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## "A Flurry of Fascination"

### The (Anti)Plagiarism Cases of
### Stephen Ambrose and Doris Kearns Goodwin

IN THE FIRST week of January 2002, a crime was committed. For some, the crime had actually taken place many months, even years, before the *New York Times* published the first of many reports on the topic. For others, the offense came later as scattered details coalesced and the several participants (perpetrators and victims alike) stated positions for the record. And yet, for many the crime never happened at all, but rather those accused had been falsely charged by an envious, resentful few. In the end, it would not be clear as to who did what, when, where, to whom, and why.

Nevertheless, something did happen in early 2002, and the goal of this retelling is to consider how the many players involved managed to articulate both the nature of the crime and its relevance to education, scholarship, and American culture at large. These players would include a handful of state universities, several college professors and students, one major publishing house, a slew of journalists, a few concerned citizens, three spokespersons, a staff of research assistants, and a series of experts prepared to wax eloquent on topics ranging from the proper use of punctuation marks to the diabolical repercussions of selling one's soul. The issues at stake would be biggies: integrity, truth, honesty, discipline, courage, tradition. New and old technologies—computers, word-processing software, and the Internet, but also plain old paper, pencil, and handwriting—would factor in as evidence, and even accessories to the crime.

The story begins on January 5, 2002, when the *New York Times* posted the following headline: "2 Say Stephen Ambrose, Popular Historian, Copied Passages." The headline alone reveals the complexity of the issue at hand: Who is Stephen Ambrose? Who are these mysterious "2," and why are they interested in this particular "Popular Historian"? In what sense is a popular historian different (or not) from a historian per se? Finally, why is it important that Ambrose

"Copied Passages," an activity I can imagine many historians, like most writers and scholars, engaged in readily and often? My recounting here will attempt to answer these questions. I conclude by addressing two related questions that set the stage for the remainder of this book: What can we learn—in particular, about writing, reading, and scholarship in higher education—by examining the ways in which the *Times* and other mainstream press vendors handled the Ambrose and Goodwin stories? Furthermore, in what ways do popular understandings of the issues and concerns surrounding these cases either support or belie those perspectives commonly found in the academy?[2]

## ANATOMY OF A LITERARY CRIME

The crime under discussion here is literary theft, or plagiarism. To answer at least one of the questions posed above, Stephen Ambrose, Popular Historian, did something wrong not in copying passages but in copying, in his book, passages later traced to a book written by someone else. More specifically, Ambrose erred in failing to credit—via the rules and conventions of academic writing—the passages he purportedly chose to copy. The two books affected in this case are Ambrose's *The Wild Blue* and Thomas Childers's *Wings of Morning*, and as David Kirkpatrick reported in the January 5 *New York Times*, Ambrose's error was essentially one of punctuation: while he did acknowledge Childers as a source, he did not acknowledge "quoting from the book or borrowing phrases or wording."

At issue, then, is a discovered similarity between two works of history: Ambrose's book makes use of several phrases that can be found, word for word, in Childers's book. Ultimately it would be argued that this unacknowledged similarity marked a certain degree of "sloppiness" or "carelessness" on Ambrose's part. This carelessness—failing to mark off borrowed text with marks conventionally used to indicate such borrowings—amounts to what most scholars of literary convention would call *plagiarism*.

Considering the nature of the act itself—a punctuation lapse—one might wonder what all the fuss was about. But much indeed was at stake when Professor Ambrose neglected or chose not to use " " in the text of his book. As one of many who would chime in on the topic, *Times* reporter David Kirkpatrick helps to articulate just what is involved, and at stake, in acts of plagiarism. There is something particularly vexing, he suggests, about finding similar passages in two otherwise distinct historical works. The situation gets even more troubling when "several sentences and paragraphs" in one text "closely echo words" in another, and when footnotes and other credit markers do not go far enough to "acknowledge quoting from the book or borrowing phrases or word-

ing." In other words, acts of innocuous quoting and borrowing become criminal, or at least unethical, when the debt of one author to another is not properly paid via credit evidently due the receiver ("2 Say").

As Kirpatrick goes on to explain, such breaches of literary etiquette—and copyright law, no doubt—can be verified by the time-honored technique of "side-by-side" comparison. In the case of Ambrose, text comparisons did reveal that some of his wordings, in these and other passages, were identical to wordings found in Childers. This act of overt imitation, sans quotation marks, sufficed as proof positive that Ambrose, knowingly or not, plagiarized. And as Thomas Mallon states often in his scintillating history of plagiarism, originality in literary authorship is all about how one manages "the infinitely varied molecular matter of the words" (108). Or as Mallon claims elsewhere: "[T]he words are all" (123).

But are the words—and the quotation marks that go around them—really the "all" of this story? The answer, in a word, is yes. In "Sanctioning Voice: Quotation Marks, the Abolition of Torture, and the Fifth Amendment," Margreta de Grazia tells us that over time quotation marks have come to "privilege and protect" an author's utterances, reminding us whenever we see them that the words of another can be borrowed but "only on certain conditions" (289). Evidently, Ambrose failed to honor these "conditions," and in so doing, broke a literary (and civil) law. For as de Grazia argues convincingly, these "grammatical ciphers" do legal work as well, protecting the individual (in this case, Childers) via "protective warranties" that guarantee an author's rights to textual ownership (291).

Thus, to recap, Ambrose has been accused, quite simply, of violating Childers's right to protected property. He (Ambrose) has stolen—or kidnapped (for that is what plagiarism originally meant)—Childers's "children," his words. Meanwhile, Ambrose has allegedly committed the related and equally egregious crime of being unoriginal, of failing to use his own children, if you will, in writing his history.[3] So indeed "the words are all," but only insofar as words coded as belonging to one writer (without quotation marks) in fact belong to another. In violating this time-honored code of quotation, Ambrose has undermined the sanctity of protected stuff. More specifically, Ambrose has compromised—we might say stolen—Childers's very originality as a writer, and, by default, Ambrose has called into question his own originality as well.

As one might expect, then, the first response issued on behalf of Professor Ambrose came as a direct defense of his authorial originality. Adam Rothberg, spokesperson for Ambrose's publisher Simon & Schuster, was quick to claim that Ambrose's *The Wild Blue* "is an original and important work of World War II history. All research garnered from previously published material is appropriately footnoted" (Kirkpatrick, "2 Say"). Another spokesperson will later reverse

this claim, but for now note that Rothberg's defense of Ambrose mentions originality and footnotes almost in the same breath. There is obviously a larger issue of *techne*, or craftwork, at play here that is hard to separate from issues of authorial integrity and honesty. In brief, to make a technical error of the sort Ambrose evidently made is to mess quite profoundly with deeply embedded codes of decency and propriety. Indeed, just as quotation marks code sanctioned voice, the accusation of technical sloppiness in this story codes a legal and moral violation that we, as deputies and witnesses, would be loath to ignore.

And what of our accused plagiarist, who has so far chosen to remain silent? Ambrose was "unavailable for comment" on January 5, but David Kirkpatrick did track down the putative victim in all of this, Thomas Childers. Initially, Childers's response was generous and forgiving. Admitting that he felt "sort of disappointed," he could not bring himself to attribute any "malice" to Stephen Ambrose: "[H]e did it with the left hand," Childers commented, translating a German expression meaning that Ambrose was "focused on something else." The next day, on January 6, Ambrose supported Childers's account when, according to Kirpatrick, he "apologized and said the repetition had been inadvertent" ("Author Admits"). This apology, along with a promise to correct all future editions, seemed to satisfy Childers, who referred to Ambrose's response as a "gracious gesture" and "a classy thing" for a "fellow scholar" to do.

The story does not end here, however. Kirkpatrick assures the reader that the Ambrose incident is likely to "further debate among historians about the kind of blockbuster history that Mr. Ambrose writes" ("Author Admits"). This subtle change of topic is significant. Up to now, the debate has turned primarily on questions about words, quotation marks, originality, and similarity, but here the issue on the table is not just Ambrose the historian but that class of literary objects known as blockbuster histories—those histories, in other words, produced quickly, in large quantity, and for a vast reading public. Ambrose now stands in, as cipher, for a genre now under review as well.

Ambrose himself may have prompted this focus shift. By January 10, according to the *Los Angeles Times*, his single-book infraction had grown to a total of four books then "under question." While Ambrose's son and agent, Hugh Ambrose, declined to comment on this development, a new spokesperson for Simon & Schuster, Victoria Meyer, assured the public that all errors would be remedied in subsequent editions. When finally reached for comment, Ambrose remarked only that he was "unsure" about his other books. . . . "'I don't know. It's a lot of books,' said Ambrose, author of more than 20 historical works . . ." ("More Questions").

Speed and quantity of production, in particular, were issues central to both the prosecution and the defense in this case. Was Ambrose "sloppy"—did he make mistakes with quotation marks (did he plagiarize)—because his governing

mode (blockbuster history) led to the production of too much too fast? The January 10 *Los Angeles Times* would answer in the affirmative, and over time these related issues of production speed and quantity would be used, at turns, to both justify and vilify Ambrose and the trade publishing industry supporting him.

By way of justification, the *Los Angeles Times* theorized that Ambrose had absorbed (memorized, incorporated) the material he had read so thoroughly "that he unconsciously replicated it, or . . . the problem originates with his team of research assistants; Ambrose is also highly prolific, increasing the chance of error" ("More Questions"). In short, Ambrose may have plagiarized for one or more of three equally viable reasons: (1) After years of practice in the art of literary transmutation, his occasional repetitions became unconscious and thus, we can assume, uncontrollable. (2) His research assistants actually made the mistakes, which again poses a challenge to Ambrose's mode of production, while likewise compromising the authenticity of his authorship in the first place. (3) The "chance for error" is inherently increased with such a "highly prolific" author, who by his own admission produces "a lot of books" whose repetitions he cannot track with terrific accuracy.

The goal here, in trying to understand the nature of Ambrose's alleged crime, is not to settle on any one of these explanations but instead to situate the act (and the activity of plagiarism in general) in a web of related issues whose collective import must be taken into account. To construct an accurate anatomy of plagiarism, we must understand what body—or species of body—is under review. We may conclude from what we have seen thus far, for example, that plagiarism infractions turn on issues of originality, similarity, acknowledgment, borrowing, debt paying, wording, and the use (or lack) of quotation marks. Still, in looking at the Ambrose case specifically, it remains unclear where to locate the crime scene. Did the offending act take place in the pages of Ambrose's *The Wild Blue*, or perhaps somewhere between this one book and the other—*Wings of Morning*—from which he appears to have lifted material? Did Ambrose commit the crime in his mind or, to be more precise, in his "unconscious" mind, where immersed in a solution of "source material" he found himself honestly "unsure" about which material was his? Or was the crime distributed across several books—the four, in fact, that were at this point "in question"—or, more radically, across several minds and persons, including Ambrose's son Hugh and the team of research assistants who may, in the end, prove culpable? Or should we look beyond these materially bounded corporealities (human being, book) and consider the larger corporations, even the literary corpi, as potential targets? In other words, is Simon & Schuster holding the smoking gun? Or is the industry of trade publishing itself, run amok with its blockbuster production pace, to blame?

For answers to these and related questions, read on.

## A Strange Mix of Contempt and Sympathy

In a climate of general confusion, there is often a tendency to seek higher ground. Indeed, many involved in the Ambrose case demonstrated this tendency in the weeks following the initial disclosure of wrongdoing. Stuart P. Green's January 13 commentary in the *Los Angeles Times* promises, from the start, to be a staunch apology for Stephen Ambrose. Green begins by reminding us that plagiarism can be a "fluid and murky concept" that, once again, is difficult to define. "In all likelihood," writes Green,

> Ambrose did not intend to deceive his readers into believing that the words were his own. Rather, this prolific, bestselling and widely celebrated author of 30 history books seems to have been guilty of more instances of sloppy note-taking than would be tolerated even from a college freshman.

Note, first of all, the invocation of the student writer (here, the "college freshman") as a suitable point of comparison. More will be said on this move later, but for now note as well that Green goes on in the article to cite sloppy "note-taking" (an artifact, one might say, of an older technology, handwriting), the Internet (particularly online paper mills), and cut-and-paste editing features as major "temptations" facing the hurried writer. Ambrose, as well, has stated on one occasion that the computer did in fact help him produce—and produce quickly—his blockbuster histories, thus facilitating the hyperactive writing pace that would later, according to some, cause trouble.

In citing the computer (Web sites, cut-and-paste) as an agent of plagiaristic "temptation," Green touches on a classic connection between literary originality and original sin further elaborated by Nick Groom in *The Forger's Shadow*. As Groom explains, the word *original* was originally "tainted" by the notion of original sin (18) but over time would shed this meaning and come to signify "secular idealism, or the archetypal" (20). It is this meaning that we commonly invoke today in using the word *original*. Groom proceeds to argue that the concept of plagiarism, in contrast, has come to represent "a perversion of theories of origin" (25), "a threat, a fear, a panic, a plague . . . contagious, sickening, unnatural, and terminal . . ." (27). Groom then makes the astute point that "[in] its demonization, plagiarism has perhaps inhabited some of the space vacated by the word original" (27). In other words, in committing the sin of plagiarism (crime against originality), plagiarists commit an equally egregious sin of "original" betrayal (crime against humanity). New technologies, for some, hasten this descent into the realm of the diabolical. Or as Green intones, computers are "temptations" because they provide opportunities for

writers such as Ambrose to cut-and-paste too much too fast and for students to go online and buy term papers.

Meanwhile, returning to the "fluid and murky" waters of plagiarism itself, Green's apology of January 13 continues with a brief aside in which he chronicles his experience with a student plagiarist. I quote his story at length for reasons that will become clear toward the end of this chapter:

> Recently, I sat on a university disciplinary committee hearing charges of plagiarism against a student who had copied long passages from various sources, often without quotation marks or footnotes. As I listened to his rambling explanation of how he had gotten himself into such a predicament, I felt a strange mix of contempt and sympathy for what he had done.

The comparison of Ambrose to the hypothetical student writer, first mentioned above, bears out here in a particularly poignant way, for now it is a real student whose charges are meant to parallel those leveled against Ambrose. Green goes on to cite the case of Jacob Epstein, who in the early eighties took "plot elements and descriptive passages from a novel by Martin Amis." He also mentions Susan Sontag, who allegedly "lifted various phrases from mostly dead authors for her novel 'In America.'" And, finally, Green includes in his informal list of plagiarists the university student who sat before him at the disciplinary committee. Green summarizes the punishments issued to all three as follows:

> Epstein was skewered by Amis in a scathing rebuttal that essentially ended his novel-writing career. Sontag was given a national book prize. Meanwhile, the hapless student plagiarist on whose disciplinary committee I sat was denied his degree and asked to leave the university.

Of course, we have yet to learn what punishment—or prize—awaits Stephen Ambrose, but Green is clear on the related points that while Sontag faired quite well in the end, Epstein was "skewered" and "the hapless student plagiarist" banned from the university. Which is not to say—playing the devil's advocate here—that this particular student did not deserve expulsion. My question at this point, rather, is, What does Stephen Ambrose deserve and how might his punishment differ from that which befell the student plagiarist?

Green's proposed answer to that question begins with some rather bold invective: "[Ambrose] did a great disservice to the writers on whose work he improperly relied, and his practices cast serious doubt on his integrity as a

scholar." For these reasons, according to Green, Ambrose's community of "fellow historians" is by all means authorized to "censure him" for this impropriety. But—and this is the core of Green's defense:

> Ambrose is a beloved figure whose numerous books have brought history alive to many thousands of ordinary readers. No one has claimed that his books are inaccurate or that they cannot still be a source of pleasure and edification. He did, after all, apologize.

A loaded, but I think reasonable, question presents itself here: If it is enough for Ambrose to apologize for wrongful copying, then why is it not enough for our hapless student? It will be proven by story's end that not one or four but *six* of Ambrose's histories contained copied, unquoted passages. Even if the student's "rambling explanation" somehow trumped, in Green's mind, the several public declarations Ambrose made in his own defense, are we being asked to believe that whatever crime this university student committed in the end was, somehow, more serious than that committed by a popular historian who plagiarized in half a dozen of his published books?

Aside from announcing the committee's sentence, Green has nothing to say concerning the fate of the student after expulsion. Regarding Ambrose, however, he concludes his article as follows: "In the future, Ambrose will certainly be more conscientious in his research and writing. And, in a few months, I suspect, whatever it is exactly that he did wrong will be all but forgotten." In short: time heals all wounds, a wrist slap is enough, and apologies go a long way—if you are, as Ambrose evidently is within Green's community, a "beloved figure." If you are a "hapless student," however, making roughly the same mistake, there might be less to forget in the days and weeks following your experience with Green's committee.

## Temptations and Their Consequences

In mid-January 2002, standing before his well-attended history class, Thomas Childers announced that "he would cease using [Ambrose's] books" in his classes (Schemo). For some, the decision made sense. Others (such as Green, perhaps) would wonder if it was fair, to readers and author alike, to censure the beloved historian via outright censorship. As it turns out, the debate over Ambrose was now situated within a larger academic debate about "whether universities should continue to assign works by scholars who have been accused of appropriating someone else's work" (Schemo). Students at the University of Pennsylvania, for example, took issue with the potential problem of a double standard:

"They're telling us not to plagiarize," Sumit Walia, a sophomore majoring in economics, said on his way to class this morning. "But what kind of message does it send if they accept it at the very highest levels?" (Schemo)

Ray Groller, another student at U. Penn., agreed with Childers's decision to ban Ambrose from the classroom: "Teachers are supposed to be role models in students lives," Mr. Groller opined. "They should try to lead by example" (qtd. in Schemo).

This seems like a fair request, especially since students, broadly speaking, are often faced with the same temptations to which Ambrose evidently succumbed. In fact, as U. Penn. student Groller confessed, he had been tempted "lots of times" to lift material, but "the thought of the consequences kept [him] from doing it" (qtd. in Schemo). In other words, where professors in this story might see a debate over whether or not to include Ambrose in the curriculum, college students (Walia and Groller, at least) see a clear-cut case in which the acceptance of wrongdoing "at the very highest levels" would send a contradictory message to those residing (reading, writing) at the lower levels. Some professors also recognized the danger of a double standard: "What Ambrose did is something I could haul students before the honor council for," admitted Professor Carlton of Vanderbilt University. "And I actually have students who have trouble understanding why they should be hauled before the honor council for doing something like that" (qtd. in Schemo).

For professors, and academic historians in particular, the Ambrose case also raised some troubling questions about the role of traditional, serious scholarship in an age of blockbuster histories. *New York Times* reporter Diana Jean Schemo reported the following:

> Among academics, Mr. Ambrose's popularity . . . provoked soul searching and no small measure of envy. History professors on Internet chat groups wondered what the success of Mr. Ambrose and other popular historians said about their own failure to write readable books.

A second kind of failing, then, informs this story: The agents of scholarly good—the ones at the highest levels who follow the rules—fail nonetheless to garner the readership that those such as Ambrose, whose example is less than stellar, enjoy. Once again, the question arises: Who, or what, is on trial here? For now it appears that some academics, in the wake of the Ambrose case, felt as bad about themselves as they did about Ambrose.

Indeed, blockbuster envy might explain why Thomas Childers would later decide to sing a different tune with regard to the Ambrose infraction. While

initially praising Ambrose's "swift apology," Childers changed his mind when he read an account in which Ambrose described his purportedly sloppy method for taking notes and writing histories. "It was not just a matter of using quotation marks," Schemo reported on behalf of Childers, "but of toiling to write a good passage rather than appropriating one." In the words of Childers himself, he just could not "conceive of that. . . . It doesn't take so much effort. Find the words. Write it yourself" (qtd. in Schemo).

On the block again is Ambrose's method. As Childers's testimony suggests, plagiarism for some is not just about placing quotes around borrowed materials but also the kind of "toiling" that goes into the act of writing. The message is clear: To write requires "effort" but not "much." Just "[f]ind the words. Write it yourself." Thomas Mallon's insistence that plagiarism invariably comes down to "the words" and nothing else is here echoed in reprimands laid down by the victim himself. And he (Childers) should know, for he seemed quite capable of finding "the words" and writing his book himself. What lapse of conscience—or, perhaps, consciousness—prevented Ambrose from doing the same, from putting forth the same effort? Was he just lazy, as many claimed? Did he lose sight of his words and give in to the temptation to steal another's? Did his blockbuster pace interfere with his otherwise sound judgment? Did the "popular" historian err in forgetting his "professional" obligations before the sacredness of protected voice?

Where before the carelessness of a fellow scholar's "left hand" seemed an adequate explanation, this week the excuse will not do. A sin of omission, in short, has now been recast as a moral sin—to be precise, a sin against authorship. The "soul searching" that Schemo reported among academics can thus be read not only as possible envy before Ambrose's popularity but also as a kind of publicly acknowledged disgust at a soul (that is, Ambrose's) tainted and mired by the muck of plagiarism.

Letters to the editor in the January 17 issue of the *Los Angeles Times* lend support to this point. David J. Oliphant of Granada Hills reminds us, for example, that when historians plagiarize, readers "are denied the honesty of original research. If the first writer makes an error, the second one repeats it and less conscientious writers continue to repeat it until it is installed as the common view" (Oliphant). In other words, Oliphant is less concerned about the "honesty" of the research than its accuracy. He is worried, as he goes on to write, that when the "common view" gets tainted with erroneous or felonious research, "teachers, opinion writers, editors and others who form public opinion base their views on it." In brief, literary sin spoils the empirical evidence conveyed through "public opinion" by perpetuating a string of inaccuracies. Truth, in other words, is at risk when "original research" meets the original sin of plagiarism.

## OF ECHOES, SETTLEMENTS, AND
## SURVEILLANCE MACHINES

When David D. Kirkpatrick resurfaced on January 23 to write yet another story on plagiarism ("Historian Says Publisher Quickly Settled Copying Dispute"), his subject was not Stephen Ambrose but equally popular popular historian Doris Kearns Goodwin. Admitting that her 1987 book *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys* "closely echoed" sentences from other books, Goodwin announced that her publisher—Simon & Schuster—had decided to settle with one of the authors, Lynne McTaggart. The "repetitions were accidental," Goodwin is on record as saying, and all future editions would reflect Goodwin's debt to McTaggart's book, *Kathleen Kennedy: Her Life and Times*. Goodwin's plagiarism, I should add, "surfaced as part of a flurry of fascination with literary theft" in the wake of Ambrose's earlier admissions (Kirkpatrick, "Historian Says").

Thus, the Ambrose debate has echoed on under the aegis of a strikingly similar offense committed by Goodwin. To conclude this chapter, I follow that echo all the way to Brit Hume's *Fox Special Report Roundtable*, which aired on January 23, 2002. Hume's interview that day with Fred Barnes (executive editor, *The Weekly Standard*), Mort Kondracke (from *Roll Call*), and Mara Liasson (of National Public Radio) led to some important comparisons between Ambrose and Goodwin that intersect with other concerns taken up throughout this book. It will be useful, therefore, to review that conversation in light of the questions asked at the beginning of this chapter.

We learn from the roundtable, for example, that the Ambrose story reported by David Kirkpatrick back on January 5 can be traced to Fred Barnes and *The Weekly Standard*, the Web journal that had first covered the story a few days prior. When Barnes got a call from the *Times* just after completing a first draft, he did not realize at the time just how valuable his story was. "It hadn't been edited, hadn't been proofread," Barnes says, but nevertheless "everybody was interested in it." Equal interest materialized when, nearly three weeks later, the *Boston Globe* released a story about Goodwin that Barnes (and later Kirkpatrick) would write up in their respective publications.

At issue here is the discussion that ensues between Barnes, Liasson, and Kondracke over the amount of news coverage allotted thus far to Goodwin and Ambrose respectively. Ambrose, a "giant" in popular history (according to Liasson), had also received the giant's share of coverage. Hume asks Liasson to comment on that disparity:

LIASSON: You know, Steven Ambrose was the first. He's bigger. I would hope that Doris Kearns Goodwin gets as much scrutiny as Steven Ambrose.

> KONDRACKE: I think it was an old news-new news story.
>
> BARNES: I don't think that. And *The New York Times*, you know, there was another story recently about a scholar who made up a bunch of stuff about guns in America and said there weren't many in the early days. *The Times* ignored it for months. But when Steven Ambrose came along, they couldn't wait to run it. (*Fox Special*)

In brief, Liasson hopes that Goodwin will ultimately suffer the same "scrutiny" heaped on Ambrose because, I presume, she (Goodwin) committed a similar crime and thus deserves similar attention. Barnes insists that the *Times* played favorites to Ambrose because, to use Liasson's term, he is the "giant" they were anxious to topple. In other words, Ambrose was better news while Goodwin, as Kondracke implies, was "old news" and therefore not worth targeting.

Unlike Ambrose, Goodwin settled with the one author evidently most wronged by Goodwin's pilfering. As Fred Barnes points out, Lynne McTaggart was evidently not willing to accept a simple apology from Goodwin. "She didn't care about the footnotes," Barnes said. "She wanted her stuff in quotes. It was the lack of attribution in quotes that angered her, and of course, she says, a substantial sum of money changed hands." Evidently, this sum was "substantial" enough to appease McTaggart, who found the end result "satisfactory" ("Historian Paid").

One other difference in the Goodwin case is worth mentioning. In her list of excuses, Goodwin offers one that, to her mind, stands out above all others. In writing her book she took a lot of "handwritten notes" and then made the error of mistaking quotes in her notes "for her own words." The defense, I must say, is fascinating. With Ambrose, a new technology (the computer) contributed to the "blockbuster pace" that would eventually lead to his errors; here, conversely, an old technology (handwriting) serves as a partial excuse for misrecognizing the difference between one's own words and someone else's. Goodwin admitted that "she should have used directly attributed quotes." The method is "so simple and so right," she said, "and you learn as you do these things over time" (Kirkpatrick, "Historian Says").

We heard similar language when Green cited Ambrose's "sloppy notetaking" as a possible explanation for his "beloved" author's momentary lapse. But Ambrose, at least in the literature reviewed here, never ventured that excuse himself. For Goodwin, however, it would become the central feature of her defense. In late January, for example, in a PBS *NewsHour* feature discussed further below, Goodwin made the case that her "technique of citation [for the 1987 book in question] proved not to be foolproof in the end" because her materials ("running commentary" and "passages" found in books) got mixed together into one indistinguishable stockpile of "notes." In conducting her research, she "would recheck every one of those 300 books to make sure the quotes were

accurate and make sure the citation was right," but "[s]omehow, in that process, a few of those 300 books did not fully get rechecked." This mistake, however, of mixing up longhand notes is no longer a problem for Goodwin, for as Margaret Warner would later report, Goodwin "now does her research on computer, keeping quotes from sources and her own comments in separate files."

Several issues intersect here. For one, we have been asked to believe that not Goodwin but Goodwin's outdated "technique" (we might also call it a technology) of longhand note taking is really to blame for her plagiarism. The implications are somewhat daunting. The technology of handwriting—as old, we could say, as writing itself—is here invoked to excuse a crime against writing. Secondly, a newer writing technology—the computer—marks the transition from a mistake-ridden past to a well-organized present in which "quotes" and "comments" can be kept in "separate files," thus helping reproduce the age-old epistemological distinction between one's own words and someone else's. Furthermore, as Emily Eakin will show in her January 26 article "Stop, Historians! Don't Copy That Passage! Computers are Watching," the networked computer now factors in as a powerful weapon in the battle against plagiarism. "Over the last decade," Eakin reports, "plagiarism detection has gone high-tech." The several software solutions Eakin describes, including Turnitin.com, are interesting in their own right (see chapter 7 for a closer analysis). Important to note is simply that Green's "temptation" device proves relevant to a wide variety of related activities and not just paper downloading and cut-and-paste shortcuts. For Ambrose, the computer, in particular the spell-check function, helped increase his creative "pace" but also may have induced a particular kind of editorial sloppiness. For Goodwin, the computer facilitated a move from primitive hand-based note taking to the more sophisticated (and safer) world of quotes rendered "separate" from their related comments. Finally, for outfits like Turnitin.com, "which uses a software program to check the content of student work against millions of sites around the Web and a database of papers from online term-paper mills," the computer functions as the definitive surveillance device, poised and ready at a moment's notice to separate not just the "quote" from the "comment" but also the "honest" from the "dishonest" literary document (Eakin).

Doris Kearns Goodwin's plagiarism infraction would also be a topic of conversation on the January 28, 2002, edition of the PBS *NewsHour*, hosted by Margaret Warner. Warner begins the conversation with an ostensibly clear and distinct definition of plagiarism, borrowed from Merriam-Webster: To plagiarize, she says, is "to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own." Whether or not Ambrose and Goodwin committed such acts of literary theft would be the subject, in part, of the ensuing discussion, but first we are treated to Goodwin's own defense (recorded earlier) of her literary behavior. Much of that defense—turning on errors of "technique"—has been treated

above. Worth noting now is Goodwin's eagerness to situate her infraction within the larger debate still raging over the "double standard" invoked by our U. Penn. students back on January 15. "I absolutely believe," says Goodwin, "professional standards for historians need never be sacrificed in popular history . . . and it's critical to credit the people who have plowed the fields before." Regarding her own "professional standards," Goodwin assures the viewing audience that she is plowing her own literary territory: "There is absolutely no intent to appropriate anyone's words as my own, which is what plagiarism is."

Merriam-Webster's definition of "steal" suggests that Goodwin is correct, or at least justified, in amending the given definition of "plagiarize" to include this matter of intent. She did not intend to steal or appropriate, so despite her error of technique, she did not plagiarize. Not everyone, however, would accept Goodwin's gloss, most notably Timothy Noah, one of three guests on the *NewsHour* that night and staff writer for the online magazine, *Slate*. Noah rejects Goodwin's excuse and insists that what we have here is a case "where two academic historians or at least former academic historians [Ambrose as well as Goodwin] are distorting the definition of plagiarism. Plagiarism does not have to be deliberate. It can be inadvertent." Noah is "surprised," in fact, that Goodwin would make that claim given the fact that she "sits on the board of directors . . . at Harvard University where this is stated quite clearly in a handbook given to freshmen."

Noah has returned to the source, if you will, of the problem by invoking the Harvard freshman handbook as the definitive authority on issues of text appropriation. With the reader's permission, we will accept this introduction of new evidence because, in fact, the rules in the Harvard handbook, as explained by Noah, seem remarkably consistent with the rules we have accrued, willy-nilly, so far (not to mention those discussed in chapter 5). The handbook

> says clearly if you borrow . . . [i]t doesn't have to be an entire sentence. If you borrow a lengthy phrase and you do not put quotation marks around it, that's plagiarism whether you did it on purpose or not and whether you included a footnote or not. The quotation marks are the key thing that defines plagiarism.

If "the words are all" (Mallon) and "quotation marks are the key thing" (Noah), then indeed the case should be closed, especially if errors of this sort are considered plagiarism "whether you did it on purpose or not." Ambrose and Goodwin, despite their protestations, are guilty.

But Jerah Johnson, history professor at the University of New Orleans and also a guest on *NewsHour*, vehemently disagrees. "No. No. No. No. Absolutely not. Simply errors. Simply errors." Johnson then clarifies his point: This case, he says,

is just a prime example of how easy it is for any of us to make these kinds of errors. I agree with her definition of plagiarism, that it's a conscious act, a deliberate act, a calculating act to simply steal someone else's work.

Like Stuart Green, Johnson wants to position this kind of error making within a community of "us" for whom it is "easy" to make such mistakes.

Margaret Warner then asks her third panel participant, Eric Foner of Columbia University, to weigh in on the topic of authorial intent. At first glance it appears that Foner casts the deciding vote in favor of Noah's view that intention is not the "all" of plagiarism. It "doesn't depend," he argues, "on the motivation. It depends on the evidence that we have before us." Reiterating that Ambrose's initial denial was "rather more damaging in a way," Foner praises Goodwin for at least admitting her mistake. What Foner finds damaging, however, in Ambrose's explanation is that it violates his definition of good writing. Ambrose's "explanation that when he finds a good story he just plugs it into his own writing, that's not what most of us consider writing to be." Furthermore,

> writing is putting these things into your own words, creating your own argument, not just sort of scavenging other people's books and taking their good writing and putting it out as your own words.

Thus, to write, according to Foner, is to create your "own argument"; to plagiarize is to scavenge another's creation. Hence, the double sin of literary theft: in failing to credit another's creation, you fail to create yourself and thus become, by extension, both unlawful and illegitimate.

Warner turns back to Johnson: "[W]hat do you say to the point Tim Noah raised about what students are told and I think disciplined for in this area?" Johnson responds:

> Certainly. A student should be. They have to be taught and they should be taught. It takes a long time. It's not just freshmen. Our beginning graduate students have a terrible time understanding when to footnote and where to footnote and how to use quotations. It takes a very long time to get people trained.

As Berkenkotter and Huckin have pointed out, there is for any discourse community a given "genre knowledge" that novices within the community must learn in order to "perform effectively" (2). Johnson makes the same point with regard to the academic community, broadly conceived. Both graduates and undergraduates—any, in fact, who seek certification within this community—

must be taught or "trained" in the conventions of source citation. Warner clarifies her question: "But I mean do you think there should be a double standard or a different standard for college students than Professors—or historians?"

"No," replies Johnson, "it's all the same standard but again I go back to what I said originally. We all make errors, students and professional historians alike." So, contra Warner's leading question, Johnson insists that students and "professional historians" are similar in making mistakes of this kind. It is "all the same standard," and that standard should make allowances for simple human error. Tim Noah, however, disagrees. Referring again to the Harvard rule set, Noah insists:

> [I]f you make such an error as an undergraduate . . . they have very stern sanctions against it. You are typically asked to leave the university for two semesters. You're not even allowed within the [c]ity of Cambridge, Massachusetts. You'll lose all of the credit hours that you've accumulated until then, which means a lot of lost money. And you have something put permanently on your record that states that you did something dishonest when you were an undergraduate.

In response, Johnson wonders out loud whether Noah is "saying that Harvard students are not allowed to make errors?" Noah is ready with a quick reply: "They're not allowed to make this error apparently."

Once again, Warner turns to Foner for help, and it is here in Foner's testimony that the "flurry," I believe, reaches its fascinating climax. Warner asks him to state, for the record, his view on the question of plagiarism "standards" in academia, and Foner replies:

> Well, obviously, if a student turned up, if a freshman turned up with a paper with these errors I would probably give him *[sic]* a stern warning, send him back and have him rewrite it. If it were someone a little further advanced, the penalty would be more severe. But, you know, I think that there's . . . [t]he problem here goes beyond these two individuals. You have the publishers who refuse to acknowledge these infractions and refuse to withdraw the books from publication. (ellipsis in original)

The ellipsis here—marking an abrupt change of subject—is important for reasons I will go into below. For now I focus on Foner's apparent admission that there is, indeed, a double standard. First of all, we have our typical (male) student—a freshman—turning up in Foner's office and getting a "stern warning" for making citation errors. No problem, Foner might say, just "rewrite it," only this time be sure to "write" it—i.e., put "things into your own words"; create

"your own argument"; don't just go "scavenging other people's books." But there is another student waiting in the hall who swallows his fear and shuffles into Foner's office. If this student, suggests Foner, is "someone a little further advanced, the penalty would be more severe."

Foner believes, in short, that there should be a certain amount of play (slack, maneuvering room) in adjudicating problems of this sort. The final decision is a judgment call—in the most literal sense—issued by a responsible member of a discourse community. The "freshman," in other words, stands in symbolically for the amateur to whom any well-reasoned university expert should show a little mercy. But even the most reasonable of experts will not forget that there is also a respected community whose traditions must be upheld, as well as a particular "genre knowledge" whose rudiments, as Johnson said so well, "should be taught." Therefore, both during and after learning those rudiments, students will be held to a higher standard, and penalties for infractions will be more "severe." The logic makes perfect sense for an educational system, stretching from Columbia to New Orleans and beyond, that stresses the importance of moving up through progressive stages of development and joining the ranks of the "further advanced."

Moreover, by suggesting rather coyly that severe penalties should be meted out to those a little higher up on the academic ladder, Foner implies that Ambrose and Goodwin are just as culpable as any student who has moved beyond the first year. To summarize, if there is a double standard (Noah's argument), then students obviously get the short end of the stick. But if there is just one standard (Johnson's apparent belief, Foner's veiled argument), then clearly Ambrose and Goodwin should be subject to "more severe" sanctions than perhaps they have so far endured. The debate about double standards in education ends there, however, since as noted, Foner jumps rather abruptly to a new topic: negligence on the part of publishers. This leap, marked in the text with an ellipsis ( . . . ), is significant, and I will conclude my discussion of the Ambrose/Goodwin cases by ending where I began—in the realm of punctuation.

An ellipsis in grammar shows the omission of one or more words that are obviously understood but that must be supplied to make a construction grammatically complete. For example, "The text that she copied" may be changed, by ellipsis, to "The text she copied." Clearly the ellipsis in the *NewsHour* transcription of Foner's response is meant to indicate not an omission of this order but a sudden leap, as definitions of "ellipsis" suggest, without logical connectives from one topic to another. Still, it could be argued that in pausing between subjects, Foner both leaps toward a new topic and omits (removes from the debate) the very issue under review. "The problem," he says after the pause, "goes beyond these two individuals." And indeed, the issue on the table now goes beyond not only Ambrose and Goodwin but also beyond the other individuals— I will call them students and professionals—for whom Ambrose and Goodwin

have so far served as specially coded surrogates. In brief, Foner has replaced the student with the figure of the publisher. The problem of a double standard in academic life has been erased, bypassed, left behind, omitted from the discussion, and Margaret Warner anchors the transition: "So I take then *[sic]*, Professor Foner, that you don't think there should be a different standard for so-called popular history."

Obviously, the leap makes sense in context. After all, Goodwin opens this segment with the ardent claim that "professional standards" need not be sacrificed for popular success. As might be expected, Foner and now Warner have simply moved on to this part of the debate. Still, we have lost even the question of whether or not students and professionals (professors) do, indeed, occupy separate domains where plagiarism is concerned. Have students, in other words, now been surreptitiously moved over into the camp of the "professional" in order to better frame this now-revised debate concerning "so-called popular history" and its potentially "different standard"? At the very least the debate has shifted noticeably from one in which students are pitted against professors to one in which academic professionals (which may or not include students) face popular historians in the battle over literary terrain.

This battle plays out in the ensuing dialog, wherein Warner proposes a subtle distinction between "serious" academic scholarship and blockbuster-paced writing: referring to Stephen Ambrose, she asks, "Is it really possible to do serious research and original thinking and write a book of history in a year?" Surfacing again, we see, is the issue of blocks and their associated busters. Warner's question to Johnson is leading, to say the least, and Johnson takes issue with the implied critique of Ambrose's "original thinking": yes, he replies, it is possible if you happen to be Stephen Ambrose, who is "simply a phenomenally hard-working historian. . . . That's all Steve knows how to do is work."

Taking issue with Johnson's remark, Foner acknowledges that Ambrose may be a "very hard-working person," but "there are many other historians who are also equally hard working." In other words, hard work is not the province of popular or blockbuster historians alone. Those who do scholarly history are "hard-working" as well. But Foner, at the same time, wants to emphasize the difference between "other historians" and Ambrose:

> They don't produce a book a year. It's humanly impossible to produce as many books so fast as Professor Ambrose has and give each one the care and the originality that is required by professional standards.

Foner then assures the viewing public that Ambrose and Goodwin are "unfortunate" but "isolated instances." In brief, the world of historical scholarship is for the most part safe, as long as Ambrose and those like him are suitably dealt

with: "The largest sanction against a scholar is really what has happened here: Publicity and simply some diminution of their reputation." Moreover, in claiming that it is "humanly impossible" to produce so prodigiously, Foner makes the point that I made less elegantly earlier: Ambrose could not have acted alone, simply because the amount of work done in the time it took to do it is not possible for a single human being. In other words, in ferreting out weakness, we must look not to "Ambrose" but, perhaps, to "Ambrose and Ambrose, Inc." and then to the blockbuster publishing racket which underwrites the kind of super- or inhuman feats that Foner finds "impossible."

Nonetheless, the damage to the man himself—via diminution—has indeed been done, in part by critics such as Foner. To put it briefly, without "care" and "originality" and the blessing of "professional standards," Ambrose stands before other historians as someone who has nothing to show for himself—besides the millions in his bank account, that is. In performing the "humanly impossible," Ambrose has been stripped of his humanity, which for our purposes means that, in the end, he is profoundly and irredeemably unoriginal.

## CONCLUSION: FASCINATION REVISITED

Where has plagiarism gone in all this? It has gone where it often goes—absorbed into a larger, murkier realm in which debates turn less on individual (human) actors and more on institutional battles over contested terrain. In this case, a potentially envious professional sector cordons off a kind of careful, original, slow, and honest work and builds a barricade against the careless, false, too fast, and dishonest activities of the popular. A "flurry of fascination" builds up around the ensuing drama, and we, as participants and observers, play our respective parts in either damning or defending.

My goal in telling this story has been to reconstruct that flurry and, along the way, to note what remains murky in such tales of literary malfeasance, particularly where issues of education and student writing are concerned. I have tried to avoid taking sides—or at least have endeavored to define and temporarily occupy the several sides represented—but the alert reader will surely have guessed by now that while I am curious about Ambrose and Goodwin and their related fates, I find my affinities drifting ever farther away from those who have enjoyed over time the most attention and closer to those whose voices were seldom if ever heard in the debates captured here.

I am more concerned, that is, about the "hapless student" who, without the kind of publicity heaped on our infamous historians, has been left somewhere hidden—anonymous and mute—in the folds of this story. As Geoff Nunberg would say in late February, 2002, on NPR's *Fresh Air*, the "striking thing about

plagiarism is how rarely anybody has anything original to say about it." Echoing Thomas Mallon, Nunberg goes on to point out that there is

> a remarkable sameness about these literary scandals going back to the eighteenth century. The indignant accusations, the protestations of innocent error and above all the puzzling gratuitousness of the crime. I'm not talking now about a student who goes on the Internet to buy a term paper for a course he hasn't attended all semester. That may be reprehensible, but it isn't mysterious.

Indeed, we are not "talking now about a student"—neither Nunberg's hypothetical-reprehensible nor the hapless-voiceless one introduced above. And, to be sure, wherever student infractions are discussed, there is often a "remarkable sameness" about the ways in which the student plagiarist is cast as criminally minded at worst, ignorant or careless at best—like an "Ambrose," in other words, but without recourse to research teams and bankrolls. To sum up, finally, on the issue of standards and their potential doubling, I propose that there is only one, but the repercussions are radically different depending on where you happen to do business and just where you sit on the scale of least to most "advanced."

So, at the risk of having something original to say about this age-old topic, I think we have barely begun to understand—as students, teachers, scholars, professors, historians, reporters, publishers, and letter writers from Granada Hills—precisely what is going on when a student, or anyone for that matter, engages in the kinds of literary activities lumped together under the murky catchall of plagiarism. Thus, to confront all such incidents as crimes of either theft or negligence—and the basic tenor of the reporting in this case reinforced just that reduction—is, to my mind, the true crime that goes largely unreported. Not that acts of theft and negligence do not take place. My concern, rather, is that there appears to be little interest—in popular or professional culture, to hold onto that troubled binary just a bit longer—in considering possible causes and explanations (and even solutions) other than those serving to replicate and reinforce the common idea that what is not correct in literary practice is by nature deviant and evil. The story told in these pages seems to make that point rather well.

In general, then, the Harvard handbook—like others addressed in chapter 5—would have us believe that the issue of correct appropriation is closed, the problems easy to define, and the various cases of literary transgression so obvious (for an Ambrose, a Goodwin, or a student) that everyone would likely agree on both the nature of the crime and the need for adequate punishments. I hope this retelling of the Ambrose and Goodwin stories has shown, however, that the issue is far from closed, the problems not at all easy to define, and our sys-

tem of punishment so skewed that even a group of three professionally and academically minded experts cannot, before a national audience, either agree on what plagiarism is or keep the conversation focused long enough to isolate the source of disagreement. The only sense common to all of this is that professors, publishers, blockbuster and professional historians, universities, newspapers, radio and TV stations, and hapless students are all caught up in the "flurry" of plagiarism, and too often it is not clear who ends up paying, in the end, for whose crime.