

EDITION 41, 2022 – MOBILISING METAPHOR

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From tinkering to trench warfare: The changing work of the contemporary editor

April 2022

Editors are many things: mythological tinkers, invisible menders, midwives coaxing the progeny of others into the world. We are the bridge between the artist's chaos and all that is logical and right.

By Camilla Cripps

Editors are many things: mythological tinkers, invisible menders, midwives coaxing the progeny of others into the world. We are the bridge between the artist's chaos and all that is logical and right. We spend our days walking a fine line between criticising and cajoling, between tweaking another's artmaking and leaving no trace of our own. In the current glut of low-budget publishing, our absence weighs heavier than our presence.

As an editor, then, being trauma-informed is crucial. This includes identifying, acknowledging, and understanding that a writer's behaviours and responses may be symptoms of maladaptive coping with past trauma, rather than indicative of the person themselves.

Contemporary editing is a solitary profession, with quiet hours tapped away on keyboards in home offices and workplace cubicles. Purists, all of us, it is easy to lose sight of the author in the quiet pause over the placement of an Oxford comma. Despite our seclusion, there is an undeniable human aspect to our trade: we are frequently called upon to edit narratives of trauma, including accounts of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse.

Naturally, given the rhizomatic nature of trauma itself, these narratives are not always blatantly biographical. Oftentimes, cultural trauma plays out in the swing of fiction, in the twists and turns of plot and character. There are many subjects that can both trigger retraumatisation and lead to vicarious traumatisation of editor, author, and reader. Certainly, it is not unfeasible to assume that editors regularly encounter authors who are trauma survivors, and indeed editors themselves may have their own trauma experiences. Like an increasing number of writers, our burgeoning awareness of the effects of trauma makes us more than simple menders patching up sentences and restoring words. The ink of our now metaphorical red pen runs with the power to harm more than just the author's ego.

Editing narratives of trauma means joining the author in the trenches ... it is our responsibility as editors to facilitate cultural and philosophical change that will make space for safe, diverse, and inclusive practice.

Contemporary trauma theory provides a framework for conceptualising the effects of trauma on a survivor's functioning and behaviour. Where past theories posited that a survivor's poor functioning signified a weak moral character (Goodman 2017), contemporary theories see survivors as suffering a psychological and physical injury (Bloom & Farragher 2011; van der Kolk 2014; Williams 2006). Neurobiological research suggests that trauma – especially childhood trauma – affects the development and functioning of the brain, including the brain's physical structure.

Trauma can also cause adverse impacts on impulse control, executive functioning, and emotion-based activities (Cowell et al 2015; Toth et al 2013). Many trauma survivors report increased incidence of anger, anxiety, and agitation, including feelings of distress without periods of respite, and intrusive recollections that continue despite a return to safety.

Long-term responses can include fatigue and sleep disorders, flashbacks, depression, and avoidance of emotions, sensations, or activities that are associated with the trauma, even if remotely (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment 2014).

As an editor, then, being trauma-informed is crucial. This includes identifying, acknowledging, and understanding that a writer's behaviours and responses may be symptoms of maladaptive coping with past trauma, rather than indicative of the person themselves (Levenson 2014). More than an individual's experience alone, trauma is also a sociocultural phenomenon where entire culture groups can experience the cumulative effects of traumatic events that may be structural, historical or intergenerational in nature (Andermahr 2015). Acknowledgment of collective retraumatisation is equally as important as acknowledgement of the more classical paradigm of individual versus event.

Indeed, while there is a growing body of research on trauma-informed healthcare and trauma-informed pedagogy, there is a dearth of literature on trauma-informed editing practice. Addressing this gap in scholarship will bring significant benefits to authors and editors alike. Hopefully, research in this area will also enable the development of a set of guidelines that will allow editors to adopt a more ethical, sensitive, and responsible approach to engaging with traumatic material, as well as better management of the editor's personal and professional wellbeing.

Contemporary editing requires us to be more than mere midwives to literary babes. Writing through trauma is trench warfare – impossible to see the enemy and, in fact, quite difficult to see much at all. Editing narratives of trauma means joining the author in the trenches. Our practice emboldens us to find footholds to climb out, often with the walls becoming increasingly unstable. We must concede the rubble that exists between the stark rules of our profession and use our tools to clear the path. The world – and thus our craft – is changing, and it is our responsibility as editors to facilitate cultural and philosophical change that will make space for safe, diverse, and inclusive practice.

At the end of the day, we are not counsellors, and we are not therapists. We have no expertise in supporting a writer's mental or physical recovery from a traumatic event. We cannot ameliorate the impact of cultural or historical trauma on a people. But we must offer a productive space where our authors are empowered to create; a space that accommodates unseen trauma, that minimises the risks of retraumatisation, that celebrates the many diverse voices of our community. We must honour the individual's methods of coping without valuing one method over another and, importantly, we must honour our own wellbeing in the process.

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Camilla Cripps is a writer, editor, and publisher with a special interest in Australian fiction and poetry. Living and working on Dharawal country, Camilla is an editing and publishing scholar at the University of Southern Queensland. She is a freelance editor and the production editor at ES-Press, an imprint of Spineless Wonders. Through her research into trauma-informed editing practice, Camilla raises awareness of the importance of trauma-informed care in the Creative Arts, and how trauma affects the praxis of authors and editors. At present, Camilla is developing a set of trauma-informed guidelines for the Institute of Professional Editors (IPEd).

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Metaphors of studio learning: A dialogue on veils and infections (<https://creativematters.edu.au/2022-4-22-metaphors-of-studio-learning-a-dialogue-on-veils-and-infections/>)

The veil is a material device that articulates, enhances, and controls space, and an epistemological metaphor for expressing both the revelation of knowledge and the suppression of infection. The veil functions to both reveal and conceal. Given recent upheavals in studio education, it is important that teachers provide students with opportunities to engage the veil, embrace infection, and sense out their circumstances.

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The fundamentals of inspiration: Procrastination as divine ritual (<https://creativematters.edu.au/2022-4-22-the-fundamentals-of-inspiration-procrastination-as-divine-ritual/>)

Teaching someone how to sit down to write is as important as teaching them how to write at all. While creative writing is often mythologised as the result of divine and spontaneous inspiration ... many writers and instructors will offer different advice – that writing is a more Hephaestion labour ... one that requires consistent mental and physical struggle against one's baser instinct to do anything else.

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Metaphor in eating disorder art: Understanding the lived-in experience (<https://creativematters.edu.au/2022-4-22-metaphor-in-eating-disorder-art-understanding-the-lived-in-experience/>)

It is difficult to communicate what it means to live with an eating disorder ... This illness, anorexia nervosa, has profoundly impacted my life in ways that words cannot express. In my art practice, I utilise metaphorical imagery to challenge stereotypical eating disorder images, such as the physically thin body, in order to adopt a novel way of looking at ordinary objects through an eating disorder perspective.

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Now you don't see me, now you do: Queer artists as inverse magicians (<https://creativematters.edu.au/2022-4-22-now-you-dont-see-me-now-you-do-queer-artists-as-inverse-magicians/>)

Museums and galleries are places of world-making. They document, display, and interpret artefacts deemed worthy of our attention, objects considered significant for collection and preservation. Such objects are carefully staged to relay certain stories, while other stories are concealed by their absence ... it is no surprise that museums and galleries, at least historically, have intentionally and inadvertently excluded those of us whose ways of knowing, doing, and being in the world are challenging or uncomfortable to dominant logics.

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Metaphor as a doorway to understanding (<https://creativematters.edu.au/2022-4-22-metaphor-as-a-doorway-to-understanding/>)

A metaphor is what motivated me to undertake my PhD ... I was a full-time high school teacher, teaching English and music, with a background and training in jazz music performance ... To me, jazz and teaching were similar. Jazz was a metaphor for teaching.

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In the creative and performing arts, resonance is everywhere, both literally and metaphorically ... Metaphorically, in moments of connection, performers feel a resonance with their audience – an actor may feel “heard” by their fans; a musician might be “amplified” by a crowd’s roaring applause.

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Metaphors live at the cross-roads of convergence and divergence, and they meet at points of connection, contraction, and intersectional friction. Indeed, it is metaphor’s unusual ability to simultaneously emphasise and de-emphasise certain understandings that gives metaphor its argumentative force and its creative power.

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