1. Historical fiction and archaeological interpretation: introduction

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Introduction

Humans are the 'storytelling animal' (Gottschall 2012). We weave narratives to shape and make sense of the world around us—past, present and future. Over the last 20 years, there has been a resurgence of interest across the humanities and social sciences in the role of narrative in the creation, communication and consumption of meaning; there are now also growing calls in the sciences to learn from this research and to harness the techniques of narrative storytelling for more effective presentation and dissemination of scientific research (e.g. Dahlstrom 2014; Martinez-Conde & Macknik 2017). At the intersection of the humanities and the sciences, archaeology has a particularly well-developed literature on the role of narrative, built on a long tradition of critical reflection on reasoning and writing about the material remains of the past (e.g. Evans 1989; Hodder 1989; Holtorf 2010; Joyce *et al*. 2002; Pluciennik 1999, 2015; Terrell 1990). In part, this attention reflects the challenges of working with rich but incomplete, and often ambiguous, archaeological evidence that both demands and defies ordering into meaningful accounts. The result has been great experimentation with, and analysis of, different narrative forms. It is one specific form—fictional narrative—that is the focus of the present volume.

Along with the 15 other contributors, our aim is to examine the intersection of archaeological research and historical fiction *sensu lato*. Historical novels, films and TV series present imagined narratives of periods and regions that often have been investigated thoroughly by archaeologists; indeed, some of these fictional accounts make extensive use of the results of archaeological research. Such imagined narratives often have been dismissed by archaeologists, either outright as fantastical tales or, more specifically, for particular

misunderstandings or misrepresentations of the past. The latter, in fact, may be a constructive process, drawing the attention of archaeologists to neglected aspects of the past and prompting new and more rigorous research. But just as frequently, historians and archaeologists have welcomed these fictional narratives, both for 'bringing the past to life' for wider audiences and as objects of serious study in their own right (e.g. Augoustakis & Cyrino 2016; Bernbeck 2005; Cyrino 2015; Smith 2001; Mattingly 2011: 4–5; Wyke 1997). Indeed, a number of professional archaeologists have turned their hands to novel writing, and many more have experimented in scholarly publications with forms that either resemble or make direct use of fictive techniques. The latter range from short fictional vignettes, intended to engage the reader or to exemplify specific points, through extended accounts that foreground marginalised groups, to imagined journeys that evoke the experiences and even emotions of past people. Often such fiction is used to disseminate to the public the final results of a research project or of an excavation (e.g. Cooper 2003; Leach *et al*. 2010; Savani *et al*. 2018), but these techniques also have been used as part of the research process and for communication with other archaeologists.

While recognising the importance of fiction as a means of public outreach, this volume focuses primarily on the use of fiction within the research process itself. Hence, it is concerned primarily with archaeologists as producers rather than consumers of fictive accounts. It is also focuses on the epistemological and ethical aspects of integrating fictive techniques into the archaeological thinking rather than the aesthetic or artistic value of the resulting fictions. In short, how can these techniques be used by archaeologists to achieve a better understanding of the past?

We start with two basic premises. First is the centrality of the imagination in the study of the past. Archaeologists excavate material traces from the ground and generate vast amounts of data, but these must be transformed into information and knowledge through a fundamentally creative process (see Edmonds 1999: x). Second, the aims and methods of archaeologists and historical novelists are more similar than the widespread and deeply rooted notion of 'fact versus fiction' allows. There are indeed important and meaningful distinctions between archaeological and fictive accounts of the past, but they are not fundamentally different (see Elphinstone & Wickham-Jones 2012: 536; cf. De Groot 2015: 13–22). These two premises

allow us, temporarily at least, to put fictional and scholarly accounts on to the same analytical plane. Such equivalence may appear irresponsible, but as each of the contributors to this volume demonstrates, both archaeologists and most fiction writers maintain a fundamental commitment to the evidence and to advancing truthful accounts of the past. Far from arguing that evidence and emotion can be freely mixed—or are synonymous even—the contributors explore, and sometimes blur, but do not erase the distinction between fact and fiction.

The editors of a recent volume, *Subject and narrative in archaeology*, point to an "increasing clamor for and interest in alternative forms of archaeological narratives, involving [amongst others] writing fiction…" (Van Dyke & Bernbeck 2015: 1). This claim is evidentially true, as demonstrated by the contributors to this volume, but it also requires context. First, the use of these fictional forms is still disputed, and, second, although interest has indeed increased, it is by no means new. In this introduction, we first explore the question of archaeological fact and fiction and the line that may or may not divide them. We move on to present case studies of the intertwining of archaeological research and fiction writing to demonstrate both the risks and opportunities involved. We then present a selection of examples to establish the long history of the use of fictive techniques in archaeological accounts of the past. The second half of the introduction reviews some of the key fictive techniques used (e.g. vignettes, journeys) and discusses the authors' motivations and intended outcomes. We then review some of the key objections and challenges to the use of fictive techniques, before outlining the contributors' individual chapters. In neither this introduction, nor across the volume as a whole, have we attempted to impose any grand overarching theoretical framework for the use of fictive techniques in archaeology. Our aim is to draw attention to the scale and breadth of the use of these techniques and to hear from a diversity of contributors about their theoretical and methodological practices. In this way we hope to open up a space for the investigation of the potential of fictive techniques in the archaeological research process.

The borderline between archaeological fact and fiction

In the popular perception, there is a strong distinction between fact and fiction, and between their practitioners. The archaeologist is a scientist who discovers material traces of the past, analyses them rigorously and reports them objectively in scholarly site reports, replete with

technical language, data, diagrams and references. In contrast, the novelist or filmmaker is an artist, inventing characters, dialogue and stories about the past. Hence, one informs, the other entertains; one discovers facts, the other makes them up. In more formal terms, there are perceived to be epistemological differences in the uses of evidence by, and truth claims of, archaeologists and the creators of historical fiction. Archaeologists generally reflect and reinforce, to varying degrees, this distinction of fact from fiction. Part of the very origins of the discipline was a process of distancing and differentiating itself from antiquarianism and folklore and aligning with scientific developments such as evolutionary studies (Trigger 2006). To stray too far from objective description and analysis of the evidence, to move too close to the arts (see Figure 1.1), is to risk consorting with those who, with either good intent or bad, invent things about the past (e.g. Kristiansen 2011: 77). The archaeologist's responsibility is to the evidence and to the past; the novelist's is to his or her reader in the present.

<FIGURE 1.1 HERE>

The discipline of archaeology as a whole therefore reflects wider anxieties about authority and the past, and works to reinforce the division of its own enterprise from that of historical fiction writing. Archaeological authority lies, at least in part, in maintaining disciplinary coherence and respectability via a well-policed borderline, and one does not need to look hard to find the border guards in action. Three examples—selected for no other reason than they were published in the same recent year and reflect work on varied archaeological contexts—demonstrate the case. Brian Hobley (2015: 157) states "'speculation' is […] carefully avoided by professional archaeologists, while 'interpretation' is acceptable if based upon evidence". Claudia Sagona (2015: 92–93) argues that "imaginative forays into the sensual, emotive and subjective" risk "weaving untenable threads into the fabric of academic discussion", and Dennis Harding (2015: ix) warns that "we should guard against allowing the 'empathic' approach to prehistory to take us beyond the limits of archaeological inference". These quotes introduce the terrain through which runs the borderline separating fact and fiction: on one side is interpretation and on the other imagination, similarly, inference vs. speculation and objectivity vs. subjectivity. Although these examples are all recent, the borderline itself is far from new. Similar concerns can be found in the archaeological

literature extending back for decades. Eighty years ago, for example, the Aegeanists, Alan Wace & Carl Blegen (1939: 131) stated that "the archaeologist is or should be cautious [and] prefers to state the facts as he knows them quite frankly rather than indulge in free reconstruction of pre-history for which he sees little or no real evidence". Indeed, the same basic conceptualisation of fact vs. fiction can be traced back deep into the ancient Greek past, such as Aristotle's distinction of history and poetry and Thucydides' (1.20–23, see Węcowski 2008) critique of the fantastical elements in Herodotus's *Histories* (the latter intended as moral lessons of the past rather than a record of what happened).

The repeated articulation of such concerns in the archaeological literature over the last century illustrates both the perception and policing of a line between scholarly archaeology and historical fiction. As will be demonstrated below, an important observation is that this borderline, and its maintenance, transcends wider trends in archaeological thinking through the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Whether in the culture-historical, processual or post-processual eras, the need to reaffirm the borderline reflects the persistent perceived threat to, and presumably crossing of, that line by fellow scholars whose methods are deemed inappropriate. Indeed, the uses of fiction, poetry, theatre and multimedia in some archaeological approaches over the past 25 years have been characterised collectively as, precisely, 'transgressive archaeologies' (Praetzellis 2015: 119–31; see Southgate 2009: 173–78 on the parallel debate in the study of history).

But how real or meaningful is the line threatened by such transgression? What distinguishes the craft of the archaeologist from that of the historical novelist? After all, they often write about the same periods, places and events and draw on the same evidence. Their specific written outputs (site reports vs. novels) and their audiences (archaeologists vs. public) are largely distinct, but how different are their general aims and methods? In the words of archaeologist Stephen Lekson (2018: 191), "surely pre-history and good historical fiction will share some methodological chops? Both interpret, extrapolate from factors to sequences, causes, and narratives". The specific methods may vary—the use of statistics or the invention of dialogue—but the broader objectives and working practices demonstrate strong similarities. Indeed, a collaboration between the archaeologist Caroline Wickham-Jones and the novelist Margaret Elphinstone led them to the conclusion that the differences between

archaeology and fiction writing are “generic not intrinsic” (Elphinstone & Wickham-Jones 2012: 536; see chapters by both of these authors in this volume). In other words, they are set apart by the specific practices of each genre rather than by their fundamentally different natures.

To explore these issues in more detail, we start in the next section with a discussion of two historical novels—*Salammbô* and *The Source*—examining the complex interrelations of archaeological fact and fiction. Specifically, *Salammbô* is used to demonstrate some of the risks involved when the line between the archaeological and fictional accounts becomes blurred. Conversely, *The Source* offers an example of how the novelist can draw on archaeological evidence in ways that imitate those of the archaeologist, and even advance ideas that are only entertained by archaeologists many years later with the subsequent discovery of new evidence.

Historical novels and archaeology

Salammbô

For centuries, the past and its material remains have offered a rich source of inspiration for artists, poets and writers. Before the Enlightenment, their works freely mixed evidence and imagination, epitomised by Giovanni Battista Piranesi’s fantastical views of ancient Rome. As a clearer distinction between ‘fact’ and fiction’ began to crystallise, however, such works came under critique as “imaginative archaeology” (e.g. Murray 1888: 21) and were dismissed as liable to mislead. But the power of such representations is sometimes too deeply ingrained in the cultural imagination to disregard. The risks of this interweaving of archaeological evidence and imagination, fact and fiction, is well illustrated by Gustave Flaubert’s 1862 novel, *Salammbô*. The novel is set in ancient Carthage in the years following the First Punic War and focuses on the daughter of the Carthaginian general, Hamilcar Barca. The book was a publishing sensation, not least because of its lurid scenes of child sacrifice. When Flaubert was drawn into a dispute with scholars of history, who questioned his depiction of Carthaginian life, he deferred to his literary source, Polybius’ *Histories*, around which he freely developed his narrative (see Green 1982). At that time, no actual Phoenician infant

cemeteries (*tophets*) had been discovered. It was only decades after the novel had been published that archaeologists located and excavated a child cemetery at Motya, Sicily. Joseph Whitaker's (1921: 12) publication of the excavations linked the child remains uncovered with "the terrible practice of human sacrifice". The following year, Charles Saumange reacted to what he perceived as Flaubert's undue influence on Whitaker's interpretation:

> "The imagination of the public haunted by Flaubert's memory, has promptly dramatized the discovery: these children […] are the victims of cruel holocausts which Carthage offered to Moloch. This is an imprudent and grave step to take lightly. Imprudent because it is important to know the excavation perfectly and in all details before advancing such a thing even hypothetically. Grave because one compromises the rehabilitation which the religious reputation of Carthage has benefited from among a good number of our best historians" (translated by Gras *et al*. 1991).

But it was too late. In 1921, Icard and Gielly discovered the *tophet* at Carthage and its publication by Poinssot and Lantier (1923: 66) drew directly on Whitaker's interpretation:

> "It is only to the holocausts of the Syro-Palestinian countries that the immolations of human victims revealed by the excavations of Carthage and Motya can be compared" (authors' translation).

Hence, the archaeological evidence was intertwined with ancient sources and historical fiction from the moment it emerged from the ground. The debate as to whether or not the Carthaginians practised child sacrifice and the question of exactly how to interpret the archaeological evidence continues to the present (e.g. Schwartz *et al*. 2012, 2017; Smith *et al.* 2011, 2013; Xella *et al*. 2013). Child sacrifice, and the broader context of Orientalist attitudes towards the Semitic Phoenicians, makes this case particularly compelling. But there are plenty of other examples of how such fictional narratives shape both the general public's and archaeologists' understanding of the past.

Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883), for example, mediated through subsequent novels and films, has had a powerful influence on the archaeology of piracy. Skowronek & Ewen (2016: 193–207) demonstrate how this classic pirate story shaped ideas about historical piracy and powerfully, if subtly, predisposed expectations about the types of shipwrecks and artefacts that we might, or might not, expect to find in the archaeological record. Indeed, as with the example of *Salammbô*, it is noticeable that many literary tropes about the past, that continue to influence both popular and archaeological thinking today, were established by novelists and other artists in the nineteenth century.

In organising the original conference sessions from which the present volume derives, it was suggested to us that professional archaeologists should actively avoid reading or watching historical fiction lest we confuse the real with the imagined. Others have expressed similar concerns; Michael E. Smith (2001), for example, relates how, initially at least, he abandoned reading Gary Jennings's 1980 *Aztec* because he found himself confusing the 'facts' with the 'plausible details' added by the novelist. But, as the problem of *Treasure Island* suggests, it is difficult to live in cultural isolation; we can be influenced by such tropes even without having read these fictions (for the general inseparability of history and fiction, see Southgate 2009: 20; see also Crossland 2015: 104–107 on how fictional imaginings of forensic anthropology are drawn back into the field itself). Instead, the identification, exposure and critique of these accounts, and the literary tropes they perpetuate, should form an integral part of good archaeological practice (e.g. on Neanderthal novels, see Hackett & Dennell 2003).

The Source

The example of *Salammbô* demonstrates the potentially insidious influence of historical fiction on archaeological thinking. But can historical novels also have archaeological value? In other words, as well as entertaining, inspiring and confusing archaeologists, can the historical novelist engage with the past and its material remains in ways that parallel those of the archaeologist, or even demonstrate potential as a research methodology? Can the imaginary world of the historical novel allow novelists to generate ideas or advance possibilities that are archaeologically useful? Here, we focus on a single historical novel of extraordinary chronological sweep, from the Early Holocene to the 1960s—James Michener's

(1965) *The Source*. Although it was not Michener's most successful novel, it was nonetheless a best-seller and highly influential, inspiring students to study archaeology and archaeologists to write their own novels (e.g. Nelson 2015a).

Ostensibly, the novel addresses the history of the Jewish people as experienced by the population of the the fictional site of Tell Makor. It is, however, far more ambitious in scope and complex in structure than an account of a single religious and cultural group. The narrative moves back and forth between the early 1960s, when the tell site is under excavation by archaeologists, and the past and the people and events the archaeologists are uncovering. The temporal gap between past and present is bridged by specific archaeological objects and buildings, which the reader is privileged to see both as they are used and deposited, and then as they are found and interpreted thousands of years later. The text is rich in the politics of archaeology, acutely sensitive to the taphonomic processes that create the archaeological record and it explores some of the big questions that motivate archaeologists: migration, technology, economy and religion—including child sacrifice.

Each chapter of the book is named after its associated archaeological stratum; here,we use the example of Chapter / Level XV (The Bee Eater), set in 9831 BC. The protagonist is Ur, an old man experiencing an era of great change. The chapter explores a series of archaeological topics including the domestication of plants and animals; the emergence of religion (from animism to polytheism); the concepts of home and property; and tensions within and between social groups. Michener, for example, links the experiments of Ur's wife gathering, transplanting and finally sowing wild grains with Ur's existential concerns about the reduced role of hunting, increased sedentism, moving from a cave and constructing a 'house', and the need to placate the supernatural forces that threaten his crops.

Michener drew on archaeological sources and, indeed, his characters reference actual excavations such as those of Kathleen Kenyon at Jericho, undertaken only a few years earlier. In relation to Level XV, he made use of new ideas and discoveries that were radically changing archaeological interpretations. During the mid twentieth century, V.G. Childe's (1936) concept of the Neolithic Revolution was the dominant interpretive paradigm. Childe

posited that the domestication of plants (initially in southern Mesopotamia) led to the settling of humans in permanently occupied places. Yet, as Michener was writing, this theory was in the process of being overturned by discoveries such as those of Dorothy Garrod (1932) at the Shuqba Cave in the West Bank. Here, Garrod identified a mesolithic culture dating to *c*. 12,500 to 9500 BC, characterised by hunter-gatherers who lived in permanent settlements; this she labelled the 'Natufian'. Discoveries such as this allowed Michener to incorporate the origins of domestication—previously located one thousand kilometres to the east—into his narrative of Israel.

Michener therefore made use of recent archaeological work. He was not, however, limited by it. Ur and his family, for example, eager to placate the storm-god after their first crops are damaged, erect a monolith. In Michener's account, this monumental act is associated with the very beginnings of agriculture. At the time of writing, however, no archaeologist believed that monumentality could be traced back to the tenth millennium BC. It is unclear whether this megalithic act is simply a device to advance the plot or the logical outcome of working through the evidence and its implications within the framework of the fictional narrative. Either way, many years after the novel was published, the discovery at Göbekli Tepi, Turkey, of a series of stone enclosures surrounding T-shaped central pillars richly carved with symbols, dating back to the tenth millennium BC, provides evidence of precisely the same date as Michener's Level XV. Crucially, as no evidence for domesticated crops or animals has been found at the site, Göbekli Tepi has been interpreted as a monumental sanctuary built by hunter-gatherers, which in turn led to the domestication of local wild wheat to supply ritual feasts (Dietrich *et al*. 2012).

Whether or not Michener 'predicted' such early monumentality is debatable. More broadly, however, his fictional account of the domestication processes can be seen to challenge monocausal and teleological explanations (i.e. that domestication led to sedentism or that religious practices led to domestication). Instead, Michener portrays the co-evolution of domestication, settlement and religious ideas as individual people think, experiment, make mistakes, learn and pass on these ideas to their descendants. In this way, Michener's model of false starts and failed experiments more closely reflects twenty-first century thinking on the

social aspects of domestication than anything written in the mid/late twentieth century (for an overview, see Shennan 2018: 47–55).

To be clear, the social and economic changes imagined by Michener in Level XV are impossibly compressed into the lifespan (indeed, the later life) of a single man. No archaeologist would attribute such changes to the 'genius' of an individual human or argue that these could have been accomplished within the span of a few years. Not least, it is now clear that there were multiple centres of domestication and that these agro-pastoral transitions were drawn out across millennia (e.g. Colledge *et al*. 2013). But Michener's narrative endeavours to open up the 'black boxes' of concepts such as domestication and approaches them in terms of the everyday lives of the people that brought about such processes through numerous false starts, failed experiments and unintended outcomes (on the need for finer-resolution chronologies to enable human-scale narratives, see Whittle 2018).

Moreover, Michener is also effective at combining narratives of different scale. Archaeologists often stress the importance of working between large, long-term processes and the actions of individual human agents in order better to capture the range of possible explanations (e.g. Edmonds 1999: x; Hodder 1999: 143–47; Robb & Harris 2013: 222). In practice, however, they often struggle to do so. In this sense, Michener's account of the economic, social and cognitive changes that followed the last Ice Age makes use of narrative techniques such as characterisation and motive in ways that archaeology would only arrive at some decades later (see below).

Michener's novel is also notable for its structure, shifting back and forth between the past and the present and integrating dialogue between the excavators. In this way, it directly resembles, but significantly predates, Hodder's (1989: 273) manifesto for a new type of site report "as a complex interweaving of sequences of events in the past (what happened on the site) and sequences of events in the present (what happened on the excavation)". Hodder was looking back to antiquarian reports for his inspiration and there appears to be no genealogical link to *The Source*. The convergence of Hodder and Michener on the same narrative form, and for more or less the same purpose, therefore appears to be coincidental, but arguably the

novelist's freedom to experiment allowed Michener to do this decades before Hodder (similarly, Southgate 2009: 124–25 discusses how novelists anticipated such narrative shifts by scholars of history).

The Source suggests that novelists can do more than simply invent stories around archaeological facts; they can also suggest new ways of thinking, pointing towards interpretive possibilities that archaeologists have not yet entertained. Some other novels have made more specific 'predictions', for example, Vellanoweth (2016: 208) notes that a fictional site featured in O'Dell's 1960 novel *Island of the Blue Dolphins* was subsequently 'verified' by the discovery of archaeological materials (see also Elphinstone, this volume). It is difficult, if not impossible, to know whether these are coincidences or whether they might, in some cases, attest to a more fundamental appreciation of the logic of the underlying evidence. But it is precisely this working through of the material, bridging gaps in the data with informed conjecture, following the logic of characters, events and ideas, that forms one of the main justifications for the use of fictive techniques by archaeologists. The following section therefore turns from historical novels to a select history of the use of fictive techniques in the archaeological literature and considers how, and why, some archaeologists have incorporated fictive techniques into their accounts of the past.

The long history of fictive techniques in archaeology

The previous section considered the relationship between historical novels and the archaeological theory and practice. In this section, we consider the use of fictive techniques by archaeologists themselves. A not-inconsiderable number of archaeologists have penned full-length novels (see Nelson 2003), with some authoring specifically historical fiction, including Lindsay Allason-Jones (2000, *Roman Woman*) and Sarah Nelson (1999, *Spirit Bird Journey*), as well as Victoria Thompson (V.M. Whitworth, e.g. 2012, *The Bone Thief*, see also Savani & Thompson, this volume) and Mark Patton (e.g. 2012, *Undreamed Shores*, see also Patton this volume). Here, however, we focus on examples of fictive techniques deployed by archaeologists within the scholarly research literature. In other words, we explicitly exclude novels in order to concentrate on the motivations and methods for the use of fictive techniques as part of the research process itself. We start by demonstrating that, far

from representing a new or recent development, such techniques have been used by archaeologists for decades. We then discuss the variety of techniques deployed and consider the authors' motivations and justifications.

One of the most famous pieces of imaginative archaeological writing can be found in Sir Mortimer Wheeler's 1943 report on his excavations at Maiden Castle, Dorset. It is a passage widely cited in anthologies of archaeological writing (e.g. Connah 2010: 29–31) and Brian Fagan (2010: 25) says that Wheeler told him these were "the hardest paragraphs he ever wrote". In the report, Wheeler narrates of the storming of the Iron Age hillfort by the Roman army.

> "Indeed, something less than imagination is now required to reconstruct the main sequence of events at the storming of Maiden Castle, for the excavation of the eastern entrance has yielded tangible evidence of it. With only a little amplification it may be reconstructed as follows. [...] Men and women, young and old, were savagely cut down before the legionaries were called to heel and the work of systematic destruction began. [...] That night, when the fires of the legion shone out (we may imagine) in orderly lines across the valley, the survivors crept forth from their broken stronghold and, in the darkness, buried their dead […]".

The larger imagined scene concludes with the statement: "So much for the story; now for its basis" (*ibid*., 61–62), with which, Wheeler moves on to present the supporting archaeological evidence. But though Wheeler appears to be dismissive of his 'story', this very passage features in Wheeler's later autobiography, where it is favourably contrasted with other aspects of the *Maiden Castle* report that he claims subsequently he would have done differently (Wheeler 1955: 105–108). Some insight into Wheeler's mindset comes from his 1939 review of R.G. Collingwood's (& Myres 1936) *Roman Britain and the English settlements*, published a few years before the *Maiden Castle* report:

> "Mr Collingwood has adopted a personal and subjective attitude towards History that must either be accepted or rejected by the reader at the outset. [...] He interpolates motives, builds characters, constructs episodes with a liberality or even licence that is great fun, but is liable

> to shock the pedant. Fact and speculation stand shoulder to shoulder, no documents are cited, the innocent student may know not with what voice his author speaks." (Wheeler 1939: 87–88).

That Wheeler would charge Collingwood in this way is unsurprising. Collingwood's (1994) 're-enactment doctrine' involved re-constructing thought processes, thereby accessing past motives and actions (see van Helden & Witcher, this volume). By occupying the historical actor's place as thinker-of-the-thought, the actual historical thought is present in the scholar's mind. For Collingwood, this was an objective process—an act of imagination, but not of invention. Wheeler undoubtedly did not see his account of Maiden Castle in the same light; the evidence, after all, was so unambiguous that "something less than imagination" was required to reconstruct the sequence of events. But did the evidence really speak for itself? Subsequent studies have outlined the potential for alternative interpretations demonstrating that the evidence did not automatically assemble (or 'emplot'; White 1973) itself into narrative form (Todd 1984; Sharples 1991: 124–25). Perhaps most significant is that Wheeler (1955: 108) himself characterises his account as a form of tragic narrative; but if the evidence spoke for itself, would it have used a literary form and to moral purpose? What really separates Collingwood's 'speculation' from Wheeler's approach? However we answer this question, Wheeler himself articulates, both in his own work and in his critique of Collingwood, the well-rehearsed concerns about the use of imagination in scholarly accounts and the transgressing of the line between fact and fiction.

Wheeler's *Maiden Castle* is considered a classic account, but is far from unique. A number of similar 'amplifications', to use Wheeler's term (e.g. Persson 1931: 68–70), and more explicitly imaginative accounts (e.g. Lilliu 1963: 207–10), were published during the first two-thirds of the twentieth century. The proponents of New or Processual archaeology, however, took aim at precisely this type of thinking and writing. David Clarke (1968: 11–12), for example, forcefully argued:

> "It is this attempt to convey smooth historical narrative as the essence of prehistoric studies, in the total absence of the record appropriate to that art and in the presence of records of a

> quite peculiar and especial nature—the artefacts, which we might well view as 'counterfeit' history. The expression of archaeological results may call for nicely written historical narrative but this is a matter of choosing one particular vehicle to convey results obtained by quite alien methods. The danger of historical narrative as a vehicle for archaeological results is that it pleases by virtue of its smooth coverage and apparent finality, whilst the data on which it is based are never comprehensive, never capable of supporting but one interpretation and rest upon complex probabilities. Archaeological data are not historical data and consequently archaeology is not history".

In place of narrative, fictional or otherwise, Clarke argued for archaeology as a science—objective, testable and falsifiable, the antithesis of culture-historical archaeology. Clarke's approach, for example, demanded that assumptions and methods were made explicit in order that other archaeologists could follow the workings and ultimately improve on them. This is the exact opposite of the process of writing historical fiction; novelists work actively to conceal rather than foreground their methods and materials in order to maintain the reader's suspension of disbelief. Yet, in explicitly deploying fictive techniques within archaeological research, there is the potential for them to act as testable hypotheses, that is, models that seek logically to integrate the strands of evidence and which can then be tested against alternative explanations or other datasets (see Gibb, this volume). In this sense, the differences between the aims and methods of processual archaeology and the use of fictive techniques may be less stark than they first appear (for an evaluation of Clarke, see Chapman & Wylie 2016: 133–36).

The reaction of the post-processualists to Clarke's archaeology focused, in part, on the critique of its detached, scientific methods and style of writing (e.g. Hodder 1989; Mickel 2012a, 2012b). This critique echoes concerns raised decades earlier by the likes of Jacquetta Hawkes (1968: 258), who was troubled by the rise of scientific reports that "bar all individuality from their pages". It is therefore unsurprising that the post-processualists should have looked back to some of the ideas of the pre-processual era. Ian Hodder (1986: 353), for example, turned to Collingwood to reassert archaeology as as a form of history rather than natural science (though he subsequently moved away from Collingwood, Hodder 1991: 7).

The post-processual shift from the generalising to the particular, from processes to people, was associated with a proliferation of experimental methods and forms of archaeological writing. The intention here is not to reproduce an outdated notion of a progression from culture history through to post-processual / interpretative theoretical enlightenment (critiqued in Bintliff & Pearce 2011), but rather to demonstrate that the use of, and concerns about, fictive techniques in archaeological writing rise above the prevailing theoretical paradigms of the past century. Without doubt, however, the post-processual shift has given particular impetus to a wide range of experimentation in archaeological writing including fictive narrative forms. This is a trend that continues into the current period of theoretical *bricolage* (e.g. Harris & Cipolla 2017). In sum, the use of fictive techniques—and the reactions to them—have a long history of use in archaeology; the justifications for, and objections to, their use appear to transcend broader theoretical shifts; instead, the same basic division of fact and fiction is reframed within the prevailing debate of each era.

Fictive techniques in archaeological writing

A variety of fictive techniques have been employed in archaeological writing. In this section, we discuss the principal categories, focusing on more recent publications, but also drawing in 'classic' texts to flag up particularly significant examples.

Vignettes

The most widely used fictive device found in the archaeological literature of the past 30 years is the vignette or short imagined scene. The classic example is James Deetz's (1977: 1–4) influential *In small things forgotten: an archaeology of early American life*, which uses vignettes of everyday activities such as individuals cooking, farming and carving tombstones. In support of his wider objectives, these short scenes are used to focus attention on the importance of everyday material culture, at once fundamental to what archaeologists do, but at the same time frequently neglected. In a similar vein, Francis Pryor (2003: 164–68) uses imagined scenes as a means to suggest how monumental enclosures "might have come into being". Similarly, Rebecca Yamin (1998: 84–85) offers vignettes as a ways both of presenting and "knowing" which "forces the scholar to go out on a limb—to interpret what it all might mean", and Guy Middleton (2017: 397) offers a reconstruction of a Mycenaean

royal funeral, arguing that it helps us "to interpret and explicate the archaeology more richly by allowing us to generate imaginative and plausible scenarios of events and the lived experiences of past people".

Such fictive scenes, however, have been used with a wide spectrum of specified purposes. Michael Given (2004: 5), for example, starts each chapter of his monograph on colonised populations with imagined scenarios intended to communicate the experiences of the colonised and to build "a relationship between a reader and a book, through identification and sympathy". Conversely, Robin Skeates (2010: 7) presents vignettes towards the ends of his chapters, elaborating on his scholarly analysis of the senses in prehistoric Malta; he argues that these passages are "intended to stimulate new thoughts and questions about what life felt like in the past". Another book on the senses, also uses vignettes as "fragments of material and sensuous life-worlds, hopefully retaining and conveying the texture and carnality of inter-subjective and trans-corporeal experience" (Hamilakis 2013: 130). As well as the aim to build sympathy and empathy (see van Helden & Witcher, this volume), other uses of vignettes include attempts to evoke past landscapes: for example, in *The remembered land*, Jim Leary (2015: 15) leads the reader around Northsealand (or Doggerland), now submerged beneath the North Sea, to help visualise an otherwise invisible landscape and to show that it was a dynamic and inhabited place. Others have used vignettes more formally to explore the logic, or the inadequacies, of interpretive frameworks. Neal Ferris (1999), for example, offers "interpretative imaginings" as part of his critique of the dominant interpretations of the Iroquoian life in southern Ontario during the Late Woodland period. Many other examples of fictional vignettes can be found, deployed across a wide range of archaeological periods and regions and with varied objectives, including Ruth Tringham (1991: 124), Carmel Schrire (1995: 117), Kathryn Kamp (1998); Mark Edmonds (1999), Martin Henig (2002), Rosemary Joyce (*et al*. 2002: 146–50) and Alex Butterworth & Ray Laurence (2006).

Travel through time

A particular fictive device concerns the use of time-travelling observers. In *After the ice: a global human history, 20,000–5000 BC*, Steven Mithen (2003: 5) argues that a conventional, archaeological account of the early Holocene would be 'dry' and that "a more accessible and appealing history is one that provides a narrative about people's lives; one that addresses the

experience of living in the past and recognises human action as the cause of social and economic change". To escape the deadening hand of the all-knowing narrator, Mithen sends a time-traveller to witness, though not interact with, people at the end of the Ice Age. A similar device is used by Keith Hopkins in *A world full of gods* (1999), sending back modern students to experience life in Pompeii. In this example, the travellers are not simply another set of eyes through which to view and describe the city, they also engage with its inhabitants illustrating the gaps in understanding between past and present, for instance, around slavery and religion.

Another example of this device is Janet Spector's (1993: 63) *What this awl means: Feminist archaeology at a Wahpeton Dakota Village*, in which she offers "informed speculation" about the significance of the archaeological discovery of a bone awl. Specifically, Spector aims to step aside from her own Eurocentric perspective and advance beyond the limitations of the data in order to achieve a better understanding of the past: "I sometimes imagine being transported into the past by a bilingual, bicultural, bitemporal guide—a Dakota person willing and able to explain to me his or her view of the area's politics, tensions, and interactions". Notably, these fictional elements attracted little attention at the time of publication (though see Grover 1993; Rothschild 1996); only later was Spector's approach critiqued for the ethical implications of its fictionalisation of historical individuals (Joyce *et al*. 2002: 125).

Travel through space

As well as using fictive techniques to allow the reader to travel through time, accounts dealing with movement through space have proved particularly attractive to archaeologists. Some build firmly, but evocatively, on specific evidence to animate and humanise the archaeological data. Others more explicitly imagine (usually) pedestrians as they move through landscapes or buildings with the aim of reconstructing experiences, linking disparate pieces of evidence, analysing spatial relationships or demonstrating specific points of interpretation.

A vignette by Leary (2014: 1) elaborates a scene around a series of footprints left in the tidal mud of Mesolithic Britain:

> "On a warm summer's day, four young adults set off along the edge of an estuary foreshore. They walk alongside one another heading southeast. With every step their bare feet sink into the soft estuarine mud which squeezes and squelches as they move. They stride at a brisk pace. At one stage, one of them sees something and veers left, crossing the paths of the others and causing them to momentarily bunch together before spreading out once more. Four lines of flow: weaving, interacting and mingling together […]".

This passage is based firmly on the evidence for specific, if anonymous, individuals and their movement across a particular landscape at a defined moment in time. It is more literary than fictional, but evokes intimacy with the experience of past people and their social lives (for a similar treatment, see Macfarlane 2013: 359). Also concerned with movement and experience, rather than imagination, are phenomenological accounts. Among these, the studies of Christopher Tilley (1994, 2008) is foundational. His earlier work, for example, describes the experience of moving along the Dorset Cursus and the kinetic responses to the rise and fall of the land and the reactions of the pedestrian to the ways in which other monuments come in and out of view. The purpose of this and other phenomenological accounts, drawing in particular on the work of Heidegger, is to access the lived experience and meanings of these landscapes as produced and reproduced through routinised movement. Unlike the vignettes described above, these are not fictive accounts; rather, they use the experiences of the archaeologist in the present to access the experiences of people in the past (for critiques, see Brück 2005; Fleming 2006). Yet, in seeking to walk in the footsteps of these earlier people, and to understand the landscape as it may have been understood by them, we move into territory—narrative, emotions and senses—shared with those using fictive techniques.

Sue Hamilton and colleagues similarly explore the 'sensory worlds' of Neolithic southern Italy during the late sixth millennium BC, reconstructing journeys from an area of dense settlement on the Tavoliere plain up into the foothills of the Gargano to visit the Scaloria cave

for burial and cult purposes (Hamilton *et al*. 2006, 2016). Their imagined journeys identify the sensory contrasts of moving from the world of the everyday to the underworld, with familiar reference points (e.g. light, birdsong) replaced in the dark cave by heightened senses of touch and smell. The journey from dry open landscape to wet underground space "would generate states of confusion, struggle, disorientation, surprise, and revelation" (Hamilton *et al*. 2016: 105). These latter concepts begin to move beyond the strict limits of the evidence and to think "what the experience of visiting Grotta Scaloria during the Neolithic might have been like" (*ibid*., 107). Explicitly, the authors view these reconstructions as the means through which to generate new questions about the archaeology. In a similar exercise, Van Dyke (2015: 94) offers a creative representation and sensory engagement with the landscape of Chaco Canyon, New Mexico, imagining a young Pueblo girl on her first pilgrimage to Chaco. The intention is to "help us ask new questions and see relationships that might not otherwise be apparent".

Paralleling, rather than deriving from, such phenomenological studies, other accounts of journeys are more overtly fictional, setting out to narrate the experiences of past people—real or invented—rather than those of the archaeologist. Bronwen Riley's (2015) *Journey to Britannia: from the heart of Rome to Hadrian's Wall, AD 130*, for example, provides an extended account of a fictional journey of the province's incoming governor, Sextus Julius Severus, as he travels from Hadrianic Rome to the Empire's northern frontier. Julius Severus is attested in the historical sources as the provincial governor, but Riley's account of his journey is entirely fictional, drawing on archaeological evidence, which is densely documented in the endnotes. Her intention is "to evoke a journey" and "to capture the flavour of life" (*ibid*., 15). We do not, however, learn much about Julius Severus, who never evolves as a character, as would be expected in a novel. He is simply a device that allows the reader to experience the past at a specific time and place.

In contrast, Diane Favro (1996) presents two narratives reconstructing the experiences of pedestrians moving through the streets of ancient Rome, from the Forum along the Via Flaminia to the Milvian Bridge in 52 BC and then—in reverse—back to the Forum in AD 14. Embedded within an analysis of how Rome was transformed under the emperor Augustus, Favro's imagined walks are used to highlight how the cityscape was transformed during the

intervening 66 years and its effects on the viewer. Explicitly fictive techniques are required here for several reasons: the route today is covered by modern Rome and we do not have knowledge of every ancient building and monument at any specific moment in time. Perhaps most importantly, however, Favro's aim is to explore what the changes in this monumental landscape meant to ancient Romans—people who had lived through historical events and carried memories. In other words, rather than automata designed to operationalise a sequence of stimulus-responses, her imagined pedestrians have individual biographies that shape their reading of monuments and their significance. Other imagined journeys are used with more specifically analytical intent. Eric Poehler (2017: 189–215), for example, uses the invented character of Sabinus, as a "narrative vehicle", not only to "enliven some of the deep archaeological detail" (*ibid*., 192) of Pompeii but more specifically to evaluate between a series of overlapping hypotheses about how traffic was managed in the ancient city.

Biographies

Favro's pedestrians are significant as they are not simply devices that allow the reader to see the past world through someone else's eyes; they are individuals (or characters) complete with memories and biographies. Nonetheless, they remain inventions. In contrast, another area in which fictive techniques have been used concerns biographies built around 'real' individuals from the past. The term 'real' is used here to differentiate between the invented and idealised individuals of phenomenological accounts, with their universal bodies and emotions, and the remains of actual individuals excavated from the ground, with their unique physical forms and histories. Arguably, archaeologists have been slow to recognise, or at least to operationalise, the potential of personal microhistory or biography on the basis of human remains. This may, in part, reflect the fact that most human archaeological remains are treated as acultural, biological materials, depersonalised and subject to population-level analysis of stature, disease or violence. Indeed, archaeology as whole tends to work at larger scales: processes, cultures and societies, rather than individuals. Yet, through techniques such as isotope analysis and ancient DNA, we can now learn about individuals and their life courses in greater detail than ever. Fictive techniques offer one way to move between population-level epidemiological accounts, such as the prevalence of malaria, and insights into individuals, such as the effects of that malaria on individual lives.

Alexis Boutin has advanced an ‘osteobiographical’ approach to the bioarchaeology of personhood that uses ‘fictive narratives’, preceded by detailed scientific accounts, to examine the embodied life course of individuals. One of these osteobiographies (Boutin 2016) focuses on a young woman from Dilmun (Bahrain) of the early second millennium BC, whose varied skeletal pathologies are used to imagine scenes around her birth, life and death. Boutin also builds an approach that works between large and small scales; the unusually good condition of the woman’s teeth compared with those of the wider population, for example, is linked to her diet, rich in protein (fish) rather than dates, which is imagined to be the result of the special care the woman was afforded. On another level, these accounts, begin to provoke emotional responses, such as sympathy or pity (e.g. Boutin 2012).

Plays and diaries

Two final specific fictive forms concern plays or scenes imagined in the form of invented dialogue and diaries. In both cases, a particular concentration of interest has developed in the context of North American historical archaeology. Pioneers of playwriting, archaeologists Adrian and Mary Praetzellis, have used imagined dialogue, with some stage directions, to elucidate life in a variety of colonial North American contexts (e.g. Praetzellis *et al*. 1997; Praetzellis & Praetzellis 2015). The intention here has been both to find engaging new ways to present the results of archaeological research, but also to use these approaches more formally as part of the research process itself. Gibb (2000), in particular, has used playwriting, which involves inventing characters and setting them loose within specific scenarios based on archaeological and documentary sources, and allowing his creations to interact and develop independently. In a process that resembles agent-based modelling, Gibb sets the parameters, runs the experiment and evaluates the results in order to understand not simply how the past might have been, but also to understand causation (see Gibb, this volume, for an extension of this approach into earlier periods).

Another use of such fictional dialogue, this time in a British context, integrates archaeological and documentary evidence to explore the lives of the inhabitants of an excavated post-medieval house in Wales, highlighting gaps in the perceptions and understandings between past and present (Mytum 2010). Meanwhile, back in the US context,

Beaudry (1998) has integrated similarly diverse sources of evidence in the form of fictional diary entries. In all of these cases, the concentration on the historical (US) or post-medieval (UK) periods provides a greater abundance of source material, as well as tangible, even named, individuals around whom to develop narratives (for a series of microhistories or biographies of inhabitants of historical New York, see various chapters in Janowitz & Dallal 2013). For this period, the gap between past and present in terms of cultural difference is also much less than compared with, for example, the Palaeolithic. Conversely, although we may assume familiarity with the people of the past five centuries, it is easy to assume greater acquaintance than is strictly warranted, even for very recent periods (see below, and Gibb this volume).

This necessarily selective overview provides a sense of the diversity and abundance of archaeological accounts that have made use of fictive techniques. Beyond their shared lack of satisfaction with the standard site report format, each of the authors has been motivated to use these techniques with particular purpose. The next section reviews the range of stated objectives, from giving a voice to marginalised groups through to formal evaluation of alternative scenarios and hypotheses.

Fictional motivations

The most basic, and perhaps most common, stated objective for the use of fictive techniques is to 'show' rather than 'tell' (Joyce *et al*. 2002: 122; see Kavanagh, this volume). Instead of, or in addition to, the description of data and the explanation of details, it is possible to demonstrate connections, causation or effects. This may illustrate a point more effectively, though it need not lead to any greater insight into the past. More ambitiously, the re-presentation of data or ideas in an alternative format may stimulate new and different understanding by either the author and/or reader. In much the same way that watching a historical drama may cause the viewer to become conscious of particular aspects of the past, formal studies suggest that engaging differently with the same information may result in new perspectives (e.g. Green *et al*. 2004: 165–66 in relation to fiction). Clearly this is not an exclusive argument for the use of fictive techniques, but central to the effectiveness of the

process is the role of narrative, which is processed differently from non-narrative information (Green & Brock 2000).

Another commonly stated objective for the use of fictive techniques is the importance of foregrounding people rather than processes. Many of the core themes of archaeological research—domestication, social complexity, technology, trade and exchange—are conceptualised and examined in high-level and abstract ways that neglect the human individuals and groups involved. Archaeologists often struggle to refine the spatial and temporal resolution of their accounts due to the nature of the data and, even where this is possible, there are questions as to how the different scales of data can be integrated. Fictive techniques offer one way of working through the data on a human scale. Of course, none of these concepts could be understood solely in terms of any individual's life, but fictive techniques encourage engagement with the human-scale actions that aggregate across time and space into large-scale processes (Hodder 1999: 143). Using anthropocentric narrative, relating specific objects or outcomes to human actions, also provides structure and meaning to descriptive detail (Grethlein & Huitink 2017).

Drawing attention to, and making visible, particular groups of people is another well-cited reason for the use of fictive techniques. In seeking to focus on groups marginalised or missing in traditional narratives, including women, children and slaves, archaeologists have found great potential in fictive accounts (e.g. Tringham 1991: 94). In many ways, the archaeological record is better suited to the identification of silent or subaltern peoples than are documentary sources, but the material record is still uneven and often insubstantial and fiction offers a powerful medium for amplifying this evidence and making these groups more prominent.

In shifting from processes to people, fictive techniques have obvious attraction as characters lie at the heart of historical fiction. Such people, however, can be evoked in different ways, for example, first- versus third-person narrative. The presentation of fictional journeys, inviting the reader to travel alongside a protagonist and to experience the world from within, is a particularly well-used fictive technique. By looking at the world in the same way as a

past inhabitant we may even begin to ‘think’ like them, for example, about where to locate a camp or how to attack or defend a hillfort. Some of these accounts attempt to go even further, not only to immerse the reader in a past world, but actively to put the reader into the shoes of another person and to experience their cognitive and emotional perspectives (see van Helden & Witcher, this volume).

Another stated reason for creating fictional accounts is that it compels the archaeologist to engage deeply with the evidence base. As archaeologists and novel-writers Michael Gear and Kathleen O’Neal Gear (2003: 26–27) note, “the process will sharpen your wits and skills [as] fiction […] takes you in directions you never would have considered and poses problems that the archaeologist must solve in order to continue the story”. Writing even the briefest vignette to animate the archaeological evidence is hard work due to the new and profound attentiveness to the material required and an alertness to its ambiguity, incompleteness and formal limits (see Beaudry 2013: ix). Fictive techniques may then offer some means of addressing the inadequacies of, or gaps in, the archaeological record. But historical fiction itself is rarely about creating complete worlds; indeed, a common problem is “the archaeological virus” (see Savani & Thompson and Wickham-Jones, this volume)—the dead hand of excessive archaeological detail in pursuit of accuracy and commitment to the data (see also Beaudry 2013: vii-viii). Hence, whereas the process of writing a fictional scene requires detailed engagement with the data, the fictional scene itself does not. (Historical) fiction works by the creation of vivid and credible worlds, rather than authentic and complete ones (see Elphinstone, this volume). The categorisation of fictive techniques discussed above concentrates on the form of the end-products. These outputs, however, may be incidental to the research process itself. Fictive techniques, for example, can be used to model logical relationships between sources of evidence, to explore the potential implications of different scenarios, or to evaluate causation. As with the above examples, fictive techniques are only one way in which this can be achieved, but they are particularly effective at concentrating attention on human agency.

A final specific motivation for the use of fictive techniques concerns the need to challenge teleological thinking. Archaeology, and history more broadly, is often deceived by the gift of hindsight. We know how history played out, but past people did not. Action (or inaction) that

seems inexplicable today, may be perfectly rational when considered within a contemporaneous frame of reference, with all the incomplete knowledge and uncertainties entailed. Understanding the past, and causation in particular, therefore requires examination of decisions and actions in the context in which they were experienced alongside consideration of the alternatives not chosen (Grethlein 2010: 322–32, 2014; Hassig 2001). In short, we need to forget the ending. Counterfactual history is one approach to this problem (Ferguson 1998; Grethlein 2010: 325–27); though see Collins 2007 on the limited imagination of writers of counterfactual history). Again, fiction is not a prerequisite for counterfactual history (e.g. Scheidel 2017: 395–401), and some historians argue strongly against it (e.g. Ferguson 1998: 7). Yet it can offer an explicit and even formal method to underpin this fundamentally imaginative enterprise.

In summary, three key points emerge. First, fictive techniques are used by archaeologists with a variety of stated purposes. Second, these techniques are neither essential in the achievement of most of these stated objectives, nor mutually exclusive of the use of other approaches. Third, many of these applications appear to make explicit types of thinking that commonly take place as archaeologists build interpretations and write narratives; thinking in terms of fiction engenders greater reflexivity about the research process as a whole.

Objections and challenges

Having demonstrated the long history of fictive techniques in archaeology and the motivations with which they are used, this section examines some of the objections and challenges involved. As already discussed above in relation to *Salammbô*, in mixing fiction and non-fiction, there is potentially a significant risk of confusion both within and beyond the discipline. The reflections of Sarah Pollock (2015: 284), a professor of non-fiction writing, on the contributions in the Van Dyke & Bernbeck (2015) volume are relevant:

> "Non-fiction writers imagine. Fiction writers invent. These are fundamentally different acts, performed to different ends […] As scientists experimenting with new narrative forms,

> [archaeologists] would be wise to maintain an awareness of risk and a commitment to disclosure".

Core to Pollock's concern is the issue of outreach and the risk that the public mistakes our use of fiction for 'science'. In the context of the current volume, and its central focus on the use of fictive techniques for archaeological research rather than outreach, this issue can be sidestepped to some degree. More importantly, however, in arguing that one of the benefits of using fictive techniques is that this makes explicit what are often implicit modes of thinking, Pollock's broader concern should not present difficulty.

Another objection is that the use of fictive techniques is simply not required to achieve the stated objectives; the same outcomes could be attained via other methods. Gibb's (2000: 2–3, 2003) argument that the writing of theatrical vignettes helped to suggest new research questions and that the method could form part of the analytical process has been critiqued on the basis that these questions should have been identified "well before the storytelling stage" (McKee & Galle 2000: 15). While it is probably true that these questions could have been developed without the use of fiction, Gibb's point is precisely, as noted above, that his method provides a means to show explicitly how his research questions were generated. As a form of structured imagination (see also Gibb, this volume), this approach offers a transparent and rigorous account of the handling of evidence and the generation of ideas, allowing others to follow the logic and potentially to go back and rework them.

A different question concerns the nature of archaeological 'facts'. In researching her novels on prehistoric Scotland, author Margaret Elphinstone (this volume) notes that she found data-rich site reports more useful and inspirational than interpretative volumes. Given the sustained critique of the traditional site report within the discipline (Mickel 2012a, 2012b), this is a striking observation. Are archaeologists' own efforts to create narrative generally, and fictive accounts specifically, less inspiring than the dry facts: context descriptions and lists of finds? True, highly successful novels can be built around individual objects from archaeological sites, such as Rosemary Sutcliff's (1954) *The Eagle of the Ninth*, inspired by a cast bronze eagle discovered at the Roman town of Silchester. Be that as it may, core to the

critique of the archaeological site report is the presentation of ‘data’, detached from and independent of the archaeological processes that created them. But data invoked as facts are interpretive constructs (Chapman & Wylie 2016: 93). Novelists therefore do not take archaeological facts, but archaeological interpretations (see Henson and Wickham-Jones, this volume). In the process, contingent ways of thinking can become embedded in historical novels. This can be problematic both because the audiences for these works are much larger than those for scholarly texts and because, unlike those scholarly texts, novels are not updated; over time, they can therefore become “doubly historical” (Schwebel 2016: 21). But, as with Pollock’s concerns about potentially confusing the public (above), here, this particular issue can be partially sidestepped, for this volume is concerned with the integration of fictive techniques into the research process and the creation, rather than independent use, of those ‘interpretive facts’.

Different again is the question of if and how it is possible to hold fictional or imagined reconstructions to account. Are plausibility and multivocality sufficient to justify a disregard for equifinality? Are these accounts testable in the same way as scientific theories? If not, how is it possible to distinguish them from tall-tales, or even from those narratives that attempt to deny events or to justify immoral actions and beliefs (Trigger 2006: 471–75)? There are different ways—none perfect—to respond to these concerns, but of central importance is archaeology’s core emphasis on materiality. Material culture does not have any singular meaning, but nor can it sustain an infinite number of meanings. Its material form and physical context limit the interpretive possibilities. We cannot say simply anything we like about the past; accounts must be logical and credible within the limits of the available evidence. Some, though not necessarily all, can be treated as models, as testable and falsifiable. In broader terms, the question of whether it is possible to hold interpretations to account is not limited to fiction and has been directed at a far wider range of archaeological research (e.g. *ibid.*, 470).

The universalising tendencies of fiction present another question. One argument in support of the time-traveller device discussed above is that, in order to understand ourselves, we need a sense of otherness and that, in a globalised present, the only place to experience such otherness is the past (cf. De Groot 2006). Yet most imaginative reconstructions—and

phenomenological accounts—are predicated on the universalist assumption that past people experienced the world in similar physical, cognitive and emotional ways to ourselves. Indeed, it is precisely this assumption that permits us to connect with past people. Hence, rather than finding otherness in the past, we simply find ourselves. This arguably essentialist view of humanity contrasts with much sociological research built on constructivism, that is, the argument that minds and bodies are socialised and cultured in significantly different ways across time and space. This questions the assumption that, for example, the experiences of an archaeologist moving through the landscape today might correspond with those of people in the past (see Brück 2005). The basic tenet of constructivism is particularly challenging for those interested in the use of fictive techniques, because making the past familiar through recognisable people and scenarios is one of the key motivations and methods invoked (see Elphinstone, this volume). When it is suggested that we can give a 'voice' to the people of the past, how can we be sure that we are not simply imposing our own voices, concerns and emotions (for a review of these issues in relation to slavery, see Gill *et al*. 2018)?

The osteobiographical approach discussed above, raises specific ethical questions. Whereas scholars such as Tringham (1991) and Favro (1996) invent fictional characters to explore issues of gender and personal memory, it is, in the words of Joyce *et al.* (2002: 125), "more problematic to impute motivations, feelings, and thoughts to someone who actually lived, and who cannot speak for themselves". In a similar vein, John Robb (2009: 112) presents a critical study of how archaeological research on Ötzi, the Ice Man, "has been harnessed to supplying personalizing narratives of his life and death", which seek to normalise and familiarise that prehistoric body.

Within postcolonial studies, Gayatri Spivak (1988) has argued that attempts to give voice to the 'Other' always end up imposing the voice of the author. Archaeologists Reinhard Bernbeck (2015: 261) distils the core paradox: "The author who aims to include flesh-and-blood people in an archaeological narrative is forced to fictionalize the past [but] the invention of fictionalized subjects, however well meant the empathetic effort, implies a certain disrespect for past people". The issue is made most apparent as we move into the archaeology of the recent past—slavery, the Irish Famine, the World Wars or the Holocaust (e.g. Gilead 2015). Bernbeck argues that rather than invoking empathy and forging

connections with the people of the past, we should write fictional accounts that unsettle, disturb and alienate the reader (Bernbeck 2015: 267–69). In some respects, this is the logical conclusion of archaeology's decolonisation process and good archaeology should challenge, not just confirm, understandings of the past. But it is also problematic in practical and political terms.

First, by removing narrative and emotional connections with the past, and focusing on objects rather than people, the resulting accounts risk omitting the very characteristics that encourage people in the present, including archaeologists, to engage with the past. Moreover, even if these aspects were removed from the written accounts, might they still underpin the archaeological thinking; that is, would this represent a change of written form but not the underlying cognitive engagement with the past? Second, Bernbeck sees the encroachment of the present on the past as a form of colonial violence. But over the past 30 years, historians and archaeologists have chosen to focus precisely—and with political purpose—on the 'people without history' (cf. Hobden, this volume). On the basis that those without history are powerless, if archaeologists shift their focus to objects, is there is a risk that people, and especially those groups already hard to find in the archaeological record, slip from sight?

By granting full control of the past to the people of the past, Bernbeck's position is diametrically opposed to that of scholars such as Holtorf (2007) who see the discipline's ethical responsibilities to lie entirely in the present. A more pragmatic position would seem to recognise that archaeologists have responsibilities to both past and present (and to the future); neither constituency has complete sovereignty over the other and every position we take is ultimately political. In this way, historians and archaeologists can acknowledge the intertextuality of the evidence and speak—however inarticulately—for the people of the past, while directing that work towards the pressing social issues of the present. More straightforwardly, Sarah Nelson (2015b: 217) argues that fiction is no more likely to objectify the people of the past than any other form of archaeological writing. Certainly there are risks (e.g. Schwebel 2016: 25 notes the danger of literary tropes), but there is also need to recognise that the people of the past were more than dull-but-worthy caricatures (Edmonds 1999: x; Fleming 2006: 276).

In summary, the use of fictive techniques in archaeology is full of opportunity as well as danger. It raises significant epistemological and ethical questions, but also offers powerful ways of thinking and communicating about the past. It is clear that many see significant risk, if not outright error in writing imaginatively about the past. Yet, as the diversity of examples cited here suggests, a wide range of archaeologists are already using fictive techniques in their research, while many more, we contend, are doing so, even if they do so subconsciously. Finally, many of the risks and objections identified apply equally to a wider range of archaeological thinking and writing and, as such, they cannot be targeted specifically against the use of fictive techniques any more than they can against 'conventional' archaeologies. In his analysis of archaeological storytelling, Terrell (1990) argues that scholarly accounts draw on deep narrative structures to communicate. Such storytelling is not a neutral technology for ordering information, but rather it profoundly shapes the meaning of the material. He believes this to be a creative process, capable of stimulating new ideas and hypotheses, and even of being testable. But he also argues for critical self-reflection to avoid prejudicing our understanding. Storytelling, for example, involves deep-rooted components such as actors and formal structure that shape meaning through implied causation. Much more recently, similar arguments have been made by Gerbault *et al*. (2014) in relation to the archaeological narratives, or stories, told about domestication. The key point here is that these are seen as 'dangers' of conventional archaeological narratives. Terrell is not critiquing the use of fiction—he is talking about archaeology, as a science, being fundamentally a form of storytelling. A distinction between conventional archaeological narratives and imagined narratives can, and should, be maintained, but they are not divided by a single or sharply demarcated line that separates fact from fiction. Not least, as the contributors to this volume demonstrate, historical fiction and the use of fictive techniques in archaeology both rely on a combination of rigorous research, deep and critical engagement with the evidence and the act of imagination.

In the words of Adrian Praetzellis (2015: 122) this type of archaeology is "as much about the archaeologist awakening his or her own creativity as it is about communicating the result to an audience. Sometimes more so". Some might fear that the sleep of reason will produce monsters, but the full epigraph of Goya's Caprichio 43 neatly sums up our position: "Fantasy

abandoned by reason produces impossible monsters: united with her [reason], she [fantasy] is the mother of the arts and the origin of their marvels" (see Figure 1.1; Sokolove 2009: 39).

This volume

With these many issues and questions in mind, this volume gathers together a diverse group of contributors. The authors were invited to bring their individual experiences and expertise to the discussion and the result is a variety of perspectives. We have, however, sought to ensure that the volume is more than the sum of its parts by, for example, the circulation of draft chapters between the contributors to encourage the cross-fertilisation of ideas.

The first group of papers focus on prehistory and historical novels. Archaeologist Caroline Wickham-Jones presents a wide-ranging discussion of the intersection between archaeological interpretation and fiction-writing based on her experience as an archaeologist and her work with novelists. The core of the chapter is her analysis of the role of archaeological 'facts' in fiction writing. Reflecting on the epistemological shakiness of much archaeological evidence and the scholarly interpretations of it, she turns the tables to suggest: "perhaps it is not so much the role of fact in popular writing that we need to worry about as the definition of fact in academic texts". Next, historical novelist Margaret Elphinstone reflects on the 'voices from the silence' and the process of working with archaeological materials and archaeologists (including Wickham-Jones). Her chapter examines the medium of fiction writing and the materials and experiences that the novelist can draw upon. In particular, she relates the ways in which she has developed awareness of her own cultural context and its limitations, for example, in relation to oral storytelling, and her discovery of words to describe the past through her attempts to craft objects and to forage for food. Writing about the Mesolithic, Elphinstone argues that there is only a limited number of stories to be told—they are simply told in different forms. Certainly recent comparative phylogenetic analyses of folktales demonstrates long-term stability of simple narrative forms over centuries, with at least one story reaching back to the Bronze Age (Graça da Silva & Tehrani 2016). Though some way short of the Mesolithic, this supports Elphinstone's broader point about the persistence of narrative forms.

Mark Patton is an archaeologist who latterly has moved into novel writing. His chapter provides detailed examples of how, in writing two of his novels, he was able to draw on archaeological excavations he conducted some years earlier. From his unique vantage point, he is able to define both the differences and shared aims of the two enterprises. One of his key observations is of historical fiction as form of 'thought experiment' through which to access the less tangible and more remote aspects of the past. Next, archaeologist Donald Henson presents his analysis of imagined accounts of the British Mesolithic. By quantifying the different characters, settings and actions represented in historical novels set in Mesolithic Britain—a surprising number!—Henson demonstrates significant biases, for example, in the representation of men and women or in the emphasis on certain activities. At the same time, he argues, some of these novels provide important lessons for archaeologists, articulating more diverse and fully rounded accounts of the Mesolithic than found in scholarly accounts. Mesolithic people lived very different lives from us, but as Henson demonstrates, one reason for the fascination with this period lies in the lessons that it offers for our own world. The next chapter, by Daniël van Helden and Robert Witcher focuses on the concept of empathy, which they argue underlies the success of much historical fiction, but is also integral to the archaeological process. By concentrating of the work of R.G. Collingwood and Hans-Georg Gadamer, they examine how novelists and archaeologists seek to put the reader in the shoes of past people with the aim of understanding their emotions and actions. Such empathy (rather than sympathy) is a potentially powerful tool for archaeologists, but also raises epistemological and ethical issues that require substantially more research.

The next group of chapters comprises contributions that each address a different, specific form or application of fictive techniques. First, archaeologists Francesco Ripanti and Giulia Osti present two case studies of public archaeology projects on active excavations in Italy. The authors reflect on the particular challenges and opportunities of excavating sites and simultaneously interpreting them for the public. In each case, the archaeologists sought to integrate fictive techniques into their interactions with local communities, including a writing competition and the production of docu-dramas. The results of these exercises—unexpected insights and ideas—fed back into the ongoing archaeological research processes. A particular fictive technique, discussed above, is playwriting and one of the pioneers of this approach,

archaeologist James Gibb, offers further thoughts on the use of dialogue to advance archaeological understanding of the past. A key innovation here is his application of the method, hitherto focused on more recent historical periods, back into prehistoric times. Working in the US, Gibb's extension of the technique into the pre-colonial past raises a different set of ethical questions compared to the work of, for example, Elphinstone and Patton in Europe. Firmly believing in the need for archaeology to occupy the territory between the humanities and the sciences, Gibb also emphasises the requirement for the rigorous engagement with the evidence and the potential for the more formal testing of ideas.

The next chapter, by archaeologist Michael Given, is a translation into text of a storytelling performance at one of the conference sessions from which this volume derives. Without exaggeration, the audience at that meeting was spellbound. Here Given retells the story—refusing to confirm or deny it veracity—about his subterranean meeting with a mineworker during fieldwork on Cyprus. Like Gibb, he finds that creating dialogue compels him to engage more closely with people and, like Ripanti & Osti, he relates how performing such stories can lead to the co-production of knowledge as an integral part of the research process. Next, archaeologist and poet Erin Kavanagh, makes the case for poetry as a research method using examples from her personal practice. These include the use of poetic language to communicate between different stakeholders and the writing of an epic poem (included as an appendix) that draws together archaeological and geological data, with literary references, to conjure a voice from the past. In both cases, she argues, the poetic form can be as precise and analytical as any scientific language, and, indeed, can serve as both method and result.

The final chapter in this group reports the collaboration between two archaeologists—one of whom is also a visual artist and the other a novelist. After setting out their theoretical position, Victoria Thompson explains how she went about writing a short story (included as an appendix) inspired by two pieces of Anglo-Saxon stonework. Giacomo Savani then details the processes by which he produced a series of paintings to illustrate the text and the complex ways in which the words and images work in tandem, or at cross purposes, to communicate the story. Much has been written about visual archaeological reconstructions (e.g. Hughes 2015; Perry & Johnson 2014; Sorrell & Sorrell 2018), but little research has explored the

incorporation of these images into textual narrative and how they can be integrated into the research process.

The next set of chapters offers some external perspective on the use of fictive techniques in archaeology. Historian Fiona Hobden takes the TV series *Spartacus* as a case study for the power of fictional representations of the past. Her analysis shows how the series builds both on archaeological evidence and layers of historical interpretation to evoke a vivid, if not always authentic, Roman past. The effectiveness of the depiction of characters lies not in the accuracy of the costume or scenery, but in the use of techniques such as empathy and plot to create credible scenarios that communicate the complexity of life in the Roman world. Joanna Paul also looks to the Roman world and to the sub-discipline of Classical Reception Studies. Her chapter examines the way in which classicists have developed a vibrant area of research around the uses and representations of the classical past in later societies. Paralleling the wider argument of this volume, Paul demonstrates how the study of these later (fictional) representations not only gives insight into the contexts in which they were created, but also into the original source materials and periods. The analysis of a retelling of the *Odyssey*, for example, can form part of a re-analysis of the original story, in the same way that creating imagined scenes or dialogue based on archaeological materials can lead back to a reassessment of the original material evidence. Finally, Andrew Elliott brings insight from the discipline of Film and Cultural Studies. The representation of the past in film has generated a huge literature (e.g. Michelakis & Wyke 2013; Wyke 1997). Much of the debate around this has focused on questions of the accuracy of portrayals and impact on audiences, particularly in an educational sense. Starting from the position that such films are intended to entertain rather than educate, Elliott asks, why care about accuracy? In answering that question, he also makes clear how little we really understand about the way in which the message (historically accurate or otherwise) is transmitted to and decoded by the audience. These are questions which resonate across the volume—what constitutes accuracy and how does it relate to authenticity and truth? How do archaeologists communicate with their audiences, professional and public? Where and how is the past actually made? Collectively, the three chapters in this group underscore the great potential for more interdisciplinary research into the use of fictive techniques in archaeology.

The volume concludes with a chapter by archaeologist Adrian Praetzellis, a long-term advocate and practitioner of 'transgressive archaeology'. Here, he reflects on the motivations for some of his own work, undertaken with Mary Praetzellis. He also draws out some of the common themes linking the other contributions in this volume, including narrative as method, empathy and artistic expression. Like the editors, he is pleasantly surprised by the degree to which the diversity of authors and approaches succeeds in offering complementary and overlapping insights into the use of fictive techniques in archaeology. Our collective hope is that these contributions lead to further work on the many stimulating new questions they raise.

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Figure caption

Figure 1.1. The sleep of reason produces monsters (*El sueño de la razon produce monstruos*) by Francisco Goya. Plate 43 from ‘Los Caprichos’. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Creative Commons Attribution CC0 1.0 Universal.