

The Icky Side of Being An Artist Is Plagiarism

BY CAROLYN RIKER

Most artists have had the experience of seeing their words, ideas, art or photography displayed without being given appropriate credit. Sometimes it is blatant, for example – word for word – copied and pasted straight from our social media site and then boldly displayed on the plagiarizer's page as if it is their own work.

Other times it is a bit sneakier when the artist copies form and style, but many might not know this, and yet they still carry out their espionage-form as being an original.

What adds rock salt to an artist's already sensitive nature, is when the plagiarizer starts to get comments FROM OUR WORK [all CAPS is appropriate when write-screaming] and they (aka the Plagiarizer) thanks them as if it were their own craft. I'm perplexed by this predatory behavior.

Actually shock is my first reaction. It is as if someone came into my home, with muddy shoes, ate all the chocolate chip cookies, brushed my cat's fur in reverse, (btw, this would never happen. My cat would eat them.), and leave without saying a word.

My jaw remains on the floor. Eyes are glazed and palms sweaty. I doubt myself and reread (several times) and hope this is a mistake. Nope. My heartbeat somehow rings in my ears – this is real.

As a poet, blogger and author, I am honored and delighted to be surrounded by a plethora of creative, intelligent and imaginative people. It is inspiring. For the most part, people share and give appropriate credit. And if we do misstep, we

apologize and quickly rectify by acknowledging their work.

Conversely, the underbelly hides an insidious icky-factor where our words are twisted and abused. Here's a few personal examples:

Example #1 (almost-plagiarism)

Early on, as a new-blogger, I wrote an article along the lines of, how making a list helps to keep me focused. Which was snatched up by a better-known blogger, who countered my post. In their savviness they linked my article into theirs with the retort of (and I'm paraphrasing), '[how] this writer (me) is not being spiritual enough and to-do-lists are immature.'

In essence, she used my idea in a passive-aggressive way. "That-being-said," (a favorite line used by this particular writer-traitor), demonstrates how plagiarism can be murky; not quite there but also too close for comfort.

Example #2: (plagiarism meets betrayal)

Another more direct example was when a person used my words from our private conversation. I sarcastically, yet-half-truthfully wrote, "If we threw the word F*ck, in the title, people would probably like it better." Imagine the shock I received seeing those words, and my idea, in print the next day. My text's ink-thought-bubble wasn't even fully dry. I confronted them with pure hurt and this individual, adamantly and nonchalantly defended themselves, saying I was overreacting.

In the end, my f*ck-title-theory wasn't as good as I thought. Sleep deprivation and lowering my guard isn't the best matrix for writing but it is delightful for free associating. Content is still the crucial element. However what truly affected me, was being deeply betrayed.

Plagiarism and some friends are deceitful.

Example #3: (plagiarism used to shame)

Over the years, I have had folks come to my Facebook page and 'copied and pasted' my poems and use the full poems or bits and pieces as if their own.

Confrontation doesn't always work and their responses have been an arsenal of learning boundaries and self-defending:

"What's the big deal? It's doing great! Don't be so childish. Your words were there for me to take."

Example #4: (how to cope)

Using the above example is when I need to text a trusted friend. Being ambushed needs support. I must reach out to someone who's been there before and who can empathize with the violated-heart-wearing-sleeve of creativity and being used.

Habitually, I'm pacing at this point, which makes it difficult to be text-worthy-coherent:

"They even forgot to put quotations." I sob-squeak in my text.

"They walked all over my Facebook page and took quotes and poems and even art without giving the artist credit too."
(This happened three times in the past week.)

At this point, I'm shaking and the room gets really blurry. At best, I whimper and paw at the earth searching for worms or grubs – anything that can assist with reasoning and a rebuttal. After a volley of kindness, sharing similar horrors, and the bridge of supportive words, I can pull myself together and build up to a solid string of:

NO! NO! NO! {Breathe}

FUCK NO!

Which is Example #5 (anger is our bff)

Some plagiarizing tactics try to dehumanize an individual by turning the table, minimizing, diminishing and chastising.

Once courage mingles with outrage, I am better able to write back with roaring ownership. "Remove it or give me credit!"

Fact is, sometimes outrage works and sometimes it doesn't. Some will truly apologize, others remain clueless and others won't budge. With the latter, my last resort is to report and block them. Then return to my lapis-lined-cave of creativity and regroup.

My artistic friends share that this pilfering-pirating happens way too frequently. Nonetheless, it is violating and wrong. Even with the most innocent intentions, (i.e., taking a phrase and writing around it with their own words), it is still stealing another's original work.

Saying, "I didn't think you would mind" or "I was only inspired by you" or "It's only a few words of yours and the rest are mine – so what's the big deal?"

This doesn't lessen or dismiss what has happened. It is a BIG deal. The hours and labor of our experiences has been titrated into our art. How dare a person think that it is okay to steal? (On a wide-passing-side note, it is challenging enough to write, with rarely receiving any income, but couple that with plagiarism and it bites.)

With the endless rise of social media and the prevalent 'share' factor it seems to be easier to plagiarize. Granted, mistakes can happen but let's learn together and give the originator credit. This is respectful and professional. And if you know the artist, ask for permission.

In my short tenure as a published writer, it has been very rare for another artist to turn down a 'free' promotion of

their work. Most are extremely modest and flattered and are beyond thrilled when asked. I feel the same way too. Thank you.

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