

**CPA** Canadian Poetry Association  
London Chapter

## **CREATIVE PLAGIARISM**



**BOOKCLUB BOOKLIT #3**

## **Creative Plagiarism**

BookClub Booklit Series #3

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To steal the language, ideas or thoughts from another, representing them as one's own original work.

(Random house Dictionary, 1980}

Everyone has plagiarized in one form or another at some time in their past. They have picked up and used a word or phrase from a song or story or movie and stored that word or phrase in the back of their mind and invariably slipped it into a poem or song or piece of prose.

Most of what we have read has been written or thought of long before we were born. Writers have borrowed ideas from one another for as long as ink has passed over paper (or velum). While true plagiarism is wrong (claiming entire pieces of another's work as your own), borrowing an idea or phrase that you find interesting or important can be as good as a compliment to a writer (whether they in turn, borrowed it or not). This can be categorized to some as *Writer's License* or as it is called here . . . *Creative Plagiarism*.

The first form of *Creative Plagiarism* that will be discussed is one that has been growing in popularity over the past few years. This writing form is known as the *Found Poem*. Found poetry can be created from any existing written material or conversation. While the original material should still be credited to the original author, the changed form and not the actual words becomes your credit or authorship. Original material can be obtained from graffiti, speeches, lists, conversations, stories, books, etc.

This author's first attempt at Found poetry first occurred in 1974. While working as the Assistant Foreman for Metro Toronto Parks Department at James Gardens in Etobicoke during the spring cleanup of the Monument Garden a large piece of paper was discovered with parts of a letter and other scribbling on it. It was wedged in the slats of a park bench and contained the rambling and thoughts written to a girl named Judy from a young man named . . . The letter was filed away for ten years when this author was the Grounds Foreman at the University of Toronto in 1984. As synchronicity would have it, a crumpled letter written on yellow paper was accidentally discovered and was written by a young woman named Judy to a young man named Mike. Upon returning home and comparing this discovery with the one from ten years earlier, they were found to be compatible in content and even though they were not written by the same people (even though the names were the same) they could have been. A Found Poem was created:

### **Rochdale 1**

#### **Art Shoes, Yellow paper:**

*Mike and Judy a psychotic love affair*

Hello Judy  
down the hall from me  
is a lady piano teacher  
and if you like I'll ask her if you

could play her piano for a while.  
I love you more than a sister for a sister I never had.  
I love you more than a daughter  
because even though I had her mother, she  
has told them not to love me.  
Oh Judy I miss you  
and there was so much I didn't say  
(did I listen  
when you were telling me an importance?)  
I love your concern  
for even a hardened cicada  
protests inside a paper bag.  
(forgive my packrat mind, my  
stupidity for fumbling  
and you laughed at how warm I felt)  
womanly beauty,  
the ability to express it,  
a warm thought that covers  
the feelings of each moments nearness,  
space time a word that is gracious,  
complementing,  
(as needed as the nuts on a nut loaf)

forgive me for you  
find beauty in the junkyards of my mind.  
I need a simple room, a quiet room,  
completely black with a candle,  
a room for contemplating only,  
I seemed to really upset you  
last night when you . . .

Please express specifically what  
your thoughts were at the moment  
you began to cry and then sob?

Dear please, I am concerned for you,  
what hurts you, I also feel.  
May I say there is no logic as  
to how you felt at the time.  
You are a woman and  
I couldn't get over it so please specify:  
SEX  
how often where you want  
how you want when you want  
(how honest should I be with her?)

Your friends, my friends, what do they want?  
What do you want?  
True affection bull shit games.  
Oh Judy, the tears well up in my eyes.

**Rochdale 2:**

*Mike and Judy a psychotic love affair*

Art basics, props not  
so much alive on basics  
    but I can't speed.  
I've got to get in touch with coops,  
find out about . . . etc.  
Is it more or less accessible to students  
a    n inevitability - geo aesthetics  
constant thoughts of suicide  
and I have to consider the light at Rochdale.

    Yellow futures,  
applying for starship birds,  
flexibility shoes, and  
the board committee is involved  
in the feasibility of the  
expensive and the old.

I've only been a grub in the co-op,  
whose people can little afford new ideas  
    and borders.

I've only been a parasite.  
I've taken from Lori  
and I've given nothing back,  
and from Mike I've taken much  
and given in return  
what money can't afford,  
others are indifferent.

    Mike I care about.

    Much less bed feeling . . .

Usually bed nothing  
(he's having ego attention)

I have not given  
what a human being can be paid for  
when words they will be spoken  
all these thoughts of all these days.  
I don't give much care  
about philosophical dilemma,

a divider of suspicion reigns Michael,  
unlock the ravages of this room.

Show me the whole little girl,  
she must touch, act, sense, feel,  
    ( she felt she had composed all these things )  
The other night I dreamt that we were  
ordering food which in the end  
we did not eat and the waitress  
got angry and the others with us had left  
and there we were paying nothing,  
    later I was bringing up some food  
on a downtown street and I remembered  
that I saw several people,  
people I had to eat to know  
although in reality I already did,  
( we make so much of the little nothings in our brains )  
    can you paint the prom?  
I think the world needs another citizen  
who firmly believes  
    that they are right.  
Perhaps your paintings are too intense.  
Too much open mindedness  
and some sense of connection, is it fear?

The kind of undermining techniques  
of the adversary which is built  
into people, oh well . . .

Well. . . what promise is there  
in casting  
    free shadows on the beach?

Another example of Found Poetry can be taken from literature itself as in this one:

### **After Reading Virginia Woolf I Sat Down And Wept**

In a sketch of the past  
where colors of memory begin  
I raise my fist to hit him,  
I felt, why hurt another person?  
I dropped my hand instantly,  
and stood there and let him beat me.  
It was a feeling of hopeless sadness.  
I became aware of something terrible,

my own powerlessness,  
and I remember the feeling,  
where colors of memory begin  
in a sketch of the past.

or from an anonymous postcard writer, found in the mailstream at Canada Post:

Midwinter

The physical consciousness of a plant in  
midwinter is not directed towards the past  
summer but toward the coming spring.

If plants are certain of a coming spring,  
through which they will come out of themselves,  
why cannot I, a human plant, be certain  
of a spring to come, in which I will be able  
to fulfil myself?

Perhaps our spring is not in this life -  
this life may be nothing but a winter!

or borrowing just one line from Margaret Atwood to end an original poem where only she could  
say it best:

**Twenty Years**  
*for Vicki Armour*

It s hard to believe that  
I ve been in love with you  
for twenty years.  
Although I ve never written  
you a love song,  
never phoned in the last  
decade but once,  
only written twice, but I dream.

You have been the main  
character in my stories  
told late at night to typewriter keys.  
You will be fifteen forever.

When I was seventeen  
and you were almost  
- sweet sixteen -

I dreamt I swam the lake  
to your Algonquin cabin,  
carried you naked  
to the beach, kissed your lips,  
caressed your soft skin  
and having never known love,  
I dreamt.

When I was twenty-seven  
and you were still fifteen,  
I had a family of my own,  
but each and every summer  
I would get away  
and drive to Whitefish Lake  
where your spirit walked  
the shoreline of my mind  
and having never known your love,  
I dreamt.

Next summer,  
I ll be thirty seven  
and you, will turn sixteen.  
I will leave a photo of myself  
on your dock at the beach

*and if you look closely,  
you will see me floating  
just beneath the surface*

Graffiti can make the easiest and best Found Poems. These recorded graffiti are from around the University of Toronto campus by that famous Greek author Anonymous , in the mid 1980's.

Reality is a cop out  
for people who can t  
handle Drugs.

Drugs are a cop out  
for people who can t  
handle suicide.

Suicide is a cop out  
for people who can t  
handle life.

Life is a cop out  
for people who can't  
handle reality.

Is there life after Petri-dish,  
Or is it all;  
psychological-pseudomicrobacteria-plenonvirological-deoxiriboneucleic-hypertensive angina  
without a superlative phraseology?

Question: Is religion  
Man's attempt to communicate  
with the weather?

Six Responses:

1. He certainly  
manifested his displeasure  
through it this year.
2. You're talking about God,  
you've missed the point.
3. Obviously an Atheist!  
Religion without God?
4. Communication with the weather  
has been just as poor  
as with God.
5. Jesus was Gay . . .  
How else could Mary  
have stayed a virgin.
6. The Virgin Mary gave birth  
to Jesus,  
she didn't screw him  
you idiot!

Finally, another form of Creative Plagiarism or Found Poetry that is easily worked on is called  
Index Poems for want of a better phrase. If one were to pick up an anthology of poems that  
lists title and/or first lines, check and see if they flow coherently. Find which sections work  
together and which do not. It is best not to change or delete words as it should be kept as original



as possible, but sometimes *Writer's License* makes it necessary for the flow to be maintained. In the haste to create an Index Poem, the title of the book was overlooked and the original author/editor cannot be properly credited. Make sure you are diligent and give credit where credit is due. Below is a Found Poem created from all or most of the first lines of poems listed in the index of an anthology.

### **A Blue Grained Line**

a blue grained line circles  
a fragment of the mind,  
a dead mosquito,  
flattened against a door, after dark

ailanthus,  
what makes you flower as  
a knight rides into the moon,  
a man in terror of  
impotence, and now  
outside the walls, this is how  
you live:  
a woman, children,  
an old pot, an old shoe and  
an old skin,  
a piece of thread ripped-out  
from a fierce design as solid  
seeming as antiquity

autumn equinox  
autumn sequence  
the old times,  
autumn torture and  
a woman in the shape  
of a woman,  
walking behind grimed blinds  
slatted across a courtyard back  
there,  
birds and periodic blood  
blacked out on a wagon, part  
of my life cut out forever

burning oneself in  
burning oneself out

can I easily say  
there is a celebration

in the plaza,  
a child with a chip of mirror  
in his eye, coming  
by evening through the windy city  
completely protected on all sides  
where cruelty is rarely  
conscious

the days of spring  
dead, dead, dead,  
demon lovers,  
did you think I was talking about  
my life  
about evenings which  
seem endless now  
and even when I thought I prayed  
I was talking to myself

everywhere, snow is falling,  
from here on  
all of us will be living frost,  
burning the cities ill

however legendary  
hopes sparkle like water  
in the clear carafe and I  
am trying to imagine  
I am up at sunrise, I am walking  
rapidly through striations of light  
and dark,  
I don't know

in my dream, children  
in my imagination, insomnia  
in the field the air writhes,  
a heat pocket in the heart  
of the queen annes lace,  
a knot of blood in the woods  
it is asleep in my body

I trust only my existence  
last night you wrote on the wall:  
revolution is poetry,  
letters from the land of sinners  
means there is something

to hold,  
meditations for the savage child  
mirror in which  
two are seen as one,  
night pieces for a child

now, again,  
the life and death talk,  
now, not a tear begun,  
now that your hopes are shamed,  
you stand nursing your nerves  
when our mother went away  
and father was the king  
out in this desert,  
rain of blood  
rape reforming the crystal  
riding the black express  
from heaven to hell  
so many minds in search of bodies  
something broken something

the clouds are electric  
in this freedom of the wholly mad,  
their faces, safe as an interior,  
their life, collapsed,  
the music of words,  
the mystic finishes of time,  
the long sunlight  
lying on the sea

the pact we made was  
an ordinary act,  
there were no angels,  
the trees inside are moving  
out into the forest  
and they say  
this is a womans confession,  
this is how it feels to do  
something  
you are afraid of,  
to live illusionless  
in the abandoned mine,  
to live, to lay awake  
trying to tell you  
we had to take the world

as it was given

we smile,  
bound by the wheel  
of an endless conversation,  
whatever it was  
what is happening when the ice  
begins to shiver,  
when the grains of a glacier  
are caked in the boot cleats

you are beside me like a wall,  
I touch you with my fingers and,  
you are falling asleep  
I sit looking at you  
hiding there in your words,  
you see a man in your dreams,  
you show me the poems  
of some woman,  
you are sleeping now,

I cover you with my heart.

One word or even one phrase uttered by someone else can inspire a writer to new heights. Occasionally a poem or story can be quite plain but a good word or well placed phrase can stand out like an evergreen in a deciduous forest. It is best to keep track of these words and phrases (and their authors) and return to your list for inspiration in your own writing or upon creating some of your own, pass them on to someone who may be inspired by you. In closing, I will leave you with a piece of Found Prose, inspired by a dream and created around sayings and phrases found in *The Alexandria Quartet* by Lawrence Durrell. It was published in the summer issue of *Well Magazine*, (Halifax) 1989 and *Giants Of The North*, (Third Eye Press) 1991.

### **The Receiving Room**

The small receiving area at the university book room was crowded with low, black tables, cluttered with books processed in either coming or going, upstairs or down, specials or textbook, medical or children or adult categories. *The constant hum* of the two fans and the air conditioners added little to the *white monotony of the ceiling and walls*. The shuffling of papers, *the classical distance of the radio* and the occasional thud of a box of books on a table were the only sounds to break the noise of this silence. Shippers and receivers can *dream of kings and dragons and paupers. A gallery of historical dreams. A galley full of paper dreams* and in it, nightmares imbedded in cardboard and *transformed by memory, divorced from the detail of before and after*. The titles of the books passed out of the boxes and through the fingers of the men who worked these tables, were enough to stimulate even the weakest mind. Many times in as many days were there pauses in reflection and inspiration among these men. Sly smiles and widened eyes were to

be seen while their imaginations were turning things over in their heads.

In front of the longest table (a table used for the largest returns and orders) worked a three man crew. The other tables had one man each. They were spaced unevenly around the room and facing a different wall so that no one man could see the other without moving drastically from one side to the other and inside each man, *the heart wearied of the monotony*. The crew were busy counting, erasing, boxing and processing a large number of books at a steady stoic pace. The constant breeze of the fans lifted the edges of loose papers on the table and on the shelf above and laid them down again in a steady rhythm. Up and down like the hands of the three man crew, lifting and pricing, lowering and erasing, lifting and counting and dreaming, lowering and dreaming.

Someone had placed their face on the xerox machine and photocopied their profile with a knife blade against the throat. It was taped to the wall above the table. Empty boxes of all sizes and shapes filled the cluttered floor in the aisle leading to the textbook sales area, where racks upon racks upon racks of sleeping books awaited another fate.

The stock control computers were idle after sixteen thousand entries and across the room, directly under the fans, were five tables piled ceiling high with boxes of unsorted, unprocessed books waiting for the chance to be sold, *dreaming their own dreams, full of their own stories*, screaming color. The other men at the different sections of the room, followed their own routine, quiet and supreme in their little worlds, sublime..silent.

There in *the distance of their minds*, a real sound breaks the silence. The sound of truck engines and the rattling of the automatic doors opening and in robotic unison all seven men form a line, a human chain, unloading the truck of its brown load of double dark brown boxes, passed from one pair of strong arms to the next set of hands and on to the conveyer belt at the back of the room. A few minutes later the door closed and the brown boxes disappear into the second floor storage area. The seven men, faint smiles, idle chatter, return to their work stations. *There are no windows in the room*. There are no windows in the loading bay. There are no windows in the doors and there are no reflections on the floors and the books in the boxes are still screaming. They take their jackets off, shed their hard outer covers... SCREAM... in all the languages of the world. *That other world, not this sterile one*. The fans increase their noise to hide the screaming.

Several men turn their heads and answer someone they thought they heard call their name. Someone says to shut off the radio. Some of the men didn't even hear it. The boxes are bursting at the seams. The books are bursting with their screams. These books are the dreams of men, these seven men, this cities men. These exploding boxes, cardboard ripping and disintegrating in a flash. These colors splashing prisms on the walls, ceilings, and floors. Animals and cars and fictions bursting, life and death springing forth from the boxes of books. The letters flew off of the words which flew out of the books and filled the white room and the vacuous minds of men, enlightening the world like a long sleep waking and the dust in the tear's of God fills the eyes of the strangers.