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PLAGIARISM: THE CULTURAL OUTBREAK

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Plagiarism Declaration

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in this dissertation from the work or works of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Abstract

The aim of this study is a conceptual and theoretical exploration of literary plagiarism. Chapter One traces various definitions of plagiarism and contrasts plagiarism with copyright infringement. It is argued that plagiarism is a social construct which cannot be defined solely in terms of textual features and must be contextualised. Authorial intention and reader reception play a key role in the discourse of plagiarism, since both reveal the prevailing contemporary textual ethics underlying textual production. The literature review in Chapter Two analyses the ways in which plagiarism has been interpreted in the last fifty years contrasting essentialist definitions of plagiarism with postmodern theories of plagiarism as a discourse of power. Plagiarism is contextualised within modern and postmodern aesthetics. In Chapter Three, the discourse of authorship as a stable and unified category is destabilised and challenged. What counts as plagiarism is argued to be inseparable from changing valorisations of authorship. Paradigms of authorship are then contrasted to illustrate how textual values change from one era to another, affecting dominant representations of authorship and plagiarism. Originality is explored as the pivotal construct on which the Romantic model of individual authorship depends – the model in which our current views of plagiarism have their origin. The plagiarist or ‘non-author’ is commonly viewed as everything the author is not: a copyist, unoriginal and immoral. Chapter Four analyses this construction of the plagiarist in the context of a South African case study in which Stephen Watson, Head of Department of English at the University of Cape Town, accused writer Antjie Krog of plagiarism. An analysis is made of the debate which ensued in a South African online journal, as well as of the press documentation surrounding the case. An interview was also conducted with Watson once the debate subsided. The conclusion reached from this study affirms that plagiarism is not an easily definable phenomenon since it depends on cultural notions that are in flux. Social, economic and technological changes also bring to bear on the literary institution, models of authorship and the consequent treatment of plagiarism. By enlarging the range of motivations for textual practices traditionally labelled as plagiarism, this thesis argues for a new conception of plagiarism, one that engages various discourse participants and contexts.

Opsomming

Hierdie studie is 'n konseptuele en teoretiese begronding van literêre plagiaat. In die eerste hoofstuk word verskillende definisies van plagiaat ondersoek teenoor die kopiereg-oortreding. Daar word aangevoer dat plagiaat 'n sosiale konstruksie is wat nie alleen in terme van die teks bepaal kan word nie en hierom binne 'n bepaalde konteks geplaas moet word. Die bedoeling van die skrywer en die leser se reaksie hierop speel 'n rol in die sogenaamde diskoers van plagiaat wat as sodanig 'n heersende tekstuele etiek verrai met betrekking tot die onderliggende tekstuele produksie. In die tweede hoofstuk word 'n letterkundige oorsig van die afgelope vyftig jaar van plagiaat gegee waarin verskillende essensiële definisies van plagiaat met postmoderne teorieë van plagiaat as 'n diskoers van mag, gekontrasteer word. Plagiaat word gekontekstualiseer binne modernistiese en postmodernistiese estetikas. In die derde hoofstuk word die diskoers van die outeur as 'n stabiele en eenvormige kategorie ontwig en bevraagteken. Wat beskou word as plagiaat kan nie onderskei word van die veranderende erkennings van skrywerskap nie. Paradigmas van outeurskap word gekontrasteer ten einde aan te toon hoe tekstuele waardes verander van een era na 'n volgende, wat 'n effek het op die heersende representasies van outeurskap en plagiaat. Oorspronklikheid word ondersoek as die belangrikste konstruksie waarop die Romantiese model van individuele outeurskap gebaseer is. Op hierdie model word ons huidige siening van plagiaat gebaseer. Die plagiaris of non-outeur word allerweë beskou as dit wat die skrywer nie is nie: 'n nabootser: onoorspronklik en immoreel. In die vierde hoofstuk word die konstruksie van plagiaat geanaliseer binne die konteks van 'n Suid-Afrikaanse toetsgeval waarin Stephen Watson, hoof van Engels aan die UK, die skrywer Antjie Krog van plagiaat beskuldig het. Daar word 'n analise gemaak van 'n debat op sowel 'n webruimte as binne die dagbladpers. Ná die debat afgeloop het word daar ook 'n onderhoud met Watson gevoer. Daar word tot die gevolgtrekking gekom in hierdie studie dat plagiaat nie 'n eenvoudig definieerbare fenomeen is nie, aangesien dit gebaseer is op kulturele aannames wat voortdurend in verandering is. Sosiale, ekonomiese en tegnologiese veranderinge het ook 'n invloed op die letterkundige bedryf, op modelle van outeurskap en die hantering van plagiaat. Hierdie tesis argumenteer dat plagiaat herdefinieer moet word wat sodat tekstuele praktyke verbreed sal word. Verskillende diskoerse en kontekste moet ook in ag geneem word.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“Copying one book is plagiarism; copying several is research.” Behind stories and aphorisms like these lies the realm of plagiarism. It is a region vast and baffling, its landscape kaleidoscopic, its roadways labyrinthine, its soil rich in anecdote, its valleys full of echoes. In the market places of its towns one hears many outland tongues, and one sees wares from all points of the earth. It is a place of ancient origin. Its history is the history of man’s striving for expression.

--- Lindey, 1952: 2

outbreak **noun** **1** a sudden or violent breaking out of activity: *the outbreak of war*. **2** a sudden rise in the incidence of something, *esp* a disease: *an outbreak of measles*.

--- *The New Penguin English Dictionary*

The title of this study “Plagiarism: The Cultural Outbreak” suggests that the incidence of plagiarism has increased, or that plagiarism has suddenly appeared as a textual activity akin to a disease breaking out in our society. As Alexander Lindey’s conception of plagiarism suggests, plagiarism is anything but new and “despite shifts in aesthetic norms, plagiarism is a very old and almost continuous phenomenon [...]” (Randall, 2001: xiv).

Over the last couple of years in South Africa there have been several accusations of plagiarism levelled at both established journalists and authors, causing a furore in literary and academic circles alike. A recent panel discussion on plagiarism at the Cape Town Book Fair posed the question: “Why has plagiarism become such a feature of the South African literary landscape? How do we move beyond the stolen word?” (20 June, 2006).

Three of the four panelists (Shaun Johnson, David Bullard and Colin Bower) at this discussion expressed a zero tolerance approach to plagiarism:

How can a writer knowingly steal without giving attribution. Firstly, it's dumb and secondly, it is reprehensible. Somebody somewhere will catch you out. I agree with David Bullard – if you plagiarise, I won't read another word you write – ever. (Johnson 2006, panel discussion)

Corina van der Spoel, adjudicator of *The Sunday Times* fiction prize, was the only panelist to open up discussion surrounding the question of originality, concerns about the glorification of the individual, capitalist ownership and the importance of sharing ideas. For the most part, the debate remained stilted at the level of binary logic: “[...] Either it's original or it's attributed” (Johnson 2006, panel discussion); the author is the binary opposite of the burglar (author/burglar) and authenticity is the binary opposite of plagiarism (authenticity/plagiarism) and so on.¹

Renowned South African writer Antjie Krog was accused of plagiarism in 2005 by Stephen Watson, Head of Department of English at the University of Cape Town. Watson's accusations appeared in the form of an article he wrote for the South African literary journal *New Contrast* in which he accused Krog of plagiarising his 1991 poetry collection *Return of the Moon* in her 2004 collection *The Stars Say 'Tsau'*. When the story broke in the press in February 2006, a host of academics, the publishing house concerned, and readers in general came to Krog's defense. Within two months the brouhaha abated; the case was left unadjudicated and largely ambiguous for members of

¹ Rebecca Moore Howard observes that binaries have garnered a bad name in academic culture today. The second term in the binary opposition is seen as subordinate to the first, creating falsification in a patriarchal frame of privileging certain qualities over others. Nevertheless, I concur with Howard that meaning can be made through binaries in such a way that discursive practices are unmasked “as long as we remember that meaning is actually made in the relay between the poles. When that caveat is forgotten or obscured, falsification occurs [...]” (1999: 31).

the public to make their own conclusions based on articles in the press and their own opinions of Krog and her work.² Once the accusation became public however, doubt was cast on the author's integrity and textual practices – did she or didn't she steal? Why was Watson's accusation couched in the vituperous language that it was, and moreover permitted for publication in a literary journal?

The virtual seminar room on Litnet, a South African online journal, provided the main platform for debate, or lack thereof. Questions about whether Krog plagiarised or not and how writers should reference henceforth took centre-stage, while broader complex questions around definitions of plagiarism in the postmodern context, the author, originality and the subject of writing itself, were only touched upon. Author and lecturer Barbara Adair (2006) expressed her dissatisfaction regarding the level of debate surrounding the Watson/Krog case: "A thief or not a thief? An honest writer of integrity or a dishonest plagiarist? Wearily I wonder why there is no scholarly debate on what writing is."

The motivation for this study hinges on Adair's concerns. The problem of plagiarism finds its nexus not in the legal arena, but in the intersection of the individual author and a cultural inheritance of ideas, styles and words which beg the question: Does originality exist? If so, what constitutes an original work and who decides? The moral character of the author is embedded in a Western tradition which prizes high literature and the

² Accusations of plagiarism are personal and largely a matter of opinion: "Plagiarism is in the eye of the beholder" argues Marilyn Randall (2001: vii); thus interest from the public is swayed not only by initial textual evidence from the press accompanied by influential opinions, but by the reader's previous sense of personal connection with the author over a period of time.

corresponding virtue of its creator genius. It is worth quoting Adair (2006) in full to this end:

The creation of a particular style, the idea of a transcendent poet or writer, is premised upon the concept of individuality, originality and uniqueness. The question that needs to be asked, then, is where does this idea emerge from, why is it indeed there? Modernism, the root of its ideology being Western capitalism, creates a case for the individual: we need to think of ourselves as individual, we need the security that we alone occupy a special space in the world. But there are only a number of so-called unique combinations, if there ever were any at all, and they have all been taken. Stylistic or even word innovation is not possible. So what is left? The imitation of the styles and words of others. Writers necessarily speak through a mask, the mask of culture.

The author has always grappled with his/her forbears in the creative struggle for expression, whether in a posture of adulation (bowing down to genius), respect, self-aggrandisement or fear. Harold Bloom (1973) coined the phrase “anxiety of influence” to diagnose the predicament; plagiarism could be a likely symptom of such a “condition” which Bloom described as a kind of “influenza – an astral disease” (in Dimento, 2004). The author works in a web of relationships, not least of which is the cultural and social collective which shapes and influences individual expression: “[...] [T]he author as an atom of solitary genius is a convenient legal fiction. By any measure, writing is a social act and the writer is a social conduit for the circulation of vast and collective ideas” (*Contra: Some preliminary midrashim*, n.d.). The mask the author wears as Adair suggests, changes all the time, at times imperceptibly, however it is necessarily there.

A preliminary reading of the literature on plagiarism (discussed in Chapter Two), opened up some of the widely accepted definitions of the term and a vast array of cases where so-

called great authors have been accused of plagiarism over the last three centuries.³

Plagiarism is commonly understood as passing off someone else's work as one's own. In *Plagiarism and Originality*, a key reference text on the subject, Lindey defines plagiarism as follows:

It is the false assumption of authorship: the wrongful act of taking the product of another person's mind, and presenting it as one's own. Copying someone else's story or play or song, intact or with inconsequential changes, and adding one's name to the result constitutes a simple illustration of plagiarism. (1952: 2)

What the "product" covers is not limited to straightforward copying word-for-word without attribution. The American Historical Association's "Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct" describes the different forms plagiarism may take:

The clearest abuse is the use of another's language without quotation marks and citation. More subtle abuses include the appropriation of concepts, data, or notes all disguised in newly crafted sentences, or reference to a borrowed work in an early note and then extensive further use without attribution. (9 December, 2004)

Notwithstanding the neat theoretical definitions which accrue, plagiarism "is a slippery subject because, while almost everyone agrees on *what* it is, few agree on *where* it is to be found" (Randall, 2001: vii, emphasis in orig.).⁴

³ Thomas McFarland (1985: 23) notes the prevalence of plagiarism in "certain major cultural figures: not only Coleridge, but Montaigne, John Webster, Plotinus, Ben Johnson, Dryden, Lessing. Others could be added; for instance, Diderot. Indeed, the very greatest of cultural figures, Shakespeare, and even Plato himself, are not entirely free from this ambivalent practice."

⁴ Randall (2001) and Mallon (1989), both authors on the subject of plagiarism, make mention of the ironical suggestion made by colleagues that they plagiarise other works in their books. This study engendered similar responses. As Mallon remarks, plagiarism carries with it "an aura of naughtiness" (1989: x).

1.1 Copyright infringement

It is important for the sake of clarity to distinguish plagiarism from copyright infringement: “Copyright infringement is the copying of all or a material or substantial part of copyrighted and copyrightable matter” (Lindey, 1952: 2). Plagiarism and copyright infringement are not the same, although they do overlap (*ibid.*). The Publishers’ Association of South Africa website elaborates the rights of the copyright owner as follows:

Only the copyright owner may do, or authorise the doing, of the following in respect of the work: reproduce it in any manner or form; publish it; perform it in public; broadcast it; transmit it in a diffusion service; or adapt it. Anyone who performs any of these actions without permission in respect of the work has infringed copyright. (Publishers’ Association of South Africa. n.d.)

Although cases of literary plagiarism most often appear in court as cases of copyright infringement (Stearns, 1994: 8), as previously noted, these terms are not interchangeable: “Plagiarism is not necessarily copyright infringement, nor is copyright infringement necessarily plagiarism” (1994: 9). For example, the Bleek and Lloyd Collection⁵ housed in the Manuscripts and Archives Department at the University of Cape Town exists in the public domain; to adapt or even copy from this material would not constitute copyright infringement. As Lindey underlines: “Whatever is in the public domain is common property, free for anyone to avail himself of” (1952: 3).

⁵ The Bleek and Lloyd Collection comprises the stories and songs of the now extinct /Xam Bushmen as recorded by Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd in the late nineteenth century. Testimonies from the /Xam were transcribed and translated in over 12 000 notebooks. See Chapter Four for further detail.

Plagiarism per se is not a legal term (Stearns, 1994: 6) and does not necessarily constitute a violation of copyright law. The etymology of the word, its derivation from the Latin *plagiarius* ('kidnapper'), has however entrenched plagiarism in a discourse of criminality. In classical times the term referred to the kidnapping of a child or slave, a criminal offence. The Roman poet Martial (A.D. 40-104) used the term as early as the first century to designate a literary thief (Randall, 2001: 62). Descriptions of professional writers accused of plagiarism make recourse to the criminal arena of the thief whose "supposed immorality [...] serves as an important unifying factor in the representation of plagiarism as a stable category" (Howard, 1999: 107). Alvin Kernan writes: "[P]lagiarism is still one of the few sins, along with racism and sexual harassment, for which colleges and universities will on persistent and egregious provocation dismiss paying students [...]" (1990: 119). In the literary arena, the plagiarist is viewed not only as dishonest, but as lacking in creative fibre; it is "to claim as uniquely yours what is uniquely someone else's and is a tacit admission that your own imagination is defective, insufficient to sustain its own peculiar hold on the world" (Ian McEwan, in Kernan, 1990: 121).

Copyright lawyer Laurie Stearns offers a useful explanation of the three ways in which both plagiarism and copyright infringement diverge. These are: copying, attribution and intent (Stearns, 1994: 6). Copyright is less concerned about what has been copied than with the amount and the form. There are also circumstances where limited use may be made of a work without the owner's permission, known as "fair use". One of the misconceptions about fair use however is the idea that there exists a specific quantitative rule about permissible borrowing:

A dozen paragraphs taken from a long book may be fair use; four lines from a six-line poem may be an infringement. The question is whether or not the borrower

has unreasonably taken advantage of the creative effort of his predecessor.
(Lindey, 1952:12)

As Stearns (1994) points out, in plagiarism what is at stake is *the creative process*, while in copyright infringement what is at stake is *the creative result*. It is possible to infringe copyright even though proper attribution is in place. Copyright law is less concerned with issues of attribution, while the key affront in plagiarism cases is the fact that credit is taken unearned from another author. Attribution reflects “the highly personal connection between author and work, but the interest that copyright protects is the impersonal connection between owner and property” (Stearns, 1994: 11).

While there is no copyright on ideas, plagiarism can mean using someone’s ideas without acknowledgement (Angélil-Carter, 2000: 15). To cite an example, in the well-publicised case of *The Da Vinci Code*, Justice Peter Smith (as cited in Oldenburg, 2006) ruled that Dan Brown’s novel did not steal ideas or themes (nor their *expression*) from an earlier non-fiction work. Smith rejected copyright infringement claims by authors Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh against Random House, the British publisher of *The Da Vinci Code*. Baigent and Leigh had accused Brown of lifting the “architecture” of their 1982 book, *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* and using it in *The Da Vinci Code*. Don Oldenburg (2006), *Washington Post* staff writer cites intellectual property lawyer, Lee Bromburg on an aspect of copyright pertinent to the case: “Copyright protects the expression, not the idea [...] What Dan Brown did is simply make use of some of those ideas, but the expression was his and was original.”

The third and most important aspect for the purpose of this thesis in which copyright infringement and plagiarism differ, is that of intent. A grey area seems to exist in delineating whether plagiarism includes both intentional *and* accidental copying. If the author claims his/her borrowing (the creative process) is unintentional and yet the work (the creative result), for example a poem, is an almost word-for-word copy, is this no longer plagiarism? Who would readily admit to plagiarism in light of the scandal it invokes? Columnist Robert Greig (2006) asks: “How can the law distinguish between the workings of simultaneity, coincidence, common consciousness or influence, and plagiarism on the other?” Is unconscious borrowing still plagiarism? Or is it merely sloppy scholarship? Applying Stearns’s distinction between the creative process and creative result, one response to Greig’s question would be that the law focuses on a different set of concerns and does not, or rather cannot address the complexities of similarity, common consciousness, influence and a host of textual practices that have fallen under the rubric of postmodern theory. Indeed, Stearns highlights the fact that “the law and literary ethics intersect only imperfectly” (1994: 5).

In 2005, South African poet Melanie Grobler was accused by Loftus Marais (2005), a young student at Stellenbosch University, of plagiarising Canadian poet Anne Michaels’s poem *There Is No City That Does Not Dream* (Michaels, 1999). Publicising his findings on the Litnet website, Marais (2005) revealed that Grobler had copied Michaels’s poem almost verbatim. Sympathisers would be hard-pressed to defend such borrowing on the grounds that it was unconscious or accidental. Grobler subsequently relinquished the Eugène Marais prize and explained to the Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns that the similarities occurred due to “absorption that takes place naturally when one

is an avid reader” (in Breytenbach, 2005). The poet thus distanced herself from any conscious process which would suggest that she knew what she was doing, that there was intention.⁶

In a revealing interview with Dine Van Zyl (2005), Grobler denies intentional plagiarism, which she defines as rational and cold-blooded; by contrast, she attributes her mistake to the irrational aspects of her personality of which she was unaware (*ibid.*). Journalist Charlotte Bauer (2005) argues for a clear-cut definition of plagiarism, refuting claims of negligence as well as repeated denials: “To think that a professional writer could commit plagiarism without realising it is as ridiculous as believing that a thief could take money from a purse without knowing it”. (Such a definition however, does not take into account postmodern texts and contexts, or the range of textual values and practices these encompass). Grobler’s profile as a plagiarist has been posted on www.famousplagiarists.com (Index of Plagiarists. n.d.).⁷ An example of translated or inter-lingual plagiarism (Michaels writes in English, while Grobler writes in Afrikaans), Grobler’s work carries a high-risk threat level on the website. As this case demonstrates, inter-lingual plagiarism is a growing problem as the internet facilitates the crossing of language and cultural borders.

⁶ Most of us, as Lindey (1952) remarks, are influenced by daily conversations, readings, stories, things we have heard and seen, or learnt over the years. We tell jokes, gather information and pass it on, often as if we were expressing our own views rather than the opinions we gleaned from a newspaper journalist. This is commonplace and quite innocuous; however in Grobler’s case, it seemed unlikely that almost an entire poem could have been stored away in the writer’s unconscious without a conscious glimpse of its source.

⁷ The *Famous Plagiarists* website is authored by plagiarologist Dr. J.P. Lesko. He is also founding editor of the scholarly journal *Plagiary: Cross-disciplinary studies in plagiary, fabrication and falsification* launched in 2006. The *Famous Plagiarists* website is described as “the official command-and-control station for the *War on Plagiarism* [...] to carry out strategic threat-level-analyses”. Some of the colour-coded plagiaristic profiles include Martin Luther King Jr. (red – severe risk), Shakespeare (Blue – guarded risk) and Eliot (yellow – elevated risk).

Plagiarism carries with it the intention to deceive. Grobler's denial of such an intention wasn't sufficient to stop Tafelberg Publishers from placing an embargo since August 3, 2005 on any further stock going to retailers (Breytenbach, 2005). It appears that Grobler also infringed on the rights of author Anne Michaels. Copyright law is not concerned with mitigating circumstances as far as the reason for infringement is concerned. Intent becomes irrelevant to the charge:

If you absent-mindedly take another man's overcoat in a restaurant, thinking it your own, you don't commit a crime. But if you hear a copyrighted melody and it becomes buried in your memory and you later set it down as your original composition in good faith, the law will not spare you. (Lindey, 1952: 8)

As Stearns maintains, the different views of intent in plagiarism and copyright infringement reveal a different understanding of harm (1994: 12). The law recognises harm to the creative result over and above harm to the creative process. Who stands to benefit is at stake in the law's allowance of infringement action: "[T]he law measures harm by impairment of that owner's economic interest" (*ibid.*).

If the confines of the law are inadequate for addressing the problems associated with plagiarism, it is for the literary institution, academics, publishers, writers and readers to wrest meaning from the myriad cases and contexts in which accusations of plagiarism have arisen. Historically, plagiarism has been a fertile literary arena offering ample associations and analogies for those writers and critics who seek to define and categorise it. Randall postulates that "[o]ne of the most stable aspects of the concept of plagiarism over history is the negative connotations that accompany it" (1999: 131). While the practice and respect for imitation has shifted throughout the ages along with the valorisation of originality, plagiarism has been consistently regarded as unethical and

immoral. As Shelley Angélil-Carter asserts, imitation is an important part of learning and “[p]lagiarism ‘criminalises’ imitation” (2000: 17). The concepts of imitation and plagiarism are deeply entangled for they both point to elements of copying commonly associated with a lack of imagination or cheating.

1.2 Metaphors of plagiarism

From the research on literary plagiarism, it emerged that there was a lack of consensus on what constitutes plagiarism and how concepts such as imitation, intertextuality, allusion and appropriation, for example, relate to plagiarism. Columnists, past and present have isolated the term from acceptable textual practices, invoking the juridical lexicon of stealing/pilfering/looting/shoplifting/burglary to comment with wry wit or sheer distaste on the phenomenon that is plagiarism. Not surprisingly, the term readily succumbs to a wealth of metaphors which reflects its facets, yet as the ambivalence in which plagiarism cases are cast suggests, the term is never fixed. Closure around the representation of plagiarism is elided and the terrain around textual beliefs and values contested afresh with each new case that arises.

The metaphor of plagiarism-as-disease is well-worn. Robert Kirby (2005), writing for the *Mail and Guardian*, adopts an indignant attitude to what he terms “this new infection” that is “the whole dingy plagiarism affair”. Plagiarism is couched in terms of a pestilence which needs to be eradicated with the aim of keeping books “free of plagiarism”, as Kirby puts it (*ibid.*). Peter Hoffer (2004), a University of Georgia historian, writes in a similar vein: “It’s like cockroaches. For every one you see on the kitchen floor, there are

a hundred behind the stove.” Apart from metaphors of disease, the juridical vocabulary used for discussing plagiarism tends to “engulf the entire field of plagiarism [...] It seems neither oppressive nor hegemonic, but ‘natural,’ since it accords with the modern properties of authorship” (Howard, 1999: 107).

Plagiarism encompasses a wide range of textual practices which have recently coalesced into the metaphor of plagiarism as trend. In a tongue-in-cheek appraisal of the South African “plagiarism industry” spurred on by leaders of the publishing industry, according to Kirby (2006), plagiarism is gaining popularity as “the newest trend in South African post-transformation creative writing.” Similarly, columnist for *The Sunday Independent* Robert Greig (2006) construes plagiarism as a cultural phenomenon which appears both as a fad and a phobia:

Every era has its fad diseases – consumption in the Victorian era, cancer in the 1960s, herpes in the 1970s and Aids in the 80s and 90s. The diseases are real but their dominance of public space changes with time – and medical invention [...] In intellectual life, today’s fashion item is plagiarism – a term that is being applied indiscriminately to acceptable and necessary artistic practices alike.

As a metaphor for malaise, plagiarism and the phobia associated with it expose the cultural, economic and political symptoms of a particular time. Perceived as an infection or a plague, plagiarism is construed as a threat to the values of print culture (exacerbated by the fluid boundaries of electronic culture). On a deeper level, plagiarism destabilises received definitions of originality and autonomy of the *bona fide* author – the bedrock of Romantic individualism. Rebecca Moore Howard, English professor and author of *Standing in the Shadow of Giants* (1999), views plagiarism as a cultural index deeply implicated in intellectual politics: “What constitutes acceptable and unacceptable textual practices changes from one era to another” (1999: 14). Practices that were considered

acceptable and even laudable in the Middle Ages might come under fire today as examples of flagrant plagiarism: “For the medieval writer, practices that we now excoriate as plagiarism and forgery could provide ethical, sensible means for establishing one’s authorial credibility and advancing God’s truth” (*ibid.*).

1.3 Plagiarism in a postmodern context

Over the last decade scholars in literary theory and textual studies have sought to challenge the notion of plagiarism as a stable category and to redefine it. Indeed, as Lisa Buranen and Alice Roy, co-editors of the seminal work *Perspectives on Plagiarism and Intellectual Property in a Postmodern World* articulate: “Literary theory has much to offer in the conversation about plagiarism and intellectual property” (1994: xi). Postmodern theory questions the modernist values of autonomy and originality ascribed to the author and validates textual appropriation in various critical modes, namely parody and pastiche. Kevin Dettmar, professor and scholar of modernist and postmodernist fiction, notes that “[t]he boundaries between various of these terms—quotation, allusion, plagiarism, and piracy, as well as related terms like reference, echo, parody, and pastiche—are rather porous and ill-defined” (1994: 106). Whereas postmodernist fiction capitalises on the fluidity and collapse of these boundaries as part of its subversive idiom, modernist practice strives to maintain them. Postmodernist critics call attention to the problem of ownership – that words and ideas cannot be owned:

All we can do is honour and recompense the encoding of those ideas, the use of those words, in the certainty that such honour and compensation are negotiated in contexts of time and place, class and power, within social and economic considerations. (Buranen and Roy, 1994: xviii)

A postmodern perspective would posit plagiarism as a discursive formation involving discourse participants: the reader plays a central role in negotiating the text, while the traditional author is dethroned from the role of 'Author-God' and according to Barthes's famous pronouncement, consigned to the grave. Buranen and Roy caution against the oversimplification of such a perspective: "Plagiarism is not merely the flipside of postmodern authorial uncertainty: my words, you can't have them" (1994: xviii). Certainly postmodernist versus modernist debates are heated, the former rejecting the properties of authorship the latter holds valuable, namely autonomy and originality. Howard (1999), quoting literary theorist Susan Stewart, suggests that the postmodernist critics regard the modernist stance as "closing down" the problem of plagiarism while those who defend textual purity view redefinitions of plagiarism as invalid or sheer sophistry.⁸ Paradoxically, both representations hold validity if plagiarism is understood as a malleable concept, on the one hand constructed solely on the basis of textual features and on the other, as a social category within a specific cultural context.

Thomas McFarland describes plagiarism as a "practice that occupies a grey area, encroaching in many instances on clearly defined standards of propriety and ethics" (1985: 22). While borrowing is a consistent feature of the creative process, the ethics of what is borrowed and from whom has changed over time. As Andrea Lunsford (1994) suggests in the foreword of *Perspectives on Plagiarism*, discursive practices have become

⁸ Charlotte Bauer (2005), a columnist for *The Sunday Times*, wrote an article in which she maintains that plagiarism "is a very straightforward kind of theft. It is not a grey area; it is not a matter of opinion." Robert Kirby (2005) applauds Bauer for what he views as refreshing and blunt reasoning in a column for the *Mail and Guardian* entitled "Cheats, Loots and Thieves". Kirby appears intractable in his view of plagiarism as a clear-cut transgression; it is the moral and legal obligation of publishers to 'out' the culprits. Considerations of the context, the reader's participation in making meaning and the author's intention are thus seen as a poor attempt to "defend the indefensible".

difficult to label. Not all accusations of plagiarism should be interpreted as referring to the same phenomenon. The changing concept of authorship, particularly how the author has become individualised over the last three centuries has had important implications for past and present definitions of plagiarism. As Howard expounds, “textual ethics describe rather than guide a society; they derive from social conditions [...] Our beliefs about plagiarism demonstrate rather than cause change in the social organism” (1999: 14).

In a digitised global society increasingly confronted with questions of ownership supported by copyright, borrowing the words and ideas of another writer can be seen as trespassing or stealing property. Yet the boundaries between legitimate borrowing and transgression are increasingly uncertain. As Morris Freedman puts it: “Plagiarism has indeed not been pinned down for long or firmly [...] It has not always been clear what has been stolen or how the victim of plagiarism has been harmed” (1994: 504).

Plagiarism acts as a social barometer in which social, cultural, literary, and political values are changing. Returning to Greig’s metaphor of the fashion fad, the term seems to be “in season” in South African literary circles and abroad, where it has been applied at times indiscriminately to a range of textual practices. McFarland concurs with Howard’s conviction that cultural notions of plagiarism are shifting, as are notions of authorship: “The indeterminacy of plagiarism’s boundaries is a constant in cultural usage” (1985: 24). Moreover, McFarland defines plagiarism as a variant form of imitation and influence – the difference being that plagiarism comes under censure because it involves stealing “the insignia of another individuality” (1985: 22). The fact that these insignia are essentially

derived from words on a page in which we all partake complicates the issue. Howard expresses it succinctly:

The difficulty of plagiarism policies is that they attempt to make visible that which does not exist: the line between what is textually “mine” and that which is “theirs”. All discussions of plagiarism are therefore vexed by problems in defining the term. (1999: 20)

Canadian professor Marilyn Randall (1994) and Howard (1999) maintain that plagiarism is a social construct rather than a textual feature per se; it is therefore subject to change. Isolating plagiarism from the social and literary context in which it arises threatens to stigmatise and oversimplify our understanding of a concept which resists monolithic definitions:

The way [plagiarism] is dismissed from our cultural considerations, however, is by treating each instance, as it comes into our awareness, as a special case, and invoking ethical censures to isolate it still further. Perhaps the first understanding that needs to be achieved, therefore, is that the practice has always been more frequent than we allow ourselves to realise. (McFarland, 1985: 22-23)

Howard (1999) suggests that the difficulty in attaining reliable statistics on the incidences of plagiarism increases the anxiety level of those who see plagiarism as a threat. Moreover, “a rising rate of plagiarism is often believed to correlate with a decline in respect for the values of high literacy” (1999: 24). The need to curb instances of plagiarism is spurred on by the perceived immorality of the plagiarist who threatens textual production and intellectual property. The fact that most plagiarism cases are not addressed by the law furthers arguments criticising the apathy surrounding the inadequacy of current measures to deal with the problem.

Indeed, the battle begins at the conceptual level. Definitions of plagiarism are elusive and as Howard maintains, “[w]e cannot find a neat solution to the terminological and

conceptual muddle that is plagiarism” (1999: 18). However, by tracing the development of the theory and practice of literary plagiarism through a literature review, it is possible to evaluate the prevailing discourses which continue to influence textual ethics and practices today.

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Chapter 2

Literature Review

Several contemporary composition teachers and academics have expressed the concern that plagiarism is under-theorised: McFarland (1985), Buranen and Roy (1994), Howard (1999) and Angéllil-Carter (2000). Howard argues that plagiarism is “commonly regarded as a distasteful, instrumental, necessary function of pedagogy, unrelated to theory” (1999: xviii). Similarly Buranen and Roy suggest the following:

We need to examine our own assumptions to lay bare the misconceptions and fuzzy definitions that derive from a dearth of inquiry into the nature of the beast we want to tame. Before we can address ‘it,’ we need to know what ‘it’ is. (1994: xvii)

It is only in the 90s that we begin to see theoretical treatments and perspectives on the phenomenon that is plagiarism.

This literature review traces the ways in which plagiarism and indeed, the text and author have been conceptualised from a postmodern perspective, in contrast to prior classical works where a markedly different approach was taken. Inquiries into the relationship between theories of authorship, copyright and plagiarism have steadily increased in both composition studies and literary theory, initiated by Martha Woodmansee’s watershed essay first published in 1984, “The Genius and the Copyright” (1994: 35). The recurring themes of originality and imitation fused with concepts of authorship and intellectual property law within a specific social context, prove of great importance and relevance to a conceptual analysis of plagiarism. Cultural and literary theory on plagiarism was found

to be clustered only in the last decade, prior to which a number of texts (discussed in this chapter) adopt an ahistorical approach which focuses on the psychology of the literary plagiarist and anecdotal treatments of plagiarism cases. Although each specific case of plagiarism may be analysed in isolation, a theoretical framework of plagiarism requires a transhistorical approach linking and framing the key concepts of authorship, originality and plagiarism.

Contemporary scholarship examines the ties between received notions of authorship and the capitalist market. Lunsford makes the following comments:

As Lisa [Ede] and I and scholars like Rebecca Howard and Susan West have tried to point out, contemporary concepts of plagiarism are not only fraught with contradictions but are also fairly new and, in fact, they grow up right alongside the author construct, the intricate system of copyright, and the capitalist economy in which both are deeply implicated. (1994: xii)

According to Woodmansee (1994), the properties of authorship which Howard (1999) enumerates (autonomy, originality, proprietorship and morality) are historically contingent rather than timeless universal attributes. Similarly, plagiarism is a historically bound construct which increased in circulation when authors became owners of their works, thereby earning a livelihood in the eighteenth century. Supporting this view, Angélie-Carter defines plagiarism as “a modern Western construct which arose with the introduction of copyright laws in the eighteenth century” (2000: 2).

An examination of the literature on plagiarism sees contemporary scholars McFarland (1985), Howard (1999), Randall (1994), Buranen and Roy (1994) underscoring the ambivalence and complexity of the term. Earlier classical authors on the subject decry such ambivalence, pressing for swift action against those who threaten textual production.

Two pertinent advocates of the latter position include Thomas Mallon, author of the 1989 publication *Stolen Words: Forays into the Origins and Ravages of Plagiarism* and Peter Shaw, whose well-known article *Plagiary* (1982) is ubiquitously quoted in literary treatments of plagiarism. Mallon (1989) offers a comprehensive account of plagiarism through various case studies in different genres (including the television series *Falcon Crest*), from the seventeenth century up to the early 80s. Compelling as his treatment may be, Mallon tends towards an essentialist approach in which plagiarism is viewed as a homogenous category. His twofold focus remains the psychopathology of the plagiarist and the general noncommittal attitude of scholars to the exposure and punishment of plagiarism.

The opening lines of the preface to *Stolen Words* raise a question which Mallon answers throughout the book:

No, it isn't murder. And as larceny goes it's usually more distasteful than grand. But it *is* a bad thing. Isn't it? Somehow we're never quite sure about plagiarism. (1989: xi; emphasis in orig.)

Mallon is unequivocal about the fact that plagiarism admits of no degree: “[...] [W]e often, and mistakenly, see plagiarism as a crime of degree, an excess of something that is legitimate [...]” (1989: xiii). As Buranen and Roy (1994) underscore, Mallon capitalises on a definition of plagiarism which is clear-cut and unified. Plagiarism, concludes Mallon, has essential features; it is first and foremost a paradoxical compulsion which the thief cannot help but perpetuate: “[t]he practiced thief takes care to leave self-destructive clues” (1989: 23). Both Mallon and Shaw share a similar psychology of plagiarism based on the plagiarist's paradoxical desire to be caught:

Similarly self-destructive behaviour characterises the social crime that plagiarism most closely resembles. This is kleptomania. The plagiarist resembles the kleptomaniac both in his evident wish to be detected and in the circumstance that what is stolen may not be needed. (Shaw, 1982: 332)

Mallon (1989: 28) deems Shaw's article on plagiarism and its psychology to be the best ever written. Both authors view plagiarism as a predictable pattern of behaviour complete with a psychological profile, from the plagiarist's self-incrimination to the professional apologists who make endless excuses for the exposed victim.⁹ Mallon (*ibid.*) is appalled by what he calls "predators", who get away with what he asserts is not "murder" but surely something close to it. If one extrapolates the metaphor of the predator further, the plagiarist bears similarities to the serial killer whose immoral acts are repeated over and over again. The plagiarist is seen as a criminal element threatening society, while those called to protect society and to keep criminals out, stand by complacently.

Stolen Words portrays the word as a kidnapped infant and the plagiarised text as the site of violation (Mallon, 1989: xiv). Plagiarism is surrounded by an aura of intrigue, not dissimilar to the sensational interest a murder case in the newspaper might incite. The gossip around plagiarism tends to distract from proper inquiry, runs the argument, added to which are the inadequate responses from those who ought to punish plagiarists. Shaw too is concerned about the apathetic responses and "eventual abdication of responsibility on the part of those called upon to render judgement" (1982: 332). Moreover, writing itself is seen to be in jeopardy as literary standards drop, writers lose self-respect and in a fatalistic pronouncement, ultimately stop writing altogether (Mallon, 1989: 237). As

⁹ Mallon (1989) makes the case that apologists have repeatedly exonerated Coleridge from accusations of plagiarism. He views Coleridge as the consummate plagiarist motivated by guilt and compulsion to thief repeatedly, while scholars have turned a blind eye for over a century. Mallon draws on Shaw's case study of Coleridge in which similar views are expressed.

Howard observes (1999: 25), the threat to literature motivates Mallon's call for punishment of the offender. Shaw shares a similarly serious prognosis, describing "the act's threat to the moral climate of literature" (1982: 336). Shaw concurs with H. M. Paull's point that "the extent to which it [plagiarism] is condoned [...] is a still more valuable indication of the state of the literary conscience of the period" (Paull, in Shaw, 1982: 326).

According to Shaw and Mallon, those scholars and critics who shirk the responsibility of denouncing the supposed plagiarist ought to be brought to task, since they are equally at fault; they are the literary role models for general opinion in society and its morality barometer. A unified stand seems to be called for as an answer to the ambiguity and contention surrounding plagiarism. Mark Rose (2002) contrasts Marilyn Randall's view of plagiarism as a changing social category with the criminal discourse in which Mallon and Shaw situate the term. Rose suggests that the latter wrote "to chastise the literary profession for having lost its sense of ethical standards in a wave of subjectivity and moral weakness" (2002: 2). In his postscript, Mallon writes:

Plagiarism is a fraternal crime; writers can steal only from other writers. And if it's to be punished, the penalty must be what was meted out after the first crime between brothers: a "mark". (1989: 237)¹⁰

The logic here carries the assumption that once literary standards traditionally associated with high morality are reasserted, plagiarism will be remedied once and for all. The plagiarist is thus typically immoral and must be exposed systematically in order to protect

¹⁰ The *Famous Plagiarists* website (www.famousplagiarists.com) describes those "collaborators and sympathisers" who justify the actions of the plagiarist as "criminal accomplices". The mark of the "plagiarazzi" or "author-murderer" is advocated, following Mallon's suggestion.

textual purity and control of the literary field, the dignity of the writer, individual ownership and creation itself. Freedman adopts the most radical view of the plagiarist as an abomination:

[T]he plagiarist pollutes the universe of achievement [...] The plagiarist kills a man's soul, denying him recognition of his self, his offspring. He mocks originality, destroys distinctiveness, blasphemes against creation. (1994: 517)

While the psychology of plagiarism is a valid and interesting field of inquiry, this present study suggests that plagiarism can neither be limited to modern polarities of the individual and the universal, nor the actions and consequences of one individual—the criminal ‘Other’—against society.¹¹ Plagiarism charges cannot rely on textual determinants alone; the author's intention and the reader's interpretation within a particular context are integral to a postmodern definition of plagiarism.

Challenging a monolithic view of plagiarism, Buranen and Roy, and over two dozen contributors to their title *Perspectives on Plagiarism and Intellectual Property in a Postmodern World*, argue for an understanding that plagiarism is a loaded term “full of degrees, that is, replete with difference” (1994: xvi). The volume covers multiple definitions of plagiarism in different contexts and cultures, exploring questions of authorship in a postmodern shift from the modern:

With this collection of essays we draw on the very fragmentation and destabilisation that have characterised “postmodern” as a definition of acts and events in aesthetics, politics, education, and science, and now characterise even the concept of postmodernism itself, in order to problematise notions of plagiarism and intellectual property, to purposely bring to light the inherent fragmentation and instability of terms that are often taken for granted, “givens” in discussions of creativity, cognition, law, and pedagogy. (1994: xvii)

¹¹ For a psychoanalytical approach to plagiarism, see Schneider's *Voleurs de Mots* (1985).

Postmodern writers urge a culture-specific view of plagiarism, acknowledging that traditional ideological notions of authorship frame our ideas about plagiarism by privileging certain academic textual values over others:

[...] Only recently have teachers and theorists of writing begun to excavate the deeply repressed and unspoken formalist, positivist, and individualist ideological assumptions underlying the simple need for exclusionary ownership of intellectual property. (Lunsford, in Buranen and Roy, 1994: x)

Howard (1999: 62) suggests that cultural changes (as well as economic and technological changes) have a keen impact on dominant representations of authorship. When the culture of writing shifts, plagiarism and authorship become particularly contested sites. The change from a manuscript to a print culture, and in the last decade, from print to electronic media, represents two ground-breaking paradigm shifts. In the battle over the literary object as intellectual property, access to the World Wide Web only further abstracts the word from its existence on the printed page belonging to one identifiable individual. The literary field has become a virtual domain and the boundaries between texts and their status uncertain. Indeed, postmodern critics challenge the notion of the text as a stable, objective entity created by an autonomous author who 'speaks' to the reader. Séan Burke, in *The Death and Return of the Author* (1992) discusses how digital technology reconfigures the text, author and reader, foregrounding intertextuality and the interactivity of the reader, while minimising authorial intention:

Digital images complicate the questions of origin and originality, authorship and authority with which Western conceptions of art have been preoccupied. (1992: 201)

In the multidirectional realm of hypertext,¹² writing becomes a collaborative activity and the individual author as sole creator and originating source loses prominence. Through multimedia, conventional models of authorship are changing which brings to bear directly on our perspective of plagiarism. The author's individuality throughout the twentieth century has been decentred and contested, leading to what has been described as a postmodern revolution – a crisis of authorship and representation.

Rose's book *Authors and Owners* (1993) traces the cultural formation of the author. Building on authorial questions raised by the post-structuralist critic Roland Barthes and postmodern philosopher Michel Foucault,¹³ Rose discusses the development and history of copyright alongside hegemonic conceptions of the author as original genius and owner. Copyright and the construction of literary property are seen as paradoxical since they rely on firm boundaries between texts and a discourse of originality which is difficult to sustain. Referring to eighteenth century practice, Rose writes:

Property, originality, personality: the construction of the discourse of literary property depended on a chain of deferrals. The distinctive property was said to reside in the particularity of the text ... and this was underwritten by the notion of originality, which was in turn guaranteed by the concept of personality. (1993: 128)

Rose focuses his analysis, as does Howard (1999), on problematising naturalised representations of authorship. Illustrating the way in which the deferral of concepts—

¹² Hypertext is an electronic document that contains links enabling the reader to jump to different references. In addition, as Howard (1999) explains, the reader is able to make additions or changes without leaving a trace of having done so: "Hypertext makes visible what literary critics have theorised: the cumulative, interactive nature of writing that makes impossible the representation of a stable category of authorship" (1999: 133).

¹³ Foucault's famous essay "What is an Author?" (1969) surveys the sociohistorical context in which the author was individualised, arguing that the discourse of the author's name and status is regulated by cultural contexts. The author is not a person, but rather a discursive function; Barthes (1977) similarly asserted the author as a socially and historically constituted subject.

from property to originality to personality—served to fix the value of literary property permanently, Rose foregrounds representation over subjectivity as a means to understanding nascent models of eighteenth-century authorship. Howard (1999) examines definitions of plagiarism and the concomitant ascendancy of the individual in modern authorship as interlinked discursive formations. Formal features in the text, she argues, are insufficient for defining plagiarism *un fait accompli*. Those literary critics who adopt a postmodern perspective on plagiarism emphasise the difficulty in fixing the term and the importance of taking into account context-dependent features:

Until very recently, scholarly discussion of plagiarism assumed it to be a natural (though loathsome) category, not a constructed one; hence these discussions did not understand causal and evaluative arguments about the construction of plagiarism and the cultural work that this construction performs. (Howard, 1999: xviii)

Viewed strictly as an offence, commentary on the subject in published discussions of student plagiarism, for example, employs juridical language to describe a lack of ethics which might be prejudicing those not versed in the protocol of academic discourse.¹⁴ In the press, plagiarism is seen as a transgression against common morality or an absence of morality altogether. Angélie-Carter writes that “plagiarism has become a naturalised concept and citation a naturalised skill” (2000: 2). Plagiarism becomes a unified phenomenon that we recognise when we see it:

[...] In textbooks and in university publications about academic integrity, plagiarism is often treated as a monolithic, uncomplicated concept or event [...] The assumption seems to be that we all know what we mean when we talk about it: it just is. (Buranen and Roy, 1994: xvii)

¹⁴ Howard (1999) describes “patchwriting” as a textual practice whereby the student rearranges and changes the source text as an important learning process in composition. She calls for patchwriting to be removed as a subset of plagiarism and to be legitimised in academic contexts. Punishing students for this practice only serves to perpetuate a hierarchical membership reserved for the intellectual elite. I would argue that we all “patchwrite” on some level, this thesis itself being an amalgamation of many discourses and concepts which have influenced the writing of the text.

The theory that plagiarism is 'made', put forward by Randall (1994; 2001) and Howard (1999) underpins this study. Randall (1994: 139) argues that plagiarism does not exist objectively in any real sense ("plagiarism exists in an entirely symbolic realm"); it is constructed not exclusively by the transgressor, but by discourse participants who construct meaning at a particular time in a specific context. Both authors assert that the examination of plagiarism should take into consideration authorial intention, reader reception as well as socio-cultural features and contexts. Howard endorses Randall's explanation that the intention of the author should affect the way in which plagiarism is interpreted: "[T]he determination of authorial intention can variously identify plagiarism as fraudulent, aesthetic, or subversive" (Randall, in Howard, 1999: 162).

In the postmodern context, plagiarism may be sanctioned as part of a literary game where the reader is supposed to recognise the author's conscious or deliberate borrowing and appropriation of other texts. Angélie-Carter makes such a distinction clear:

The plagiarist deceives us by pretending that the work she/he is presenting is his/her own. This is intention to deceive. However, there is the other form of plagiarism [...] This is conscious borrowing, but its intention is not to deceive, but to plagiarise [...] Here, too, the thrill is in the hunt for the source, but the author expects and writes for exposure: the true plagiarist writes to conceal the source. (2000: 22)

In *Pragmatic Plagiarism*, Randall (2001) postulates the reader-oriented nature of plagiarism, raising the point that while some textual repetitions are judged criminal or plagiaristic, others are not (a question which alludes to the pragmatic nature of the category). The two most important claims the book makes are that "plagiarism is in the eye of the beholder, and second, that plagiarism is power" (2001: vii). Plagiarism in the postmodern context is a discourse of power: "[W]here the subversion of dominant

authorities has become widely endorsed, [plagiarism] is construed as a powerful weapon wielded for strategic reasons in a morally justified opposition to former colonisers” (Randall, 1994: 137). As Rose comments: “[Randall’s] approach shifts the subject of discussion, at least in principle, from production to reception, from study of the plagiarist—and most often the plagiarist’s psychology—to consideration of the stakes in the controversies that attend charges of plagiarism” (2002: 2). As a pragmatic discourse, plagiarism involves actions with effects which are often far-reaching:

From a pragmatic perspective, it is perhaps more interesting to view the alleged crime of plagiarism as an attack against larger and more powerful forces than individual authors, or even against a literary heritage. If the practice is evaluated in terms of the *presuppositions required to generate the accusation of plagiarism*, we see that this form of repetition [...] is the reverse of cultural values such as *property, individual identity, originality, and authenticity* [...]. (Randall, 1991: 538; emphasis in orig.)

Chapter Three explores these cultural values in relation to the historical construction of the author and the plagiarist in further detail.

Chapter 3

Constructing the Author: The Originality Paradox

Originality – not just innocence of plagiarism but the making of something really and truly new – set itself down as a cardinal literary virtue sometime in the middle of the eighteenth century and has never since gotten up.

--- Mallon, 1989: 24

Contemporary critical theorists suggest that the author is a “relatively recent modern invention” (Woodmansee, 1994: 36). Rose (1993), in a chapter called “The question of literary property” writes:

What is an author? As Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and others have emphasised, the notion of the author is a relatively recent formation; as a cultural formation, it is inseparable from the commodification of literature. (1993: 1)

The author and his work are embedded in a masculinist literary tradition which prizes originary status and personal ownership.¹⁵ As Meltzer articulates: “Our culture is dominated by myths of discovery (America, electricity, the telephone, the atomic bomb); and of being first (George Washington is father to the First World country)” (1994: 6). When the first copyright law known as the Statute of Anne (1710) was passed in England, authorship became enveloped in a discourse of exclusive ownership relying on a stamp of originality for its legitimacy: “Copyright is founded on the concept of the unique

¹⁵ References to the plagiarist and the author are given the male gender since, as Debora Halbert argues: “The proprietary author is indebted to a gendered understanding of authorship and ownership. The history of intellectual property is a history of masculine creation and birth” (1994: 111). The patriarchal environment of the eighteenth century dissuaded women from writing, and originality through authorship was considered to be a strictly masculine domain, inappropriate for women. It is important to point out that women still became authors; as Halbert (1994: 113) explains, women appropriated genres that were more acceptable for women – interestingly, the writing of wills.

individual who creates something original and is entitled to reap a profit from those labours” (Rose, 1993: 2).

The author’s work became his personal property, a concept based on John Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), in which the philosopher conflates personhood with property: According to Locke (as cited in Rose, 1993), a man owns his body by natural rights as well as the fruits of his labour, thereby producing his own private property. When this axiom is applied to literature, it would define the text as a form of labour which, being an embodiment of the individual and his originality, becomes a man’s private property akin to a piece of land.¹⁶ The notion of original genius, intermingled with the traditional discourse of authorship was first attributed to Edward Young’s watershed treatise *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759): “An original may be said to be of a vegetable nature; it rises spontaneously from the vital root of genius; it grows, it is not made” (in Kernan, 1990: 111).

Citing Rose, Halbert (1994) explains that certain metaphors were applied to the domain of authorship with the aim of legitimising ownership of ideas (to the exclusion of women). Rose suggests that the two most common tropes for articulating authorship were first that of paternity, the “author as begetter and the book as child” (1993: 38) in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, followed by the real estate model in the eighteenth century. The latter metaphor became culturally expedient since it foregrounded the proprietorship of the author over a commodity which he could sell in the marketplace.

¹⁶ The etymology of ‘author’ is the Latin ‘auctor’ meaning originator, founder or creator and the verb ‘augere’ is to increase, augment or grow. Both terms conjure the idea of cultivation befitting the metaphor of author as tiller of the field, as Meltzer (1994: 6) suggests.

The envelopment of authorship in the property metaphor is somewhat problematic when establishing contours between idea and expression.¹⁷ The perennial uncertainty over what may be defined as common knowledge and what is attributable is also at issue. Stearns (1994) argues that the property metaphor is inadequate since it suggests that words can be owned. James Zebroski, Associate Professor of Writing at Syracuse University, suggests that from a socio-historical point of view, plagiarism might be conceptualised as “part of a notion of authorship” – as its negation (1994:32). Plagiarism and authorship are similar in making claims about authority as exercised through texts: Both are engaged in the issue of intellectual property and in the “policing of established boundaries between owners and their property, whether corporate or individual” (*ibid.*). As composition theorist C. Jan Swearingen puts it:

Plagiarism relies on the notion of exclusionary ownership, a kind of intellectual land-rush model in which the first to stake a claim on a concept, term, title, or even idea from that moment forward must be cited as its author. (1994: 21)

The status of the book is tenuous not only because of the metaphysical tension between what is real and ideal, but because the values or properties of authorship—namely proprietorship, originality, morality and autonomy—are interdependent signifiers rather than foundational facts. Indeed, these are the positive attributes embedded in a discourse of authorship which the plagiarist fails to fulfil.¹⁸

¹⁷ While copyright law draws lines between an idea and its expression, such a separation of form and content is not necessarily obvious “especially in many aesthetic productions where the vehicle is virtually indistinguishable from the content” (Randall, 2001: 147). Indeed, postmodern schools of thought suggest that there is nothing *but* expression.

¹⁸ Rose regards the attempts of eighteenth-century lawyers to fix the notion of literary property as futile, yet necessary: “Futile because the concept of literary property is itself finally an oxymoron. But necessary because the institution of copyright is deeply rooted both in our economic system and in our conception of ourselves” (1993: 8).

Angélie-Carter (2000) maintains that the solitary Romantic author creating masterpieces is more myth than reality. The attributes of a good author, particularly the foundational value of originality, is emphasised at the same time as the author's property rights are asserted in the eighteenth century. With the ascendancy of originality as the dominant model of authorship and literature being viewed as property, it became possible to steal. The transgressor in Lockean terms would not only be stealing a text, but robbing a man of his personhood, of his sacred individuality. Foucault explains that with the establishment of copyright regulations, "the transgressive properties always intrinsic to the act of writing became the forceful imperative of literature" (1977: 125). Because the territory of the book is never fully demarcated (the question of whether it is property or whether it is abstract belonging to the community), theft is always at issue in debates about the definition of the book (Meltzer, 1994: 70). Theft and paranoia arising from the fear of one's ideas being robbed, as Meltzer notes, "underlie any notion of originality" (*ibid.*). The author's opposite or nemesis in the Romantic era was the individual who proved to be lacking in originality, morality and autonomy – the plagiarist.

3.1 The originality paradox

It is not only the status of the book which poses an intellectual problem, but the nature of originality itself. Contemporary literary theorists raise piquant questions about what Freedman has described as the "riddle of originality":

As for originality, we are crumbling altogether any firm definition of it. It has joined pornography among things we can't define but think we know when we see. (1994: 504)

Attempts to solve the riddle of originality inevitably lead to a crisis in representation, particularly in the context of the subject's loss of authority in the late twentieth century. As Randall (1991) notes, the suspicion around whether a genuinely original work of art exists has never eliminated the aesthetic category of plagiarism. Confronted by the riddle of originality, the author is blinded by the search for newness only to find himself quoting a predecessor of old, damning evidence of which might be fearfully plain for his peers to see. According to Harold Bloom: "We shy away from the overt criterion of originality, and we have learned to ask for it under different and more nuanced names" (in Randall, 1991: 525).¹⁹

Great masters, the likes of Shakespeare, Coleridge and Wordsworth were deemed incapable of plagiarism or as Cocteau succinctly put it, an original artist cannot copy (in Randall, 2001). The status of the "great author" or "strong poet" (Bloom, in Randall, 2001: 26), otherwise defined as the imprint of the unique personality in the original work, relied on the presuppositions on which an entire canonical tradition was based. The author as personality thus transcends the specific text, becoming a desirable commodity in marketplace economics: "[T]he author becomes analogous to 'baron' or 'earl', an honorific title grounded in authenticity and originality" (Rose, 1993: 118). Coleridge was accused of plagiarism and yet his reputation remains untarnished even today, "a testimony to the strength of the 'great author' phenomenon" (Randall, 2001: 54).

McFarland (1985) draws on Bloom's well-known phrase, the "anxiety of influence" to explain his theory of the "originality paradox". It has been mentioned that in the

¹⁹ For Bloom, originality is much like a dream which the artist—with an Oedipal need to create something never seen before and different from the father-predecessor—pursues (in Kernan, 1990: 124).

eighteenth century, literature was esteemed and authorship accorded on guarantee of authenticity and originality. However, the onus on spontaneously creating original work, the need to earn originary status and the anxiety produced for fear of being unconsciously influenced by writers of old, became a burdensome legacy. McFarland (1985) describes such a polarity between the individual ego and the existence of an intimidating intellectual tradition, as the complication of the originality paradox. The lure and displacement of originality, which Lindey (1952) calls the “elusive fire-drake”, continues in our time:

We are reared, as it were, on Emerson’s advice to ‘insist on yourself; never imitate’; and we recollect only by an act of historical imagination that the rise of this opinion replaced the ascendancy, which lasted for many centuries, of the doctrine of imitation. (McFarland, 1985: 5)

If one concedes the claims of the cultural past, of tradition, the paradoxical status of the originality discourse comes starkly into view. If all originality is actually influenced, then perhaps it does not exist:

The truth is all works of literature are Janus-faced²⁰ and look to the future and to the past. Shakespeare, Pope and Dryden borrow from Chaucer and shine by his borrowed light ... There never was an original writer. Each is a link in an endless chain. (Emerson, in McFarland, 1985: 15)

Similarly, in recognition of the interconnectedness of writings through the ages and with a move to liberate the text from the omnipotent author, Barthes makes the following statement:

We know that a text is not a line of words releasing a single “theological” meaning (the message of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of

²⁰ Emerson’s allusion to Janus refers to the ancient Roman deity who kept the gate of heaven. He was represented with two faces, one in front and one behind to guard the gates of his temple in Rome (*The Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*).

writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. (1977: 142-148)²¹

If authorship is predicated on originality and the existence of originality is disproved, the Romantic author comes within close quarter of the plagiarist, who is himself a 'non-author'. Thus the fear that originality may be all but a myth risks the intellectual status quo and moreover, the discourse of intellectual property of the individual. The ambivalence which accrues around the concept of plagiarism is directly linked to the paradoxical nature of originality in relation to tradition:

[T]he practice of plagiarism is a variable ratio, not an inert quantity in cultural matters. It is a practice that participates in and is witness to the paradox that surrounds the entire conception of originality. (McFarland, 1985: 29)

The originality paradox is not merely a historical development exclusively characteristic or new to the Romantic era; it was an intensification of a question always present in literary creation, for as McFarland concludes, "it defies resolution" (1985: 14). The normative model of the autonomous originary author, as Howard asserts, "derives from economic and technological change and participates in maintaining hierarchical social relations that are potentially threatened by those changes" (1999: 57).

3.2 Historical models of authorship

In stark contrast to the emphasis on the inspired original author valorised over the last few centuries, the textual values of the ancient world and indeed, the Middle Ages show

²¹ Seán Burke describes Barthes's essay "The Death of the Author" as "the single most influential meditation on the question of authorship in modern times" (1992: 19). Notwithstanding his admiration for theorists like Barthes, Burke challenges Barthes's reading of the author in his engaging study *The Death and Return of the Author*. He argues that in trying to abolish the author, Barthes ironically participates in its construction: "He must create a king worthy of his killing. Not only is the author compared with a tyrannical deity, but also with bourgeois man himself [...] Hence, too, the comparisons with the capitalist [...] Hence, again, the characterisation of the author as the Father to whom the book is the child" (Burke, 1992: 27).

that authorship was not an autonomous creation unique to one individual, but a collaborative process. Howard (1999) explains that representations of authorship from one era to the next are based on “cultural arbitraries”, not in the sense of being capricious, but as historical constructs having the appearance of being “timeless moral principles” (1999: 53). Representations of authorship are indeterminate and conflicted, dependent as they are on values which are unstable:

Though the competing poles in the mimesis/originality and collaboration/autonomy binaries are evident at all times in the history of Western letters, social circumstances at any given moment determine which of these values is in the ascendant. (Howard, 1999: 58)

Cultural changes thus affect “[t]he rise and fall of poles in the authorship binaries” (1999: 62).

In the ancient world, the dominant model of authorship was imitation; by imitating previous orators and historians, writers could elevate the cultural standards of their time:

The treatment of imitation during the first century A.D. is coloured progressively by the sense of decline that seems to have been virtually universal during that era. Thus imitation, when it is perceived as desirable, tends to emerge as a technique for mitigating the general lowering of standards. (Ogden White, in Howard, 1999: 63)

In the Middle Ages, the autonomous writer was de-emphasised. The traditional view of learning and knowledge represented a collective accumulation to be shared for the purpose of edifying and communicating.²² Mimesis at that time was perceived as a tool for the task of disseminating God’s word, rather than a means of self-expression. Howard

²² The vantage point of an accumulation of knowledge meant that the writer, indebted to a variety of sources, could see further than his predecessors. The metaphor of “standing on the shoulders of giants” is pertinent to medieval textual values, suggests Howard (1999), since it describes the writer’s humility for past knowledge and yet his ability to see further in the present: “In comparison with the ancients, we stand like dwarfs on the shoulders of giants” (Sarton, in Howard, 1999: 65). This aphorism as Howard points out, was not Isaac Newton’s, but can be attributed to Bernard of Chartres in the twelfth century (*ibid.*).

notes that “[t]he notion of individual authorship was, in fact, more foreign to the Middle Ages than to either antiquity or the modern world” (1999: 64) and thus it does not come as a surprise that with the devalorisation of originality and individual proprietorship, issues of plagiarism hardly featured.

Contemporary theorists like Rose ascribe the development of the author in the Modern era to the invention of the printing press, however as Howard (1999) points out, other factors played a key role in the emerging modern discourse of authorship. These were: The notion of the text as immaterial property, a staggering increase in mass literacy resulting in a wider readership, the concomitant fear among traditionally educated intellectuals of the masses creating a lower class culture, and of course, the ideology of individualism. If ideas were considered communal property in the Medieval period, the origin of ideas resided in the individual in both the Romantic and Modern periods, albeit in different paradigms. From the medieval valorisation of mimesis and collaboration, textual theory shifts in the Modern era to the opposite pole where authorship is represented through originality and autonomy. It is in this setting that the author’s opposite—the figure of the parasitic plagiarist—is rife.

While the Romantic writer wrestled against the anxiety of influence, the Modern writer “at the top of the textual hierarchy” (Howard, 1999: 101), could overcome the influence of tradition by borrowing from the past – as long as what was stolen was made into something better. As Mallon explains:

The point, however, is always that the writer need not blush about stealing if he makes what he takes completely his, if he alchemises it into something that is, finally, thoroughly new. In short, one has an intensification of the classical notion of imitation: don’t just pay homage to the past; ravish it. (1989: 25)

The authority accorded an author through his name meant that in certain instances imitation, clothed as originality, escaped charges of plagiarism. Autonomy freed the author from the towering burden of a great literary past allowing the individual to assert an equal footing in present achievement. Howard puts it another way: “The writer is no longer a pygmy obscured by giants” (1999: 68). Those in possession of great wit and a solid reputation were praised and immune to accusation: “Little wits that plagiarise are but pickpockets; great wits that plagiarise are conquerors” went a quotation in *Blackwood’s Magazine* of 1863 (in Howard, 1999: 101). While originality became the defining characteristic of authorship, the plagiarist was considered to be at the lowest end of the authorial scale, unless he formed part of a certain category of author (of high character and social value for example). Such an author, boldly exhibiting the reality of working in dialectical relationship with other texts, was heralded for his borrowings.

3.3 The postmodern paradigm

Another context in which plagiarism is not condemned and even appreciated, is the arena of postmodern literary criticism. Postmodern critics value plagiarism as a form of challenge to received models of authorship imbued seemingly naturally with originality, autonomy, morality and proprietorship:

In this context, the traditional discourse of authorship is undermined by the impossibility for this new ‘non-subject’ to actually possess any of the structuring features for individuality or subjecthood that are necessary to effect ‘authorship’: authenticity, originality, authority, self-expression, and even property can be the attributes of only a full and self-possessed subject, the kind that is felt to be no longer relevant, or even possible, in the late twentieth century. (Randall, 2001: 219)

With the dissolution of the subject and therefore the author, the plagiarist (positioned as the non-author) “might be the necessary or logical form of aesthetic production available to an author who has been deprived of the attributes of subjecthood” (Randall, 2001: 219). Postmodern plagiarism has served in political contexts such as decolonisation, as well as offering a substantive critique through which feminists subvert the Western canon. Part of the postmodern project has been to challenge stable distinctions between the writer, reader and text (Buranen and Roy, 1994: 59) and to envision, in the place of universal subjecthood, plural, gendered and shifting subject positions.

In the postmodern paradigm, appropriation is distinguished as a textual practice from plagiarism; the overt theft of a source text plain for all to see, presupposes the traditional criterion of intent to covert and deceive. Yet the appropriations of American fiction writer Kathy Acker, to cite an example, have come under threat for copyright infringement. Randall casts Acker’s texts in the textual practice of what she calls “guerilla plagiarism”:

Postmodern plagiarism in literature has been approvingly called a kind of ‘terrorism’; I prefer to characterise it as a guerilla tactic of a subversory movement whose value lies in its pure oppositionality to dominant power – in other words, whose importance lies in the pressure it exerts against the institutions it attacks, but without which it could not exist. (2001: 228)

Acker challenges phallogentric literary capitalism by ‘stealing’ well-known texts (often nearly verbatim), with the aim of critiquing notions of original genius and ownership of textual material. Examples of what Acker herself refers to as “her method of appropriation” (in Dettmar, 1994: 105) include “stealing” titles (her novels *Great Expectations* and *Don Quijote*), characters from Shakespeare; and taking almost 1,500 words from Harold Robbins’s *The Pirate* (1974) for her 1975 novel *The Adult Life of Toulouse Lautrec by Henri Toulouse Lautrec*. As Dettmar (1994) points out, Acker did

make some changes to the former, recasting the third-person narrative as a first-person narrative, changing the identity of the main character and setting off the passage as an inset with its own title. Acker makes what she takes visible and the term 'plagiarism' in her case is qualified within quotation marks, since it is part of an aesthetic strategy.

In an interview, Acker explains her motivations:

I took the Harold Robbins and represented it. I didn't copy it. I didn't say it was mine ... It seems to me quite a different procedure than the act of plagiarism. I had changed words, I had changed intentionality. (In Dettmar, 1994: 107)

Dettmar (1994) explains that Acker calls into question the boundaries of modernist allusion which have been traditionally sanctioned. Modernists applaud the work of a luminary like T.S. Eliot whose copious notes to *The Wasteland* intended to cover all intertextual echoes and ward off any accusation of illegitimate borrowing:

What precisely distinguishes allusion from quotation? Is an unmarked quotation an allusion? Is an unmarked allusion a plagiarism? [Acker] Can allusions ever be considered plagiarised? Where does quotation end and allusion begin? (Dettmar, 1994: 102)

The cultural complexities of postmodern theory reveal the fluidity of boundaries between textual practices, undermining the assumptions that govern representation. By challenging the ideal of originality, plagiarism offers alternatives to normative inscriptions of identity through ascribing difference. Randall (2001) cites two cases of plagiarism in the postcolonial context whose intention was deliberately subversive: The first is a book by Québécois Hubert Aquin published in 1968 called *Trou de Mémoire* (*Blackout* in English) where the writer discusses plagiarism overtly in the text by having characters talk about it, while at the same time he borrows from lesser known, unattributed sources. Randall explains that the book deals with crises of identity in the

colonial condition of Quebec and how the characters grapple with deprived subjecthood: “[T]he novel thematises problems of authorial identity, authenticity, plagiarism as each successive narrator glosses and contradicts the former, accusing each other of falsifying the autobiographical discourse” (2001: 235). The book was received favourably and the author’s reputation was not significantly changed by the discovery of the unattributed sources. In the second example, a text by Malian writer Yambo Ouologuem, *Le Devoir de Violence* written in an African storytelling mode, achieved great acclaim, until it was condemned albeit belatedly for plagiarising from renowned English novelist Graham Greene. The plagiarised sections were to be removed subsequently from further editions.

These cases beg the question: Why was Aquin exempt from accusation while Ouologuem came under fire? Randall (2001: 241) points out that Aquin suffered less because he plagiarised sources that were quite obscure, whereas Ouologuem was seen to have incurred a greater transgression by stealing from an established author in the Western canon. Such an outcome emphasises the gravity of the transgression when the literary turf of an important cultural figure in the Western tradition is encroached upon.

Chapter 4

A South African Case Study: Watson Accuses Krog of Plagiarism

The heated debate opened up by Stephen Watson's accusations of plagiarism against Antjie Krog in what was called "[a] bitter spat [...] between two of the country's top writers" (Jacobson, 2006), is more complex than a petty argument between two writers would suggest. The questions arise: What was 'stolen' and from whom? If as Randall postulates, plagiarism is firstly "in the eye of the beholder" (2001: vii) and secondly a discourse of power, what has been the literary institution's response to the accusation? If plagiarism is construed as a guide to the prevailing modes of aesthetic practice, what are the textual values Krog's text has been perceived to transgress? As Howard observes, "[...] textual values and practices are indices to our society, they point to an age of shifting, conflicting opinions about textual ethics" (1999: 15). The premise of this study is based on a definition of plagiarism which foregrounds authorial intention and reader reception, while the text as sole arbiter of meaning is contested. Besides an analysis of the substance of Watson's plagiarism claim, it is also necessary to look beyond the two academics in question to the Bleek and Lloyd archive and the /Xam narrators on whose testimonies they have based their works.

Watson and Krog both used source material (stories, myths and songs) from the /Xam culture (a subgroup of the "Bushman" now extinct), which has been made accessible through the remarkable work of two linguists, Wilhelm Bleek and his sister-in-law Lucy Lloyd. When Bleek emigrated to South Africa from Germany in 1855 to study Zulu, he

became aware of the fact that the culture of a group of Bushman prisoners, held in the Breakwater Prison in Cape Town, was under threat (Krog, 2004a: 8). Consequently, Bleek obtained the permission of the governor at the time to have a few of the informants moved to his home in Mowbray so that he could study their culture and their language. Thus it was that Bleek and Lloyd spent years transcribing and translating the testimonies of six principal /Xam informants in the latter part of the nineteenth century: “Out of these farsighted, painstaking labours came the 138 notebooks, amounting to more than twelve thousand pages, that comprise the Bleek and Lloyd Collection, presently housed in the archives of the University of Cape Town” (Watson, 1991: 7).

Describing this collection in her paper “By What Authority? Presentations of the Khoisan in South African English Poetry”, Annie Gagiano writes: “This body of material became a cultural and linguistic testament [...] this work remains the main and invaluable source of a *verbal* San presence from the past” (1999: 125-139; emphasis in orig.). Watson (1991: 7) praises the extraordinary work accomplished by Bleek and Lloyd: “It is one of the most remarkable ethnographic records” and Leon de Kock (2005) has described the collection as “South Africa’s own prelapsarian treasure”. Again, the question of authority comes to the fore: Can such a “treasure” be stolen when it is already in the public domain to be shared? It was pointed out in Chapter One that material in the public domain is common property and therefore exists outside the bounds of copyright. As Eve Gray (2006), copyright consultant on behalf of Random House points out, “these materials are regarded as a site of collective memory, by definition meant for sharing and transmission”. What is the yardstick for measuring the appropriation or exploitation of such material? Does it depend on how close one sticks to the ‘original’ or how far one

strays from it? Is it more appropriate to re-author the work or to adopt the role of compiler?

The scandal surrounding the plagiarism allegations seems to overdramatise what is surely trite but true, that 'there is nothing new under the sun'. Writers have always borrowed from their predecessors and where, in the case of a national treasure like the Bleek and Lloyd Collection, the material opens up contemporary creative explorations (the likes of stories and versifications), there are going to be overlaps and similarities. Perhaps what is of greater concern is the risk of cultural exploitation as De Kock (2005) asserts: "This process is problematic, because one runs the risk of being seen to be appropriating the words of the voiceless, and making personal literary capital out of it."

Several writers have turned to the archives at the University of Cape Town, as well as Lloyd's publication *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* first published in 1911, and again in 1968 (Struik). J.D. Lewis-Williams has expressed the view in his *Stories That Float from Afar* that the versification of /Xam texts might lead to "prettification": "Perhaps versification comes close to prettification, and the starkness of the narrators' dictated text [...] better conveys the tragedy that permeates the whole collection" (2000: 38). Similarly, Alan James (*The First Bushman's Path: Stories, Songs and Testimonies of the /Xam of the Northern Cape*) takes Lewis-Williams's point concerning "prettification" as he questions the appropriate use of the texts and issues of ownership:

Questions may well be asked about whether such use of poems as literary vehicles for the /Xam (translation) texts is proper, whether it is helpful. Whether such use is not reductive. Whether it is not appropriative through transforming texts of a once-living people into a poet's intellectual property. Whether it does not obscure and subordinate the texts and erase their narrators and translators while projecting the poems and the poet who takes charge of the texts. (James, 2001: 21)

Responding to the debate on Litnet, Gagiano (2006) writes: “Underlying the present quarrel are deeper questions concerning cultural ‘ownership’, cultural border crossings, cultural sharing [...]”. On the one hand, the texts need vitalisation which a literary version could achieve (James, 2001: 19), on the other, the criteria and estimation of success are moot. The question is whether Watson achieves his goal, to “disinter this poetry” (Watson, 1991: 13), or whether he only succeeds in “reinterring” the /Xam, to paraphrase Gagiano (2006) in her 1992 review. It is clear that these stories are meant to be told; they are meant to be heard and yet the form this transmission takes has sparked heated controversy. Within /Xam culture “storytelling was characterised by variability and versatility, each narrator feeling free to take-borrow stories, to construct and share, and to reconstruct them” (James, 2001: 22). Stories were disseminated freely and to use James’s metaphor, collecting stories became a kind of foraging, or hunting and gathering (*ibid.*). Stories were not the intellectual property of their originators, neither was authorship autonomous. You couldn’t ‘steal’ a story or lay charges of concept theft. Rather, oral repetition and multiple authorship ensured the perpetuity of a legacy through common consciousness.

Thanks to the dedication of Lloyd and Bleek and their teachers, the /Xam narrators, a glimpse into the richness and texture of that legacy remains with us. Bleek spent the last five years of his life devising a phonetic alphabet in order to record as much of the /Xam oral tradition as was possible:

First the stories were transcribed word for word on the right-hand pages of the notebooks and then, painstakingly, translated into the formal Victorian English. The translations were then checked and rechecked against the explanations of the narrators and faithfully recorded on the left-hand pages, with explanatory notes. (Krog, 2004a: 8)

When Bleek died in 1875, he entrusted Lloyd to continue the work they had jointly embarked upon. Lloyd's hardwon research led to her major publication *Specimens of Bushman Folklore*. A year after its publication, in 1912, she was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Literature by the University of the Cape of Good Hope. The UCT Manuscripts and Archives website attributes Lloyd as the first woman in South Africa to receive such an honour.

James explains that by the time the /Xam narrators recounted their stories to Bleek and Lloyd, they had already been largely dispossessed of their land, their way of life becoming a "cultural relic" (2001: 26). European settlers viewed the Bushmen as thieves when in fact they had been forced off their territory and left with the bitter choice of farm labour or exile. Although re-envisioning and 're-presenting' the texts as verse might be construed as appropriative, the recreation of folklore for the written medium could be articulated and redefined as "a productive way of holding the stories in trust. It helps them to be and to become and to live again as part of daily life" (James, 2001: 23). De Kock (2005) offers a similar analysis on how to negotiate the mediation of poets into these texts:

Whether one regards this as "appropriation" of the work of the dispossessed or as a tribute to and a reclamation of voices smothered in the course of colonial conquest, such "versions" of /Xam poetry remain uniquely South African artifacts. Like the historical process from which they emerge, they are defined by cross-appropriation, cultural interpenetration, re- and misreading, and translation.

Cultural interpenetration could be seen as exploitative in some cases. The Bushmen remain an underclass in our society and thus a representation of a body of work like the Bleek and Lloyd Collection ought to involve ethical considerations outside of that body of work. While there is the unwelcome reality of publications "playing the humanitarian

tune for commercial dividends” (Naidu, 2001: 23), the practice of cultural mediation can equally enhance and extend oral tradition in a hybrid form through the interaction between oral aesthetic practice and the written medium, and a mindfulness of contextualisation. As South African artist and academic Pippa Skotnes articulates:

The archive is so multifaceted that one form of interpretation is not going to bring you close to the richness and texture of it. The more you contextualise your interpretation, the more you convey the richness of the archive. (Interview by the author, August 8, 2006)

The methodology of the writer (introduction, notes, annotations and acknowledgements) may offer a certain amount of insight into his/her relationship and the articulation of that relationship vis-à-vis the original translated texts and previous versions of those texts. As Gagiano (2006) and Gray (2006) have pointed out however in their responses on Litnet, annotation (and the lack thereof) does not stand as a guarantee against claims of illegitimate borrowing, or more grievously, plagiarism. It is important in this plagiarism study to unpack the writer’s conception of his working methods, for they reveal authorial intention. The fact that Watson couches his process of working with the /Xam material in terms of acceptable and positive attributes of authorship serves as a dialectical indicator for the presuppositions on which he ‘fails’ Krog as a poet of English verse. If Watson describes his poetic renderings as acts of translation, transformative borrowing and imitation by improvement (valorised over word-for-word copying), he judges Krog’s work as plagiaristic on the basis of appropriation, derivative borrowing and copying.

To this set of transgressions Watson also includes a lack of scholarship, poetic ability and the “sin of sloth”, which he believes derivative borrowing “of this undemanding type” reflects (2005: 59). Watson’s esteem for transformative over derivative borrowing harks

back to the modernist tradition espoused by T.S. Eliot in his famous pronouncement, which most contemporary authors on the subject of plagiarism cite:

Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different.
(In Howard, 1999: 88)

Not much guesswork is required to ascertain which category Watson believes Krog to occupy:

Of course I was making fun of her, mocking the fact that she can't write English verse. This is the recourse that people sometimes go to when they feel exceedingly affronted by somebody's literary behaviour. (Interview by the author, May 29, 2006)

As Ingrid de Kok (2006) has succinctly summarised:

[T]he charges of plagiarism become not issues of principle at all, but matters of aesthetic judgement. According to Watson, really good writers such as T.S. Eliot borrow, but bad writers such as Krog steal.

Krog would seem to have usurped the title of poet, but worse than this, that of English poet. Anthropologist Rosalind Morris (2006) describes Watson's behaviour as one of possessive individualism: "[...] Watson expresses so jealously controlling a relation to the spaces of knowledge in the nation" and further on: "The entire series of accusations against Krog cannot but smack of the most vulgar colonial fantasy – of possession and alienation". Writing about his intricate labour in recasting the archival material, Watson contrasts Krog's work as "largely an exercise (no doubt extended) in the lowly art of moving one's fingers over a computer keyboard" (2005: 57). In other words, hers is a

convergence with the originals²³ which is devoid of any creativity, while Watson's is one of authenticity precisely because of his unique creativity.

The good poet is not derivative; he/she transforms what is taken in a kind of alchemy which betters it; this is good literary behaviour otherwise known as "significant enhancement" (Randall, 2001: 49) and involves much toil. Recalling the metaphor of the author as tiller of the land, Mallon describes the process as one of ploughing whereby the harvest reaped is richer for the author's intervention: "It is not put unchanged onto the dinner table by someone who pretends he's been cooking all day" (1989: 26).

The essential conditions for Watson's conception of Krog's plagiarism have been outlined so far as derivative borrowing, copying, laziness and lack of talent. Randall (2001) contrasts the connotations of "copying" with "its more noble cousin" – "imitation": "[...] [C]opying implies covertness, because of the relationship of identity, and therefore of the potential for substitution of the copy for the 'original'" (2001: 21). The act of copying negates aesthetic value because it is considered mechanistic, while imitation suggests difference from the original or model (*ibid.*). In the case of the /Xam material, the original is to some degree an enigma due to its deferral through a chain of mediators or storytellers and the lack of a solitary, autonomous author. The Bleek and Lloyd Collection pays homage to a collective culture which can no longer speak out; verifications are not possible and thus the collection is a crucial record, not a proxy

²³ Mediation by Bleek and Lloyd (in the form of conversations, transcriptions and translations) coupled with the understanding that the texts originated from an oral tradition, does not detract from the fact that the archive is the only remaining testimony of the /Xam, and in this sense, the texts are originals.

original. No one owns the /Xam material; Watson's interpretation cannot be asserted as sole authority or locus of aesthetic access.

In perhaps the most sardonic final comment of his article, Watson (2005: 61) 'fails' Krog as a writer altogether, ironising the fact that she was invited to a "symposium" (actually, a discussion) at the University of Cape Town, on the problem of plagiarism:

Evidently, those who invited Krog were in no position to know the degree to which she might be called an expert on the subject. Nor could they have been aware that for a while, they harboured in their midst a writer who now has reason to be considered the pre-eminent copy-typist in South African letters. (2005: 61)

The implication behind the label "copy-typist" (underscoring the absence of talent or work), is that Krog was involved in covertness or authorial deceit, hence theft:

The deceit works like this: Conveniently, all the archival material is in the public domain, so you and I are at liberty to do anything we want. We can copy it. [...] The collection seems to offer people a wonderful way of having your cake and eating it. You can copy-type the material quite literally, put it in a book, attribute it to //Kabbo, but it becomes your copyright at the same time – without doing any work. (Watson, interview, May 29, 2006)

As Watson would have it, Krog's *The Stars Say 'Tsau'* is not only derivative but "in fact an act of appropriation [...] which is almost pure, almost total. It is that act of appropriation which is outright theft" (2005: 57). What was Krog stealing and from whom? Watson is affronted by "a debt never made public" (2005: 49) rooted in Krog's lack of acknowledgement of his work, although throughout his argument he purports to be concerned about a far more damning crime: Krog has 'stolen' not only from him, but from Lloyd "who was responsible for transcribing the greater part of the Bleek and Lloyd archive" (Watson, 2005: 57), and furthermore from the /Xam informants. Ironically, Watson's *Return of the Moon* published thirteen years earlier came under the very same

fire. Gagiano's 1992 review sees in Watson "a touch of the cultural trophy hunter" and de Kock (2005) asserts: "Unlike Watson, Krog leaves herself less open to charges of appropriation." The merit of both statements will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

4.1 Watson and Krog: Who is the more appropriative?

In the opening paragraphs of his article, Watson introduces the theme of plagiarism by aligning Krog with Darrel Bristow-Bovey and Pamela Jooste, both commonly confirmed as outed plagiarists. Krog is consigned here to an already 'tried' category of non-author whose proliferation he sets up as a plagiaristic trend, in the "annals of plagiarism". Her name is to go down in history as belonging to the counterfeit and the fake (in the "house of plagiarism" [Watson, 2005: 50]); this is the building block of Watson's tentacular complaint.

Gagiano (2006) elucidates some of the contentious aspects of Watson's anthology, namely that he seems to foreground himself as poet, above the Bushmen poets who shared their stories with Bleek and Lloyd. His name is printed in bold on the cover below an illustration of one of the Bushmen. It is only at the back of his book that he attributes groups of poems to each of the individual narrators. As a reader one has no way of knowing to what extent we are reading Watson's work reflected in his own distinguished poetic voice or if this is the work and product of countless conversations between Lloyd and the /Xam narrators around a table. Secondly, he chooses to describe his texts as translations, a term that was considered problematic by readers and literary critics when

his book was published. Watson uses the term with the broader meaning of poetic interpretation; indeed the translations in the literal sense are the work of Bleek and Lloyd alone. Krog on the other hand, makes it quite clear that she has selected and adapted the texts and that these testimonies belong to the individual /Xam narrators to whom she clearly attributes each group of poems. The names of the narrators appear above her own on the front cover and she includes a biography and photograph of the informant at the beginning of each section. She also acknowledges her debt to the archive and Lloyd's *Specimens of Bushman Folklore*.

4.2 Arguments and responses to Watson's article:

"Annals of Plagiarism: Antjie Krog and the Bleek and Lloyd Collection"

Watson's article in *New Contrast* is only partly about the issue of plagiarism, even though he gives it the title "Annals of Plagiarism: Antjie Krog and the Bleek and Lloyd Collection". In a sense, to reflect the weight of his argument and his personal bias, the title should have included Watson's own work, *Return of the Moon*, as his complaint centres around his view that Krog "lifted the entire conception of her book" from his (Watson, 2005: 49). The accusation takes on a very personal flavour which transcends plagiarism to a critique of Krog's spelling, her "tin ear" and what he describes as "worthless" verse (2005: 52). This was after all not specifically a review of Krog's poetry and the quality of her verse, but a plagiarism claim. In response to the view that it was perhaps inappropriate to combine a review concomitantly with an accusation of plagiarism against Krog, Watson made the following comments:

It is a review. Strictly speaking it would be called a review article – you review a book and also discuss the wider issues involved. I mean I don't think I was muddying the waters at all. (Interview, May 29, 2006)

The mounting furore which ensued when the story was leaked to the press would suggest otherwise.

Alongside Watson's primary accusation against Krog (that she lifted the concept for her collection from *Return of the Moon*), stands the buttressing accusation that Krog has lifted from others as well. Watson (2005) accuses Krog of plagiarising English poet Ted Hughes's conception of myth in her acclaimed book *Country of My Skull* (winner of South Africa's *Sunday Times* Alan Paton award) in the very same article. Krog has "strategems" (2005: 59) of prior borrowing; Watson's choice of words here ("strategems") serves to show-up Krog's actions as part of a history of deliberate guile. Krog's metaphorical application of myth in *Country of My Skull* departs from the context in which Hughes used it. In response to the accusation, Krog (2006) methodically unpacks each phrase on Litnet explaining the meaning and context for her use of myth and how this differs from Hughes's conception:

It is ludicrous to label a similarity in idiom (or even conceptualisation) as 'plagiarism', particularly when there are myriad discussions on the nature of myth – thousands of these on the internet alone.

Ideas are intangible; one cannot own ideas; they "partake of human thought and language" (Meltzer, 1994: 1). One might ask: Is the same idea in a different context, the same idea?

The legitimacy of Watson's arguments is hindered by the consistent inclusion of his own personal dislike of Krog's poetry which seems to 'write her off', not least as being incapable of producing anything good (stolen or not). By villifying Krog as an author, Watson's stance is necessarily personal and undeniably implicates him in "muddying the waters", to use his own expression. Branding Krog's work an example of copying, Watson also invokes an ethical transgression traditionally associated with the plagiarist's lack of moral character (evidenced by an intention to deceive) as discussed in Chapter Three.

Indeed, the discourse of accusation is grievous, for it constitutes a threat to the perceived integrity of the accused. Plagiarism is viewed as a serious offence; even the slightest hint of illegitimate borrowing would lift the discourse of review to one of malpractice and the attendant juridical reprisals that follow suit. It has been illustrated however, that Watson's specific definition of plagiarism rests on derivative borrowing, which he motivates by negating the aesthetic value of Krog's poetry through review. Hence the review is a subordinate vehicle through which Watson substantiates his main plagiarism claim. Plagiarism is clearly the central focus of the article. The potential damage to Krog's reputation lead Kwela, the publisher of *The Stars Say 'Tsau'*, to consider a libel suit, while Random House (publishers of *Country of My Skull*) came to Krog's defense, refuting the plagiarism claim completely as "altogether unreasonable, venomous and academically shallow diatribe" (Stephen Johnson, 2006).

The language of vitriol and vendettas has surrounded the dispute between Watson and Krog. Johann de Lange (2006) refers to the "gleeful malice, the kind of hateful pettiness"

behind Watson's conduct. His article (2006) "The Return of the Repressed" focuses on Watson's egotism and anger, fuelled by Krog's current popularity and the success of her work over his own. De Lange conjures the old but familiar green-eyed monster surfacing in a moment of fury—or to apply his Freudian title—the threatened ego in the figure of Narcissus leaning over the pond, unable to see beyond his own mirror image. Shaun de Waal (2006) also highlights Watson's personal disgruntlement: "Watson is exercised by the similarity of Krog's Bushman project to his own 1991 work. That's what seems to get his goat most." Krog (2006) herself referred to Watson's plagiarism accusation as "vituperous [...] a bit like an accusation of plagiarism by Walt Disney studios for making poems out of the stories of the Brothers Grimm."

Whether Krog should have acknowledged Watson's *Return of the Moon* as one of her sources has been a source of contention. Rightly so, Krog (2006) states: "The fact that I didn't give Watson the recognition he thinks he deserves does not make me a plagiarist." Watson mentioned that Krog had paid him a visit a few years before her collection was published to inquire about the Bleek and Lloyd Collection (interview, May 29, 2006). In light of Watson's statement that "had she written even a sentence to thank me for my help ... That would have been absolutely fine" (*ibid.*), Krog might have incurred a more tempered reaction had she mentioned the fact that a similar project had been undertaken earlier by Watson (regardless of whether he was her source or not). Needless to say, Krog's intention here is important, as well as the fact that her collection was published in English and Afrikaans: "In fact, to bring the /Xam voices back into Afrikaans after so

many years, was the sole motivation for my initially undertaking the project” (2006).²⁴ Watson attributes the fact that her verses bear close resemblance to the originals to laziness, copying and an exaggerated use of the carriage return key. Yet Krog is clear too that her aim was to stick as closely as possible to the translations.

The primary accusation of plagiarism is but a claim until proven, yet to whom was this responsibility given once it became clear that copyright infringement was not at issue? If plagiarism is defined as an act of reception (“in the eye of the beholder” [Randall, 2001: vii]), who are the readers who influence analytical discourse and general opinion? The fact that a prolific writer’s integrity was being called into question could have implications and effects beyond the duration of the reader debate, from an economic, academic and personal perspective. As Randall underscores: “The discourse surrounding literary plagiarism is itself often the only court wherein the greatest number of putative cases are tried” (2001: 7). Even then, plagiarism cases like the one discussed, are ‘tried’ without sufficient in-depth explorations into how plagiarism is defined and constructed; predictably there is no consensual verdict, but rather an array of divided opinions.

4.3 Coverage in the *Mail and Guardian* (Friday, March 3-9, 2006):

“The Antjie Krog Saga”

The question of plagiarism was seized, sensationalised by the media and framed as a debate/split across different cultural binaries: Krog/Watson; Stellenbosch/UCT;

²⁴ In the introduction to *The Stars Say 'Tsau'* Krog explains that most Bushmen were bilingual by the end of the nineteenth century, speaking their own languages and Afrikaans, yet “[b]y the turn of the century they spoke chiefly Afrikaans” (2004a).

Afrikaans/English; Koeksusters/Cream pies, in the *Mail and Guardian*. On the Litnet website (2006), we read “Attack on Krog” which, as columnist Tom Eaton (2006) suggests, gives the whole debate a “religio-literary fervour” resonating as it does with biblical mythology (“Attack on Jericho”).²⁵ The discourse of plagiarism has been articulated through the metaphor of argument-as-war, precluding a platform for discussion; and heightening the bias of friends and foes, supporters and detractors alike.

Tom Eaton’s comment (2006) in the *Mail and Guardian* on the plagiarism allegations against Krog is largely satirical. Against the backdrop of divided opinions about Afrikaans versus English literature (“koeksusters vs. cream pies”) in South Africa, he uses the Antjie Krog fiasco to illustrate his point concerning the impassioned allegiance Afrikaans readers show to a writer who “has established a hold on the imagination of South Africa’s readers (all 173 of them) in a way that no other writer of fiction or poetry has managed in a very long time” (2006; parenthesis in orig.). Eaton casts doubt on the validity of this hold by showing up Krog’s (small pool of) 173 supporters as being Afrikaans fanatics who share the bond of their language, rather than a critical appreciation for the literary value of her work. These fans also lay claim to Krog’s shared Afrikaner identity (“onse Antjie”) notwithstanding the fact that she works bilingually. In a sense, Watson comes off better as he is hardly given mention in the article, whereas Krog is set up as a hero in the eyes of a limited few, according to Eaton (and perhaps bound for a fall?).

²⁵ The subtitle of the *Mail and Guardian* story—“The Antjie Krog Saga”—is indicative of the serialisation in a chronicle more than a debate; a ‘saga’ also alludes to the medieval Scandinavian narratives which dealt with historic or legendary figures and events (*The Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*).

The plagiarism accusation is satirically construed as an act of heresy by Eaton (2006) following the fervent responses he receives from two distressed Afrikaans callers who criticise his publication of Watson's article in the *New Contrast* journal.²⁶ The male caller is outraged at the attack on Krog's reputation while the female is upset and worried. Eaton sends up the first caller for his abusive name-calling and humorously bad English, while the second caller is "intelligent", telling him he has done the wrong thing, (although she has not even read Watson's article). Eaton strips both callers of all credibility, the first for his swearing and his inability to speak English very well and the second because she makes a moral judgement on something she has not even read.

Eaton (2006) makes the generalisation that those most offended by the recent allegations against Krog are "religious people who feel their faith has been attacked". These individuals are "young, intense, emotional and fiercely protective of a personality they have divined from their imaginations and a few lines of verse". Again, Eaton creates a demographic assumption about who Krog's fans are and it would seem that he credits this group with little intelligence, genuine interest, or sound knowledge of Krog's work. Clearly, Krog's literary accomplishment does not stand on "a few lines of verse", since she has published widely (over ten volumes of poetry); most recently, her two books *Country of My Skull* and *A Change of Tongue* received critical acclaim internationally. Her awards are numerous and her works have been translated into several foreign languages. Surely her devotees, as Eaton describes them, are unquantifiable.

²⁶ Eaton was the editor of the *New Contrast* literary journal at the time Watson's article appeared in the winter edition of 2005. He subsequently resigned in 2006.

To continue the cult metaphor, Eaton cites hero worship as he goes on to make references to the “pious respect for an injured deity [...] Krog has apostles. A personality cult is in full worship [...]” Mobilising the metaphor of religion, Eaton describes Krog’s “apostles” over and above regular fans; she is ascribed the status of a deity who needs to be defended and vindicated. In this protective light, the collective devotion to Krog and her majestic status is reminiscent of Hans Christian Anderson’s tale *The Emperor’s New Clothes* – perhaps Eaton would suggest that behind the fawning of her ignorant followers, Krog’s true status would become transparent. By focusing on the frenzy around Krog, Eaton trivialises the seriousness of the claim made against her. It should be recalled that Watson made the attack personal in the first place. The satirical reference Eaton makes to his act of “heresy” in publishing Watson’s article in *New Contrast*, seems to justify his own actions (indirectly) – namely that he has brought to print a controversial, unorthodox opinion which needs to be heard, as unpopular as it might be. Eaton attempts to solidify his position and to bolster his authority by clothing himself in the emperor’s new clothes.

4.4 Minor misdemeanours: Shaun de Waal’s response

“Much Ado”

De Waal’s article is a probing analysis of the specific arguments in Watson’s article against Krog. His conclusion is that the case against Krog is not as strong as Watson would like to have it. Without pointing fingers, he puts the focus of Watson’s complaint into a far less sensational light. De Waal (2006) contends that Watson’s accusation is not a singular one of plagiarism, even though the aim of Watson’s critique is to show how

Krog belongs to the same family of plagiarists as Bristow-Bovey and Jooste: “Watson’s accusation is in fact a cluster of accusations, radiating out from a charge of plagiarism but not limited to straightforward plagiarism.”

In comparison to Watson’s substantial criticism of Krog as a poet, de Waal points out that the instances where the plagiarism accusation appears specifically are few (for example in relation to the “plagiaristic spirit” [Watson, 2005: 50] of her introductory notes). Watson airs the complaint that “she was stealing the conception of my book, my way of working with the material. She borrowed the very format of my book” (interview, May 29, 2006). According to de Waal, “the strongest thread of Watson’s argument is that Krog is a bad poet.” As Krog (2006) pointed out in her rebuttal on Litnet, Watson’s article covers 14 pages. From this perspective, Watson’s attempt to prove his case would seem rather disproportionate. Is it the poetry or the plagiarism? To what subject are the remaining pages of the article dedicated? De Waal (2006) sums it up succinctly: “Watson is exercised by the similarity of Krog’s Bushman project to his own 1991 work. That’s what seems to get his goat most.”

The conclusion reached is that Watson’s annoyance and resentment towards a fellow poet is based on her using an idea that ‘belongs’ to him (the proof of which incidentally is the fact that she uses it badly to boot—in other words, she wasn’t able to transform, but only to “deface”—to borrow from T.S. Eliot’s aphorism). De Waal (2006) shows that both poets draw on different aesthetic strategies which are equally valid, contrasting Watson’s transformative imperative with Krog’s close transposition of the source material. He concedes that it would have been wise for Krog to acknowledge Watson’s 1991 work,

although neither poets in his view are immune to practices of appropriation. De Waal questions whether it is more or less appropriative to rework as little as possible (Krog) or to rework extensively (Watson).

Underpinning these choices of course is the split between modernist and postmodernist aesthetics, which de Waal raises at the end; however he admits that “the discourse around the Krog issue hasn’t yet gone wide enough to encompass such ideas.” The ubiquity of borrowing is emphasised: “All art is built on reworking what has been done before.” Echoing Krog’s witty analogy about the preposterous idea of Walt Disney accusing a person of plagiarism for making poems out of the Brothers Grimm tales, de Waal cites the example of the million-rand cookery book industry: Could one stand accused of plagiarising a recipe?

4.5 The anxiety of competition: Two further responses on Litnet

“Speaking Through the Mask of Culture”: Barbara Adair (Litnet, 13 March 2006)

“Literary Polemics: Questions and Answers; Claims and Responses”: Madame Lacoste (Litnet, 15 March 2006)

[...] The definition of plagiarism is shaped less by clear ideas of right and wrong than by the particular, at times peculiar, character of the community in which the alleged offence takes place.

--- Jonathan Yardley, in Meltzer, 1994: 73.

The plagiarism debate surely says something about the “character of the community” in South African writing circles and the culture of literary celebrity (Morris, 2006). The

debate highlights the gap between academe and creative practice which de Kok (2006) fears has “become the ground for technologically based witch-hunts pursued under the guise of research.” From the realm of criminality, of theft, we move to the notion of the witch-hunt (not forgetting Eaton’s satirical positioning in the *Mail and Guardian*, where he sends up the inclusion of Watson’s inflammatory article in his journal as heresy). The most probing and pertinent response to the debate concerns writing itself, within the aesthetics of modernism and postmodernism. Adair (2006) has asked: “[W]hy is there no scholarly debate on what writing is?” A symposium, as Lacoste (2006) suggests, is called for, not a “death sentence”. A plagiarism charge is serious and as such calls for an exchange around writing in the twenty-first century, more than a courtroom.

An analysis which references the socio-cultural and literary contexts of modernism and postmodernism highlights the complexity of the issues in ways that are highly relevant and useful. Adair is less concerned about whether Krog stole, than whether a writer can in fact ever do anything that is original. Is quintessential originality possible? This question has reared its head for centuries as writers seeking to the status of ‘inventor’ and ‘creator genius’ have striven to be the first, the originators. At the same time, the fear of being stolen from has further brought into question the alternating conception of originality as myth or construct. It is useful to recall Meltzer here: “Theft, in other words, is always the theme underlying any notion of originality; and paranoia is inevitable in this sense [...]” (1994: 70).

Lacoste (ascribing to herself the chameleon nature of postmodern identity discourse through the pseudonym “Madame Lacoste”) describes the current Krog/Watson furore as

a “psychodrama” as she brings the question “Who was first? Who was second?” to bear on Krog’s poem “I think I am the first – Lady Anne of Tafelberg”. One cannot miss the politics of envy and jealousy embroiled in most discussions of the case (although a psychological reading is not the focus of this study). Intellectual wrestling over the ethics of ownership, of exclusivity over sharing has continued as the /Xam texts are constructed either as communal or original (where the latter is a mark of guaranteed authenticity, and the former opens up ethical issues of cross-cultural borrowing). The dilemma is articulated by Helize Van Vuuren in her review of another mediation of the /Xam as follows:

Does the enigmatic material reworked by Watson, Krog or James gain more appeal and does it add to the stature of the poet involved, or does it open a window onto the world of the /Xam? (2003: 79)

Several critics have chastised Watson for his acerbic tone and Lacoste (2006) asks whether literary etiquette ought not to have required a more “sober, academic tone.”

Watson defended his response candidly as follows:

Let me just say something which I don’t think is understood in this country. I am being insulting. There is a very small place for insults sometimes. It shouldn’t be too often. In fact, it should be used very rarely. I was insulted by that book of hers. In that particular instance, yes, of course, I was being unkind. (Interview, May 29, 2006)

The idea that plagiarism is a personal matter, rather than a matter of profit (Halbert, 1994) resonates throughout Watson’s interview. Similarly, Krog’s response in an interview (“Met hierdie liggaam is ek”) with journalist Willemien Brümmer (2006) in *Die Burger* a few months after this particular plagiarism debate subsided, tells of the emotional toll which the accusation took on her:

Ek verwerk dit nog steeds. Dis ’n verskriklike ding omdat dit die heel belangrikste ding in jou lewe aangaan, en dis jou integriteit. Daar’s nie ’n manier wat jy dit kan

herstel nie [...] Dis soos kindermolestering. Ek moet vir die res van my lewe hiermee sit. (2 June, 2006)

(I am still working through it. It's a terrible thing because it's about the most important thing in your life and that's your integrity. There's no way of restoring it. [...] It's like child molestation. I have to live with it for the rest of my life.)

The metaphor of “child molestation” turns the paternity metaphor of authorship (the author as begetter of the book – the “child”) on its head; here the impact of the accusation aligns the ‘maternal non-author’ with harm incurred not only against another author, but against the purity and innocence of original creation which is despoiled. Such a response obliquely recalls the gendered notions of originality discussed in Chapter Three, in which the true author is perceived as masculine, while the feminine is objectified and ‘othered’ as suspect.

These readings echo Adair’s analysis of modernism’s case for the individual: “we need to think of ourselves as individual, we need the security that we alone occupy a special space in the world” (2006). And yet, of course, there are only limited possibilities for innovation, which is the reason she cites for artists necessarily “speaking through the mask of culture”. As de Waal (2006) asserts: “[E]very cultural artifact is a version of another cultural artefact, and individuality is a charade.” Postmodernism turns the nature of fictionality and writing on its head; it breaks down borders between genres, subverting prior certainty of an essential difference between the original and its referent. To cite an example, *Country of My Skull* blends poetry with the testimonies recorded at the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. This work is neither fact nor fiction; some would call it ‘faction’ (a portmanteau of ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’), while

Krog (2004b) explains that the book was classified in the Netherlands under the rubric of “creative non-fiction”.

Maintaining a strict border between fiction and non-fiction would also buttress those arguments which appraise non-fiction according to certain standards of scholarly apparatus within an academic tradition. Critiquing Krog’s *The Stars Say ‘Tsau’*, Skotnes highlights the distinction as follows:

She behaved half as a scholar and half as a poet. It wasn’t fiction. It’s a piece of non-fiction and there are traditions of scholarship attached to working with non-fiction. I think she was a cavalier in a sense. [...] I couldn’t recommend it as a reference work – it’s too inaccurate for that. [...] I think Watson was quite rightly offended. She clearly depended on the research of everybody and acknowledged nobody. (Interview by the author, August 8, 2006)

Krog’s authorial ‘behaviour’ frustrates easy classification; her previous works straddle the (at times) diaphanous border between fact and fiction; she takes on multiple identities throughout her texts, confounding the separation between scholar and poet, wife, mother, artist, journalist and so on:

Isn’t the splitting of the self into many selves precisely what makes it possible to permeate borders of genre with authenticity showing up the ridiculousness of compartmentalized art and lies? Isn’t linking oneself with as many genres and as many cultural, social, linguistic, political communities as possible underlying the embeddedness of the self in others? Why are we so obsessed with the individual and the personal “I”? (Krog, 2004b: 5)

Krog (2006) points out that writing would seem to be moving towards a new genre where non-fiction is concerned (and new ways of citation) and she is certainly under no illusion about the contribution of others, all text-makers in the process of producing a work like *Country of My Skull*: “This work is not a revelatory egg laid exclusively by myself” (*ibid.*). At a seminar in Stellenbosch entitled “Fact Bordering on Fiction”, Krog (2004b)

put forward the suggestion of a new genre called “autobiographical fiction”. This genre would highlight the fictional nature of truth-telling and the fragmentary composition of the ‘I’, unstable and shifting in postmodern literature. Indeed, in an uncanny echo of Adair’s phrase “speaking through the mask of culture”, Krog (2004b) discloses that she uses the first person ‘I’ when applying a mask to her face.

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Chapter 5

Conclusion

Plagiarism, like literature, cannot be found in a text, or even in an intertext. It exists only in the space circumscribed by texts, readers, and their cultural presuppositions, that is, in the pragmatic space of the literary context.

--- Randall, 2001: 190

Marilyn Randall, Professor of French at the University of Western Ontario and author of *Pragmatic Plagiarism* (2001), analyses plagiarism as a discursive strategy within a postmodern aesthetic practice. As a discourse of power, Randall (2001: 11) suggests that plagiarism may be construed pragmatically in two ways: as an authorial act and as an act of reception. The former refers to the plagiarist who appropriates the work of another in order to gain symbolic power, while the latter refers to the accuser. As a discourse of accusation, plagiarism becomes a “potential weapon for exerting control over one’s rivals in a contest for ascendancy” (*ibid.*). An accusation of plagiarism can ruin a writer’s reputation, regardless of whether it is true or false: “Reputation is a symbolic social property that can be possessed, lost, stolen, damaged, and sued for” (Randall, 1991: 526). Shifting the discourse of power, Meltzer casts the act of violation (recalling Krog’s metaphor of molestation) instead as one perpetrated against the accused: “Indeed, to be accused of plagiarising is in some cases to be even more personally violated than to be plagiarised – and this is true – significantly, whether one has in fact committed the robbery or not” (1994: 42).

The disputes around the ethics of cultural borrowing, and the concomitant valorisations of imitation over copying, allusion over appropriation, suggest that the problem of plagiarism has always lurked in the murky battle over the individual's inviolable right to 'his' property as associated with 'his' personhood:

[T]he very existence of charges of plagiarism – especially in the form of invectives, intended as personal insults – is sufficient indication that usurping another's ideas, words, and expressions has always constituted an affront to the integrity of the victim, and a slur on the integrity of the perpetrator. (Randall, 2001: 95)

As this thesis has sought to emphasise, “[p]lagiarism is upsetting because it is personal” (Halbert, 1994: 117). In summary of the Krog/Watson case, most polemicists (Blatchford, de Jager, de Lange, Johnson, Mason-Jones, Morris)²⁷ responded on Litnet in defense of Krog, while support for Watson was virtually absent. Krog duly responded to each critique submitting her comments and concerns; Watson did not respond at all until he accepted the request for an interview two months later in light of this thesis: “I am blissfully ignorant of all these debates because I haven't followed them” (Interview by the author, May 29, 2006). Other than the article in *New Contrast* in which he summarily dismissed Krog as having any merit as a poet, as well as relegating her to the ranks of the exposed plagiarists Bristow-Bovey and Jooste, Watson has remained notably silent.

Following Randall's discourse of accusation, it might be argued that Watson attempted to exert symbolic power over Krog by discrediting her. In his article for *New Contrast*, Watson (2005: 61) points to the irony that Krog should enjoy the status of success she does in South Africa today, given the timeous reality check he offers his readers that she

²⁷ Responses by these polemicists are available from <http://www.litnet.co.za/seminarroom/default.asp>.

is really merely hiding her true identity as a “copy-typist”. One of the most revelatory comments from the interview discloses his true opinion of Krog:

Well, I just think of her as a housewife from Kroonstad masquerading as Joan of Arc. So I didn't have a sense of her as a cultural icon. And I don't have a sense of her as a cultural icon. (Interview, May 29, 2006)

Watson's article swathes him in the emperor's new clothes as he masquerades his scholarly authority over what constitute the 'true' properties of authorship, notably the emphasis on style, flair, personality and originality. Perhaps his point is that if you don't have it, you just don't have it. And therefore you steal it.

The debate which ensued on Litnet is reflective not merely of the personal nature of a plagiarism accusation, but also the complexity surrounding questions of authorship, cultural appropriation and originality in a postmodern world. As a matter of reception, it has been argued that plagiarism is generally defined as the opposing binary of a naturalised set of authorial attributes:

Plagiarism is what has been accused of being and condemned as plagiaristic – it is an institutional judgement which creates its own object as an expression of the limits of tolerance with respect to norms such as propriety, originality and authenticity. (Randall, 1991: 535)

Plagiarism accusations are an index of the social, cultural, literary and economic practices of a particular time. The quest for originality – both its origin and successive displacement, has revealed the embattled evolution of the notion of individuality and its contestation with regard to the rules and conventions governing intellectual property in a more or less identity-shorn postmodern world. As Howard puts it: “Plagiarism, then, counts among the categories of identity that contemporary juridical structures engender, naturalise and immobilise” (1999: 111).

Watson's allegations and the various responses these summoned, offer insight into the current categorisation of authorship and its otherwise 'illegitimate brother' (branded with the mark of Cain perhaps), plagiarism. Several critics have turned to familial metaphors to describe the relationship between these terms (arising from the logocentric notion of the text as offshoot of a male creator or father in the eighteenth century). However, neither authorship nor plagiarism are stable unified categories, but shifting socio-political constructs entangled and inseparable from one another. Indeed, "[t]extuality and authorship can never be fully articulated – much less regulated. They can only be enacted" (Howard, 1999: 156).

Chapter Three explored the properties of authorship the plagiarist is seen to transgress, informed by changing values and perceptions surrounding the individual, the community and heritage. Originality persists in our vocabulary clothed alternatively as an essential imperative or as a myth which eludes us as we try to pursue it. The emphasis on originality as the defining characteristic of authorship can be "seen as a strategy of institutional self-validation which protects the annihilation of difference in the guise of protecting individuality" (Randall, 1991: 525). In a court of law, where difference may fall within the purview of copying and copyright infringement, Halbert concludes "the postmodernist will lose" (1994: 116). Through an analysis of the differences between copyright infringement and plagiarism in Chapter One, the conclusion was drawn that plagiarism and the law intersect imperfectly. Although the negative connotations surrounding plagiarism have been historically stable, the fact that those textual practices deemed plagiaristic has changed through the ages, suggests that plagiarism is a site of contest open to change in ways the law may not be.

Chapter Four articulated the irony behind Watson's arguments in the fact that there is no original text to begin with – he has borrowed from the /Xam texts himself which have their root in oral performance; furthermore these texts have been mediated by the work of the linguists Bleek and Lloyd and an entire literary tradition which Van Vuuren (2003: 78) describes as the /Xam “industry”.²⁸ The difference in aesthetic strategy Watson asserts, has been argued as quintessentially what constitutes good and bad borrowing. His project is believed to bear the aesthetic merit and transformative component necessary to a worthy and legitimate act of borrowing, instating him as a true author, while Krog's work is perceived as lazy copying, derivative at best; a negation of such values, showing her up as an impostor: “[...] she wants to publish but she does not want to do any real work, whether in checking sources or in doing the necessary background reading” (Watson, 2005: 50-51).

An important premise of this study has been to locate plagiarism as a discursive formation that cannot rest on textual determinants alone, but is informed by authorial intention and reader reception. If the stature of the /Xam is enlarged by Krog's publication and if her intention was to promote visibility of a vital cultural heritage from which society can learn about identity, community and largesse, then her contribution holds merit beyond her signature. It was shown in Chapter One that reader reception in the Krog/Watson case was limited by formal, monolithic definitions of plagiarism which closed down discussion, in defense of textual purity. Reader reception among journalists at the Cape Town Book Fair and critics (Kirby [2005] and Bauer [2005]) revealed that

²⁸ Although Bleek and Lloyd represent the cornerstones of the /Xam literary tradition, several writers followed in their wake transforming the texts from the archive into stories and more significantly, poems: Marais (1927), Markowitz (1956) and Cope (1963).

plagiarism was viewed largely as a textual feature, without consideration of authorial intent. Randall makes the suggestion that the question we should be asking is not “what is plagiarism?” but “who is reading plagiarism?” (2001: vii). The reader is inscribed in a complex social, economical and political context which influences the reception of texts, how they are judged and reviewed.

In 1952, Lindey came to the conclusion that there could be no final answers with respect to the conceptual muddle that is plagiarism. He also cast doubt as to whether a truly definitive appraisal of plagiarism would be ever achieved (1952: xiv). This has been the line of argumentation followed in this study, through an analysis of the prevailing moods and historical judgements made on the nature of authorship and the presuppositions on which accusations of plagiarism rest. Plagiarism is a complex subject: “Its history is the history of man’s striving for expression” (Lindey, 1952: 2), and one might add, the history of the socio-political context which governs the reception of such expression. Plagiarism is subject to and reflective of social and economic change and as such, can never be fixed.

APPENDIX 1

Interview with Stephen Watson, 29 May 2006

CV: Robert Greig wrote an article for *The Sunday Independent* in which he suggests that plagiarism is today's fashion fad in intellectual life. What is your opinion on the spate of plagiarism cases in our society? Is plagiarism "an unhealthy cultural obsession"?

SW: I simply haven't done enough research to know whether it is an obsession or whether it has become the subject of obsession because its incidence has risen dramatically ... These are questions one would have to investigate. Certainly, my experience as a lecturer is that there has been a dramatic increase in cases of plagiarism. There are a host of factors behind that, like the internet. Again, one couldn't be anything but speculative or conjectural about that. There does seem to be a nationwide, perhaps global ethical shift. When the brouhaha broke out with Krog, somebody wrote to me from the University of London – he had written an article in which he was bemoaning the incidence of plagiarism at the University of Glastonbury where he teaches. He pointed out that when he was a student at Oxford one didn't dare commit plagiarism. You would be committing vocational suicide. You tampered with somebody else's words. Nowadays if you plagiarise, you might get a warning, fail your paper or do community service, but it isn't really a big deal.

CV: Let us consider plagiarism outside of the academic context. For the modernists, borrowing was acceptable provided that it was transformative. T.S. Eliot has been described as the "heroic plagiarist" (Howard). Peter Wilhelm of the *Financial Mail* made the point that if the poem *The Wasteland* were published today, Eliot would be considered a plagiarist. Do you agree?

SW: One of the things that makes the whole plagiarism debate interesting, more than the intent to shame, is of course the fact that we are all plagiarists. We are all cultural plagiarists. We are all in the business of borrowing. Where the debate gets more interesting and tricky, is the distinction between stealing and borrowing. Is there a distinction? For example, as with the whole Antjie Krog issue. Some said she was just borrowing; I said she was stealing, I was quite sure of it. She actually came to visit me about five years ago. She was very cagey. In fact, she had read my book and she wanted to know about my sources etc etc. I told her about the Bleek and Lloyd Collection. She said she wanted to include a sample of the work for an expanded Afrikaans anthology.

CV: *Met Woorde Soos Met Kerse?*

SW: Yes ... and so she went away after I had fed her all these things.

CV: You say "fed". The Bleek and Lloyd Collection exists in the public domain. Everybody has access to it. Antjie Krog credits this source material. In response to your

article in *New Contrast*, Krog asserted that lack of recognition did not make her a plagiarist. What is your comment on this?

SW: Again, this is why the plagiarism debate is so tricky. Yes, technically, legally, absolutely, she is not a plagiarist at all. Perhaps I should have spelt out in that article that where the legal definition of where plagiarism begins and ends, is where it begins and ends. For the sake of a court of law, there have to be strict parameters obviously. This is partly why I was horrified that the article was leaked to the popular press. But I know from my inside knowledge of her, the way she was working and the meeting that we had, that she was in fact stealing.

CV: What was she stealing?

SW: She was stealing the conception of my book and my way of working with the material. She borrowed the very format of my book. She was in fact very conveniently going to the Bleek and Lloyd Collection, taking material, turning it into free verse poems, maintaining that it was the work of //Kabbo and those other people, but in fact it wasn't. It was her work; the book is copyrighted in her name.

CV: On the Kwela website Krog is listed as the compiler of the work.

SW: She isn't a compiler. I think that's a lie. The book is her intellectual property. Furthermore, she has changed those records into poems. She has translated in a certain sense, those versions. To turn prose into poems is not compiling. It is to turn the work into your work.

CV: There is a tradition of reworking material from the Bleek and Lloyd Collection. This is not a new project.

SW: Yes, but the precise conception, I mean, of the introduction explaining the working method, choosing 36 extracts, doing notes etc. That hasn't been done before.

CV: Can that be called plagiarism?

SW: I think it can be. As I said, had she not come to visit me, spoken to me, asked me at length how I did it, gone off and done very much the same thing with the same extracts... and then refusing to acknowledge me; that was calculated.

CV: Hypothetically had she given you recognition ...

SW: Yes, had she written even a sentence to thank me for my help, that would have been absolutely fine.

CV: Have you speculated as to why she didn't give you the "coup de chapeau"?

SW: Who knows. This is where one gets into another kind of psychology. There is a kind of, and again, this is speculation about personal motive ... There is a kind of arrogance there, in her failure to acknowledge. Let me put it slightly differently. I have a very

strong sense that cultural work is a conversation. No matter who you might think you are. You are always talking to something or someone. You are talking to the tradition, or to your peers hopefully, to a readership, you are talking to the future, sometimes you are talking to the dead. In literary/cultural work you are always involved in a conversation. This is why acknowledgement is important. On the face of it sometimes it is just a formality – thanks to one's wife, one's dog etc. It isn't just a routine matter however. It is an acknowledgement that you are part of a conversation. Moreover, what you are doing is never your own unaided work. In this respect, I think it is true to say that literary work—despite the fact that it is in other aspects a highly elitist activity—is profoundly democratic because you are always talking. You have to acknowledge the fact that you are in dialogue and it is part of the ethics of literary practice. To pretend that you are not in dialogue, not to acknowledge, even if it is just a tiny acknowledgement—to put the point slightly melodramatically perhaps—is equivalent of literary fascism: I am the only one who is talking, I am not talking to anybody else and I don't need anybody else. All this is my own unaided invention.

CV: Annie Gagiano has pointed out that you didn't acknowledge Jack Cope as a predecessor in versifying the Bleek and Lloyd translations. Where does one draw the line as far as acknowledgement is concerned?

SW: Where one draws the line is sometimes difficult to establish. Cope only did about two translations. I didn't get the idea for my book from Jack Cope. I got the idea from collaborating with Pippa Skotnes. I duly acknowledged everybody out of which that book arose and I was careful to do that. The debate with Krog has been more complex. There is that personal connection with me.

CV: She describes you as someone who has guided her a lot, as a mentor.

SW: Well if someone is your mentor, you acknowledge them. That makes it even more ironic.

CV: It would seem that Krog was taken completely by surprise by your article.

SW: That, I'm afraid, I just don't buy that.

CV: How would you describe your relationship with Krog?

SW: Well, she arrived in Cape Town in the mid 1980s and was pretty lost. I think she had to leave Kroonstad for all sorts of dire reasons. I think I met her at a book fair. I did what I could to help her. I would hardly consider myself her mentor. (She is older than me for a start). Certainly I introduced her to people and did what I could to be friendly.

CV: Did you approach Krog or contact her when *The Stars Say 'Tsau'* came out?

SW: You know I felt so slapped in the face that she hadn't spoken to *me* and that there had been no acknowledgement. I thought it best not to respond immediately. So I waited about a year. I also expected some reviewers to call her on it. Perhaps it's part and parcel of the inadequate system of reviewing in this country. On that basis, I decided to write

something about it. I also wanted to double check things before writing. I found that her work did belong in a plagiaristic orbit.

CV: Alongside Bristow-Bovey and Jooste.

SW: That was probably unfair of me if I may say so.

CV: Should Krog not have had an opportunity to respond before your article went to print?

SW: One doesn't phone people up to warn them of a bad review of their work. You always have the right to reply in the following issue. There are equally harsh reviews that appear in *The New York Review of Books*. It might sound naïve of me to say this, but *New Contrast* has a subscription of about 300 people who I thought would know my book and know the context.

CV: Some have felt that you were ill-advised in combining a review of Krog's *The Stars Say 'Tsau'* at the same time as making an accusation of plagiarism against her.

SW: I was asked to review the book but there were wider issues. It *is* a review. Strictly speaking it would be called a review article – you review a book and also discuss the wider issues involved. I mean I don't think I was muddying the waters at all.

CV: What about the tone of your article? Critics have noted that you might have used a more academic tone.

SW: Let me just say something which I don't think is understood in this country. I am being insulting.

CV: That's clear.

SW: There is a small place for insults sometimes. It shouldn't be too often. In fact, it should be used very rarely. I was insulted by that book of hers. In that particular instance, yes of course I was being unkind. Of course I was making fun of her, mocking the fact that she can't write English verse. That is the recourse that people sometimes go to when they feel exceedingly affronted by somebody's literary behaviour.

CV: You were accused of libel.

SW: The publishers had to come out swinging.

CV: An accusation of plagiarism can be potentially ruinous to a writer's reputation. It can be the end of your writing career. What is your opinion?

SW: Well it doesn't seem to be the case these days. That is part of the cultural climate we live in. Bristow-Bovey is writing again. Pamela Jooste's novel was not taken off the shelves and apparently she is writing another novel.

CV: Let's talk about the attribution aspect. Krog attributes the /Xam authors by name. She also acknowledges the Bleek and Lloyd Collection. You write that Krog affronted Lucy Lloyd even more than she did you. How so?

SW: Yes, because I felt there was a kind of deceit at work. The deceit works like this: Conveniently, all the archival material is in the public domain, so you and I are at liberty to do anything we want. We can copy it. Nobody could have any reason for quibbling with you. People who have worked with this collection like Pippa Skotnes know that there is a kind of ethic not cast in legal stone, but that informs the way one uses that kind of material. Like Nigel Penn and others who worked with this collection, Skotnes was also affronted, horrified by the preponderance of what seems to be sheer copying. The collection seems to offer people a wonderful way of having your cake and eating it. You can copy-type the material quite literally, put it in a book, attribute it to //Kabbo, but it becomes your copyright at the same time – without doing any work. To me, that seems illegitimate; a travesty of those who have worked extensively with the archive. In any case, it doesn't work as literature what Krog has done. It adds insult to injury for Krog to pretend that she knows what English poetry is and that she can write it. Again, yes, that is highly subjective on my part. There seems to be a kind of subterfuge in the use of the material because as soon as someone says you copied it, you then say you are just a compiler or an editor. On the other hand, it's your copyrighted material.

CV: Krog's project did however introduce something new. There are marked differences between your work and hers. She includes a female voice among the informant texts and also foregrounds the individual contribution of each informant much more than your work did.

SW: Not only do I acknowledge my sources, I do provide a list at the back of the sources for each informant. Also, I am not really pretending that this is anything other than my work. That is what I am at pains to spell out in the introduction. I take those records and turn them into something other than what they are. They aren't the authors, or rather, there is a joint authorship going on. The Bleek and Lloyd Collection is not a collection of poems and as soon as you take something and turn it into verse, you are authoring or re-authoring the work.

CV: You called your verses translations. Can you explain that?

SW: They should be strictly called second translations because it is a translation of a translation, or third translation in fact. But that is a standard usage, it's not a subterfuge on my part in the English language tradition.

CV: Turning to Litnet as the main platform for the debate, have you followed the comments recorded there?

SW: I am blissfully ignorant of all these debates because I haven't followed them.

CV: May I ask why you have chosen not to respond?

SW: You know I don't really feel I have anything more to say.

CV: Where has the cultural conversation gone that you spoke about?

SW: It's all around. You know I didn't really think I was putting something big on the table. Maybe it's my naïveté. I certainly thought I was writing an exceedingly negative review of what I thought to be a very bad—

CV: on a cultural icon—

SW: Well I just think of her as a housewife from Kroonstad masquerading as Joan of Arc. So I didn't have a sense of her as a cultural icon. And I don't have a sense of her as a cultural icon. Perhaps that was my mistake. Partly one of the reasons I didn't re-enter the debate is because it became a target for any number of projections, a useful vehicle for people to transfuse all kinds of disgruntlements and obsessions. There were interesting spin-offs obviously, but what startled me was the sense that it became of a sort of magnet for all sorts of free-floating psychic material: men versus women, Afrikaner versus English, UCT versus Stellenbosch. There was an interesting question about South African literary culture behind this astonishing range of passionate and impassioned responses.

CV: What about Krog's *Country of My Skull*?

SW: I thought it was another bad and largely appropriative piece of work. If you read Elaine Scarry and go to *Country of My Skull*, there are so many echoes. Her whole way of working is deeply appropriative, if not plagiaristic. I wasn't impressed. And if someone calls you on something you have borrowed without acknowledgement, it seems crazy to me that one would say I never read that or I didn't read Hughes. The gracious thing would be to say my research assistant made a mistake or mea culpa. But to go back to your original question, I didn't really have more to say. There must have been something else going on in the whole issue for people to have gone so "bedonnerd" about it. I didn't take the whole Litnet thing seriously at the start because the Eve Gray response was a corporate response. It was quite clear that a whole lot of people were marshalled to put out the fire. And for the rest – I really felt that I had made it quite clear as to the distinction I make which I thought useful, the distinction between derivative and transformative borrowing. That was the kernel of my argument. In my terms, derivative borrowing is plagiaristic.

CV: How did the story get leaked to *The Sunday Times*?

SW: I have no idea. They contacted me and told me it had been leaked. I asked them please not to print the story.

CV: Tom Eaton has resigned from *New Contrast*.

SW: Yes, well, he was too busy anyway. It was a convenient way for him to step down. He was just way too committed.

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