

Poetics of the Marginalia.

Question: Why use poetry as a mode of expression within an information resource concerned with theory, speculation and conjecture relating to heritage, archaeology, historical geography, folklore, vernacular architecture etc.?

Answer: The writing of poems for inclusion as part of this website, which is about souterrains in South Munster, has been a means of creatively drawing together, collocating, scraps of ideas, uncertain thoughts, speculating about lacunae in how we read the past and cultural heritage, the nature of what constitutes 'evidence' in one discipline and not so in another e.g. phrases such as 'absence of evidence is not evidence of absence', 'known unknowns' and 'unknown unknowns', what is the relationship between how we want to perceive a memory of landscape and how it was actually experienced.

It is also about considering marginalia, from manuscript and printed documentary sources, as potential evidence and as alternative, or enhanced, perspectives on what the main body of a text communicates, or lacks. Such marginalia are work derived thoughts and ideas, quotes and references, comments, scraps of 'evidence' for which an author may not have had sufficient information to justify debate or discussion within the text. Quoting and discussing them may have been beyond the scope of an author's comfort zone or available research resources at the time of writing. They are as much a feature of the cultural heritage of the World of Letters as are the texts they are associated with. Such 'scraps' or 'informational units/ objects', to use the language of Information Science, are not necessarily derived from the literature of any particular intellectual discipline. They 'free float' within conversations, conversations about heritage, about memory; be such conversations about mythical, fantastical, legendary, fictional, antiquarian or scientific matters, about the history of professional and amateur modes of academic reasoning - and interpretations of same; be they about the perspective of the *seanacháí* compared with that of the scholar.

Narratives of the 'past' are, in themselves, constructions of later times i.e. histories of histories, as much to do with current architectures of cultural identity as with frameworks based on who recorded what and how what was recorded was perceived at any particular point in time. Interpretation and understanding can be a matter of currently accepted thinking as much as one about what individual experiences of living in a past time were.

As various branches of Social Science and Anthropology are always developing, progressing by means of new research and theory, new perspectives and new paradigms of interpretative method, changes in how a historical record is understood, re-appraisal can take place.

In the fluidity of ongoing change old information 'scraps' ideas and theories may become the subject of revisionist thinking. The release to accessibility to large quantities of data through new technologies, data hitherto unavailable or difficult to find, or access, as a consequence of the practicalities of print culture, changes scholarly awareness. Classificatory knowledge architectures, structural organisations of printed resources which affect access issues, retrieval and storage tools, all begin to dissolve into the immediacy and freedoms of knowledge availability brought about by new information technologies focused on discovery, delivery, analysis and creating awareness of what the manuscript and print cultures of the past garnered for society, for the continuity of its memory.

Poetry is a means of contextualising such scraps if only in the context of giving them a fictional existence, and a set of imaginative inter-relationships within such boundaries. It is about modes of expression for creative thinking not expressible scientifically, modes not contributing to a logical and debated construction of how the past might be understood. Should one talk about simply one linear past or should one talk about parallel multiplicities of past experiences, about how one person's experience of a past time may be quite different from that of another, about how one local society's past might be different from another?

Poetry can weave scraps of information, thoughts and ideas, together colourfully and musically, to create an artistic piece of expression. It may change a personal viewpoint or perspective. Like many forms of art, what a viewer, or reader, takes from an art work is 'ad hominem'.