

# PLAGIARISM AND COLLABORATION: A CASE STUDY

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I am grading essays. A pile of papers addressing a prompt for the intertextual analysis of some reading from the “Critical Thinking” section of my syllabus sits before me, and I read about the positive and negative effects of television, the union of democracy and complaining in defense of Bill Buckley, and why the student body should vote for an activities fee increase. And, I must admit, I am fairly impressed. Until I get to this paper:

“May His Soul Rest in Perfect Peace”, were the words that came out of the mouth of Priest. An announcement was made by the priest that if anyone wanted to pay his last respect to Mr. James they should join the queue. I did not understand what was really happening. The casket, which had been resting throughout the service on a classic gorgeous ultra metal casket bier, was opened and skillfully ornamented with pink colorful flowers with a nice smell. The congregation joined the line that the family of the late Mr. James had already begun to form. Being so inquisitive to find out what was really happening I also joined the queue. I could see from afar the late chemistry professor lying in the casket. Sooner or later it was my turn to file past the body. I could smell the nice fragrance that was being used on him. He did not look the same, but as usual he had his smile to let some of us who had not known him for that long still make him out. Honestly he looked like a circus clown with his shade of lipstick just that he did not have the circus stick. He was dressed in a white linen tuxedo

with black gloves. I stretched my neck to see if I could see his legs but his legs were covered in a black lace. Pictures of his youthful stakes were displayed on the walls of the casket. I could see the makeup that was being used on the poor old man. He looked as if they had sprinkled glitters all over his face. The casket had a nice leather interior with rose colored lights aligned in the casket. I could see that his lips weren't positioned well and that you could see the stitches that were stitched to enable the poor old man close his mouth. The Mr. James I knew had a reasonable amount of hair but the man I saw lying down looked bald to me. I knew that was the last time I was going to set eyes on the man I admired so much in life. As we walked pass the body the organist played a soft classical music that enabled a siren atmosphere for mourning.

What alarms me about this piece, which so beautifully opens a response to Jessica Mitford's "Behind the Formaldehyde Curtain," is that I fear it might be plagiarized. The writing exhibited in this excerpt far surpasses the previously exhibited capabilities of the author. Consider this opening paragraph to an earlier draft on Vicki Hearne's essay "What's Wrong With Animal Rights?" which he asked that I make some final suggestions on, for he felt he was almost finished:<sup>1</sup>

Adam shouted " throw the ball" I threw the ball so hard that it hit Adam could not catch the ball that it hit a dog strolling by with its owner that every body around me started to stare at me . Adam yelled at me "go and apologize to the dog" . I was so mad at him because how could the dog figure out that I did not throw the ball at him and really know if I was sorry. For a while I neglected them and thought everything was ok. But they kept staring at me. I felt so uncomfortable that I walked towards the dog to stroke her. I felt so bad that I left the baseball pitch and departed for my dorm. I just could not understand why

everybody felt for the dog that I did not accidentally hit with the ball. but rather put me in a tight corner that I would say messed up my day. Since the commencement of spring I have not been out to enjoy the weather so I thought I was going to have a lot of fun today but in the name of defending he rights of the dog that no one understood how it felt the people around me made me feel really terrible.

The writing of the first sample has been dramatically improved upon from the second. The first demonstrates a tight control over language, using economical detail and adverb description to create a vivid picture, while the second is thickly populated with a remedial disarray of run-on sentences, missing words, and jumbled, incomplete and disconnected thoughts. Could the precise and focused sentence “The casket, which had been resting throughout the service on a classic gorgeous ultra metal casket bier, was opened and skillfully ornamented with pink colorful flowers with a nice smell” have been penned by the same author whose typical style is represented in the line: “I threw the ball so hard that it hit Adam could not catch the ball that it hit a dog”? This latter sentence represents the compounded ideas that its author threw a ball so hard that his friend Adam was unable to catch it. Flying past Adam, the ball hit a dog strolling by. It is a sentence I must decode, not one I can readily enjoy and picture in my mind as I can the former. The apt description of the casket with such specific vocabulary seems beyond the control of the author of the second sample.

My student felt he was very near to concluding the animal rights piece when he submitted it to me for review. Wouldn't the author of the Mitford essay, however, immediately recognize the unintelligibility of that writing and realize that much revision was yet to be done with the piece? Other essays by this student, both drafts and final copies, had not exhibited the sophistication evidenced in the Mitford essay. They had followed in the confusion of the second example.

I suspect plagiarism, particularly as the remainder of the Mitford essay falls into the idiosyncratic mistakes so characteristic of the student's other work, so reminiscent of the Hearne essay. Indeed, the conclusion reads: "As at now I am at home thinking about how to go to bed without seeing old poor clown looking Mr. James calling me to go do some chemistry titrations in the laboratory with him, poor old Mr. James may his soul rest in perfect piece." I suspect it must be a type of "mosaic" plagiarism in which the student has engaged; he is borrowing in bits and pieces, ideas and phrases—whole sections even—from some other text to preface his argument and in the reprint of which he has introduced his own mechanical errors (e.g., "May His Soul Rest in Perfect Peace") .

I do a quick Google search of key words. Surely this paper—at least its coherent parts (i.e., the narrative first featured above)—must be "borrowed" from some online narrative about a funeral experience. Nothing shows up. So I then suspect that his paper was written by someone else, perhaps a friend or a roommate.

I preach to my students that if they have difficulty with writing, they should get outside help. I advocate the use of the Writing Center and also make myself available to students both during and outside of office hours. I urge them to go to friends to help improve their papers. "Whatever help you need, get it. If writing is difficult for you, you work with an expert who will mentor you in the skill." It's the path I follow in my own writing.

I bring the student in to my office. He tells me he has taken my advice and is receiving tutoring from a classmate, Sean, a more advanced writer than he. Sean has good subject matter and more panache than any other student I have read. Despite these gifts, however, Sean has just as many problems with grammar and organization as his supposed tutee. Sean tends to become too impressed with his own wit, such that his comments become a litany of one-liners which distort the focus of his paper.<sup>2</sup> Sean also pluralizes with the possessive, substituting "dad's" for "dads" and "task force's will be sent out to prevent television bootlegging" for "task forces will be sent out to prevent television bootlegging."

Sean himself goes to the Writing Center to resolve these issues, but his final papers never seem to be error-free and still preserve a feeling of disorganization (as evidenced below).

How can the author of the Hearne essay produce something so well written as the Mitford piece in collaboration with a student who has similar problems? Sean is receiving no help with his grammar errors and prewriting gaffes even after revision: possessive plurals, choppy sentences, and loose, interjected thoughts. Conversely, in the Mitford essay there are grammar errors, but nothing too distracting—nothing idiosyncratic that points to the Hearne piece. There are no issues of coherency and organization.

Perhaps my student received assistance from a roommate or friend who helped him fine-tune his thoughts in a line-by-line revision process to produce coherent sentences. This is plausible. This process would be collaboration—of the kind even that I advocate. But what is the limit of acceptable collaboration before my student is no longer the writer? The Mitford paper is possessed of my student's voice. It is also tight and focused more than I have seen in any of his other papers: "Honestly he looked like a circus clown with his shade of lipstick just that he did not have the circus stick." There is just enough detail here and nothing extra. It doesn't wander as does the Hearne example: "I just could not understand why everybody felt for the dog that I did not accidentally hit with the ball. but rather put me in a tight corner that I would say messed up my day." What is the ethical threshold of collaboration from outside sources?

The primary issue is framed by the two larger questions: (1) What is plagiarism? and (2) What is collaboration? The answers to these questions call my responsibility into question. Am I, in fact, somehow culpable for this plagiarism's occurrence? If my student is not plagiarizing, then he is most certainly receiving outside help. But in this help is he actively participating to better his work or has his text been appropriated by someone else? If he submits to me the appropriated text, is this act plagiarizing? Am I, as an instructor, guilty of abetting plagiarism if during a conference

with a student I appropriate his paper by altering his sentences to read better? As Alice Drum argues in her work discussing pedagogies to address plagiarism, the act “involves a student, an instructor, and the structure within which the two interact” (242) and it is imperative that we not perpetuate “the myth that plagiarism has nothing to do with the instructor and the course”—that plagiarism is merely an illegal and unethical misdeed solely committed by the student (243). According to Drum, “we must admit that many students do not know how to avoid plagiarism, that most rhetoric textbooks are of little help in this respect, and that many college composition classrooms deal inadequately with the problem”; if I fail to satisfactorily teach against plagiarism, then I abet its incidence (242). But I may also be more actively committing the offense myself through overactive *collaboration*—that is, compulsory revision I press upon a student as I appropriate his/her text.

To determine if this paper is plagiarized, I first review my own policy regarding plagiarism. My syllabus explains plagiarism to be the use of

someone else’s words or ideas (intentionally or unintentionally) as if they were your own. It is dishonest, unfair, and unethical. If you put the words of other writers in quotation marks, if you cite the page number(s) from which a writer’s words and/or ideas came from, and if—when necessary—you include a list of works cited, you are not plagiarizing. Otherwise, you are.<sup>3</sup>

I further encourage my students to review their assigned text, *A Pocket Style Manual* by Diana Hacker, for information on the proper use of another writer’s work, and I forewarn of the grave penalties of plagiarism: flunking my course and a formal drumming up before the Office of Student Affairs. I make one final ominous note: “I will enforce this policy regardless of your reason for plagiarizing.”

This definition of plagiarism assumes it to be a wholly negative thing motivated by what Rebecca Moore Howard would call either “an absence of ethics or an ignorance of citation conventions” (788). It conceives of the procedure as being merely synonymous with “‘copying’ and ‘stealing’”—as Elaine E. Whitaker defines in “A Pedagogy to Address Plagiarism” (509). It fails to distinguish “between plagiarism and legitimate forms of imitation” (509) or to account for positive motivations in the act (Howard 788). Furthermore, it defines “academic integrity to include the assumption that all work submitted, unless otherwise labeled, will have been written entirely by the student who submits it” (Whitaker 509). This idea of sole authorship belies the very concept of “writing as a social process,” one composed of a dialogic community and collaborative efforts, which James A. Reither and Douglas Vipond argue and teach the discursive process to be, and which I foster in my classroom through such activities as the writing workshop and peer editing (855). And my final warning sets me up to be more a judge or gatekeeper, than a coach of writing (Secor).

This is problematic.

This negative view of plagiarism is consonant with one which Robert Palmer Saalbach promotes in his article “Critical Thinking and the Problem of Plagiarism.” Saalbach suggests that plagiarism occurs because students tend to be immature thinkers; students “do not clearly distinguish their own thoughts from those of others” (45) and thus “*uncritically*” appropriate someone else’s ideas as their own (46). In Saalbach’s opinion, then, “the first step in curing plagiarism is to get students to think *critically*” (45). Saalbach offers several classroom exercises, involving summative reviews and intertextual analyses of complicated literature, which will supposedly achieve this end.

Although teaching critical thinking will undoubtedly deter plagiarism, I do not think that the act itself is necessarily devoid of any acumen, as Saalbach implies. Plagiarism may in fact be only misapplied genius—something akin to the devilish sagacity of the master jewel thief or grifter. Moreover, as Howard in her article

“Plagiarisms, Authorships, and the Academic Death Penalty” postulates, plagiarism can be understood to represent the positive efforts of students attempting to enter an academic discourse community. These *positive* efforts are usually instanced in what is called “patchwriting,” writing which “involves ‘copying from a source text and then deleting some words, altering grammatical structures, or plugging in one-for-one synonym-substitutes” and which is not a symptom of poor ethics or ignorance to citation conventions, the two negative and typical motivations I have insinuated plagiarism to always be through my policy on the matter (788). Instead it represents a remedial attempt at appropriating academic language and argument for the sake of membership into that community. Recognizing that there is a proper language which must be appropriated for entrance into an academic discourse community and attempting to mimic its structure—even remedially, even through patchwriting—demonstrates critical thinking. Immature thinking, conversely, entails what many students observe academic writing to be: stodgy. These students are not recognizing that our language is important, for it articulates special (and specialized) arguments and structures; instead they perceive us to be merely writing in bland, voiceless and formal manners, because that’s what we people in tweed jackets with bowties do, because we’re boring.

Once realizing that the skill of critical thinking can be expressed through diverse means and that, against my policy assumptions, plagiarism is not always a negative affair, my fears of whether my student has performed the act are lessened, and I can begin to think through what actually has occurred.

Several thorough online and library searches have culled no hits for the narrative portions of my student’s Mitford essay. Therefore, my student is not directly plagiarizing; he is not patchwriting nor is he cutting from other works and mosaically pasting into his own. My student *is*, however, recognizing the existence of an academic discourse and he *is* attempting to enter it. Thus, he is critically thinking. This is why I expect he has jumbled up his words into incoherency in the Hearne essay. He is



attempting, as David Bartholomae calls it in his article “Inventing the University,” to do exactly that, to “invent the university for the occasion” and in doing so, in trying out “the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define our community,” he is muddling himself—for certainly my student does not orally communicate this confusedly (134). Furthermore, the title of the Hearne essay, “The head and tail of the coin,” illustrates the undertaking of an elaborate metaphor which works itself out throughout the body of the piece and whereby my student ultimately vindicates animal rights by demonstrating that humans and animals are different but joined, being only opposite sides on a coin, and thus are deserving of equal treatment. My student realizes that we, at the university, speak and work within fields which maintain distinct “rules governing the presentation of examples or the development of an argument”; he is upping the ante for himself by working within these structures, through the use of a complicated analogy, to establish some point (135).

How, then, do I explain the transformation of language in the Mitford piece, which is so remarkably polished, from that of the Hearne essay, which is so garbled? The answer, once again, is critical thinking.

Earlier, I wondered why the author of the Mitford piece would not recognize the chaos of the Hearne essay were he the composer of both. I submit that perhaps he has. My student recognizes that he is unsuccessfully communicating in our academic language. He knows he needs help. This admission and subsequent quest for help—which he has indubitably received, for the second piece is much more complete—is a mature and critical evaluation of the self, one which many of us are so loath to perform. My student is thinking critically by getting help.

The degree to which my student is receiving help is quite significant. The Hearne to Mitford transformation is considerable. Is it considerable enough to re-approach definitions of plagiarism? How much collaboration is too much?

Irene L. Clark ponders similar questions of ethics when considering the role of a writing center in the development of a student text. Clark's article "Portfolio Evaluation, Collaboration, and Writing Centers" seeks to circumscribe the bounds of legitimate collaboration so as to learn what suggestions for revision in a text are ethically permissible. Clark defines legitimate collaboration as being "directed at developing the student's writing *process* and at improving the student's understanding of how texts operate in terms of their readers and the expectations of an appropriate discourse community" (520). Illegitimate assistance,

on the other hand, substantially effaces or overrides the student's own contributions to the text. Such assistance does little to improve a student's abilities as a writer; instead it merely results in a paper which those abilities could not produce independently. Illegitimate assistance not only fails to help the student's development but also renders the student vulnerable to charges of inadvertent plagiarism. (520)

By analogy, all tutors, peer reviewers, instructors of writing—in essence, all text readers—are writing centers. We must ensure when giving advice for a paper that we direct our comments at the writing process. Thus we preserve the integrity of the student's ideas, the most essential contribution to the text. The linchpin for determining illegitimacy in assistance is in ascertaining whether the student could produce those structures himself—legitimate collaboration entails merely coaching him along into the recognition and use of those structures.

My student is collaborating. I have received notices of his attendance at the Writing Center, and he has acknowledged collaboration with Sean. I do expect a degree of appropriation occurring with my student's texts during collaboration with classmates. If we as trained instructors lapse into appropriation, as Nancy Sommers demonstrates throughout her evaluation of

teacher commentary on student drafts in “Responding to Student Writing,” then untrained students are apt to do so also. Although appropriation distracts writers from their own purposes in the text, I do not consider this inadvertent plagiarism, for the following three reasons. First, we do not consider ourselves to be plagiarizing through appropriation, even as we need to provide more responsible feedback to our students’ papers. Second, I do think my student capable of producing the structures of the Mitford essay. Consider this line from the Hearne essay:

I kept on asking myself that Adam and the people staring at me and fighting for the rights of dogs are in one way or the other equating me to the dog and that I am a psychological being, with an experimental welfare of my own that makes me aware that me and that dog are not the same and never going to be the same.

Here is my translation of this bit:

I kept on asking myself, *Why is everyone staring at me? Why are they fighting for the rights of dogs?* In fighting for the rights of dogs, requesting that I apologize to the mutt, they are equating me with a lowly animal—a dog! But I am a sentient being with a psychological welfare of my own, which ensures that the dog and I are essentially not the same—indeed, we will never be the same.

My student has stumbled onto some big ideas here. His essay starts with the consideration that perhaps the perceived difference between humans and animals stems from the idea of psychological welfare, that humans can sense *both* physical and emotional pain, and rationalize that pain to learn from it whereas animals cannot, and then moves to resolve this realization of difference. This is demonstrative of high-level thinking: my student puts out his initial assumptions about animal rights, plumbs their depths, and then demolishes them in the context of Vicki Hearne’s own

arguments. He is being self-critical. This is comparable to such rational structures exhibited in the Mitford essay as “Pictures of his youthful stakes were displayed on the walls of the casket.” My student is arguing (and he later returns to this point more strongly) that we surround the caskets of the deceased with healthy, lively photos of their better days, not because we wish to remember them at happier moments, but because we wish to vaunt our wealth and successes, instilling in the mourners that we have achieved a legacy worthy of remembrance. My student’s critical thinking has been preserved in both essays.

Third, my student is innocent of plagiarism by appropriation as this outcome is an inevitable function of collaboration. Composition instructors Sandra M. Lawrence and Elizabeth Sommers remind us of the “Vygotskian premise [that] all learning is a collaborative process in which social context is crucial” (101). To write is necessarily to collaborate. And successful writing collaboration involves, as argues Harvey S. Wiener, achieving “consensus” (56). Consensus is, Wiener continues, a group “activity that demands collective judgment” (55); in Kenneth Bruffee’s seminal words on the topic: it is the strugglings of a “knowledge community involve[d] in a process of negotiation” (647). Thus, in the collaboration between my students, the Mitford draft worked upon conjointly must be fundamentally different from my student’s singly crafted original. It will be a negotiation comprised of each student’s work. To have successfully collaborated, my student must and should have appropriated, to pass them off as his own, the most effective rhetorical structures, techniques, and ideas of more advanced writers (i.e., Sean). Reither and Vipond’s argument for understanding writing collaboratively maintains just this: “Texts are figures that arise out of the ground of others’ texts.... We learn to write by using writing, our own and others’, to achieve genuine ends” (866). With the genuine end here being the quest for good, functional writing (or, in the parlance of students, an “A”), my student is vindicated in adjusting his essay to emend it with the structures of a collaborating classmate to achieve the coherence he finally did in the Mitford piece—a

coherence perhaps not typically and foremost his own. Collaboratively reviewed essays should become more advanced and better hybrids developed synergistically: something which neither student alone could have accomplished, in nearly every respect (858).

This “synergy” is something lauded by Reither and Vipond as a specific benefit of coauthorship, a particular and deep realm of collaboration (858). But my assignment is not to be coauthored. It was designed for *individual, independent* student assessment. Coauthorship according to my assignment parameters ought to be plagiarism, for the proper collaboration I have sanctioned for my classroom (like so many of us) is the simple peer review workshop.

But peer editing is flawed. Lad Tobin, in discussing its failure in his classroom, asserts that peer editing is “halfhearted collaboration...lacking the energy and honesty of intense and direct peer competition but also the intimacy and exhilaration of intense and total peer collaboration”; thus, it is a “weird no-man’s-and-woman’s-land where students feign collaboration” (131). In my own classroom, it is I who engenders this no-man’s-and-woman’s-land. I use peer review seemingly to promote collaboration; I urge it on with the snappy dictum “Help your neighbor help him- or herself.” However, I undermine any potential connections of my students to their peers’ texts, and reinforce traditional student vs. student and hierarchical teacher-student relationships, by ultimately insisting that finished texts belong solely to one author and that official evaluation stem solely from me (131). In essence, I effectively belie theoretical notions that writing is a social engagement or conversation—more accurately, an “internalized conversation re-externalized” (Bruffee 641)—whereby a student seeks to gain membership into a “community of status equals: peers” (642). How can my students enter into a knowledge community when they must paradoxically deign themselves absolute ruler over the “social artifact” (642) that their writing actually is, to make it not dialogic, but monologic, a thing soliloquized only to me? As collaboration begins to take

shape in my classroom through the peer review workshop, I suddenly undercut it with a witch-hunt for too close cooperation; I disallow my students to help each other too much. Consequently, my students are little wont to get involved with each other and with each other's writing.

Thus, if we really want to teach collaboration, Tobin advocates coauthorship—the synergy of Reither and Vipond requiring Wiener's "consensus on a number of different issues" (Tobin 132). Collaboration, he writes, at its best and most successful, is coauthorship. Only coauthorship is true collaboration (131-33). This is why Geraldine McNenny and Duane H. Roen make such a strong call for this type of scholarship in our field generally, where, they argue, despite enjoying theoretical accolades, in practice coauthorship is eschewed. We must practice our collaborative theory, they exhort; we must coauthor. If my student—this supposed weaker writer—is coauthoring, then he is doing exactly that which we should be already. In appropriating, my student understands that "[b]oth writing and knowing...are from beginning to end collaborative": inevitably and inherently coauthorative (Reither and Vipond 856-57). I am therefore reluctant to strike down so quickly structural appropriation in collaboration. It is to be expected. I must evaluate it via what is the true touchstone for determining a case of plagiarism in such instances: I must establish whether the "collaboration is hierarchical rather than dialogic," and thus plagiaristic rather than coauthorative (McNenny and Roen 292). To return to Clark above, I must ascertain whether my student is actively participating or whether he is merely recording dictations. In the Mitford essay, my student is not just a recorder; he is an active shaper. His collaboration is dialogic. He is not plagiarizing. In fact, I have since caught glimpses of my student and Sean together at the library, the two absorbed in a concentrated *exchange* of ideas as together they review both their essay drafts.

I left the following comment at the close of my student's Hearne essay: "You need to clean up your grammar and punctuation before you submit things to me in any form. This was

very difficult to read. Please be sure to go to the writing center for help.” This comment encouraged my student to seek the help which I now fear he has too much received. I demanded that my student completely reorganize his unreadable sentences; any revision performed on the Hearne essay would necessarily radically restructure the piece. Yes, the Mitford essay is another topic, but undoubtedly it too was in such a form once. My student has not plagiarized, though. He has been self-critical enough to realize he needs help. He has gotten that help—that legitimate help—through fellow students and the Writing Center. I now can assess his writing for revision and not overwhelm him with grammar and mechanics corrections. Any good editor can clean up mechanics. And my student has found that editor: his classmates.

Perhaps if my student had mentioned in the introduction to his essay, his cover letter, the extensive use of peer review assistance, I would have felt better about the Mitford revision. This cover letter, an assignment given concomitantly and turned in with each essay, reflects upon and explains the student’s writing process. In it, the student discusses the content of his/her accompanying essay, explaining how that content was specifically generated.<sup>4</sup> With detail in his cover letter of collaborative efforts, my student would have clarified the possibility of plagiarism. I would immediately have known how he ended up where he did in his essay. I should, however, be anticipating, acknowledging and appreciating that my student has revised; I should be working to discern what happened in this writing assignment. I should, as the close reader which I teach my students to be, recognize the preserved nuances of the critical thinking structures consonant in each essay and know that the Mitford essay is not plagiarized. From now on, I will read my students’ work as it deserves and seek to understand it, not to interrogate it.

So this is why I ultimately commended my student upon his revisions, his improvement in the Mitford essay. I extolled his willingness to have forgone the less functional Hearne essay and to have begun utterly anew with a different topic—a thing students

are typically reluctant to do. I related my delight in his collaboration with Sean, urging that he continue with such writing relationships (it was helping!), but cautioning, too, that in them he should always actively participate and maintain a staunch authority over his text. The grade I finally awarded the Mitford piece was a mid-level B. I chose to reward effort and process rather than polished output; I opted to focus more prominently on the later part of my course's title, elevating its critical thinking component somewhat above the actual writing—particularly as this student was my only one who tackled Mitford (others selected instead more approachable readings). I conveyed to my student that the Mitford essay was not a finished piece. I encouraged him to re-read the essay to find errors he had missed, that he might weed them out in the future. One such occasion might be for the next assignment, the final essay which is a comprehensive revision and extension of a previously composed course essay. Thus, I advised more revision, prodding my student further along in a process that was already becoming very fruitful.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The first sample eventually supplanted the second as his third essay for the course. I strongly urged him to revise the Hearne piece, advising that he was not finished with the text as he hoped.

<sup>2</sup> Exhibited below is an excerpt taken from one of Sean's (whose true name has been changed) better, more refined responses to portions of *The Plug-In Drug: Television, Children, and the Family* by Marie Winn. The genius, as well as the many difficulties in Sean's writing, which I mention, is clearly evidenced in this passage:

I have a simple idea to solve the television dilemma. The government could say they are going to ban all television viewing. Police will raid people's houses and remove there television, task force's will be sent out to prevent television bootlegging. Mass Chaos will ensue, dad's clinging to there television's will have to have there iron grip pried from there prized machines by the 'jaws of life.' Mothers will cry at the loss of Oprah and day time soaps and little children will sit there jaws on the floor and eyes glued open (for no other reason then



that is their typical expression as they sit in the living room and watch television). In an uproar fifty times the magnitude of that of 9/11, these angry Americans will organize a march from that state where the 'OC' is, to that state where that show 'West Wing' is based. The pounds will melt away as they march from the coast of California, to the Capital. Family's will unite in sympathy for their fallen brethren and there rage at the evil government, only out there to keep them intelligent and fit, those bastards. When they finally arrive, skinny, tired, and united, the government will offer them back their televisions. But they will look around and see the ailments of modern society gone, family's standing hand in hand; the David's of the world have regained a waist line, Betty Sue hasn't seen the 'OC' in a week, and she's alive, Mom and Dad were reunited by their love of television, and for just a moment things will be back to the way they used to be. A calm will settle over the crowd, an angelic voice and light will rain down from above, as everyone stands at the foot of the capital building. Then from the back a consensus grows, it floats through the crowd, growing in number and force. The people are chanting, in minutes flat it's reached everyone, "TV, TV, TV." A father in the front, beady eyed and broken down draws his troops into battle with one last command, "Save the TV's and burn the Capital!"

<sup>3</sup> This policy is in fact borrowed with blessing from my former supervisor, Professor M. Royce Kallerud. It is a commonly used policy throughout the Division of Language and Literature at Truman State University.

<sup>4</sup> The above description of the cover letter is an adaptation of one formulated by Professor Kallerud. It is a popular writing assignment given out generally at Truman State University.

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