
BOOK REVIEW

Doug Underwood, 2011, *Chronicling Trauma: Journalists and Writers on Violence and Loss*, Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press. ISBN 978-0-252-03640-8 by Folker Hanusch.

While journalists have been covering traumatic assignments for hundreds of years, academic research into and awareness of the way in which these experiences may affect their mental health has a relatively short history. Traditionally, journalists would, following a harrowing experience, debrief at the local pub, drinking copious amounts of alcohol and consuming other drugs in order to help them forget, at least for a while. Trauma was, and to some extent still is, one of the big taboos within journalism. However, in particular the establishment of the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma at the University of Washington in 1999 has led to a rapidly increasing amount of research into the ways in which journalists are affected by traumatic experiences, raising awareness of the topic and allowing more and more journalists to deal with their trauma.

Doug Underwood, the author of *Chronicling Trauma*, is a former journalist and Professor of Communication at UW, where, as a member of the Dart Center, he has played an important role in contributing to the emergence of trauma studies in journalism. His latest offering, which builds on his 2008 book *Journalism and the Novel: Truth and Fiction, 1700-2000*, presents a fascinating and detailed account of the way in which traumatic events have shaped the careers of 150 British and US journalist-literary figures over the past 300 years. The focus on journalist-literary figures (which he defines as writers of 'fiction and/or non-fiction who had an important career in journalism and built his or her literary work on a foundation of journalistic research' (p. 6)) is a welcome one, as it allows us unique insights that studies of journalists may rarely provide. This is so, Underwood argues, because journalists tend to hide their real feelings based on journalism's ideology of detachment, while as writers they enjoy the freedom their craft gives them to actually explore their experiences. And explore he does, weaving the various life stories and careers of his research subjects – which include such illustrious writers as Ernest Hemingway, Charles Dickens, Dorothy Parker, Graham Greene and Truman Capote – into a very readable account. At the same time, the book is couched within an inter-disciplinary framework combining trauma studies, literary biography and the history of journalism, highlighting the way in which such combinations can expand our understanding of complex phenomena.

The four main chapters deal with the writers' life stories and early traumatic experiences (Chapter 1), their pressures

on the job as journalists (Chapter 2), experiences as observers of war and military correspondents (Chapter 3), as well as their history of substance abuse (Chapter 4). Rather than simply adding writer after writer, Underwood sorts his analysis by themes, which gels well with his theoretical framework and avoids too descriptive an account. In what is perhaps too short an epilogue, Underwood speculates about the extent to which modern developments in journalism, such as the increasing isolation of journalists but also the higher awareness of trauma may be leading to different experiences or expressions of the issues affecting their lives. An added bonus is the appendix, which presents separate tables on writers' traumatic experiences outside of and within journalism, making for an easily accessible overview of the main commonalities between them.

This book offers an incredibly rich and historically-grounded account of the intersection of trauma, journalism and literature, making it relevant reading for anyone interested in any of these three fields. It opens up a highly contextualised understanding of a phenomenon that is still somewhat under-researched.

FOLKER HANUSCH,
SENIOR LECTURER IN JOURNALISM,
UNIVERSITY OF THE SUNSHINE COAST

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