

Redact – Fiction strand

The fiction strand of Redact was inspiring, practical and crammed with so much information that I had to check back over my notes in order to write this report. Here's what I could decipher from my almost unreadable handwriting.

First of all, our guru Sarah Brennan said that when editing fiction: 'If there is little or no plot to the story, *give the stranger accents.*' I'm not sure how the introduction of a mysteriously accented stranger solves structural problems, but surely Sarah's thirty-something years of experience can't be wrong.

Apparently, we also asked ourselves the question: What makes us *bury a book*? A useful counselling topic, I'm sure you'll agree, aimed towards those editors with a canine strand of post-publication denial trauma – I think.

But things became really baffling when I read that we had been asked to look for the *itching incident* in each manuscript. Capital letters written by my own hand virtually tripped over themselves in their eagerness to exclaim that BEING ABLE TO RECOGNISE THE ITCHING INCIDENT WILL MAKE YOU A BETTER EDITOR!!

Lastly, we discovered that our first responses to a text are valid – but that we then have to *just titty* our reactions. Now, I know editing is a female dominated profession, but I really felt that Sarah had gone too far here – what happened to inclusive treatment of the sexes, huh?

I quickly realised that I'd unknowingly participated in some kind of sick, brainwashing weekend. But before calling up the Redact committee and ranting at what a disgrace it was, what kind of advice are you giving to innocent editors etc, a vision of Sarah Brennan as an iridescent angel appeared before me and whispered these words of wisdom: 'Re-read the text, Lorelei. Interrogate your initial reaction.' Obediently, I revisited my notes and looked more closely at the scrawling mess.

What I discovered was that when there isn't much of a plot, you can give *stronger accents* to the turning points to create a clearer sense that you are advancing through the story. I saw that we were asked to cross-examine what exactly makes us *buy* a book. Oh yes, and I now understand that the *inciting incident* sends the hero or heroine off on their quest and is thus pivotal to the story.

And of course, you should read back over what you've just read to question your first reactions and *justify* them. Find out what it was that made you feel that way in the first place (my own terrible handwriting) and see if your initial reaction still stands when you re-read it (frankly, no).

Thanks so much to Sarah Brennan and to my colleagues who made Redact such a valuable, important weekend. Thanks also to the Redact committee for organising such an inciting – and not at all itchy – event.

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