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Paratexts, protection, and personal truths: The limits of authorial redaction

Abstract:
Writing a novel that addresses one of the most stigmatised and silenced taboos – child sexual abuse – involves the author performing in a deeply affective space, where emotions function as essential components of the creative process. Complicating this writing act is what Margaret Atwood calls "a burden of anxieties", noting that writing is "so much like evidence – like something that can be used against you later" (2002, p. 48). While writing *The* [redacted] ([redacted]), I was acutely aware that my subject matter could be perceived as evidence of my own childhood sexual abuse – something I was not ready to disclose. To protect myself, I actively erased any personal identification with the novel's protagonist, redacting my presence from the paratext. This academic disembodiment offered psychological refuge in public discourse, allowing me to maintain a sense of detachment. At the time, I believed this strategy kept my psychosocial world intact. Years later, while supervising a forensic psychologist's PhD on intrafamilial child sexual abuse, her exegesis generated an unexpected personal epiphany: my self-redaction was not a refuge, but a profound denial of my own experiences and their impact on my identity. This article reflects on that realisation, contributing to creative writing scholarship by exploring the challenges writer-academics face when engaging with deeply personal and socially fraught subjects. By examining the implications of self-redaction, it highlights the complex interplay between personal history, creative expression and academic inquiry.

Biographical note:
*Due to the potential for this article to impact the lives of others, my name and novel details have been redacted. The decision is bittersweet and deeply ironic. However, while truths have been obscured, my sentiment and argument remain. And that is vital.

Keywords:
Authorial redaction, trauma writing, paratext, author identity, disclosure

Introduction

Several years after the publication of my novel *The* [redacted] ([redacted]), I began supervising the PhD of a forensic psychologist who specialises in intrafamilial child sexual abuse. Early in the candidature, my line manager warned me to decline supervising research that confronts such a bleak and disturbing topic due to the potential emotional difficulties such subject matter raises. His advice was offered out of a duty of care; however, perhaps if he knew of my personal history – and the creative expression of that history – his advice would have been more considered. My line manager's choice of words indicated he had not read *The* [redacted], leaving him unaware that the novel wrestles with the very same fraught topic and that it does so as a work of autofiction. It is important to point out that his lack of awareness was not his failing – nor do I consider it my failing. Aside from the question of whether my supervisor should be aware of my writing and research practice, a novel is a public commodity, but it is not necessarily a public declaration of an author's private life. It is important to clarify that *The* [redacted] was not written as a form of narrative therapy; that is, the novel was not written with personally determined therapeutic aims to externalise trauma as emotional release or to "re-author" or "re-story" my experiences (Otmar, 2024, p. 192). At least, that was never the conscious goal during the practice phases of the writing. I now describe the novel as autofiction, but that was not the case at publication. The reasons for this, and the thinking behind and through this process of disclosure, will become evident in this article. As a work of autofiction, it aligns more closely to Nicol's observation that, "in autofiction the author commits to a sincere exploration, through fiction, of a personal, i.e. autobiographical, truth" (2018, p. 257). According to Dix (2018), many works of autofiction emerge in the wake of traumatic experience, framing the act of writing as a way of repositioning the self within a new context when other relational frameworks (our psychosocial and identity frameworks formed through relationships) have been lost or destabilised. Nor was the novel intended to be literary activism, voicing a "survivor's" story. The literary work functions more as a controllable method of "testing" voice and its response, rather than a mode of disclosure per se.

There are many barriers to an adult disclosing experiences of child sexual abuse (CSA), and these impediments are exacerbated when the abuse was perpetrated by a family member (Draucker & Martsolf, 2008). As Draucker and Martsolf's study demonstrates, CSA is a distressing experience that is difficult for children to comprehend, especially when perpetrated by someone expected to protect or care for them. These children face the challenge of making sense of deeply unsettling events that are notoriously shrouded in secrecy and shame due to social stigma, and that frequently occur within the context of maltreating or chaotic family environments (2008, p. 1038). When those children become adults who have lived the majority of their lives without disclosure, there is an inherent compulsion to comprehend the "nature and cause" of their experience so as to create a degree of "order and meaning"; Draucker and Martsolf define this "psychosocial problem" as "the challenge of understanding an experience that both defies and demands an explanation". As adults, those who suffered CSA will often follow a common process of disclosure, a process that I revisit further down in this article.

As a writer-academic, making a disclosure within the scholarly context provides even further

challenges, particularly when, as Maguire and Deller articulate, paradigmatically speaking, "[scholarly] knowledge has as little as possible to do with the researcher's inner workings and unique perception of the world" (2024, p. 8). "From this perspective," Mitchell argues, "disembodying the subject (which can include both a researcher and an author) denies truth"; and along with the oppression of the voice of the researcher, "there is a denial of their existence and their concerns" (2017, np). Within academia, it is more likely that a researcher will avoid disclosure of personal lived experience – especially when institutional discourse actively repudiates the validity of subjectivity in "legitimate" research on the grounds of "rigour" – and this continuous non-disclosure becomes a form of self-redaction. That is, personal information is removed from research materials/circumstances to "safeguard" identity and bureaucratic process. However, despite academic protocols and values that prioritise objectivity via the disembodiment of the author's voice, the presence of the author persists – through individual style, through the choice of subject matter and voice, and even through what has been redacted. An author resists full erasure.

Returning to the quandary introduced at the beginning of this article, regarding the acceptance of a higher degree candidate wanting to explore these topics in her studies, an appropriate supervision panel was put in place to support my new PhD candidate's research. My role was to guide the development of her novel which portrays intrafamilial CSA with a primary prevention function, the novel offering models of dialogue, as well as dispelling myths and misinformation that pervade sociocultural understandings of victim and perpetrator behaviour, risk factors and the impacts of abuse. Throughout the majority of the candidature, I maintained a "neutral, formal, and detached" presence within the research (Maguire & Deller, 2024, p. 8), withholding personal disclosures due to both the institutional barriers firmly in place and the personally held beliefs that I was "protecting" myself through the reclusion of truths that had little to offer the candidate and the research. Psychosocially, I found it straightforward to self-redact under the expectations of a supervisor role. I admit there were times when this facade threatened to rupture, when the pressure below the surface of scholarly norms pushed for an outlet. However, this feeling was always kept in check. That was, until I read the penultimate draft of the candidate's exegesis and an epiphany struck: while I had construed my self-redaction as a form of refuge, I realised this thinking was not only self-silencing, but self-destructive. I had betrayed the fully embodied subjectivity of myself as an academic and creative practitioner. Moreover, I had missed an opportunity to benefit others through advocacy. It was then I understood that academia had taught me how to muzzle my sense of self, profoundly denying my experiences and diminishing the reality of their impact on my identity, as well as relinquishing the position of advocacy that authorship can bring.

This article reflects on these issues in a creativecritical mode, one that is experimental in form, "approach, method and ethics of practice" (Markidis & Juckes, 2024, p. 2). As Markidis and Juckes define, creativecritical scholarship agitates traditional critical discourses by performing their theoretical functions in creative ways. As this article seeks to revivify the intrinsic subjectivity of the researcher as an equally emotional and analytically insightful individual, the creativecritical mode is apposite to explore the challenges writer-academics face when engaging with deeply personal and socially fraught subjects. By examining the implications of

self-redaction, this research highlights the complex interplay between personal history, creative expression and academic inquiry – a unique space that creative practitioner academics occupy and which produces distinctive personal and professional challenges that force us to be "multiplicitous": that there are multiple senses of "self" that can constitute the "mind", a form of "self-organisation" (Davies, 1998, pp. 195–196).

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> "…the act of writing comes weighted with a burden of anxieties. The written word is so much like evidence – like something that can be used against you later."
> – Margaret Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing*, page 48

Dear Author,

You wrote:

> [redacted] a six-year-old boy [redacted] a closed door [redacted] the older one [redacted] should know better. [redacted] The six-year-old boy doesn't ask questions. [redacted] the conspiracy of words and actions. Whole lives pass [redacted] Until, at last [redacted] ([redacted], [redacted], p. [redacted])

These words lived between skin and skull for thirty years. Words unspoken. Etched into my pericranium by recurring thought, cut into those tissues in fumbled syllables to begin with, slowly developing into phrases and eventually entire sentences, expressing sentiments only the blood had the privilege of knowing. No one else. Except you, dear author.

My author. You sprang from my head when I was eight years old, sitting on my bedroom floor beside the bookshelf stacked with picture books and chapter books. It was a Sunday afternoon. I pulled a handful of books onto the brown carpet and sieved them until I found those I loved most, because they made me laugh or taught me what love can look like. Or those able to dislodge more complex emotions. Like *Samantha Seagull's Sandals* by Gordon Winch. Winch's picture book is a ludicrous story about a silver gull who desperately wants to be different, so she tries wearing high heels, gumboots, slippers and finally a pair of sandals. But each time she only ends up feeling embarrassed, and she blushes so much that her beak, eyelids and legs turn red forever. I also knew well the feeling of shame. It was already a word carved onto my skull. So, I decided I wanted what Gordon Winch had – his own author to tell his stories. Stories about love and acceptance despite, or perhaps because of, shame and self-reproach. Perhaps my author would be the one to peel back the scalp and read aloud the furtive words I knew but could not say.

Do you remember, dear author, how as a little boy I would sometimes play with a set of

matryoshkas? Babushka dolls, Dad called them, one nested inside another, inside another, and so on. There wasn't much I could *do* with them so I lined them up as I unstacked them, and even when I knew there was another inside I feigned surprise as I split the next in half to reveal the following layer. These matryoshkas: a chain of mother begetting daughter who becomes mother. I liked the tiniest one best. As the youngest in a family of five, the affinity is obvious. But they were also a curious paradox: each one hollow except for a smaller replica of itself. They each hid a truth – that their identity was not singular or fixed, but "multiplicitous" (Davies, 1998). Their serene faces never gave way to affect, but each knew what they carried.

So many of our toys were multiplicitous. The plush football I kicked down the hallway could be turned inside-out to become a bear. The yellow motorbike that, in just two actions, transformed into a gyrocopter. The rock that sprang into a rock monster at the press of a button. One thing becomes another, while still being the original thing, just tucked inside or hidden from view. Playthings for children to project themselves onto, splitting their consciousness into the hand that does the holding and the imaginary life being held. Toys showed me to be multiple and to find refuge in being multiple. An author's rehearsal, you might say.

Each writer has their "slippery double" (2002, p. 36), Margaret Atwood declares:

> All writers are double, for the simple reason that you can never actually meet the author of the book you have just read. Too much time has elapsed between composition and publication, and the person who wrote the book is now a different person. Or so goes the alibi. On the one hand, this is a convenient way for a writer to wriggle out of responsibility, and you should pay no attention to it. Yet on the other hand, it is quite true. (Atwood, 2002, p. 37)

You are not my alibi, dear author. You wrote what I could not say, albeit as a form of projection. ~~But I did wriggle out of my responsibility.~~ *The* [redacted] ([redacted]) depicts the familial fallout when a high school student levels an allegation of sexual misconduct against his English teacher. These circumstances, devastating to both families, draw to light the sexual abuse the teacher, [redacted], endured when he was a child at the whim of his older brother. It took you to write this novel, addressing one of the most stigmatised and silenced taboos. ~~A life I lived too closely to write myself.~~ Atwood reminds us of the tears Dickens cried when "his pen-wielding hand was pitilessly doing in" Little Nell, his "self that comes to be thought of as 'the author'" committing the deed (2002, p. 38). Atwood then discusses, at length, these double-goers – doppelgangers, twins and "Author as severed part" (p. 44) – from ancient mythologies to Borges. She concludes:

> The writer writes himself into his work – which contains an element of posturing and artificiality – and the more he does this, the more he loses what might be called his authentic self. (Atwood, 2002, p. 45)

But perhaps we are matryoshkas. Should I be concerned with authenticity if you are inside me and inside you is another me, multiple but finite? Having, as Davies terms, "multiple self-organisations" (1998, p. 196) does not mean we are broken – it means we are dynamic. Writing

into the deeply affective spaces of child sexual abuse required you to iterate the bumps and divots on my skull. The Braille of my innermost identity. You took those words and wove them into a story, and you knew that writing about such a troubled and troubling subject would likely be perceived as evidence. But that was not your issue, was it? That issue was mine. Apparently, Dickens's hand knew not the turmoil it penned, even as tears blotted the ink.

Dear Academic,

You taught me your wily ways too well, and in them I found both inclusion and exclusion, refuge and oppression.

Authorial redaction is an editorial, bureaucratic function. It is the convention of removing information that can be used to identify the author. In the research context, institutional expectations are that objectivity is maintained via mechanisms that uphold anonymity, especially for peer review. Academia is a system that positions disembodied knowledge as more authoritative, especially within a positivist view of scholarship (Mitchell, 2017). Subjectivity is suspect; it is synonymous with bias. During peer review, knowing the identity of the author is a disruptor of scholarly rigour, and rigour is one of the protected pillars of the academy. Collapse rigour, and the edifice crumbles with it. But you know that well, don't you, my academic? You are dexterous in sleight-of-hand manoeuvres that extend beyond the literal, and I hid in your towers and corridors because those centuries-old structures were a safeguard. Scholarship is moated, drawbridged and turreted. Built on distrust of outsiders. Do not knock unless you are willing to leave all your banners at the door.

So I did. Feeling Atwood's "burden of anxieties" (2002, p. 48), that *The* [redacted] would be evidence of a personal history I was not ready to disclose, I actively erased any personal identification with the novel's protagonist whenever I spoke or wrote about it, shaping the novel's paratext to protect myself. Self-redaction became a strategy as I intellectualised public discussion away from the reality of the novel's emotional origins. My dear academic, you should have seen my self-redacting tongue in action. It deftly curled around barbed questions; it deflected with word choices that swathed truth like matryoshka inside matryoshka inside matryoshka. Because people did ask, hesitantly. The publisher; public relations staff; a colleague; a journalist; a radio talk-show host. Family at the Christmas get-together. "The abuse [redacted] suffers in the novel – are they drawn from your own experiences?" "I can't say that they are," my slippery double replied, salivating at the delicious ambiguity. The truth was kept behind double-glazed thinking: I could not say those experiences were mine because of the anticipated damage it would bring to those I cared for; and I could not say those experiences were mine because Roland Barthes taught me the text is nothing more than "a tissue of quotations" (1990 /1978, p. 230) and because Derrida taught me that the sign and the signified can never meet (1976). Nor could the Dickens of me reveal my tiny, vulnerable matryoshka inside. Not like that, at least. So I played Academic. I was multiple.

You see, the trick of the matryoshka doll is that the largest one can conceal all others. I can pick her up and place her on the bookshelf as one object that occupies one consistent space. In

that state – each figure nestled snugly inside another – they become singular. Or do they? Perhaps in their apparent singularity these objects become "radically indeterminate", ambiguously singular and plural at once, oscillating between "iridescence" and "opalescence" (McHale, 2000, p. 99). Mathematically, the dolls are:

$$D_0 = \{\{\{\cdots\{\emptyset\}\cdots\}\}\}$$

Un-nested, the dolls' plurality is visible, so they plainly exist. Nested, all the smaller ones become *sous rature* – under the erasure of the largest doll. I know they exist inside, yet I cannot sense them. Young me playing with the dolls sought the surprise of this conjuring, over and over again, seeking out the reveal of recursive containment – that the absent can suddenly become present, and when re-stacked, the present is simultaneously absent-present. *Sous rature* – tangibly cancelled, and yet their existence endures beneath this cancellation (McHale, 2000, p. 100). ~~Something is here.~~ Or: "saying without saying, writing without writing, to use words without using them" (Derrida, as cited in Steenekamp, 2024, p. 96). In the same way, the narrator of a story can tell us that a character leans against the architrave of a doorway, then erase him at once. ~~This happened.~~ Or: This happened. Actually, it didn't happen. Or: He said [that she claimed [that they remembered [that this happened – but also, that it didn't.]]] Existence flickers. One voice cancels another. And yet, do we still hear it?

I played Academic. The largest doll of them all. She swallowed her others, kept them secret and thereby safe from aversive reactions. The academic – skilled at tucking the self behind the facade of the disembodied institution, where an "author's words should speak for themselves to be judged by the reader for their merit, and that judgment should not be based on knowledge of the person speaking them" (Elbow, as cited in Mitchell, 2017, p. 2). The academic writes in the third person. The academic's text does not originate in emotion. This "voice" is hostile to the individual, indifferent to bias, impervious to dialogue, locked into fixity and obsessed with procedural stringency. The novel's paratext was steeped in this lack of subjective voice, emanating from a perceived need for personal protection. While my Author wrote the novel, my Academic maintained control over the story that existed outside the novel. And I was free to live on, per the usual. ~~Unharmed.~~

Dear Author,

You wrote:

> [redacted] he'd prefer to not talk about it – [redacted] doesn't want answers to questions like *why?* [redacted] they were just two boys [redacted] one day the older [redacted] had ideas [redacted] no one else knew [redacted] no one could stop him [redacted] He [redacted] took [redacted] what he wanted.
> [redacted] a set of instructions was created.

I'll tap you on the head [redacted] *One tap means* [redacted] *open your mouth* [redacted] *big two taps means* [redacted] *move away and pretend to be* [redacted] *playing.* [redacted]

[redacted] Kids do stuff – he knows [redacted] Kids [redacted] are just trying to make sense of their bodies [redacted] Yet [redacted].

[redacted]

No more fire.
Please. ([redacted], [redacted], p. [redacted])

Flåm and Haugstvedt might call the novel my "test balloon", filled with my own breath and sent into the Earth's troposphere to see how the wind carried it, a purposeful search "to find door-openings to explore how to understand and tell" (2013, p. 239). The mixed metaphors aren't ideal, but Flåm and Haugstvedt point out the "extensive loneliness for a child" unable to find voice for personal disclosures because of the social obstacles so "strongly in operation". Perhaps, as they suggest, the novel was my most vulnerable matryoshka's "call for joint exploration, understanding and solution in a moment where something is at stake", an "invitation to a dialogical enterprise". And it was so long in the making. I was a lonely boy and I dreamt of you, my Author, reading the bumps of my skull like a skilled phrenologist and translating them into words on a page, to be bundled and bound into a book with cover, barcode and ISBN. "One day I will write you," you told me. I kept you to that promise. It was just a matter of time. And words. Always a question of the "right" words…

You were the opposite to my academic, weren't you? He used theories and institutional fortifications to obfuscate and obliterate; you sought language as *lingua* – tongue. You tongued words around our mouth for year upon year. Draucker and Martsolf point out that, "Disclosure is rarely a linear process and might involve a variety of patterns, including delayed disclosure, disclosure followed by recantation, and disclosure and recantation followed by reaffirmation" (2008, p. 1034). Their study's observations ring true for us. It's been forty years and here we are, still finding voice. Again, the academics do this a disservice with their choice of words, their jargon (it's okay, you still have prose as mode), but they are helpful nonetheless. Draucker and Martsolf would call your novel "account-making" – "accounts" are narratives that organise and interpret life events, often beginning in private reflection and later shaped through dialogue with a "confidant" (p. 1035). Words originate in the body. Even black graphemes on a white page remind us of mouth, teeth and tongue through the sounds of clashing letters, the symphony of syllables. We had each other and the page as confidants; negotiating the limits of enunciation, how the tongue could curl around the inner cheek for the best word choice, pluck syllables from between the teeth and press plosives against gum to feel how they stab. Finding "door-openings" for full disclosure. The truth will out. And the "institution" of the novel form provided us with a framework to structure these lingua experiments. Because "the experience of CSA defies explanation as it occurred when the participants were too young to understand

the dynamics of the abuse" (p. 1038), the "story-as-account" offers meaning through iteration, a process of thinking, speaking/writing and revising. We took the stuff of memory – emotionally vivid details, sensory detonations, difficult to comprehend aftermaths – and began the process of shaping them for an audience. "The story-yet-told had been simple, whereas when the story-as-account evolved, it included an explanation of the abuse that included the culpability of the perpetrator, the family, the community, and society" (p. 1044). An ensemble cast of composite characters endure an imagined plot of a false allegation of sexual harassment (the novel's leading conceit), constructed as a catalyst to dissect the true innards of the novelist's concerns. The act of writing is more than catharsis: it is a deliberate ordering of experience, cyphered and filtered into an arc, a way to examine relationships between personal trauma and systemic forces (family dysfunction, institutional neglect, cultural taboo and the sovereignty of silence). The novel embodies a transformation from private knowledge – visceral, psychological, rooted in the past yet lingering in the present – into a public commodity that circulates in the cultural marketplace.

And yet … What did ~~we~~ I do with that opportunity, dear author? ~~We~~ I denied it.

Dear Academic,

Your disembodiment taught me how to eviscerate affect as a method of psychological refuge. And this extended to my role as researcher, supervisor, teacher. The academy is not the place for disclosure – what would the institution do with such a sudden announcement of my own voice, like a midnight ghoul calling up and down the corridor? I believed this strategy kept my psychosocial world intact – but at what cost? And while the positivist agenda is to omit voice and thereby the self, is redaction ever truly successful? Can an author be fully absent from a text?

These questions came tumbling down on us, dear academic, when reading an exegesis in which the candidate, under your supervision, wrote about *The* [redacted] as a novel that essentially failed in its capacity to be a mechanism for CSA prevention. The novel had been reduced to an instrument. Do you remember being struck with that strange sense of disembodiment as the research seemed to erase the living, feeling presence behind the novel? Had we contributed to the flattening of the author into a pure function? The self who struggled to write through grief was nowhere to be found. Nor was this sudden realisation of our own absence a mere theoretical conceit; it was more corporeal than that. It was personally dispossessing.

We were glad no one else was home the day we read the exegesis. We stood up from the chair, walked out of the study and around the house, aimless, in séance with this abrupt feeling of *un*existence. ~~I am more than a function.~~ I respect that the author is dead for any reader, including myself – have I not exploited this even as a creative writing scholar? – but in that moment I sat amid the burbling fish filter and birdsong and understood I had become both cadaver and crematorium keeper. The text was a mausoleum, vaulted by my aporia. I was everywhere and nowhere in my own work, and this realisation marked a critical turning point in how I began to understand the role of self-redaction not only in writing, but in public

discourses that envelop a text. The only solution was to become forensic coroner, whose gloved hands sieve the ashes. It was time to move to the next step in storying childhood sexual abuse: "Story-as-message" (Draucker & Martsolf, 2008).

Dear Tiny Matryoshka,

I write:

> [redacted] deny the past, [redacted] wipe clean what one thinks is [redacted] a false memory, part of [redacted] make-believe – what then? [redacted] Who would he become? [redacted] to himself? Would his own [redacted] self be altered [redacted] if someone were to [redacted] deny [redacted] the substance [redacted] of his past? [redacted] people [redacted] don't understand why the abused are reluctant to speak out [redacted] Perhaps because talking [redacted] might just be [redacted] the undoing of you [redacted] – [redacted] a lose-lose situation. [redacted] what was done, he would not now want [redacted] to be taken back. He concedes [redacted] this [redacted] strange certitude [redacted] ([redacted], [redacted], pp. [redacted])

Only now am I beginning to grasp the opportunity the novel presents across time. What began as an interior, bodily-felt truth has been shaped through craft into narrative form. A process that reframes lived experience within a structure that can be shared, sold and consumed, translating personal memory into an artefact that occupies both a literary and commercial life beyond the self. In this way, the narrative exists as "story-as-message" (Draucker & Martsolf, 2008), the work positioned in a cultural conversation about CSA. The "message" is now no longer only for me – it is for the public – and in that domain it has the potential to raise awareness, challenge myths, and humanise. To resuscitate. But I can do more. Hence, this article represents a gesture towards uttering "more".

In reflection, I have arranged myself into "multiple self-organisations". I have unstacked myself and become no longer fixed or singular, but rather made up of shifting parts or versions. Figurines within figurines. And although this multiplicity implies fragmentation – a disintegration of self – Davies (1998, p. 205) points out how this process can also allow us to reconnect with parts of ourselves that we have suppressed, denied or rejected. These old or hidden aspects of self that were spurned from a unified sense of self because they were painful, uncomfortable or confusing to our self-image can then be welcomed back and given a new role. Instead of representing instability, these old selves can add richness, insight and compassion to who we are now and how we choose to live. In short, by embracing ourselves as multiple, even the aspects of self we once hid inside, we can become whole.

The redaction of the author, especially within the context of thinking, writing and feeling through deeply affective subject matter, is a negotiation – between institutional forces and emotional truths, between disclosure and self-care, and between the self and audience. Even between skin and skull. Author-academics must continue to insist that a discursive space within the academy is essential to acknowledge how lived experiences inform creative writing and its scholarship, because to deny that entanglement risks absenting the voice that gives form and feeling to their work.

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Conclusion

Authoring my novel, *The* [redacted], required navigating one of the most stigmatised and silenced taboos – child sexual abuse – within a deeply affective creative space, where emotion was not peripheral but central to the work. Confronted by the anxiety of the text as evidence and researching in the academic context where subjectivity/affect is conventionally regarded as suspect, subversive and undermining of scholarly rigour, I strategically erased my own presence from the paratext by redacting traces of personal identification with the novel's autofictional origins. At the time, this academic disembodiment felt protective, a way to safeguard my psychosocial stability while engaging public discourse on a volatile subject.

In retrospect, however, and prompted by later supervisory work with a forensic psychologist researching intrafamilial CSA, I recognised that this self-redaction was less a refuge than a denial – one that obscured the formative role of my own experiences in shaping my creative and scholarly voice. This recognition reframes the writing of *The* [redacted] as not only an artistic act but a negotiation between disclosure and concealment, between the private self and a public commodity.

The practice of self-redaction, while often undertaken for self-preservation, can have profound implications for the authenticity of both creative work and scholarly identity. For author-academics engaging with deeply personal and socially fraught material, the challenge lies in balancing the affective risks of exposure with the intellectual and ethical imperative to acknowledge the experiential ground from which the work arises. This tension is not a flaw in the process but a defining feature of it – one that demands ongoing critical reflection within creative writing scholarship.

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