

BOOK REVIEW



**Correcting the scholarly record for research integrity: In the aftermath of plagiarism**, by M.V. Dougherty, Cham, Switzerland, Springer, 2018, xv, 248 pp., \$109.99 (cloth); \$84.99 (eBook), ISBN: 978-3-319-99434-2 (cloth); 978-3-319-99435-2 (eBook)

Most of us involved in scholarly publishing either as authors, editors, or reviewers approach our roles quite responsibly because we respect the value and importance of the archival record of scholarship. We understand the three pillars of academic fraud: falsification, fabrication, and plagiarism. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, which includes the National Institutes of Health (NIH), “fabrication is making up data or results and recording or reporting them. Falsification is manipulating research materials, equipment, or processes, or changing or omitting data or results such that the research is not accurately represented in the research record. Plagiarism is the appropriation of another person’s ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit. Research misconduct does not include honest error or differences of opinion.”<sup>1</sup> Among the three components of fraud, plagiarism has received the least attention in the study of research integrity. Perhaps it is least studied because it is the most obvious or the least practiced abuse.

When presented with an entire book devoted to plagiarism, I wondered what I would learn and how serious the transgressions of plagiarism were in academic scholarship. After all, we warn our students of the severe consequences they would face if they should be found to have plagiarized their papers or research. After reviewing M.V. Dougherty’s book (only his first name initials are available) I came to learn how extensive and nuanced the problem of plagiarism was.

The book is divided up into eight sections. They include as follows: defining the scholarly record; the meaning of academic plagiarism; efforts at correcting the scholarly record from plagiarized materials; whistleblowing that identifies plagiarized work; and the response of publishers and journal editors to evidence that they have published plagiarized materials and whether, on seeing the evidence, they correct the record.

This is a work of illuminating insights, historical depth, and moral clarity in the pursuit of correcting the record of scholarly research from plagiarism. The author produces ample cases of unusual malfeasance in authorship, that many of us probably have never heard of. He illustrates examples in the scholarly record of hoax articles and parodies even in such respected journals as *The British Medical Journal*, where it took 35 years before there was a retraction of the so-called cello scrotum hoax. The author argues that such hoaxes can be damaging to the scholarly record and to medical practice as they get citations and, because of where they are published, are accepted as the truth.

The most memorable hoaxes described in the book appeared in distinguished journals of philosophy such as *Philosophical Studies*, *Mind*, and *the Journal of Philosophy*. The author reports on cases in humanities journals of pseudonymous publications, where authors publish under a pseudonym. In one case, the pseudonym was an anagram of the original author’s name. In some cases, the pseudonymous author comments favorably on the writings of the actual author. Even the eminent scholars are implicated. “As my doctoral education was in philosophy, it came as a surprise to read: “Michel Foucault’s use of the thinly veiled pseudonym ‘Maurice Florence’ in publishing a detailed encyclopedia entry on himself in 1984, shortly before he died, does not appear to have deceived many, and the entry is now considered to be part of his published *oeuvre*” (p. 26). The

hoaxes described by the author do not necessarily fit into his definition of plagiarism, which must meet four criteria: 1) a nontrivial appropriation of words, image, or formulas; 2) inadequate credit given to appropriated material; 3) an appearance of original authorship; and 4) in a discrete item belonging to the scholarly record.

We also learn from this volume the historical roots of plagiarism which is traced to Greek and Roman authors and seems to have thrived through the early modern period and into the 20th century. A quarter century ago, two scientists at NIH, Walter Stewart and Ned Feder, turned their attention to exposing scientific fraud. They were popularly called “fraud-busters.” Stewart’s software picked up more cases of alleged plagiarism than he bargained for. Eventually, NIH stopped their activity, even as they had made some major findings of fabricated research data.

M.V. Dougherty, the Sr. Ruth Caspar Chair in Philosophy at Ohio Dominican University, is in some ways a modern version of the famous NIH duo, but focused on the humanities. His book describes cases in which he has made conscientious efforts to shed light on plagiarism and to correct the scholarly record through inquiries to publishers. His reports on the responses of authors, journal editors, and publishers when they are presented evidence of plagiarized materials is enlightening. He describes 12 cases where retractions, corrections, or inaction resulted when a plagiarized published work was disclosed to editors and publishers.

The digital revolution has affected writing and publishing. Cutting and pasting has made plagiarism effortless, both consciously and inadvertently. It has also made the discovery of plagiarized materials easier. But programs designed to pick up plagiarized material require a sophisticated interpreter. How many words? How common are the words in use? What minor changes in a paragraph would not disqualify it from being considered plagiarized?

The author claims he is not interested in penalties for plagiarists. His primary interest as a “plagiarist-buster” is to correct the scholarly record. Whereas fabrication and falsification seem more prevalent in the sciences, plagiarism is found more pervasively in the humanities. The sciences, according to Dougherty, are also more serious about correcting the scholarly record: “In comparison with the natural sciences, the discipline of philosophy often falls short of the standard practice for correcting the scholarly record” (p. 111). This volume will stand up as one of the seminal works on plagiarism in the scholarship of academic research in the humanities, with emphasis on post-publication responses. It also discusses the challenges to those who contemplate being whistleblowers and provides recommendations on how the scholarly record should be corrected.

## Note

1. <https://ori.hhs.gov/education/products/ucla/chapter8/default.htm>.

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