Design*. London: Royal College of Art.

Frey, J. (2003) *A Million Little Pieces.* London: John Murray.

McGilchrist, I. (2012) *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Harper, G. and Kerridge, R. (2010) Editorial, *New Writing*, 1(1), pp1-5, DOI: 10.1080/14790720408668185

Hawthorne, N. (1850) The Custom House. *In: The Scarlet Letter: A Romance*. Available from: http://www.bookwolf.com/Wolf/pdf/NathanielHawthorwne-TheScarletLetterIntroduction.pdf [accessed 3 April 2018].

Hobsbaum, P. (1995) *Poor Things* and Its Paradigms. *Glasgow Review*, 3, pp. 37–46. Available from: http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/critical/aboutus/resources/stella/projects/glasgowreview/issue3-hobsbaum/ [accessed 8 July 2017].

Kureishi, H. (2014) Creative Writing Professor Hanif Kureishi Says Such Courses Are 'a Waste of Time'. *The Guardian*, 4 March. Available from: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/mar/04/creative-writing-courses-waste-of-time-hanif-kureishi [accessed 25 April 2018].

Lodge, D. (1992) *The Art of Fiction*. London: Secker & Warburg.

Lyotard, J.F. (1979) *La Condition Postmoderne.* Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit.

Macfarlane, R. (2005) Only Connect. *Guardian Review*, 26 March. Available from: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/

mar/26/featuresreviews.guardianreview33

Manwaring, K., 'Let the Mountain Sing Its Own Song', The London Magazine (2015).

Ballads Across Borders. Available from: https://thebardicacademic.wordpress.com/2016/07/21/ballads-across-borders/

Murakami, H. (2009) What I Talk About When I Talk About Running. London: Vintage.

NAWE (2008) Creative Writing Subject Benchmark Statement. York: NAWE.

Neale, D. (2018) Introduction: Critical and creative reflections on process. Writing in Practice. 4. Available from: https://www.nawe.co.uk/DB/wip-editions/articles/introduction-critical-and-creative-reflections-on-process.html [Accessed 1st April 2019].

Parker, J. (2017) Inktober: 31 Days, 31 Drawings. Available from: https://www.mrjakeparker.com/inktober-1/ [accessed 23 September 2017].

Penney, S. (2006) The Tenderness of Wolves. London: Quercus.

Penny, L. (2017) The Knowing - a Fantasy review. Available from: https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/34639443-the-knowing?ac=1&from_search=true&qid=2n6ldQZUh1&rank=4 [accessed 21 May 2020]

Plimpton, G., ed. (1963) Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews (Vol. 2). New York: Viking Press.

Pullman, P. (2017a) La Belle Sauvage. Oxford: David Fickling Books.

Pullman, P. (2017b) Daemon Voices: Essays on Storytelling. Oxford: David Fickling Books.

Robbe-Grillet, A. (1965) 'From Realism to Reality'. Snapshots & Towards a New Novel. London: Calder.

Sachs, O. (1985) The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat and Other Clinical Tales. New York: Touchstone.

Said, E. (1978) Orientalism: Western Representations of the Orient. New York: Pantheon.

Scott, J. and Roffey, M. (2017) The Craft of Creative Writing. Open University Contemporary Cultures of Writing Seminar Series: Creativity, Language and Creative Writing, Senate House, University of London, 17 October.

Self, W. (2014) The Novel Is Dead (This Time It's for Real). The Guardian, 2 May. Available from: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/may/02/will-self-novel-dead-literary-fiction [accessed 2 May 2018]

Skelton, R. and Blackwood, M. (1990) Earth, Air, Fire, Water: Pre-Christian and Pagan Elements in British Songs, Rhymes and Ballads. London: Arkana.

Sinclair, I. (2001) Landor's Tower. London: Granta.

Sinclair, I. (2006) Edge of the Orison: In the Traces of John Clare's 'Journey out of Essex'. London: Penguin.

Sinclair, I. (2013) Guardian interview: 'I do a walk around here every morning before I start. It's opening up your system to the world, making the skin porous, letting all the impressions pour through and charging circuits to be able to write. And the burning of neural pathways is when you've established a set of pathways in the head. To go somewhere new is to feel the brain is being remapped, in an interesting way. And you hope that by doing that, a new form of writing might emerge.' https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/nov/01/iain-sinclair-interview [accessed 23 March 2018].

Smith, S. (1966) 'Not Waving, but Drowning'. London: BBC.

Snyder, G. (1990) The Practice of the Wild. Berkeley: Counterpoint.

Spivak, G.C. (1988) Can the Subaltern Speak? In: Nelson, C. and Grossberg, L., eds. Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, pp. 271–313.

Stanislavski, C. (1936) An Actor Prepares. New York, NY: Theatre Arts, Inc.

Stanislavski, C. (1948) Building a Character. New York, NY: Theatre Arts, Inc.

Stanislavski, C. (1957) Creating a Role. New York, NY: Theatre Arts, Inc.

Tan, A. (2017) Where the Past Begins: A Writer's Memoir. London: HarperCollins.

Tan, A. (2018) Open Book. BBC. Available from: https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qp6p/episodes/guide [Accessed 1 April 2019]

Thomas (of Erceldoune) and Scott, W. (1806). Sir Tristem; a Metrical Romance of the Thirteenth Century; by Thomas of Erveldoune, Called the Rhymer. Edited from the Auchinleck MS. by Walter Scott, Esq. Tytler, Alexander Fraser. (1800). (NLS, Acc. 10611 (2)). Thomas the Rhymer

Tolkien, J.R.R. (1997) The Monsters and the Critics. London: HarperCollins.

Vanderslice, S. (2011) Rethinking Creative Writing in Higher Education: Programs and Practices that Work. Ely: Professional and Higher Partnership.

Webb, J. (2015) Researching Creative Writing. Newmarket: Frontinus.

Whitehead, H. (2010) The Agency of Yearning on the Northwest Coast of Canada: Franz Boas, George Hunt and the Salvage of Autochthonous Culture. Memory Studies, 3(3), 215–223.

Whitehead, H. (2013) Nomadic Emergence: Creative Writing Theory and Practice-Led Research. In: Harper, G., ed. New Ideas in the Writing Arts: Practice, Culture Literature. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars.

Wyatt, E. (2006) Author Is Kicked out of Oprah Winfrey's Book Club. New York Times, 27 January 2006. Available from: http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/27/books/27oprah.html [accessed 23 March 2018].

Bibliography

Honko, L. ed. (2002) The Kalevala and the World's Traditional Epics (Vol. 12). Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.

Kinsley, J. (1969) The Oxford Book of Ballads: Newly Selected and Edited.[New ed.].

Kirk, R. (1691/n.d.) The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies:

- La.III.551 (UEL)
- MS. 5022 (NLS)
- MS. Gen.308.D (UEL).

About the Author

Kevan Manwaring (FHEA) teaches Creative Writing at the University of Winchester. He is the winner of a national science fiction novel competition (One Giant Write, run by Literature Works) and a PhD student essay prize (AHRC10), as well as a recipient of several commissions from the Centre for New Writing, based at Leicester, He is the psychogeography editor for *Panorama: the journal of intelligent travel,* and a guest editor of *Revenant: critical and creative studies of the supernatural.* His articles have appeared in *Writing in Practice*, *New Writing*, *Axon,* and TEXT. He has been a judge for *The London Magazine* short story competition, and a consultant academic for BBC TV's 'The Secret Life of Books'. He is the author of over a dozen works of fiction and non-fiction, including *Desiring Dragons: creativity, imagination and the writer's quest* (Compass Books); *Oxfordshire Folk Tales*, *Northamptonshire Folk Tales*, and *Ballad Tales* (all from The History Press); *Lost Islands* (Heart of Albion Press); and editor of *Heavy Weather (forthcoming from The British Library).* He is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, Hawthornden, and the Eccles Centre for North American Studies at the British Library. He blogs and tweets as the Bardic Academic.