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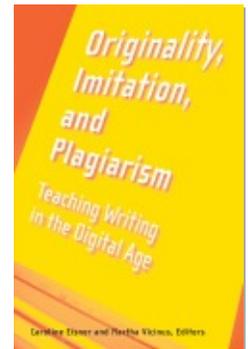
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Introduction

Originality, Imitation, and Plagiarism: Teaching Writing in the Age of the Internet

Caroline Eisner and Martha Vicinus

Across university and college campuses, writing centers face questions about plagiarism. All too often these queries are framed in narrow, judgmental terms that leave little room for either the teacher or the student to understand the complexities of permission, attribution, and copyright. Teachers find themselves placed in an adversarial position in relation to students, as if all writing assignments involved the risk of plagiarism. This collection of essays addresses not only such immediate problems, but also a larger, more central, argument that academic integrity goes beyond the classroom and that any discussion of plagiarism must involve the current questions regarding “fair use” and copyright. It is no accident that public debates about plagiarism have coincided with efforts to limit access to copyrighted material. On the one hand, we face the exponential increase in readily available information from the Web, and, on the other, threats of property-rights litigation and increasingly limited access to this material. Adding to the mix, postmodern literary theory reminds us that nothing is wholly original—that we depend on remixing and reusing the past, adding to or remaking old plots, insights, and ideas. Across disciplines and fields, we find that plagiarism is not a simple wrong; a full understanding of its role in contemporary intellectual life depends on a broad approach that includes notions of what is original and what role imitation plays in the creation of new texts. As numerous contributors remind us, at no time has copyright law guaranteed complete control over an individual work.

Within the university we rightly have a profound investment in responsible, independent, intellectual work, lest we undermine the very nature of our profession. Both students and researchers can be tempted to

short-circuit, via unacknowledged use of others' work, the necessary groundwork in learning; most of those who succumb do not get caught. In the past, before the Web, probably even fewer were caught. Stealing or buying the work of others, however, undermines the credibility of the written word and damages the open and free exchange of ideas. In the past few years, we have witnessed a rash of high-profile plagiarism cases, ranging from a Harvard undergraduate's plagiarized novel to fabrication of evidence in the biomedical field. How do we conserve and inculcate a tradition of ethical research and writing standards, while acknowledging and taking full advantage of the opportunities provided by new technologies? How can students be taught to evaluate sources and then to credit the authors appropriately? Why have so many experienced researchers been found guilty of stealing from others?

The essays selected for this anthology address these and other questions from different points of view. For, as its table of contents reveals, issues of authorial authority and control over writing cut across every area of study. We have organized the essays to highlight the ways in which experts across many fields, ranging from the fine arts to physics, are grappling with these issues. However different the starting point, each author shares a concern about the increasingly angry public debate for or against file sharing, fair use, and plagiarism. We have organized the essays to speak to each other about this issue, as well as about shared pedagogical concerns. We hope that both novice and experienced teachers will learn from the practical and concrete suggestions about how to fashion unique assignments, to teach about proper attribution, and to increase students' involvement in their own writing. At its core, this is an anthology for anyone interested in the process of learning. How can we encourage the free and ethical exchange of ideas? How can we encourage students, so accustomed to digital sharing, to understand citation practices, free use, and the legitimate ownership of ideas? These seemingly local concerns are nevertheless also implicated in larger national issues because access to and use of trustworthy information and writing are, of course, fundamental to public discourse in a democratic society.

Many of the authors included here allude to the groundbreaking work of Rebecca Moore Howard, who first suggested the importance of "patch writing" for learners confronted with massive amounts of new information. She argues that students frequently quote without citation material that they are still mastering, or may not understand, as an initial step in their learning process. The reasons for such lapses are not easy to come by:

students may fail to acknowledge their sources because of a failure in teaching the rules; because it is easy to forget who said what when sifting through many different sources; or because they come from countries in which quoting without citing an expert is a way of acknowledging the greatness of the expert's ideas. It may also be that intertextuality is simply fundamental to their knowledge base. Attribution seems artificial in a world saturated with references to familiar songs and popular culture. In her essay, Amy England points to yet another complication: what may be "common knowledge" to academics is rarely so for students—and vice versa. Joel Bloch and Lisa Emerson highlight the contextual nature of knowledge and the difficult cultural leaps international students must make to understand what is considered common knowledge within the context of a particular discipline.

The situation is more complicated for advanced and professional writers. Perhaps no field has had more high-profile cases of plagiarism than history; the notorious Sokolow case is only one of many possible examples (Mallon). Michael Grossberg documents a familiar tale of high-minded intentions torpedoed by timid committees, nonexistent enforcement strategies, and fears of litigation. His essay is also a salutary reminder of the difficulty of monitoring plagiarism within a single discipline, especially when confidentiality and privacy drive the process. Gordon Kane explains that in theoretical physics, by contrast, self-policing works effectively not only because it is a small field where everyone knows everyone else, but also because the Internet has enabled the rapid exchange of work and ideas. Rather than waiting several months or even years for publication, physicists often place their work online; congratulations, refinements, and rebuttals follow with equal speed. Yet Kane also acknowledges the difficulties of policing a larger, more amorphous discipline, such as medical biology, Gilbert S. Omenn's field. In science, the theft of ideas or data can be far more serious than the unacknowledged use of an author's words and argument. As Omenn makes clear, researchers worry that anonymous peer reviewing may enable established scholars to steal the ideas of applicants for grants.

When the Sweetland Writing Center sponsored a conference that placed plagiarism in dialogue with notions of originality and imitation, it was striking how few papers considered the place of imitation in training writers. Many participants asked but did not answer the question, "Why has imitation fallen out of composition studies?" Classical rhetoric from the time of Aristotle emphasized the pedagogic value of imitating famous ora-

tors and authors as the best means of learning to speak and write effectively. Imitation meant emulation, not perfect reproduction; indeed, it was assumed that no one could make an exact copy of the work of another speaker or writer. By close study, a novice gained appreciation of the elements that make an effective oration, and could then imitate them. After sufficient practice, he would join the masters, armed with the vocabulary, style, and form deemed most effective to persuade others. These days the only element of classical teaching still widely employed is paraphrase, in which a teacher asks students to summarize as closely as possible a particular passage (Corbett). Given how frequently teachers across fields complain about students' careless reading, they might do well to reconsider the ways that imitation, paraphrase, and précis writing can be used to inculcate close reading skills and also improve writing and vocabulary.

As long ago as 1900, the educational psychologist Jasper Newton Deahl remarked on teachers' failure to realize the important role that imitation played in their own education:

The value of imitation in teaching composition is too often overlooked. This is especially clear of young teachers and strikingly manifested in those teachers who have a ready intuition and who have easily developed good literary tastes. This holds not only for teachers of rhetoric and composition, but it may be observed in most teachers who readily acquired their academic training. . . . They more fully absorbed their models and consequently were not aware of imitating. They did not imitate less but more. It was, however, a higher order of imitation. The process is so natural and powerful that we are largely unconscious of it.
(76)

Imitation, indeed, is the backbone of writing courses in many disciplines, enabling students to master the distinctive and defining terms and style of their specialty. For example, first-year graduate students routinely learn to write literature surveys, fellowship applications, and book reviews by looking closely at previously successful efforts.

Christina Pugh demonstrates the effectiveness of imitation in a creative writing class. Determined to move her students beyond the mantra "Write about what you know," she crafted a course that asks students to "write in the style of these great writers." Despite these "limitations," students found themselves becoming freer, more compelling writers. Both Christiane Donohue and Joel Bloch document the long-standing exercise of imitating classical authors in France and China. Although both the French and the

Chinese educational systems operate within well-articulated guidelines about what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate imitation, neither seems always to recognize their own pedagogic contradictions. Ironically, the French are lauded for their tradition of individualism and the Chinese are criticized for their collectivism, even though both share a respect for imitating the work of experts as an integral part of the novice's learning process.

Although it may seem the most straightforward of our three concepts, originality is in many ways the most elusive. As graduate students can attest, nothing is more daunting than writing a dissertation that claims to be "an original contribution to knowledge." Despite our best intentions as writing teachers, even first-year students often prefer to follow a formula, a formula dictated by the organization of the five-paragraph essay. Anne Berggren focuses on classroom techniques for fostering originality in novice writers; she argues that rules may build confidence in the short run, but are destructive in developing a writer's voice. Anis Bawarshi casts a critical eye on those who prioritize originality over other authorial intentions. He addresses how originality functions in different genres and social contexts. After examining the difficulties students encounter in mastering academic genres, he turns to an infamous case of the *testimonio*, *I, Rigoberto Menchú*, by the Nobel Prize winner who wrote within a tradition that valued mixing the personal and the collective. For some American readers, who have confused the genre of *testimonio* with a personal autobiography, Menchú was guilty of dishonest borrowing; yet she herself never claimed sole, original authorship of her *testimonio*. A clear understanding of different genres teaches readers to understand different cultural conventions, whether it be an academic setting or a faraway country.

Christopher M. Kuipers's discussion of the history of the anthology provides a striking example of how difficult it can be to define plagiarism. He demonstrates how the genre combines forms of originality, imitation, and plagiarism, and suggests that perhaps all writing partakes of this mix. But as he reminds us, anthologies are also at times far more creative than they may seem to the casual reader. If anthologies are themselves a mixture of the old and the new, the borrowed and the created, this is even truer on the World Wide Web. Amit Ray and Erhardt Graeff use the example of writing for Wikipedia, in which anyone can contribute, correct, and alter the content of an entry. As they argue, the implications of open access in the creation and editing of Web content are vast, for it turns all texts into unstable entities, and the unique role of the author disappears into a med-

ley of voices. In the process, the concept of an individual original creation becomes moot because, in spite of fair-use laws, copyright owners insist on protecting permissions to copy. This is, not surprisingly, increasingly difficult to enforce in the digital age, and creators find themselves forced to turn over their rights to traditional intermediaries—publishers, record companies, and movie studios. While Wikis may be liberating for some, many authors feel a loss of control, and of royalties, with the present state of affairs.

Although the authors in this volume describe a confusing and contradictory system, they find opportunities for teachers and students. Lynn Z. Bloom describes two successful writing courses employing nontraditional assignments. She admits that both she and her students worked much harder on these assignments than they had thought possible, but the results were far more satisfying for everyone. Stefan Senders recounts his experience sending a plagiarizing student to his college's Committee on Standards. When he suggested that she write a defense of her behavior, the student began to take her writing seriously, so that he could teach and she could learn. But not every writing situation involves personal experience or an individual crisis. Kim Walden and Alan Peacock note the historical circumstances that have encouraged students' disengagement from their own learning, including the corporate structure of large, impersonal universities, overworked and distant faculty, and the seeming necessity of certification rather than education. In an effort to remedy this alienating situation and help students to trace their learning and writing on a topic, they devised an "i-map," in which students can document each stage of their research, thinking, and writing processes.

In their contribution, Linda Adler-Kassner, Chris M. Anson, and Rebecca Moore Howard suggest that we must reframe how we talk about the learning process, and how we define and discuss plagiarism. Like Lisa Emerson, they are doubtful of the benefits of Web-based, commercial plagiarism detection services, and emphasize the ways in which an obsession with plagiarism prevention can destroy the trust between teacher and student. Instead of policing student writing, teachers need to acknowledge the existence of "different discursive communities with different practices and activities." They urge readers to reframe the discussion of plagiarism in universities and in the media; rather than focusing on theft and morality, teachers should encourage students to understand different genres and contexts and to use academic citation practices.

The legal ramifications for writers and readers are subtly explored in our

opening essay by Jessica Litman, a pioneer in the field of intellectual property law and digital media. Drawn from her book *Digital Copyright*, this essay explores recent changes in the framing of copyright. What the founding fathers described as *quid pro quo*, limited exclusive rights in return for immediate public dissemination, quickly became seen as a *financial bargain*, whereby copyright owners earned a reasonable profit and the public gained easy access to information. Copyright offered limited and time-bound protection to an owner, who may or may not have been an author. It never included control “over reading, or private performance, or resale of a copy legitimately owned, or learning from and talking about and writing about a work, because those were all part of what the public gained from its bargain.” Litman argues that in the last thirty years we have seen a substantial, and accelerating, shift in power away from fair use and the public’s right of access. She notes that copyright is no longer about providing compensation but about *control*. Even though the United States has no legal authority over the copyright laws of another country, enhanced control within the United States is framed as an effort to control the theft of intellectual property by foreigners. “Piracy” has become a favorite word to describe even legal copying of material because in the digital age the potential arises to make millions of copies easily.

Cultural and legal critics remind us that intellectual property and copyright laws do not give authors, musicians, publishers, agents, or corporations absolute control over all aspects of a work. They argue forcefully that we must fight for the free exchange of ideas and cultural artifacts, whether on the Internet or by more traditional means. In the words of Lawrence Lessig,

A free culture supports and protects creators and innovators. It does this directly by granting intellectual property rights. But it does so by indirectly limiting the reach of those rights, to guarantee that follow-on creators and innovators remain *as free as possible* from the control of the past. A free culture is not a culture without property, just as a free market is not a market in which everything is free. (xiv)

Those like Lessig who have followed the technological revolution closely have documented the efforts of large, invested interests in preserving and even expanding traditional property rights. The clamping down on Napster and the policing of peer-to-peer music sharing are only the best-known examples of this battle. As the Google initiative works to index the contents of university libraries, including the library here at the University

of Michigan, a group of authors have sued for copyright infringement, arguing that Google must first receive permission from each author indexed. Efforts are also under way to limit free access to information printed from the Web. Countering these legal efforts is our long tradition of fair use, which includes the need for creative work to build upon the work of others—to borrow, alter, allude to, and create something new and timely. Ironically, as we focus on the epidemic of student cheating, we ignore a crucial legal right: the fair use of copyrighted material. When properly citing, we have a legal right to quote and use this material. But contradictory court decisions, in addition to the increasing power of corporate ownership of copyright (as opposed to individual ownership), have complicated maintaining a “fair use” system that protects both author and user rights.

Building upon the pioneering work of Lawrence Lessig, Jessica Litman, and Siva Vaidhayanathan, Martine Courant Rife and Laura J. Murray outline the difficulties of those interested in the *noncommercial* uses of copyrighted material. Teachers, Rife and Murray argue, need both to defend the free exchange of ideas and to emphasize the requirement of correctly attributing information to its proper sources. Rife documents the contradictions in recent court decisions that make fair use difficult to understand and defend. She encourages writing teachers to educate their digitally savvy students about the legal status of information sharing and copyright. Murray describes the subtle ways in which universities, fearful of legal entanglements, may undermine legal fair use. She suggests separating the academic system of citation, which engages by right with texts and ideas, and the copyright system, which insists upon permission. Murray argues that the free use of materials under copyright is an essential public good that needs to be defended; universities should guard against creating an environment of copyright permission that trumps users’ rights. If they do not do so, we risk losing the necessary free exchange of ideas that was originally written into copyright law.

While Rife and Murray analyze the ways in which the noncommercial uses of intellectual property have been hemmed in, Jeff Ward uses the example of a public artwork, Chicago’s *Cloud Gate*, in order to explore the contradictions in copyright law. Concentrating on the case of a professional photographer who wished to sell photos of the massive \$11.5 million sculpture, Ward explores the distinctive functions of photography in terms of reproduction, description, and depiction. What are the appropriate legal constraints for the *commercial* reproduction of a work of art? Is a photo-

graph a copy of a work of art, or is it a separate work of art? What rights do the taxpaying citizens of Chicago have in regard to public art? Ward traces this public debate, and like Litman, argues for a broad public rethinking about what it means to make a copy in today's technological world.

The authors in this collection investigate originality, imitation, and plagiarism in and through their own disciplines and technologies. Beyond the title's grouping of these themes, we encourage readers to locate diverse views on the place and responsibilities of the author, asking who and what an author becomes in the age of wikis and the Internet. Some readers will note how many of our teacher-writers hope to create reverence for rigorous ideas. This means honoring the careful thinking of both novices and experts, and combining the assimilation of ideas with training in analytic writing skills. One of the single most difficult tasks is integrating the teaching of intellectual integrity with challenging writing assignments. Could the problems sometimes inherent in originality, imitation, and plagiarism be as simple as teaching integrity and responsibility so that students, colleagues, and peers honor the ideas that have come before? Is it as simple as recognizing creativity and originality and placing such innovation in high regard? Our undertaking as teachers, writers, and thinkers is to encourage others to work honestly and creatively, amid the challenges posed by new technologies, litigation, and the demands of teaching generations of students to think, question, discover, and invent.

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