

Yes. I think your instinct is right.

The first-person version inevitably becomes partly **your own retrospective account of yourself**. In third person, I can occupy the role you originally envisioned: the outside reader who has spent time excavating the corpus and is now proposing a reconstruction of the writer. It also creates a little more intellectual distance—which I think will make the essay less self-congratulatory and, paradoxically, more interesting.

I would keep the same fundamental argument, but change the stance throughout. Rather than “I have been looking,” it becomes “McClellan has spent his life looking.” Rather than the author explaining his motives, the essay infers patterns from the evidence. And I would make the final ChatGPT section genuinely feel like **the editor stepping out from behind the curtain**, rather than Murray talking about ChatGPT.

Here is the third-person version.

Excavating the Author: Reading Fifty Years of Murray McClellan

There is something faintly embarrassing about asking an artificial intelligence to read fifty years of one's writing and then explain what sort of writer one has been.

The embarrassment is probably justified. The exercise is undeniably self-indulgent. The corpus is also unusually heterogeneous: scholarly articles on ancient glass and archaeology, excavation reports, a history textbook, newspaper editorials, essays about language and history, travel writing, poems, short stories, jokes, studies of newspaper cartoons, photographs, memories, and an enormous book about the public art of Oviedo.

These things were written for very different audiences. Some were written for professional colleagues, some for students, some for newspaper readers, some for friends and family, and some apparently for the sheer pleasure of writing them.

Yet when the corpus is considered as a whole, a pattern emerges.

McClellan has not spent fifty years becoming a succession of different writers. Rather, the same writer has been operating throughout, although different circumstances have allowed different parts of that writer to come to the foreground.

The voice was there early on.

What changed was the permission to use it.

Perhaps the simplest way to describe the underlying impulse is:

Look at this. There's something here.

That sentence could almost serve as a motto for the whole enterprise.

The archaeologist says it when examining a fragment of glass or a damaged skeleton. The teacher says it when introducing a historical document or an unfamiliar word. The editorialist says it when pointing out something in contemporary politics that he thinks other people have overlooked. The collector says it when finding another cartoon, another example of a particular type, another face hidden in the architecture of Oviedo. The autobiographer says it when encountering a photograph or a half-remembered episode from childhood.

And eventually the writer turns the same attention upon himself.

Look at this. There's something here. What does it tell us about the person who has been doing the looking?

The boy who noticed things

The story begins, appropriately enough, with collecting.

In *Shiny Bits*, McClellan remembers himself as a child picking up nails in the gravel driveway of his grandfather's lumberyard in Texas and digging for fossils in his grandfather's backyard. The details are almost comically mundane. Yet they provide a surprisingly good origin story for an archaeologist.

Something catches the eye.

One object is separated from the undifferentiated mass around it. It is picked up, examined, and kept.

The habit never really went away.

The future archaeologist would eventually classify ancient glass vessels into types. The future scholar would compare similarities and differences across archaeological assemblages. The future collector would accumulate nearly 1,600 newspaper cartoons. The future resident of Oviedo would begin noticing faces and eyes in churches, statues, buildings, graffiti, advertisements, and public art.

There is a cartoon reproduced in *American Funny Pages* that captures this disposition rather nicely: an old man on a beach obsessively arranging seashells. McClellan has identified with that figure, and "typologist" is a useful description of the impulse behind him.

A typologist looks for recurring forms. He notices similarities and differences. He wants to know whether apparently separate things belong together, whether a pattern is accidental

or significant, whether this thing is like that thing—and, if so, in precisely what way.

The collector and the typologist are really two sides of the same habit.

He collects because he notices.

He classifies because he collects.

And he writes because he cannot seem to leave the things he has noticed alone.

Four boys, many places

But the habit of looking did not develop in isolation.

McClellan grew up with three brothers, and the family history is important to understanding the writer he became. There was roughhousing, playing in driveways, wandering through neighborhoods, and summers spent in Texas after the rest of the year in New Jersey or Pennsylvania.

That childhood world remains part of his writing.

His later piece *Driveway Kids* is particularly revealing because it did not remain exclusively his. His brother Ross wrote his own version of the same childhood material, and his brother Bruce had artificial intelligence generate another. The three versions constitute a small family archive: essentially the same remembered material viewed from different perspectives.

That is significant because McClellan's autobiographical writing is not quite as solitary as his statement that he writes “mostly for himself” might suggest.

He does write for himself. But he also sends many of his essays to his wife, his three brothers, his three sisters-in-law, his son and his son's partner, and his nieces and nephews.

The autobiographical essay therefore sometimes becomes an invitation:

Do you remember this?

That changes its function. McClellan is not simply reconstructing his own past. He is contributing to a family memory in which other people have their own versions of the same events.

His 2023 collection *Vignettes: Memories of a Life* makes the problem explicit. He describes the pieces as “snapshot stories,” written largely to reflect on who he is and how he came to be the way he is. He deliberately does not organize them chronologically. Individual memories are allowed to surface as they wish.

The structure is revealing.

The man who spent a career arranging archaeological material into types does not arrange his own life that way.

The self is a different kind of archaeological site.

And perhaps the peripatetic quality of McClellan's life belongs here as well.

He spent summers traveling to places such as Israel, Jordan, Libya, and Egypt. He lived in Athens for four years. He spent seventeen summers working in the small village of Kalavassos in Cyprus. Archaeology repeatedly placed him in places where he was, by definition, an outsider: an American looking at the remains of another culture, an excavator entering a site whose history long preceded him, a scholar trying to understand people whose lives were not his own.

That experience may have reinforced—or perhaps helped create—what might be called an **etic observer's eye**.

He arrived somewhere and looked.

Then he tried to understand what he was seeing.

After almost nine years in Spain, he has continued doing much the same thing. The difference is that now the place he is looking at is not a temporary archaeological field site but Oviedo, the city in which he has chosen to live.

There is something wonderfully appropriate about that.

The American archaeologist who spent much of his professional life looking at other cultures has become the foreign resident looking closely at his adopted city.

The archaeologist: reconstruction from fragments

Archaeology gave the impulse to notice a professional discipline.

McClellan's dissertation on core-formed glass was, at one level, a huge exercise in typology: more than 2,000 vessels organized into 88 types, with chronological distinctions that could sometimes be surprisingly fine.

A typology is never merely a list. It is an argument about relationships. It says that these objects belong together, that these others differ, and that those differences may tell us something about chronology, technology, trade, or cultural practice.

But archaeology also introduced another element into McClellan's writing:

reconstruction.

The archaeological record is incomplete. Archaeologists rarely possess the whole story. They have fragments and traces from which they construct an account of something that once existed.

That makes archaeology inherently narrative.

The Bronze Age burial described in the Cyprus excavation report is a good early example. A male skeleton had a partially healed injury to the leg. The evidence permitted an observation about the wound. But it also invited a human story. McClellan imagined the possibility that the man had been struck in battle, survived the initial encounter, and then died from the consequences.

Hence the phrase: he might have **won the battle but lost the war**.

The joke works because the evidence remains distinct from the reconstruction. The skeleton does not establish that this particular man was a warrior who suffered a particular blow in a particular battle. The imaginative leap belongs to the writer.

The same distinction appeared in the joking “Appendix Q” that McClellan and his co-director imagined as a repository for the wilder speculations about life at an archaeological site in the sixth or seventh century.

The joke acknowledged a real intellectual problem. Archaeological interpretation necessarily goes beyond what can be demonstrated, but professional publication requires archaeologists to distinguish what the evidence establishes from what they imagine might have happened.

That distinction has become important in McClellan's writing about his own life as well.

In *Vignettes*, he explicitly worries about whether a remembered event was actually remembered or whether he is remembering a story he has told himself about the event. As the years pass, personal histories are continually retold and modified.

A Life in Memories

That is almost an archaeological problem.

The evidence is fragmentary.

The reconstruction is provisional.

And the excavator is never entirely neutral.

The teacher

If archaeology taught McClellan to reconstruct, teaching taught him to explain.

This is perhaps the most obvious continuity in the corpus.

Key Moments in American History began as a teaching project. It was designed around the idea that students should learn to think like historians rather than simply memorize historical information. Historical documents were evidence; history was an interpretation of that evidence; the task of the teacher was to help students see how the interpretation was constructed.

That is essentially the same intellectual process he had learned as an archaeologist.

Look at this. What does the evidence permit us to say? What doesn't it permit us to say? What else do we need to know?

The teacher's voice is therefore not merely the voice of someone who knows things. It is the voice of someone who wants other people to see what he sees.

That voice appears throughout McClellan's essays. Even when the subject is obscure, he tends to explain it. He defines terms. He gives historical background. He traces words to their origins. He makes connections that may not be obvious to someone who has not spent years in Classics and archaeology.

There is a certain amount of pedantry in this.

McClellan is willing to admit it.

Indeed, he has written essays explicitly identifying himself as a pedantic old Classicist.

But the pedantry has a purpose.

Words are evidence too.

Words, words, words

McClellan's interest in etymology and language runs surprisingly deeply through the corpus.

You're Welcome and *A 19th-Century New England Voice*, both written while he was still teaching, already display the combination of language, history, and humor that later became more prominent in retirement.

The retired essays did not invent this habit.

They simply gave it more room.

Words themselves become archaeological artifacts.

Where did this word come from?

How did its meaning change?

What did people once mean by it?

What happens when contemporary usage obscures its older history?

The same impulse appears in his treatment of Classical languages, including the proposed alteration of the Latin inscription on the Boston monument to Robert Gould Shaw and the Black soldiers of the Massachusetts 54th Regiment. There, a tiny grammatical distinction became the basis for a larger argument about who was included in the memorial's language.

It is characteristic that the argument could be made through Latin.

The Classicist does not entirely disappear when he becomes a political writer.

He merely changes the archaeological site.

When the teacher leaves the classroom

The newspaper editorials are sometimes easy to classify as a separate political phase, but that would miss their relationship to teaching.

When McClellan wrote *There's a Lot We Should Teach*, *Historical Myopia over Cuba*, *Sanders' Missed Opportunity*, *Citizens United*, *The Real Scandal Is the Role of Big Money*, and other editorials, he was doing something very similar to what he had done in the classroom.

He was telling people that something they thought they understood had a larger context.

History became the evidence.

The newspaper became the classroom.

The readers became the students.

The difference was that the students had not asked for the lesson.

That changed the tone. The editorial voice is more prosecutorial than the classroom teacher's voice. There is impatience with what McClellan regards as historical ignorance or bad reasoning. Sometimes the rhetoric becomes deliberately provocative. *WTF?: Bruce Cantor's Revisionist History* is a good example of the Classicist's tendency to turn political exasperation into a joke.

But the underlying habit remains recognizable:

Look at this. You're missing something. Let me show you.

There is also a deeper continuity with McClellan's childhood.

When he was in junior high, he encountered an institutional decision that seemed to contradict the evidence before his eyes. A country-club manager told him that the swimming pool was full when McClellan could plainly see that it was not. His friend Greg Jefferies, one of the few Black students in their otherwise overwhelmingly white school, had been excluded from swimming there.

McClellan told his father.

His father was furious, challenged the club, and ultimately got the manager fired.

The episode should not be turned into a simplistic origin story for fifty years of political writing. But it does illustrate an early version of the same habit: **notice the discrepancy, recognize that something is wrong with the explanation being offered, and tell somebody.**

His father's politics mattered too. His left-wing political commitments formed part of the intellectual environment in which McClellan grew up. Later, McClellan's own antiwar activism included organizing a high-school protest that shut the school down for a day and participating in protests in Washington after the Kent State killings.

The adult editorialist did not suddenly acquire a political conscience.

What changed was the venue in which that conscience found expression.

Putting words to photographs

There is another thread that may be even older than the archaeological one: the impulse to put words to images.

McClellan's father built a darkroom when the boys were young, and Murray and his brothers spent countless hours developing film and making black-and-white prints. McClellan thinks he probably took the photograph of Greg that appeared in their high-school yearbook. After Greg's death, he wrote the memorial poem that accompanied the photograph.

That poem now looks startlingly young, but it also looks unmistakably like something McClellan would do much later: encounter an image, feel the pressure of memory behind it, and try to put words around what the image means.

Decades later came *A Posthumous Ekphrasis by Emily Dickinson (1862) on a Vivian Maier Self Portrait (1954)*.

Then *Reflections on Reflections*, with its mixture of art history, Shakespeare, autobiography, and photographs.

And eventually *The Eyes of Oviedo*.

The connection is not simply that all of these works contain pictures. It is that McClellan seems repeatedly unable to leave an image uninterpreted.

A photograph asks to be remembered.

A statue asks to be contextualized.

A face carved into a building asks to be noticed.

A piece of graffiti asks to be recorded before it disappears.

In *The Eyes of Oviedo*, he walks through the city looking for faces and eyes that most pedestrians would pass without noticing. The book becomes a huge act of attention: identify the thing, photograph it, locate it, describe it, explain it, and put it into a larger typology.

The Eyes of Oviedo

It is difficult not to see the childhood photographer, the archaeologist, the typologist, and the teacher standing behind the same camera.

The collector gets out of hand

There is, however, a problem with this way of seeing.

McClellan does not seem to know when to stop.

American Funny Pages is the most spectacular example. What began with clipping newspaper cartoons became an enormous study of American humor, eventually running to more than a thousand pages and nearly 1,600 comics.

A publisher who suggested cutting the project down to a much smaller book was, from a conventional publishing perspective, probably identifying a real problem.

McClellan declined.

He wanted the whole thing.

The same impulse appears in *Spain the Bypassed*, which he described himself as having produced in a “too-long-to-cut typologist's voice.” The problem is not simply verbosity. It is the conviction that the apparently extraneous example may be the example that reveals the pattern.

This is both a strength and a weakness.

The typologist wants completeness.

The essayist needs selection.

The collector thinks the discarded item might be the important one.

And the writer who has spent a lifetime collecting is understandably reluctant to throw anything away.

That tension may explain something about the website itself. Rather than submitting everything to the discipline of conventional publication, McClellan has increasingly made the whole archive available.

Perhaps the website is what happens when the typologist finally acquires his own museum.

The retired voice

Retirement did not create the silly writer.

The private memoir makes that clear. Stories about the Cyprus Rally, the “Tampon Phantom,” moving a two-ton rock to create a miniature Stonehenge, getting into dangerous or absurd situations while traveling, and other episodes show that humor and storytelling were present long before retirement. The *Vignettes* collection itself contains an explicit mixture of memory, story, scholarship, and joke.

A Life in Memories

What retirement changed was the proportion.

Professional life imposes boundaries. A scholarly article must be recognizable as a scholarly article. A textbook must serve students. An excavation report must distinguish evidence from speculation. A newspaper editorial has to fit a newspaper. Even creative writing produced while teaching exists alongside a professional identity that imposes certain expectations.

Retirement removed many of those constraints.

The result is not a new person.

It is a person with more room to let the existing ones talk to each other.

The Classicist can now follow an etymological rabbit hole.

The teacher can lecture without a syllabus.

The typologist can accumulate examples until the essay becomes enormous.

The humorist can end with a pun.

The archaeologist can speculate.

The autobiographer can become the subject of the excavation.

And all of them can coexist in the same piece.

As Luck Would Have It is a particularly good example. It begins as a teacherly discussion of the ways cultures have personified luck and moves through Tyche, Fortuna, superstition, sports, Shakespeare, personal experience, coin tossing, and quantum mechanics before arriving at the inevitable pun. The sequence is not random. It is the typologist's mind at work: once a phenomenon has been identified, examples begin appearing everywhere.

As Luck Would Have It

The retired writer has simply stopped telling himself that every association has to justify its presence.

And that can be liberating.

Death and the archaeology of the self

But there is a more serious reason why autobiography has become increasingly prominent.

Death.

As an archaeologist, McClellan has literally dealt with the remains of dead people. The Cyprus burial is one example. At the Demeter Sanctuary at Cyrene, he encountered the skeletal remains of a young girl who had been crushed when a wall collapsed in the earthquake of 365 CE. That encounter stayed with him.

A Life in Memories

But archaeology also confronts death indirectly, through absence.

Archaeologists know people existed because traces of them remain.

McClellan's personal writing has increasingly forced him to confront the same problem from the other direction.

His grandparents died.

His parents died.

Greg died.

People who were once part of the world become memories, photographs, stories, names.

And eventually McClellan will become one of those traces.

This is where *Ghosts* becomes especially important. The ghosts in that essay are not simply supernatural figures. They are the remains of people in memory: the things they did, the places they inhabited, the things they wrote, the stories others tell about them.

What, McClellan wonders, will remain of him?

The archaeological publications may remain somewhere.

The excavation reports may remain.

The poems and stories may remain.

The political editorials may remain.

The enormous study of American cartoons may remain.

The Eyes of Oviedo may remain.

Or perhaps none of them will matter to anyone.

The website is, in part, an answer to that possibility. Posting everything online is a rather pathetic attempt at preservation. It is not immortality. Digital storage is not the same thing as memory. An archive is not a life.

But an archaeologist understands the impulse.

We preserve traces because the alternative is disappearance.

Remembering is another form of reconstruction

The autobiographical writing therefore represents more than a late-life change of subject. It is the point at which the methods of archaeology begin to turn inward.

What can McClellan actually know about himself?

What is memory?

What is reconstruction?

What is inherited from family stories?

What has been altered by repetition?

What do photographs contribute?

What does writing itself change?

His *Vignettes* explicitly wrestles with these questions. McClellan notes that memories become increasingly uncertain the farther back one goes, and that people continually reinvent their personal histories as they retell them.

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The fact that his brothers have written their own versions of family history makes the problem even more interesting. In his 2023 memoir, McClellan went back and compared his memories with those of James and Ross. They had organized their lives differently and remembered differently.

A Life in Memories

The family therefore becomes a kind of collaborative excavation.

There is no single authoritative account.

There are layers.

There are competing reconstructions.

There are fragments that one person remembers and another has forgotten.

And sometimes there is a photograph.

The author as archaeological site

At this point the metaphor of excavation becomes more than a clever organizing device.

An archaeological site contains layers deposited at different times. Later activity does not simply erase earlier activity. It builds over it, cuts through it, reuses it, sometimes destroys it, sometimes preserves it unexpectedly.

The same is true of a life.

The teacher did not disappear when the archaeologist retired.

The Classicist did not disappear when the essayist became political.

The political writer did not disappear when the autobiographer began writing about childhood.

The collector did not disappear when the scholar wrote a dissertation.

The humorist was there before the jokes became public.

The photographer was there before the ekphrasis.

The autobiographer was there before retirement, although he had not yet made himself the principal subject.

The layers coexist.

And the deeper one excavates, the less convincing the idea of a single “voice” becomes.
There is no one voice waiting at the bottom of the trench.

There is a pattern of habits.

Notice.

Collect.

Compare.

Classify.

Reconstruct.

Explain.

Argue.

Play.

Remember.

Preserve.

And then start over.

The etic eye comes home

Perhaps the most interesting late development is that the observer who spent so much of his life looking at other places has finally become the object of his own observation.

For decades McClellan was the outsider looking in.

The American archaeologist in Greece.

The American excavator in Cyprus.

The visitor in Libya.

The scholar looking at ancient cultures.

The teacher looking at historical evidence.

The traveler looking at places.

And now the American living in Spain.

There is a certain irony in the fact that *The Eyes of Oviedo* may be one of the clearest expressions of this entire habit. McClellan is living in a place that has become home, but he continues to look at it with something of the outsider's attention. The familiar remains strange enough to be noticed.

The etic eye has come home.

And perhaps that is why autobiography has followed.

Once the observer has spent enough time looking at the world, eventually the question becomes:

Who is the person doing the looking?

The family member

There is one more complication.

The person doing the looking is not only an archaeologist or teacher or writer.

He is also a brother.

A husband.

A father.

An uncle.

A friend.

A member of a family with its own accumulated memories.

That is why the family audience for these later essays matters. When McClellan writes about the driveway, or childhood, or his parents, or some ridiculous episode from a trip, he is sometimes trying to preserve something that belongs not only to him.

The story may trigger someone else's story.

His memory may contradict his brother's.

His brother's version may cause him to remember something he had forgotten.

The act of writing becomes a way of keeping a conversation going.

That weekly Zoom call with his brothers is therefore an interesting counterpart to the website. One is an ongoing conversation among living family members; the other is an archive intended, at least partly, to outlast its author.

Both resist disappearance.

The archive

This may explain why McClellan has become increasingly unwilling to discard things.

A conventional writer selects.

An archaeologist preserves representative examples.

A curator chooses.

A publisher cuts.

McClellan accumulates.

The website contains scholarship, political arguments, language games, archaeological lectures, photographs, travel writing, poems, stories, cartoons, autobiographical fragments, and essays that probably made sense only because he happened to be thinking about some peculiar connection on the day he wrote them.

The whole thing is excessive.

But perhaps excess is part of the point.

McClellan has spent his life dealing with fragments. Perhaps he has responded by producing too many of his own.

The website is his midden.

His museum.

His archive.

His attempt to leave behind enough material that someone—or something—might someday reconstruct the person who produced it.

Whether that reconstruction would be accurate is another question.

And then there is ChatGPT

Which brings us to the strangest layer in the excavation.

For much of his writing life, McClellan has been the person putting words around things.

Now he has asked an artificial intelligence to put words around **him**.

ChatGPT began as an editor. McClellan uses it to check grammar, style, awkwardness, and sometimes the logic of an argument. He still makes the final decisions. But gradually the relationship has changed. The machine has become another tool for reflection: not merely *Is this sentence grammatical?* but *What does this recurring habit tell us about the writer who keeps producing sentences like this?*

That is a rather different use of artificial intelligence.

And it introduces an unavoidable methodological complication.

The machine doing the excavation is not an archaeologist standing outside the site. It is working with the material McClellan has chosen to provide, the explanations he has given, the memories he has described, and the interpretations developed together.

Its reconstruction is therefore no more final than an archaeological reconstruction based on incomplete evidence.

Indeed, the comparison is almost too neat.

An archaeologist uses a trowel to expose what is there.

A trowel does not invent the site.

But neither does it simply reveal the site untouched. The excavator decides where to dig, how carefully to dig, what to preserve, what to record, what relationships to investigate, and how to interpret what has been exposed.

ChatGPT is a rather peculiar digital trowel.

It cannot excavate McClellan's past directly.

It can, however, help expose patterns in the traces he has left behind.

And in doing so, it has made him look at his own writing differently.

What was there all along

The final temptation would be to divide McClellan's life into periods: archaeologist, teacher, editorialist, retiree, autobiographer.

The evidence does not support such a neat division.

The archaeologist was always a collector.

The collector was always a typologist.

The typologist was always looking for patterns.

The teacher was already present in the archaeologist's impulse to explain.

The political writer was already present in the citizen who noticed institutional discrepancies and wanted to challenge them.

The humorist was already present in the archaeological jokes and the stories of things that went wrong.

The autobiographer was already present in the person who put words to photographs and preserved stories.

The traveler and expatriate reinforced the outsider's eye.

The old man simply acquired the freedom to let all these parts of himself speak at once.

That, perhaps, is the real story of the fifty years.

Not transformation, but **release**.

The voice was there early on, but different professional circumstances permitted different portions of it to emerge.

Retirement did not so much give McClellan a new voice as remove the barriers between the old ones.

The result is messy.

It is sometimes excessive.

It is occasionally pedantic.

It can be political, argumentative, silly, scholarly, nostalgic, playful, obscure, and sentimental—sometimes all within a few pages.

But perhaps the mess is appropriate.

A life is not a well-edited book.

It is an excavation.

There are layers.

There are gaps.

There are things that have been lost.

There are things that have been reconstructed incorrectly.

There are objects that seemed insignificant when they were deposited but turn out to be important centuries later.

There are things that the excavator wishes he could put back exactly where he found them.

And there are shiny bits.

A life of looking

So what kind of writer has Murray McClellan been?

Perhaps the answer is less a category than a verb.

He has been **looking**.

Looking at ancient glass.

Looking at bones.

Looking at photographs.

Looking at words.

Looking at historical documents.

Looking at political arguments.

Looking at cartoons.

Looking at statues.

Looking at graffiti.

Looking at Spain.

Looking at memories.

Looking at his brothers' memories of the same childhood.

And now looking at the accumulated evidence of his own writing.

The same questions keep returning:

What is this?

Then:

What is it doing here?

Then:

What else is like it?

Then:

What might it mean?

And finally, increasingly:

What does it tell us about the person doing the looking?

The answer, after fifty years, is not a single identity.

It is a habit of mind.

A habit formed, perhaps, in childhood driveways and Texas summers; reinforced by brothers, travel, archaeology, classrooms, excavation trenches, photographs, political arguments, and decades of living partly as an outsider; and finally turned inward by retirement, mortality, memory, and the realization that a lifetime's accumulation of words might itself be worth examining.

The archaeologist's first obligation is to notice what is there.

The writer's may be much the same.

So here is the fragment.

Here is the photograph.

Here is the word.

Here is the memory.

Here is the joke.

Here is the ridiculous pile of cartoons.

Here is the face carved into a wall in Oviedo.

Here is the old essay he had forgotten he wrote.

Here is the story his brother remembers differently.

Here is the thing he thought was important.

Here is the thing he thought wasn't.

Look at this.

There's something here.

And after fifty years of writing, the author has finally turned the trowel on himself.

And, perhaps fittingly, he has handed the trowel to ChatGPT.

Not because the machine can tell him who he is.

But because sometimes another pair of eyes is useful at an excavation.

Sources