

All Such Filthy Cheats

by Theodore Pappas



Igor Kopolnitsky

When Vice Admiral Bobby Ray Inman announced on January 18 his decision not to pursue confirmation as Secretary of Defense, he repeated Robert Massie's old charge that William Safire is a plagiarist, saying this "does not, in my judgment, put [Safire] in a position to frame moral judgment on any of us, in or out of public service." The battle that ensued between Safire and Inman on the one hand and between Safire and Massie on the other dragged on for months and included ad hominem attacks launched from *Nightline*, the *Nation*, and the *New York Times*. And though the real issue was not whether Safire is a plagiarist—but whether he had aided and abetted one by distributing an unpublished manuscript by Massie to another writer who ravaged it for an article in *Esquire*—this high-profile caterwauling made one thing clear: plagiarism has become one of the nagging issues of our day.

"If you pillage someone else's memoir for your source material, it tends to indicate a thinness of literary imagination," said an anonymous New York editor to the *Washington Post*. What this Valachi of Grub Street was too cowardly to say is that plagiarists are often untalented louts, and that the lout in question was the ballyhooed young novelist David Leavitt. Last September Bernard Knox pointed out in the *Washington Post Book World* that Leavitt's new novel, *While England Sleeps*, reproduces the story of the failed homosexual affair that British poet Stephen Spender recounts in *World Within World*, his 1951 autobiography. Leavitt stole the basic story and then embellished it with lurid detail. "I don't see why [Leavitt] should unload all his sexual fantasies onto me in my youth," complained Spender, who now is married. Spender sued Leavitt for copyright infringement and for breach of his "moral right" to control use of his writings, a "right" stemming from a new and controversial copyright law in Britain. As a result of the lawsuit, Viking Press canceled Leavitt's book in February in both Britain, where the suit was filed and the book still warehoused, and the United States, where the novel had already reached bookstores and libraries. The American paperback edition of the book, scheduled for this fall, has also been canceled. "The

disowning of a newly published novel is extremely unusual," reported the *Washington Post*. "For a writer like the 32-year-old Leavitt, who has often been cast as a spokesman for his generation, it is unprecedented."

When Baudelaire wondered "how a man of honor could take a newspaper in his hands without a shudder of disgust," he must have had something like the *Washington Post* in mind. For a publisher's disavowal of an author at the eleventh hour may be unusual, but this fiasco with Leavitt is hardly "unprecedented." Jacob Epstein, whose father is editorial director of Random House and whose mother is coeditor of the *New York Review of Books*, was the literary elite's Boy Wonder of 1979, and it was much to their chagrin to learn in late 1980 that the protégé on whom they had bestowed lavish praise had actually plagiarized his Great American Novel, *Wild Oats* (which ironically deals with plagiarism), from a novel by Martin Amis published in 1974, *The Rachel Papers*. Unsurprisingly, Epstein was allowed to slink quietly away, reportedly to a career in that land of tinsel where creativity and originality are not requisites for success—Hollywood.

"Leavitt's aura has been damaged, to state the obvious," concluded the anonymous editor to the *Post*. More obvious still is that the day of the talented reprobate has long since passed. There have always been decadent writers in the West, but the ones we once praised and hailed as artists had more in common with the model citizens of the most civilized nations than with the poseurs, hucksters, and voyeurists of today for whom high culture is the AIDS quilt and performance art. Sade, Wilde, Lawrence, and Gide never needed to plagiarize salacious scenes from the works of others: if personal experience with depravity proved an insufficient wellspring, they were skilled enough to render it fictionally on their own. With "spokesmen" like David Leavitt and Jacob Epstein, what their generation needs is a Milli Vanilli Award in Creative Writing.

Another blow to the literati occurred in April, when Ballantine Books announced that Indrani Aikath-Gyaltzen, the "promising" novelist who committed suicide late last year, had plagiarized her widely acclaimed novel *Cranes' Morning* from Elizabeth Goudge's 1956 novel *The Rosemary Tree*. Aikath-Gyaltzen, who was born in India but educated in the

Theodore Pappas is the managing editor of *Chronicles*.

United States, had merely changed the story's setting from England to her native land, substituted Hindu for Christianity wherever appropriate in the text, and then purloined virtually verbatim whatever was left. The Goudge estate in England was so incensed that it pressed Ballantine not only for a public condemnation of the plagiarism but for a worldwide recall of all copies of the fraudulent work.

Jacqueline Singh, writing last year in India's *Book Review*, had found it strange that "details of the physical surroundings [described in Aikath-Gyaltsen's book] seem more reminiscent of Europe or England," that "villagers' thatched-roofed hovels are called 'lodgers' and villagers themselves 'countrymen,'" and that the "rich landlords, more at home with English fairy tales, nursery rhymes and Shakespeare than with Hindu mythology and Tagore, are difficult to 'place.'" But far from sniffing out the scones beneath the curry, Ms. Singh concluded that "all these anomalies on the Indian scene would doubtless make the setting more accessible to foreign readers at whom the novelette may be aimed." And she may have been right. After all, the *Washington Post* had praised the novelist for believing "we all live in one borderless culture."

America's literary establishment was once again embarrassed. *Publishers Weekly* had gushed that Aikath-Gyaltsen "dissects domestic life with the gimlet precision of Jane Austen." The *New York Times* had called her novel "magic," "full of humor and insight," with "a countryside you suspect you may have visited before." The *Washington Post* had said "exquisite," a book "at once achingly familiar and breathtakingly new." And I thought Henny Yongman was dead.

Eastern book publishers and news editors were appalled at the "brazenness" of this "talented" writer, but was it really the brazenness that bothered them or just the yolk dripping from their faces? For too busy professing their shock and consternation, they entirely missed the moral of this story: that a book which was originally panned by the critics as little more than a penny dreadful became a monumental work of literature forty years later once plagiarized and placed in a Third World setting. Transnationalism and open borders, the politicization of standards, an obsession with diversity, a culture hell-bent on self-flagellation—herein lies a tale about more than plagiarism.

An equally disturbing tale involves the plagiarisms of Joe Cobb, the Heritage Foundation's John M. Olin Senior Fellow in Political Economy. The *Wall Street Journal's* Paul Gigot had assured his readers in a May 5 column that the Clinton-backed proposal of a World Trade Organization posed no threat to American sovereignty because the "independent" trade expert of the "opposition" party had analyzed it and declared it safe and sound. "Mr. Cobb, the GOP economist who's studied the GATT text, says, yes [to the WTO], because the WTO is no threat to American self-rule. . . . He says he'd shutter both the World Bank and International Monetary Fund if he could, but the WTO is different." What Mr. Gigot apparently did not know is that Cobb's "independent" analysis is a virtual duplication of a study by the Advisory Committee for Trade Policy and Negotiations (ACTPN). Whole sections of Cobb's "assessment" are lifted directly from ACTPN's work. Composed primarily of corporate and banking interests, ACTPN was hired by Clinton's Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, produced its study by government contract, and now leads the lobbying effort on Capitol Hill for ratification of the GATT agreement that would create the

WTO. Perhaps this explains the praise for Mr. Cobb at a May 25 speech at the Heritage Foundation by Clinton Trade Representative Mickey Kantor.

It is interesting to note that, though all the major news outlets were given detailed evidence of Cobb's pilfering, only *Time*, in its June 13 issue, even mentioned the incident. But instead of exploring the implications of the story like a good muckraker—what this says about the GOP, our one-party state, the duplicity that passes for scholarship and diplomacy—*Time* smoothed over this terrain with a two-sentence summary, which was barely more informative than its headline, "Conservative Copycats."

The improprieties of the heroes and institutions of the Beltway are often treated with kid gloves by the Establishment press, treated more like household squabbles best kept among family than news stories that the hicks of the hinterlands need to hear about. This certainly was the case with Martin Luther King's plagiarisms, and the silence and political spin on this story continue to this day.

Professor Garry Wills of Northwestern University devotes an entire chapter to King and to an exegesis of the "I Have a Dream" speech in his latest book, *Certain Trumpets: The Call of Leaders*. Relying heavily on the research and conclusions of Keith "voice merging" Miller of the University of Arizona, Wills admits that "the most famous of [King's] perorations comes from another man, from Archibald Carey," but he assures us that "what is important . . . is not where King got it but what he did with it." What Wills does not say is that King principally plagiarized "white sources"—the work of liberal white writers, white preachers, white scholars—but that in the case of his most famous speech, King robbed, copyrighted, and defended his legal "right" to the words and thoughts of another black man. The press and the academy have always assumed that, because all blacks are alike, all blacks think alike, and all blacks backed the civil rights movement, Archibald Carey—ipso facto—felt honored to have his words stolen by someone of the stature of King. This may have been the case, but no evidence of this has ever been offered. The speech by Carey that caught King's attention was given, after all, at the Republican National Convention of 1952, not the Democratic Convention of 1960.

Moreover, black leaders have long complained that the white community, and the white legal system in particular, ignores the problem of black-on-black crime, that when black victims are involved it refuses to uphold the same laws and standards that apply to whites. But where is the black outrage at the patronizing community of liberal white scholars who continue this ignominy in cultural affairs? Fighting cruel indifference on the one hand—in the social and political realms—while encouraging benign neglect on the other—in the cultural and academic—is hardly the best strategy for battling double standards.

To Wills' credit, he does boldly condemn King's "academic" plagiarisms:

Normal as this kind of borrowing was among preachers, it is inexcusable in academic terms, and I believe [King's] doctorate should be rescinded by Boston University. (I also think John Kennedy's Pulitzer Prize, won in an even greater exercise of false pretense [for *Profiles in Courage*, which Theodore Sorensen and his aides principally composed] should be rescinded—for one

thing this would make judges of prizes and examiners of doctoral students more conscientious at their work.)

The reader will not, however, find this passage in Wills' chapter-long paean to King: he buried this at the end of the book in a long footnote on pages 311 and 312. But if Wills did this in propitiation for his sin of candor, the literary elite and the fourth estate were unimpressed. As Frank Kermode whined in the *New York Times Book Review*, Wills "doesn't even suggest a posthumous honorary doctorate [for King] in its place."

A university unafraid to condemn a plagiarized thesis and to rescind a fraudulently earned degree is Oxford University. As the London *Daily Telegraph* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported in April, Oxford's Trinity College has revoked the 1986 doctorate of historian Gary Owen Hughes because he plagiarized his dissertation from one written at Princeton. This is reportedly only the second time this century that Oxford has rescinded a degree because of plagiarism. "I had been surprised by the great improvement in Gary's work," said don Jack Pole, "but I suppose I attributed this to my teaching." Impressed with what the *Inquirer* called his "pearl-like diction" (British accent?) and "golden" credentials, Temple University had hired Hughes and brought him to the United States in 1987 to help write its multivolume *Biographical Dictionary of Early Pennsylvania Legislators*, but he was fired the next year when the university discovered that a number of his articles had been scissor-and-pasted together from cabbaged work. Unsurprisingly, other works plagiarized by Hughes have been discovered since his firing, both here and in England. It is debatable which is most disturbing: Hughes's many thefts, the academy's silence on this story since 1988, or the fact that the best person for writing a state's colonial history is not only not an American, but a Brit.

It may appear from these examples that our "Age of Plagiarism," as Andrei Navrozov in the *London Times* recently termed our day, comprises only students of the humanities and social sciences, but the "other culture" continues to contribute its fair share. The June 1993 conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, for example, was devoted entirely to "Plagiarism and Theft of Ideas." The notorious dispute between two epidemiologists at the University of Hong Kong finally resulted this winter, after seven years of litigation costing 16 million Hong Kong dollars (2.1 million American dollars), in what *Nature* magazine called "the world's first legal verdict in which a scientist has been found guilty of plagiarism." The case involved the plagiarizing of a questionnaire that a team of scientists had developed for researching lung cancer in female nonsmokers. "Success or failure of a study depends on the quality of the questionnaire," said researcher Takeshi Hirayama.

Considering the cut-throat climate in which scientific research is now conducted, Mr. Hirayama is absolutely right. Washington attorney Barbara Mishkin, who often deals with cases of scientific fraud and plagiarism, said in a recent issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that "collegiality among scientists has been lost, especially among those in fast-paced fields where scientific breakthroughs produce not only moments of glory but also the potential for commercially valuable products. Collaboration and communication among peers often have been replaced by competition and mistrust." In light of the ongoing scandal involving Dr. Bernard Fisher of the University of Pittsburgh—who took an "arrogant and cavalier

attitude," according to a U.S. House committee, toward falsified data in a federally financed study of breast cancer treatments—one might think that faked research is more prevalent than plagiarism in the sciences. But Marcel LaFollette in *Stealing into Print: Fraud, Plagiarism, and Misconduct in Scientific Publishing* (1992) says that "the NSF [National Science Foundation] and NIH [National Institutes of Health] now report that they investigate substantially more allegations involving plagiarism and stolen ideas than allegations involving falsified or altered data."

Ms. Mishkin, however, predicts better days ahead and believes fraud and plagiarism can be combated by teaching conflict-resolution theory to university administrators. The specific program she celebrates was designed by . . . Boston University. What commentators like Ms. Mishkin refuse to consider is that dishonesty and duplicity are not problems of management—not cause for improving the counselor-to-student ratio, not signals that our organizational skills need honing nationwide—but rather signs of an ominous trait in our country's moral character that no academic seminar could possibly eradicate. Though this is the last thing our therapeutic state's minions want to hear, the problem of fraud and plagiarism is like the old joke about the man stabbed in the back. "Sure, I can remove the knife," the doctor tells the patient. "But I think you have a deeper problem."

Dante understood these "deeper problems," and it is because he understood them that he chose the formidable monster Geryon to represent fraud and to rule the falsifiers, thieves, and "all such filthy cheats" in the darker and deeper recesses of Hell. He held special disdain for miscreants of this sort because, unlike gluttons and hoarders and other persons guilty of mere incontinence, these sinners had perverted the divine gift of intelligence by which man can discover truth and used it to deceive for temporal gain. However, weaned not on the *Divine Comedy* but on Slim-Fast reform, we believe rectitude and redemption are only phone calls away, that issues of character can be solved by committee, and that with hugs, 12-step programs, and conflict-resolution theory, there is a quick anodyne for every social and personal ill. For understanding plagiarists and forgers, adulterers and murderers, and the many other transgressors of our secular hell, it is clear where we now search for wisdom and truth. Donahue and Dear Abby, not Dante, shine the way. ©

THE MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.,

PLAGIARISM STORY

Edited by Theodore Pappas

A publication of The Rockford Institute. 107 pages (paper). Only \$10 (shipping and handling charges included).

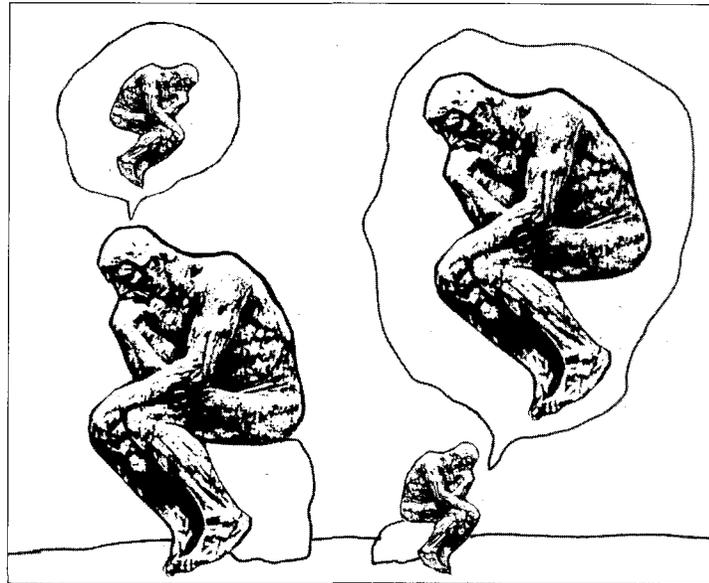
* * * * *

TO ORDER BY CREDIT CARD, CALL: 1-800-383-0680
OR SEND CHECK OR MONEY ORDER (MADE PAYABLE TO THE ROCKFORD INSTITUTE) TO: King Book, 934 North Main Street, Rockford, IL 61103 (Discounts available for bulk orders.)



The Politics of Education and the Metaphysics of Emptiness

by Stephen A. Erickson



Igor Kopeinitsky

The president of a prominent liberal arts college recently conveyed to its philosophy department (and to other constituencies) that regulations may soon be in place which would influence, if not altogether control, the conferring of bachelor's degrees. Mandated by the federal government, these "guidelines" would have a strongly utilitarian bias. However supportive this might be to the sciences and the social sciences (chemistry and economics, for example) it is likely to harm the humanities. These (as of late, curiously self-destructive) disciplines are likely to contract, perhaps even shrink, both in size and in influence.

This should not surprise us. Sputnik alarmed the country about its global military competitiveness, rather irrationally sweeping the humanities along with the hard sciences into what was quantitatively an educational boom. A rising tide is said to lift all boats, and the educational bull market of the post-Sputnik era made advanced degrees in any and every field common and plentiful commodities, compromising excellence in the process and, rather tragically, breaking many an aspiring academic job applicant's heart. Especially in the humanities, supply rather quickly and devastatingly outstripped demand, and this when it had already long been unclear what needs the supply was meant to meet. Were these needs merely institutional, or were they in some deeper sense educational, or even metaphysical?

Now in the 90's, the terrors of a lingering, largely white-collar recession and a quiet but growing anxiety over foreign influence in our capital markets have sounded a different call. In the name of enhanced global economic competitiveness, the trumpet sounds educational retreat, best known as curricular retrenchment and restructuring, and where else first to down-

size than in the humanities, where bread is neither baked nor even much eaten anymore but is mostly theorized about as a possible object of production and consumption—if, that is, it were prepared by previously "marginalized" and gastronomically and politically correct bakers, 40-some percent of whom are to be women and about 30 percent non-Euroamerican. Ingredients themselves are to be gathered from previously "oppressed" sources (and by previously oppressed gatherers), and their gathering must be environmentally nondisruptive and sexually nondiscriminating. In these requirements, incidentally, there may be some genuine virtues, but in the meantime little bread is getting baked and even less is reaching any student's table, except, that is, as an example of a kind of bread that is not to be preferred over any other.

Somewhat separately from the college president's all too easily confirmable message, something slightly less visible has also been happening in the humanistic bakery and, more importantly, on those administrative drawing boards where humanistic bakeries are now being remodeled and their staffing reconsidered. In accelerating increments, value-oriented discussions are receding from view in the academy, getting discouraged if not subtly punished. It is not hard, though no less painful, to understand why. Such discussions often imply choices based upon evaluations of better and worse, commendable and contemptible, promising and pointless, or even the more truncated Nietzschean categories of life-enhancing and life-denying. And these discussions are invariably guided by deep commitments to first principles and to ultimates. These latter are seldom adjudicable through further "argument," though they are often illuminated and even transformed in the clash of perspectives and convictions. At such "clash points" serious dialogue must ensue; much is put at risk, and much also ends up devalued, if not rejected. But in an environment where power and "empowerment" are themselves

Stephen A. Erickson is a professor of humanities and philosophy at Pomona College.