A PLAGIARISM PENTIMENTO

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> Two different acts are considered plagiarism: (1) borrowing
> someone's ideas, information, or language without docu-
> menting the source and (2) documenting the source but
> paraphrasing the source's language too closely, without
> using quotation marks to indicate that words and phrases
> have been borrowed. (Hacker 507)

I take issue with the definition of plagiarism offered in Diana
Hacker's *Bedford Handbook for Writers*. That I nevertheless use
this handbook in all my classes presents no paradox, for the
Bedford innocuously reproduces accepted wisdom on plagiarism,
its definition concurring in substance with those offered by all
the other handbooks.

Because we teachers innocuously accept this definition and
act upon it, we persecute students for crimes they did not
commit. Worse, our adherence to the received definition of
plagiarism blinds us to the positive value of a composing strategy
which I call "patchwriting": copying from a source text and then
deleting some words, altering grammatical structures, or plugging
in one-for-one synonym substitutes. By failing to recognize patch-
writing as a valuable composing strategy in which the writer
engages in entry-level manipulation of new ideas and vocabulary,
we fail to support our students in their efforts to assimilate the
constructs of unfamiliar discourse. Instead we classify patchwrit-
ing as plagiarism and offer the remedy of instruction in source-
attribution—how to quote, footnote, and construct a Works Cited
page. Although students must learn these mechanical skills, they
have a much more central need to learn how to manipulate
new academic language.

One type of instruction that responds to the pedagogical value of patchwriting is the teaching of summary. Because its role in facilitating entry into academic discourse has not been recognized, though, summary has been disdained by some scholars as a pointless and mind-deadening exercise.

PATCHWRITING, NOT PLAGIARISM

In Spring 1986, while engaged in the familiar task of responding to students' papers, I encountered the loathsome apparition of plagiarism—or what at that time I believed was plagiarism. I believed, too, that I knew the best way to deal with it. In General Education 101, a core course required of all first-year students at Colgate University, I had asked the students to read a brief excerpt from R.L. Davidson's *Genesis 1-11* and to consider its implications not only for a reading of Genesis but also of Plato's *Phaedo*. The following sentence in one student's paper, though, transgressed the boundaries of academic ethics:

Specifically, story myths are not for entertainment purposes, rather they serve as answers to questions people ask about life, about society and about the world in which they live. [Student 3]

Its similarity to the original text, Davidson's Genesis 1-11, was too close to be acceptable:

Such 'story myths' are not told for their entertainment value. They provide answers to questions people ask about life, about society and about the world in which they live (Davidson 10).

The student writer, I assumed, had been insufficiently educated in the handling of sources. But then I read another paper whose author had the same problem:

Story myths provide answers to philosophical questions about life, society and the world. [Student 6]

Soon I was faced with a veritable flood of plagiarism. Some of the students had documented the source, some had not; but nine of the twenty-six writers in my class had failed to summarize, paraphrase, or quote from the Davidson text. Instead, they had appropriated Davidson's words wholesale, making cosmetic changes:

Davidson explains that story myths answer questions people ask about life, about society and about the world that we live in. [Student 5]

The first type of story myths, which are used to explain a principle or answer a question about life, society, and the world. [Student 4]

It provides answers to questions people ask about life, about society, and about the world in which they live. [Student 9]

He says it can either answer questions people ask about life, society and the world in which they live or it can be the literary creation of a teacher to help others learn the meaning of life. [Student 5]

The story myth will be discussed in the following context: story myths provide answers to questions people ask about life, society, and the world in which they live; these stories can be handed down within the community or by a conscious literary creation of a teacher whose concern is to help others share his insight of the meaning of life. [Student 7]

When recapitulating the source material, these writers "borrowed" phrases, patched together into "new" sentences; they "borrowed" whole sentences, deleting what they consider irrelevant words and phrases; and they "borrowed" a hodgepodge of phrases and sentences in which they changed grammar and syntax, and substituted synonyms straight from *Roget's*. Some provided footnotes, attributing the source of the theft; others did not. The samples reproduced above represent only a portion of the plagiarism that was rife in the prose of one-third of the class.

I responded to all the plagiarism in what seemed at the time a sensible manner, one that I have since found supported in published recommendations for responding to plagiarism: I gave them all "F's," delivered a lecture on source-attribution, and allowed the students to rewrite the paper for a better grade.

Yet I could not lay the episode to rest. What did it mean, that one-third of the first-year students in a class at a prestigious liberal-arts college—the CEO's of tomorrow—had blandly stumbled into plagiarism? Did it mean that a substantial number of well-prepared first-year college students did not know the basics

of attributing sources? Did it mean that a substantial number of first-year college students who were aimed at careers in influential positions were cheaters? Or did it mean that I should search for a better paradigm than plagiarism for interpreting their textual strategies?

I embarked on the course of examining my own assumptions, and I emerge with deeply changed ideas about the composing strategy that in 1986 I classified as plagiarism. My original judicio-moral paradigm was gradually nudged aside by a cognitivist approach, which in turn gave way to social construction and finally to postmodernism. The result is a kind of plagiarism pentimento, in which the traces of my successive interpretive frameworks remain evident. As Lynn Worsham explains the way in which *l'ecriture feminine* can critique composition studies, she defines Lillian Hellman's pentimento, "which [Hellman] describes as a form of repentance that occurs when a painter changes his or her mind and redraws the lines expressing an artistic conception. When the paint ages and becomes transparent, it is sometimes possible to see the original lines and the initial conception still etched in the memory of paint and canvas. Pentimento is 'a way of seeing,' Hellman writes, 'and then seeing again'" (Worsham 85).

In the current canvas of my plagiarism pentimento, the "borrowings" of the 1986 General Education students were not plagiarism at all (in the sense that plagiarism involves an ethical transgression, whether committed by a calculating or a naive writer). Rather, they were "patchwriting," a composing phenomenon that may signal neither a willing violation of academic ethics nor ignorance of them, but rather a healthy effort to gain membership in a new culture. That this effort involves a transgression of the values of that culture is indeed an irony, for patchwriters, far from being unethical plagiarists, often strive to observe proper academic conventions. Four of the General Education patchwriters acknowledged sources with signal phrases like "Davidson says," and seven of the nine used footnotes, endnotes, or parenthetical documentation. They demonstrated a well-developed awareness of the need to acknowledge sources. Yet, in the words of the Bedford Handbook, they "paraphras[ed] the source's language too closely."

For the most part, this too-close paraphrase did not involve straightforward copying: only three times did any of students

make exact copies of extended passages of the source material. All nine of the patchwriters saw a need to make changes in Davidson's language; for example:

> Davidson explains ritual myths as concepts that are illustrated through spoken words but are also accompanied by the performance of religious ceremonies. (Student 8)

The writer is using deletion, synonymy (substitution), and changes in grammar to reproduce Davidson's text:

> The world of the Ancient Near East, however, was familiar with myth of a rather different kind, myth as the spoken word which accompanied the performance of certain all-important religious rituals. (11)

The writer deletes Davidson's adjective phrase "certain all-important" and employs synonymy in changing "rituals" to "ceremonies." Grammatical changes appear in the switch from the singular "word" to "words" and the active "which accompanied" to the passive "are accompanied."

Substitution is a frequent tactic of patchwriting, occurring 18 times in the prose of these nine students. Changes in grammar or syntax occur 11 times. The most frequently employed strategy, though, was deletion, which accounted for 22 of the changes made in the patchwritten passages. The patchwriting strategy that occurred only once was rearrangement.

INTERPRETATIONS OF PATCHWRITING

Published scholarship on plagiarism offers statistics on the frequency of cheating, opinions on the threat that plagiarism poses to academic culture, and suggestions for instructing students so that they will not plagiarize; but it does not explain why the nine General Education students plagiarized. A plausible explanation does appear, however, in research on summary-writing conducted by Brown, Day, and Jones and by Carol Sherrard. These studies suggest that the students didn't plagiarize at all. Instead they engaged in a summary technique characteristic of writers in difficulty, or writers in relatively early stages of cognitive development. I find these studies illuminating; and as

I have increasingly come to interpret my world in the learner-external framework of social constructionism or postmodernism rather than the learner-internal framework characteristic of empirical research, I translate the application of cognitive studies to patchwriting into a social interpretation of why my students plagiarized. (As Carol Berkenkotter has argued, cognitive and social paradigms are not necessarily mutually exclusive.)

Brown, Day, and Jones' description of the "copy-delete" method of summary-writing explains the most frequent strategy used by the patchwriters in my class:

> The components of this strategy are (a) read text elements sequentially, (b) decide for each element whether to include or to delete, and (c) if inclusion is the verdict, copy the unit more or less verbatim from the text. . . . Fifth and seventh graders were diagnosed as using the copy-delete strategy in that the majority of the units included in their summaries were verbatim or near verbatim and occupied essentially the same temporal sequence as they had in the text. (974)

Writers of mature summary, say Brown, Day, and Jones, use their own words to rearrange and recast the ideas presented in the original source. Mature summary was demonstrated by the eleventh-graders and first-year college students in their study. Brown, Day, and Jones assert that "the ability to provide an adequate written summary of a lengthy text is a late-developing skill that continues to be refined throughout the school years" (Brown, Day, and Jones 977).

Applying their research to my General Education class would suggest that my patchwriters were not cheating but employing a strategy of summary writing. But according to the Brown, Day, and Jones taxonomy, the strategy they chose placed them at a fifth- or sixth-grade level! This, too, seems implausible. I was teaching students who were admitted on a very competitive basis to a prestigious college.

Yet Carol Sherrard's research adduces similar findings. Whereas Brown, Day, and Jones' first-year college students engaged in "mature summary" of narrative texts, all ten of the undergraduates in Sherrard's study resorted to copy-deletion when summarizing expository texts.

Why were Brown, Day, and Jones' college students writing mature summary, whereas all of Sherrard's and one-third of mine were resorting to copy-deletion? One possible explanation is that Brown, Day, and Jones' students were summarizing narrative texts, while Sherrard's and mine were facing the more cognitively difficult challenge of summarizing exposition. As Joseph M. Williams has noted, students' control over basic skills exhibited in narrative writing has been demonstrated to break down under the greater cognitive burden of producing expository writing (253). A similar continuum might prevail in the reading of narrative and expository texts.

Another possible explanation is that the students in Sherrard's study and my class were summarizing texts employing unfamiliar vocabulary and concepts. Since neither Brown, Day, and Jones nor Sherrard included the summarized text in their report of research, I cannot speculate on this possibility with regard to what they call their "subjects." But I know that my General Education students were, indeed, in foreign discourse territory. None of the concepts contained in Davidson's text had been previously introduced or discussed in class.

Copy-deletion, or what I prefer to call "patchwriting," may be a preliminary way of participating in unfamiliar discourse, of finding a way into it. Clifford Geertz argues that the academic disciplines are so discontinuous as to render cross-disciplinary communication difficult or even impossible, and that key terms are the locus of that discontinuity (160-1). If we faculty have difficulty comprehending and manipulating the languages of the various academic cultures, how much more difficult a task do undergraduate students face as they are presented with a bewildering array of discourse, none of which resonates with the languages of their homes and secondary schools? Keith D. Miller's argument that Martin Luther King, Jr., was engaged in "voice merging" also illuminates the patchwriting practices of undergraduate writers. Miller's account attributes King's "plagiarism" (a word which does not appear in Miller's essay) to the oral traditions of the community of which King was a member. Similarly, my account attributes students' patchwriting to issues of community membership—but in this case it is the target community, not the community of which the students are members, that precipitates the textual strategy. Kathryn T. Flannery, recapitulating Susan Miller, explains, "Students are always caught

'intertextually'—they are never inventing a new language out of nothing, but patch together fragments of the multiple texts, the multiple voices (as Bakhtin would put it) that are already available to them" (707). If, however, students are working in discourse so foreign that the only voice available is the one which they are reading, the eclectic "patching" that is such a natural, normal resource for composing becomes limited to the text at hand. The writers have no choice but to patch monologically from that text.

If that is the case, their patchwriting is a positive rather than negative trait. It is not "immature summary"; it is the outsider's membership application, a way of acquiring the language of the target community. The target community, the academy, will not accept the application, will not find it sufficient. Valued members of the academic community do not patchwrite.

THE SUMMARY RESPONSE

But it is the task of teachers to help outsiders gain entry, and the professor must devise pedagogy that responds to the larger cultural motivation for the patchwriting. This pedagogy would recognize patchwriting as an occasion for teaching. Teaching the rules of plagiarism or source-attribution, however, is an insufficient and perhaps peripheral response. On instrumentalist criteria alone, it has been demonstrated ineffective, as Frank J. McCormick has noted: instruction in the rules of plagiarism does not prevent students from transgressing.

Teaching the rules of plagiarism or source-attribution fails because it does not address the motivation for patchwriting. It does not respond to students' need for a set of latch-keys that might unlock new discourse communities. The rules of plagiarism help mark and bound the academy, identifying its insiders and outsiders, disciplining its participants. But although the applicant does need to know what the boundaries are, that identification does not carry with it the knowledge of how to enter the hermetic circle. Summary-writing, in contrast, represents one of the latch-keys by means of which an outsider might traverse the boundaries and become a participant.

Yet summary-writing has earned a bad name in composition studies. David Bartholomae believes it perpetuates students' status as outsiders:

Much of the written work that students do is test-taking, report or summary—work that places them outside the official discourse of the academic community, where they are expected to admire and report on what we do, rather than inside that discourse, where they can do its work and participate in a common enterprise. This, however, is a failure of teachers and curriculum designers, who speak of writing as a mode of learning but all too often represent writing as a 'tool' to be used by an (hopefully) educated mind. (144)

Similarly, Russell K. Durst's research suggests that students who are writing in the analytic mode engage in "metacognitive, self-regulatory behaviors," whereas they approach the task of writing summary in a much more superficial way (373). (Durst does demur, however: "the paucity of higher-level thinking we saw in summary writing is due in part to the nature of the specific task students were given in this study, which was to summarize a narrative") (374).

Harry Edward Shaw, in contrast, places a positive value on summary-writing: "Encourage students to paraphrase if they must rehearse an author's arguments: paraphrasing well usually requires them to understand a passage" (126). Sandra Stotsky waxes much more specific in her recommendations:

Another way to conceptualize new vocabulary in writing is through various forms of precis or summary writing, although this particular value of precis writing has not been mentioned in discussions of precis writing. Summary writing requires selection and generalization in order to reduce passages to a given proportion of words. Sometimes the key words in a passage must be retained; at other times a more general term for specific ideas must be found. Basic writing teachers might consider guiding their students by suggesting beforehand some of the key words they want their students to use in writing the summary of a particular passage. (340)

A learner-external paradigm might characterize summary-writing as a potential means of providing a novice with requisite vocabulary for entering a discourse community, for participating

in its meaning-making. By struggling through and then beyond patchwriting in the effort to summarize difficult prose, students can assimilate new concepts and new vocabulary to the extent that they might move beyond the cut-and-paste of patchwriting and learn to manipulate that vocabulary in their own discussion of the concepts.

Summary writing has a variety of additional benefits. Applying the principles of Young, Becker, and Pike, John C. Bean declares, "[A] systematic program of summary writing may be a particularly effective tool for helping students overcome egocentrism" (344). Alice Drum also advocates the cognitive benefits of summary. Like Frank D'Angelo, she offers pedagogical techniques that emphasize matters stylistic.

My own classes now undertake to reanimate summary writing, in the highly structured mode of Behrens and Rosen's *Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum*. I review (and in some cases introduce) the whole congeries of skills that Brown, Day, and Jones say students must acquire in order to summarize academic expository prose successfully (977). I encourage my students to make use of summary not just when it is overtly assigned but also as an aid to their own studies—though I caution them to judge their texts carefully to determine which ones warrant the rigors of formal summary (see McGinley and Tierney). While acknowledging the complexities of the task, I tell students that they must read—and talk—until they understand; that only then will they be able to summarize successfully. I tell them that while they are drafting summary, they should not be looking at the original text. I tell them they could even go so far as to allow an hour to elapse between the time they read the original and the time they write about it.

But at the same time that I teach the learner-internal "skills" of summary-writing, I also engage my students in collaborative oral summaries of assigned readings, inquiry of the type described by Mariolina Salvatori: inquiry not so much into the text of the assigned reading as into the text produced by the student who is attempting to understand it. At the beginning of class, I call upon students to recount whatever they can remember of the assigned reading. I act as secretary, writing their recollections on the board. Other class members make their own contributions, and we piece together a summary of the assignment, with the entire class offering revisions. The silences in this collabo-

rative text, the things they have collectively forgotten, usually turn out to be the difficult passages of the assignment, the parts where, if I have assigned written summary, they have patch-written; and we turn to these passages and enter them together in a spirit of questioning, supplementing, and wondering. The students learn summary-writing as a means not just of under-standing texts but of interrogating them, and they learn that through this interrogation, each reader produces her own text.

The students groan under the burden but celebrate the results: the composition class taught at the intersection of patch-writing, synonymy, and learning produces students who can comprehend and synthesize sources, learners who are empow-ered not at the "merely cognitive" level of knowing that they should do it (see Maimon et al., xvii-xix) but also at the metacognitive level of knowing how—and why. And the "why" is not "because you must not steal or lie" nor "because you must obey the rules," but rather "because you can join the people who understand, talk about, and change these ideas." In this pedagogy, incidents of patchwriting signal efforts to appropriate the discourse of the new community rather than an occasion for adjudication. And instruction in summary-writing turns students not into rote recipients of others' ideas but into members of a community who meet, challenge, modify, and perhaps even replace its constructs.

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