

Plagiarists: Catch Your Own Clue

By Susan J. Douglas



Ann Coulter: a thieving wench.

Plagiarism is on the rise—in journalism, by bestselling authors, on college campuses and online. But the one thing those of us victimized by it can't do is speak up. If we do, we are accused of “sour grapes.”

Occasionally, reporters who make things up (Jayson Blair) or copy from another newspaper (most recently New York Post reporter Andy Geller) do get fired or suspended for sheer fabrication or thievery. But increasingly, only the form of expression is protected: I can steal your ideas all I want as long as I put them in my own words.

Educators are supposed to teach our students that intellectual theft is the worst crime they can commit in the academy, yet these same students see all sorts of people, from Doris Kearns Goodwin to Ann Coulter, profiting from it. One study in 2005 found that 70 percent of undergraduates said they had cheated. And why not?

Two recent cases expose the increasingly elastic journalistic and publishing standards vis-à-vis plagiarism. In early July, *The New York Post* reported that John Barrie, whose company iParadigms provides a plagiarism tracking service, had found “textbook plagiarism” in Ann Coulter’s latest vehicle for personal enrichment and self-promotion, *Godless*. The passages in question, lifted from the *San Francisco Chronicle*, a Planned Parenthood publication, and a newspaper in Portland, Maine, ranged from 24 to 33 words each.

Coulter’s publisher Crown responded, “The number of words used by our author in these snippets is so minimal that there is no requirement for attribution.” Similarly, Universal Press Syndicate, which syndicates her column, dismissed the charges, “There are only so many ways you can rewrite a fact and minimal match text is not plagiarism.” As Tim Grieve asked in *Salon*, “How many words can an author steal before the theft counts as plagiarism?” The answer, it seems, rests on how much she’s raking in for her companies.

In another case, Valerie Lawson, author of *Out of the Sky She Came*, reportedly the definitive biography of Mary Poppins creator Pamela Travers, found much of her research presented as original reporting in a *New Yorker* article by Caitlin Flanagan. Flanagan interviewed Lawson for the piece, yet her book was never mentioned. The January/February 2006 *Columbia Journalism Review* reprinted the entire e-mail exchange between Lawson and *New Yorker* editors over the borrowing.

Lawson provided example after example of how previously unknown material about Travers magically appeared in the Flanagan article without attribution. “Much of her

article could not be supported by her interviews,” noted Lawson dryly, because “the information came from papers and correspondence of people who are now dead.”

The *New Yorker* insisted that Flanagan had done all the supporting research herself, and replied that “credit given your book in our piece was adequate.” The magazine refused to publish Lawson’s initial letter of complaint, proposing, instead, that she write them a letter of gratitude for reminding people about the creator of Mary Poppins.

My own experience with this has been equally unpleasant. In February 2004, Meredith Michaels and I published *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined Women*. One year later, the journalist Judith Warner published her book *Perfect Madness* on the same subject, the unattainable standards of perfection surrounding motherhood. Much of the argument, point after point, was identical to our book—we compiled six pages of eerily similar passages—yet we were not cited once. Like Lawson, we saw research we had done included without attribution. But because there were no lengthy passages containing identical prose, we had no recourse. Moreover, we were told that if we sought to go public with this, it would hurt us: We would be the ones tainted, not her, as resentful soreheads with no class. After all, as a *Newsweek* reporter, her book became a cover story for the magazine while ours had not—weren’t we just bitter?

In our current hyper-commercial and anti-intellectual environment, it is the large corporations and publications that can afford to trademark, patent and copyright everything. Prominent and profitable journalists, unless their borrowing is exact and extensive, are protected. The Coulter case suggests that we may be on an even more slippery slope about how much word-for-word copying will be tolerated by bestselling writers in the future.

Meanwhile, for drones slogging away in archives, tracking down people to interview, checking their facts and struggling to develop fresh ideas about how to see the world and new arguments about history, culture and society, forget it. Your work is increasingly fair game.

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抄襲者：抓住自己的線索

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抄襲越來越嚴重了，新聞界有抄襲，暢銷書作者也抄別人，從大學校園到網際網路，抄襲處處皆是。但是我們這些受害者最不能做的就是大聲講出自己的遭遇，要是說出來，就會有人指責我們：「酸葡萄」。

雖然偶爾有些倒楣蛋因為編造假新聞（如記者傑森•布雷爾（Jayson Blair）或者因為從其他報紙抄襲（如最近紐約郵報記者安迪•格勒（Andy Geller）而被開除或勒令停職，但是越來越多的情況是，只有表達權受到保障：「只要我用自己的話說出來，就可以任意偷用我想要的任何觀點」。

我們的教育者本來應教導學生，智慧剽竊是學院裏最嚴重的罪行，但是這些學生卻親眼看到各種各樣的人，從歷史學家多麗斯•基恩斯•古德溫（Doris Kearns Goodwin）到美女作家安•庫特（Ann Coulter），都從剽竊中獲益。2005年的一項研究發現，70%的大學生說他們曾經抄襲。何樂而不爲呢？

最近有兩個案例暴露了新聞界和出版界對抄襲的認定標準逐漸寬鬆。7月初，紐約郵報（*The New York Post*）報導，在提供辨認抄襲服務的公司（iParadigms）工作的約翰•巴里（John Barrie）發現，最近爲安•庫特帶來巨大聲譽和財富的著作《不要上帝》（*Godless*）有「標準的抄襲」。有抄襲嫌疑的段落來自計畫生育組織的出版品《三藩市記事》（*San Francisco Chronicle*）以及緬因州波特蘭市（Portland）的一家報紙，一段24個字，一段33個字。

庫特的出版商Crown對此回應說，「我們的作者在這些微小片段中使用的字數這麼少，根本就不用指明出處」。同樣的，購買她專欄的環球特稿社（Universal Press Syndicate）也駁斥這些指控：「對事實的重新敘述實在變化有限，和別的文章稍稍吻合不能算作抄襲。」正如提姆葛立福（Tim Grieve）在Salon中的提問：「作者抄了多少字才算抄襲？」看起來，答案要看她能爲公司撈多少錢。

另外一個案例，迪士尼經典名片《歡樂滿人間》（*Mary Poppins*）的作者帕米拉•特拉弗斯（Pamela Travers）最權威的傳記《她來自天空》（*Out of the Sky She Came*）的作者瓦雷利•勞森（Valerie Lawson）發現，她的很多研究成果被弗拉納根（Caitlin Flanagan）發表在《紐約客》雜誌的文章中，而且作爲原創成果使用。弗拉納根確實曾經採訪過勞森，但是從來沒提過勞森的書。2006年元月2月期的《哥倫比亞新聞評論》（*Columbia Journalism Review*）重新發表了勞森和《紐約客》編輯討論這個抄襲的來往電子郵件。

勞森在信件中提供了一個又一個例子說明，有很多根本不爲人所知的有關特拉弗斯的資訊都神秘地出現在弗拉納根的文章裏，但從不注明出處。「她的文章中有很多東西都是無法在她的採訪稿裡得到佐證的」，勞森諷刺地說，「因爲這些資訊都來自死人的文章或通信。」

《紐約客》堅持說弗拉納根確實自己做了那些支持她觀點的研究，而且回答：「文章中對引用你的內容已經給出了充分的說明」。雜誌社拒絕發表勞森最初的投訴信，反而建議她寫一封信，感謝雜誌社提醒人們回憶起《歡樂滿人間》的作者。

我自己被人抄襲的經歷同樣讓人非常生氣。2004年2月，梅雷迪斯•邁克爾（Meredith Michaels）和我出版了《母親的神話：母親的理想化及其對女人的傷害》（*The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined Women*）。一年後，記者裘蒂絲•華納（Judith Warner）出版了她同樣題材的書《完美的瘋狂》（*Perfect Madness*），也是關於難以達到的母職標準。其中大部分觀點都和我們的書一模一樣。我們列舉了整整六頁值得懷疑的雷同之處，但是沒有一處提到我們的名字。像勞森一樣，我們看到自己的科研成果被人剽竊，但是因爲沒有長篇大論的雷同文字，我們無計可施。而且人家還告訴我們，如果把事情捅出去，反而會傷害到自己：名譽受損的不會是她，而是作爲充滿怨恨的牢騷者

的我們。畢竟作為《新聞週刊》(*Newsweek*)的記者，人家的書已經作為該刊物的封面故事，廣為人知，而我們的書默默無聞。難道這還不是吃醋嗎？

在當今超級商業化和反智慧的大環境裡，只有大公司和出版商才能夠有錢為產品提供商標、專利和版權。除非他們大量抄襲而且鐵證如山不容抵賴，否則名氣大、能夠為公司創造利潤的大牌記者是受到保護的。庫特案件說明，我們可能正處在對未來暢銷書作家抄多少字算作抄襲越來越寬容的下滑趨勢中。

與此同時，對於那些在資料室裡艱苦搜索、跟蹤採訪名人、再三檢驗事實、努力創造關於世界、歷史、文化和社會新觀點的人，免了吧。你的辛苦工作越來越為人人都可捕捉的獵物。

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