

# Qualitative Inquiry

<http://qix.sagepub.com/>

---

## **They Have Tied Me to a Stake: Reflections on the Art of Case Study Research**

Michael Watts

*Qualitative Inquiry* 2007 13: 204  
DOI: 10.1177/1077800406295628

The online version of this article can be found at:  
<http://qix.sagepub.com/content/13/2/204>

---

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

**Additional services and information for *Qualitative Inquiry* can be found at:**

**Email Alerts:** <http://qix.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

**Subscriptions:** <http://qix.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

**Reprints:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

**Permissions:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

**Citations:** <http://qix.sagepub.com/content/13/2/204.refs.html>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Feb 21, 2007

[What is This?](#)

# They Have Tied Me to a Stake

## Reflections on the Art of Case Study Research

Michael Watts

*Von Hügel Institute, St. Edmund's College, Cambridge, United Kingdom*

*You had to see it to believe it. I mean, we're sitting there, thirty-odd people in this new class, and I really can't think I'm the only one here wondering what exactly qualitative research is all about and why has he just walked in carrying a box of coat hangers? Why? And what has any of this got to do with this book he wanted us to read? He stands there for a while without a single word of explanation and then he quotes some guy called Stenhouse and says "I have a fear of lecturing lest you believe me." And suddenly my interest is piqued because I'd read that book he'd recommended and, to be honest, I hadn't liked it. I had no real idea what it was saying or why it wasn't saying it. It was like—Oh, I don't know. Like it had just been scribbled down because the publisher's deadline was up. That's it: it was unfinished and I figured that there had to be more to it than that. It's funny, but one of the reasons I read English as an undergrad was that I wanted to find out more about literature than just how the book ended. And here I was with this thing and here was the chance to figure it out for myself and I suppose that's what this story is all about: what do I think of qualitative research after reading Stake's Art of Case Study Research? In its own way, it's about change: change of attitudes and a look at whether it's possible for these different attitudes to exist side by*

*I'm wondering what the hell is the point of this charade that's dressed up as a lesson? I mean, we've been told to read this wretched book that's supposed to tell us all about case study research and it's utter nonsense. But now he's telling us that he's not going to tell us anything about it, you know, so it looks like it's going to be down to me*

*side, like they're following the same lines of thought and sometimes just veering off on their own and sometimes merging back again*

This article is written as a response to my reactions to Robert E. Stake's (1995) *The Art of Case Study Research*—first introduced to me through a postgraduate course on qualitative research—and, in particular, to the report on Chicago's Frances Harper Elementary School contained within it (Stake, 1995). As such, it draws together some of my reflections on case study research and attempts to trace the development of my own attitudes toward the qualitative research that has, for me, been symbolized by Stake and his report. At the same time, it is a response to my own self, an auto/biographical reflection on my understanding of where I was and where I had been coming from and of those values I had brought with me and was developing (Stake, 1995, 2006). Within this second enquiry, drawn from a (self) research diary and class notes kept throughout the course, this article also represents an exploration of myself—including myself as a qualitative researcher with a fascination for the auto/biographical. This attempt to present and re-present these entwined reflections—on qualitative research and on myself—has a third purpose here: to explore the re-presentation of this developing understanding (see also, e.g., Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997; Stronach & MacLure, 1997) and tell others something of what I might not otherwise have included (Stake, 2004). I apologize if the results seem merely pretentious.

The sources for this story are primarily my own, mostly taken from a diary that noted some of my extempore reactions to and reflections on various aspects of qualitative research. These are referred to within this article as "Stake x" and are included, complete with numbers, to mark the passage of the time within which my understanding, such as it was, developed and progressed. In effect, they are a series of interviews with myself. These interviews were recorded and purposely left unamended—even down to the odd typographic error. They were subjected to annotation without amendment (tempting as that sometimes was), and this article is, in effect, yet another series of annotations. The temptation, even now, is to annotate it further—but that would be to spoil the story.

Although I had raised other issues with myself and with others during the course of study, I have limited myself here to an exploration of the uses of literary devices and fiction in the writing of case studies. For me, particularly as I had read English as an undergraduate, these were sources of discontent and satisfaction: I had simultaneously wondered "what the hell is the point of this?" and had my interest piqued. In an early consideration of the report

I had suggested that it was “a case study of Robert E. Stake at Harper School” (Stake 1) and objected to the intrusion of literary devices: It was too much of a story, not enough of a report. I recognize the irony of writing my own report now in the form of a story as this article becomes a case study of myself considering “the case study of Robert E. Stake at Harper School.” However, I believe that there is a validity in this as such a case study addresses the question of whether there is, as had been suggested in the very first class, “some intelligent reason to change the way of doing things in one’s own professional life” (class notes). The “first objective of a case study is to understand the case” (Stake, 2006, p. 2) and in trying to present and to re-present the explorations of my own self I have had the opportunity to submit my reflections to what I had heard called “the alternative interpretation test” (class notes) and thereby locate the sources of my discontent. As I subsequently came to appreciate, this was not only a part of my own “self-correcting system” (Stake, 2004, p. 22) and my commitment to skepticism (Stake, 2004) but an acknowledgment of the ethical responsibility to identify influences on my interpretation of the case (Stake, 2006).

I have deliberately eschewed the literature of case study and qualitative research in this story, other than that written by Stake, shared with me in the classes or included in the notes I have written in response to Stake’s work because this is intended as a personal approach to case study. It is not intended as an abstract examination of the uses of fiction in qualitative research, for that would “not involve the reflection that Stake has pushed me towards” (Stake 16). Instead, this is an attempt to forego the “ease of relying upon the authority of others—whether for confirmation or to argue . . . Do I want to know (explore) what I know or what I don’t?” (Stake 16). However, just as Stake had taken his “experience in program evaluation” into the unfamiliar milieu of urban schools (Stake, 1995, p. 140), so I carried my experience of literary criticism (shaped by my responses to the “authority of others”) with me as I explored the unfamiliar milieu of case study research. Such literature as informed my experience informs this story.

Given the extent of self-reflection, does this article have any worth? Although acknowledging the potential for solipsism, I believe that it does. During the course of study I found myself tied to my own stake, for Stake and his report on Harper School informed the course of these notes throughout. The pun in the title, however, has a more serious point. Aware of the pitfalls of assuming my own knowledge in others—be it in terms of a single word such as “catharsis” (Stake 2) or to the canon of medieval literature (Stake 13)—it may be worth putting this quotation into some sort of context. Its significance may become clearer by seeing it in relation to

this article where it lies in my growing appreciation of qualitative research: "If I'm to use such research then there is a value in having come to appreciate (at least some of) its methods heuristically" (Stake 5). And so, if I had tied myself to a stake, then this represents my attempts to fly from it. To understand. Claims have been staked, and it behooves me to explore them.

My immediate reactions to case study research, particularly as the art form suggested by the very title of Stake's book and through his report on Harper School, were unfavorable. Two annotations, made at the time of my first reading the report, suggest this. Alongside the passage, "A 20-page case study is likely to run 50 if the researcher doesn't 'ruthlessly winnow and sift'" (Stake, 1995, p. 121) there are pencil marks, thickened with frustration, and the single comment "precisely!!!" On the first page of the report itself (Stake, 1995) I have written "Is this a paradigm for qual. research?" Although I believe that some words carry their own emotive meanings around with them (Stake 6) those quoted here do not appear to do that. Looking at them isolated in print they remain obstinately neutral even now. Without the preamble of frustration they could, particularly amid the data gathered since then, suggest fervent agreement and genuine inquiry. My own claim to Stake, then, is as genesis of and mediator between these two positions of frustration and agreement through inquiry.

To be honest, I was getting more and more confused with the whole case study as art thing. And that business of describing coat hangers just didn't help. I mean, what do you say? They look like coat hangers. They're designed as coat hangers. You know, things you hang your coat on. They're hangers for coats, aren't they? Well, they didn't help me at all with the book. So I went up to him afterwards and said to him, "Look, I don't get it. There's got to be more to this and I just don't get it. It reads like a story and it's not even a very good story

Shakespeare's "Scottish play" where Macbeth cries these words as the unrelenting course of action that had been initiated after his meeting with the three witches draws to its inevitable end. Having seized the Scottish throne by force, the consequences of his actions are now laid before him. He does not recognize his own culpability—after all, it is "They" who have tied him to the stake leaving him no more room for maneuver— and defiantly, heroically, gloriously unrepentant to the very end of the play that bears his name, he is killed in the next and final scene.

It doesn't tell me anything. It's a piece of crap." I mean, obviously I said a bit more but, between you and me, I was rather expecting that the persuasive force of my logic would soon swing him round to my point of view. Well, alright. No. Looking back to it I was probably hoping that he'd

because it doesn't tell you anything. There's not even a conclusion." And he said, "That's interesting. Why don't you write something down?" And I thought, "Right. I'll do that. I'll show you what I mean." And that's where it all started, I suppose.

I rejected the report for being "too literary" (Stake 2): I objected to the style of the report and, through its stylistic presentation, its content. Indeed, I wondered whether a "whole piece of work [could] be dismissed because of just one of its components—in this case, that the entire report, including its content, may be dismissed because of a negative reaction to its stylistic presentation" (Stake 1). The central narrator offered inconclusive description rather than definite prescription. It was not what I considered to be a report (Stake 3). It was, in short, a story: instead of being told whether or not the Chicago School Reform and the school's own School Improvement Plan were working or not, I was told about Professor Stake's outing to a Chicago school. And I did not like that.

It was not the language that I had reacted to. I have revisited enough of my own work to appreciate a report being readable. With Stake it was what the "readability" represented that concerned me. Comparing it to "a bad novel by Don DeLillo" (Stake 1), I dismissed it out of hand because, with its descriptive narrative rather than prescriptive conclusions, it was a story that "fails to adequately address any of its own stated goals" (Stake 1). The problem was that I wanted answers to, not insight into, the problems addressed by these "stated goals." I put style above content. It is small consolation if I am not the only one "guilty of that" (Stake 12). Interestingly (or not) reflecting on this paper helped my understanding of my appreciation of DeLillo's (1994) work in general and the "bad novel"—*White Noise*—in particular.

I had picked out and focused on one sentence: "I reach to the ground and pick up a spent casing" (Stake, 1995, p. 142). I chose to read it, "with its blandness and (seemingly) sudden incongruous juxtapositioning," as a "*mimesis* of the very situation" that I interpreted as my picture of the scene (Stake 1). Safely wrapped up in the language of literary criticism, I criticized him for not drawing proper attention to evidence of gun use on these school grounds. The suggestion that "one purpose of this research is to make the familiar seem strange so that attention can be drawn to it" (Stake 1)

indicates the potential for literary devices in the writing of such reports. It allows the reader to determine the import of the matter according to his or her own understanding of the situation—as does much literature. It says: “Here is the situation. Make of it what ‘you will’” (Stake 6). And it frees the reader from the hectoring of the author. This use of a literary dissonance contributed to my original dismissal of the report as nothing but a story. My problem with the use of a literary style is not necessarily that it does render “the findings of [such an] enquiry . . . ‘woolly’” (Stake 6) but that the association with literature can render them such. Although I can explore the nightmare scenario of *White Noise* and suggest that “Life cannot be reduced to a series of questions with definite answers” (Stake 8) I clearly had great problems applying that same consideration to Stake; and, through Stake, to qualitative research. I believe that this problem lies in “what I see/saw as the purpose of literature” (Stake 9). Yet, looking ahead to my engagement here with another work of literature—Pat Barker’s *Ghost Road* (1995)—I can appreciate the suggestion of a reasonable, and reasoned, approach to life by seeing in the fictional character of Billy Prior a ludicrous type who must split his personality in two to maintain the inflexible code he tries to live by.

Acknowledging the dangers of making sweeping statements, I will risk the suggestion that whereas qualitative research is concerned with particularities, literature is concerned with generalities that are illustrated through the particular. Blake (c.1804/1989) summed it up rather well when writing of seeing a world in a grain of sand and holding infinity in the palm of your hand and so on. Common humanity—or Sartre’s (1981) notion of the universal singular by which every person is like every other person because of the universality of social experiences and processes and yet like no other person because they are single instances of those same social experiences and processes—allows the audience to meaningfully relate to the generality of the literature. It may be worth pausing here to look at an example. So, a novel, a particular favorite of mine that you might also know, a story such as Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1902/1973)

“can illustrate the human condition. Francis Ford Coppola then took it up, and did so brilliantly, to show the madness of the Vietnam War in *Apocalypse Now* which became a commentary on the sheer madness of War, of all war” (Stake 9) even more so “after there was all that aggravation with the helicopters which had been sold by the US to the Philippine government then borrowed by Coppola before being requisitioned back to put down the insurgents” (Stake 7). What is strangest here: truth or fiction in film?

With too much of the story in it, the truths that I first saw in the report on Harper School were generally applicable rather than particularly so: I saw the story of Harper School from the premises looking out rather than in. They were liable to dismissal in terms of the school because they were not objectively reported. I wanted “confirmation and got this instead” (Stake 3). Yet I can smile at Shakespeare’s (c.1601/1975) Olivia giving out the divers schedules of her beauty and, if I can put aside the canon of “great literature” for the moment, I have laughed out loud when the meaning of life, the universe and everything has been given as 42 (Adams, 1986). I can quite gleefully agree with Wilde’s (1891/1970) suggestion that people did not notice sunsets until Turner started painting them and that the artist is, indeed, a critic. However, in reading Stake I had a great deal of difficulty in accepting that I could notice the consequences of the Chicago School Reform at Harper School. I had (with apologies to Wilde and Stake) difficulty in recognizing the researcher as critic, never mind as artist.

In fact, I am not sure that I even recognized the researcher—in the sense that I recognized his authority to comment upon urban schools. My impression “was of a white upper middle-class male being unduly surprised at finding a spent cartridge on the grounds of an inner-city school in Chicago” (Stake 1). I wondered whether it was simply this picture that I had drawn of him that had led to my resenting his authorial intrusion. What could he know of urban schools? What could he as an outsider tell me with my inner-city experiences about urban schools? Had this perception further prejudiced my reading of the report? Stake (1995) himself answers the first



question: "most" of his experience is "not in urban schools" (p. 140). Yet my experiences are also limited: I have worked in inner cities, but I have not lived in them. If I saw him as a middle-class inner-city colonizer (as opposed to me with my 9-5 anticolonialism) it was because he knew enough (unlike myself at the time of these early musings) to define his limits "so that I can make my own mind up from his experiences. Not only has he given a voice to the voiceless, he has given me a picture of the particular school and the CSR that allows me, if need be, to 'determine an alternative in the light of [my] own experience'" (Stake 8). Moreover, in declaring his own limitations of experience he had given me the advantage of knowing "where he is coming from" so that I could take that into account when applying my own experience to his observations. He knows enough to not comment, to not give me the firm conclusions I sought. Of course, such conclusions and commentary would ultimately be the judgment of one who has little experience of urban schools and would have to be accepted or rejected accordingly.

why is he there, speaking for others and not letting them speak out and up for themselves?" (Stake 4). Instead of such presumption, surely he could just get to the point and get on with giving

Yet, for all Stake's attempts to preclude such judgments, I made my own and found it difficult to recognize the validity of the report's content. I did not recognize his story as an account of Harper School under the CSR and its own School Improvement Plan. I may be able to recognize that life cannot be "reduced to a series of questions with definite answers" (Stake 8) but only if, it would seem, life is neatly bound up within the safety of a literary story. I could not approach life through case study research in the same way. My problem with Stake (and, through Stake, with qualitative research) was that I failed to recognize the potential of fictive and literary devices in his report. My problem with myself was that I had failed to bridge the divide I had made between fact and the fictive style. This was where the source of my discontent was located. Case study research, I was beginning to realize, like literature, is concerned with illustrations rather than definitive answers; but whereas literature may be concerned with the ideal, such research is concerned with the real and the particular. But that was then. Now, bridging the divide I had once seen, I had found that I was able to

recognize the potential of fictive and literary devices as they are used in Stake's report. It has required me to locate myself within the source of that discontent as I have brought what I know to bear on what I have been presented with in his study. There are answers in the stories told by Stake and by myself. And this is the thing: there are answers in the plural—not just the one. The story allows the writer or researcher to hold out a choice so that the reader can pick and choose what is appropriate to the circumstances. The reader can determine the truth as he or she sees it.

*And so I put the book to one side. Anyway, the course was getting a lot more interesting. He got this speaker in to talk about the uses of "personal stories for professional learning" I think it was. You know, what really got me with that was that she brought in an excerpt from Pat Barker's Ghost Road, the last of her Great War trilogy. I felt on more secure ground with that because I know this stuff. I think I even wrote that down somewhere. Yes, here it is: "There is a fascinating amalgam of fact and fiction here. Billy Prior is a creature of Barker's own making, but he could have been there. Rivers, Sassoon, Owen, they were all there. Real characters, people who existed and who recorded their own thoughts, have been brought into a work of fiction and their backdrop is the mess of events and propaganda that was the Great War. Four years of fighting between fact and fiction." Yes, that's it. It's from Stake 4. And how many of these facts find their way into truths told by Prior? Truths that the others may not have told? You know, where does the truth lie in all of this?*

But as Pontius Pilate asked 2000 years ago at the beginning of another story: *Quid est veritas?* What is truth? And where does the fiction become a fact? Can facts and fiction interwoven together tell a truth? "Can a story avoid the limitations of what may be seen as something definitive and still contain a truth?" (Stake 8). This suddenly came to me appearing as "a I thought, must surely "be the question I need to put to the answers I've given myself" (Stake 8). A story can contain a general truth, even if it is not an actual and factual report of events. "Gulliver's Travels did not happen, but the story does not lose its

significance for this oversight of Swift's (1726/1967). Indeed, it can be argued that the message would have been missed if satire had given way to mere reportage" (Stake 4). But *Gulliver's Travels* is clearly a fictional story. What of Stake's story of Harper School? "What I find interesting now," I later wrote, "is the recognition that I can carry all my critical analyses, carefully nurtured, to a piece of fictive literature or writing, but have difficulty in applying the same to non-fiction. And the Harper's School Report in particular. Yet when I read fiction, I don't particularly want to be told that 'This is the answer!' I want to reach my own conclusions based upon the evidence I read" (Stake 11). Stake's "story" did happen, but it had not happened for me.

In a poem, perhaps? "My friend, you would not tell with such high zest / To children ardent for some desperate glory, / The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est / Pro patria mori" (Owen, 1920/1990). Quid est veritas? What? To illustrate the point being made? But pausing to consider this carefully surely the answer or the hypothesis or report or whatever you want to call it should be enough without an illustration? to have given an illustration would possibly suggest the assertion needed this illustration, that the authority in and of itself was insufficient, that something was missing. Or am I missing it?

I began to see that the prescription that I had looked for in the Harper School report could tell me nothing if I have no knowledge of the school: "If a novel can reveal this human element as it is affected by outside elements, can a report that is written in the style of a novel do the same? The answer, surely, is *Yes* . . . The narrative form, the storytelling does not obscure this" (Stake 5). And why should I have such particular knowledge? I have a general knowledge of inner cities and of their schools, but not in the U.S. and particularly not of this one in Chicago: "Stake's report is a facet of the School [and] certainly the only part of it that I am likely to access" (Stake 11). I "know" DeLillo's *White Noise* and Barker's *Ghost Road* trilogy. But I wasn't there. In carrying my own limited knowledge into the report, had I been creating my own ludicrous type, unable to relate reality to an inflexible code? And why should the audience for whom the report was first intended, and whom I had originally written off as probably unfamiliar with the reality of inner city schools (Stake 1) have such a knowledge?

But what is the reality? Is it the casual visit of an academic, or is it the daily grind of the Chicago School Reform in action? Or is it both? After all, the academic visited the school and reported on that: "Stake's report, Stake's truth, contributes to the whole that is the perception of the

school . . . If I want to consider how CSR is working, then I must have my Stake in it" (Stake 11). I returned to my own experiences, to my own knowledge of literary criticism to reach the answers that I believe I now have. They may not be the answers that others have, but they are answers nonetheless. And to frame them within some matrix of truth it was necessary to indicate the relevance of and to my own self, to posit myself as narrator—as Stake had done.

*Quid est veritas?* What is truth? Truth, suggested Václav Havel (1990), "is not simply what you think it is; it is also the circumstances in which it is said, and to whom, why, and how it is said" (p. 67). Here, the truth, my truth that had been recorded in a series of observations made over a course of study, is presented as a composite story: a truth in action. That story tells of my objections to the style of a particular case study, of how I reacted to a story told by someone I considered unqualified to tell it. Through the story, those observations are condensed in to an identification of the problems I had in approaching the report as story. What had changed? What began that process of change?

I suspect that it was a disturbed peace: the peace of unquestioned assumptions disturbed by the "sudden incongruous juxtapositioning" of a story (about which I had some knowledge) presented as truth and a truth (about which I knew nothing) presented as a story. But what were those assumptions? And where were they located? "What is the status of the story? What is its relation to 'reality'?" (assorted class notes). Here were questions underlying my assumptions; and here was an opportunity to explore the divide I had created between fact and the fictive style rather than simply fall over into it. Two questions in quick succession following rereadings of and returns to *White Noise*, *The Ghost Road*, and Havel's *Disturbing the Peace* suggest the beginnings of this exploration: "did it really happen like this?" and "does it really matter?" (Stake 4). Do the small accuracies and their depiction really matter if they illustrate the greater truth?

What was crucial, I believe, was the realization that truths can be—and, indeed, are—told through fiction. Words that are put in the mouths of fictional characters who speak their truths can bring the reader up against unpleasant or unexpected truths told through a story. It was dawning on me that they can "make the familiar seem strange so that attention can be drawn to it" (Stake 1) and that these words "may not have been spoken [but] what is the story without them?" (Stake 4). What indeed? For these words are the story—even though they may not have been spoken. These words "make the story [and] give it its significance" (Stake 4).

As for Stake (1995), in placing himself as narrator within the report, he made clear that he had done little research in urban schools (p. 140). And, by way of compensating for this recognized lack of experience, he explains that it “is always important for me to make myself visible to the reader so as to establish the interactivity between researcher and phenomena. I try to provide lots of incontestible description but still remind that these views are my views” (Stake, 1995, p. 140). Yet I had dismissed his report because of the inclusion of literary devices—as if it were a story. There was nothing in it, though, that I dismissed as untrue. I do not doubt, for example, that he did pick up a spent cartridge. I merely objected to the way that he presented that particular truth. Here, though, in stories that were far cries from Chicago’s inner-city school, were indications that I *was* able to appreciate the inclusion of literary devices to enhance the truth—or a truth, at least—to make it affective: prescription without description of the unknown does “little to convey the sense of the subject” (Stake 3). Havel (1990) presented stories, plays with truth in them, DeLillo (1984) told truths in *White Noise* and Barker (1995) used a fictional character to tell truths about the Great War. More than this, though, and even allowing for Havel’s absurdist drama, they tell these stories as if they were true, and they tell stories within true events as if they, too, were true. You have, as it were, to see it to believe it. Take DeLillo. He tells stories that I have no particular affiliation with so perhaps my defensive association disappears and leaves me free to realize that, one way or another, you have to be there to appreciate the import of the fictive moment.

In my original consideration of *The Art of Case Study Research* I had suggested that it “may be that as perceptions of the content change, then so too will the perceptions of the style” (Stake 1). At the time this was a comment on the nature of qualitative research; and there was a sense in which I felt that the more I learned of qualitative methods of conducting research, the more I may come to appreciate the style in which it was presented. However, in focusing on the style in which it was presented, I had come to appreciate the content more. My problem with Stake was that I had allowed the “could have” element of fiction to impinge too much and lost sight of the “what is”: in seizing on one or two elements of the fictive style, I had dismissed the report as being close to fictitious. “What would I tell in my own story? And what would I leave out? I don’t know” (Stake 2). What would I want to tell? How would I begin the telling?

You had to see it to believe it?

Perhaps. But as this story began with the words of Lawrence Stenhouse, and as I have attempted to put them to use here in this exploration of my

reactions to the writing of case studies it becomes, perhaps, appropriate that I should close with further words of his: "Public funding should not be used to finance the writing of bad novels" (class notes).

*So we're talking about this and, out of the blue, he's telling me about some lecture notes of Stake's that he's got. Don't know where he got them from. Certainly don't know how he got hold of them. To tell the truth (but what is truth?) it doesn't seem important now. But what's important is that they're annotated notes. It's important because, you see, apparently Stake had been adding these annotations on the plane as he was heading off to the lecture he was giving. And that's the whole point, I suppose, as it made the jolly old Art of Case Study Research a lot clearer. Apparently it took him about 14 years to write it and I suddenly had this picture of him sitting on the plane adding yet more notes to an already prepared lecture. I don't know if they were annotated or not, but I don't think it matters because it was the picture I created that made me think this. Anyway, I see him in this picture tinkering away, and suddenly the publisher is saying to him "Submit that manuscript!" Of course, it wasn't "complete" then because if you think of him on the plane with those lecture notes, it'll never be complete. I mean, it can't be as there will always be more stories to tell and different ways of telling them to different audiences and so on because there really is "more to this case study research than meets the eye" (Stake 8). And if you don't keep your eyes open, you're going to miss this whole point. Or not, as the Case may be.*

*just about goes and sums up everything I've been trying to say about this wretched Art of Case Study Research. I mean, take a good look at it. There he is and he's supposed to be on his way to this lecture and he hasn't even bothered to prepare his notes properly. You know, it's just so obvious he's left it all to the last minute and here he is trying to palm this book of his off on gullible students like*

## References

- Adams, D. (1986). *The hitch hiker's guide to the galaxy: A trilogy in four parts*. London: Pan Macmillan.
- Barker, P. (1995). *The ghost road*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin.
- Blake, W. (1989). Auguries of innocence. In W. H. Stevenson (Ed.), *Blake: The complete poems* (2nd ed., p. 589). London: Longman. (Original work published c.1804)
- Conrad, J. (1973). *Heart of darkness*. London: Penguin. (Original work published 1902)

- DeLillo, D. (1984). *White noise*. New York: Penguin.
- Ely, M., Vinz, R., Downing, M., & Anzul, M. (1997). *On writing qualitative research*. London: Falmer.
- Havel, V. (1990). *Disturbing the peace: A conversation with Karel Hvizdala* (P. Wilson, Trans. and Ed.). London: Faber & Faber.
- Owen, W. (1990). Dulce et decorum est. In J. Stallworthy (Ed.), *The poems of Wilfred Owen* (p. 117). London: Chatto & Windus. (Original work published 1920)
- Sartre, J.-P. (1981). *The family idiot: Gustave Flaubert, 1821-1857* (C. Cosman, Trans.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Shakespeare, W. (1975). *Twelfth night* (J. M. Lothian & T. W. Craik, Eds.). London: Routledge/The Arden Shakespeare. (Original work published c.1601)
- Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Stake, R. (2004). *Standards-based & responsive evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Stake, R. (2006). *Multiple case study analysis*. New York: Guilford.
- Stronach, I., & MacLure, M. (1997). *Educational research undone: The postmodern embrace*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- Swift, J. (1967). *Gulliver's travels*. London: Penguin Books. (Original work published 1726)
- Wilde, O. (1970). The artist as critic. In R. Ellmann (Ed.), *The artist as critic: Critical writings of Oscar Wilde* (pp. 290-433). London: W. H. Allen. (Original work published 1891)

**Michael Watts** is a senior research associate at the Von Hügel Institute, St. Edmund's College, Cambridge. He was introduced to the art of case study research by the late Mr. Bev Labbett of the University of East Anglia whom he remembers with fondness and this article.