

# THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

## Faculty

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## 2 Authors Say Routledge Recycled Their Work Without Giving Credit

By *THOMAS BARTLETT*

When William E. Deal casually flipped through *Theory for Performance Studies: A Student's Guide*, published this year by Routledge, he noticed a few familiar sentences. After taking a closer look, Mr. Deal, a professor of religious studies at Case Western Reserve University, discovered whole paragraphs and even entire pages that had been lifted directly from a book he co-wrote, *Theory for Religious Studies*, published by Routledge in 2004.

"My jaw dropped," he recalls. "My stomach turned flip-flops."

Mr. Deal and his co-author, Timothy K. Beal, a professor of religion at Case Western, estimated that roughly 80 percent of their book had been copied word for word, without credit of any kind. Their names did not appear in the new book.

But this isn't your average plagiarism case. Back in 2005, Mr. Deal and Mr. Beal signed an agreement with Routledge, allowing the company to use the material in their book however it saw fit, provided they were given credit and royalties. Routledge planned a series of introductory books, dubbed *Theory 4*. *Theory for Religious Studies* was the first volume.

Mr. Beal and Mr. Deal never thought the agreement, which they now regret signing, meant that their work could be lifted more or less whole cloth and put under someone else's name. And the authors received neither the promised credit nor, initially, the promised royalties, they said.

Even more disconcerting, according to Mr. Beal, was Routledge's response to their complaint, which he regarded as dismissive.

"They insist in our conversations that they've done nothing

wrong," he says. "I think presses are used to authors simply rolling over when they've been misused."

Mr. Deal's discovery has led to a spate of finger-pointing and blame shifting. But it also raises a question: How much of a book can you say is your own if it is lifted largely from another source — even with the publisher's permission?

## Spreading Blame

Philip Auslander is listed as the sole author (and sole copyright holder) of *Theory for Performance Studies* — even though, as he acknowledges, he wrote only a small part of it. He said he sees nothing wrong with copying most of the book and reacted strongly when a reporter asked if he had committed plagiarism. "I'm not going to be roped into defending something I don't think is in need of defense," he replied.

Any blame, as he sees it, should rest with the publisher. If it failed to credit Mr. Beal and Mr. Deal, then that is Routledge's problem, not his. "I don't consider this to be my fault," says Mr. Auslander, who is a professor in the School of Literature, Communication, and Culture at the Georgia Institute of Technology. "It was never presented to me as something I would need to think about."

Both Mr. Auslander and Routledge officials argue that the copied material is little more than rote background — the sort of mundane biographical material that might as well have come from Wikipedia. In fact, the chapters in Mr. Beal and Mr. Deal's book are biographical portraits, with opinions and assertions, short excerpts and observations. They are much more than who, what, and when.

Routledge is "ensuring that all parties get due recognition and credit," says Claire L'Enfant, humanities director at Routledge, which is part of Taylor & Francis Books. In an e-mail message, she blamed the situation on "rather confusing contractual arrangements."

Ms. L'Enfant did not offer further explanation or respond to subsequent requests for clarification. Mr. Beal and Mr. Deal say

they have now received checks for the royalties they were owed.

The editor originally responsible for the series, William Germano, has since left Routledge. Mr. Germano, who is now dean of the faculty of humanities and social sciences at the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, declined to comment, noting that he had left Routledge before Auslander's book was published. Also, he said, he didn't want to get involved in a dispute arising from the series he created.

The editor later put in charge of Mr. Auslander's book, Talia Rodgers, says the failure to credit Mr. Beal and Mr. Deal was an oversight. Ms. Rodgers says she does not think Mr. Auslander's use of the text — for instance, assiduously changing each "we" to an "I" — was unethical. "If he agrees with a certain statement, then changing the 'we' to an 'I' — I don't think that's a problem," she says.

Besides, she says, she was unable to keep a close eye on the project. "I inherited an enormous number of Bill's books when he left, so there's a limit to the amount of monitoring I can do," she says.

### Uncommon Practice?

So is the practice of reusing large chunks of content in a book series, without credit, common in publishing? Not according to Garrett P. Kiely, director of the University of Chicago Press. He says imitating the framework of a book, its essential structure, is not unusual. But reusing verbatim text is another story. "An author's words are an author's words," he says. "That seems to be a very bright line to me."

Since the publication of *Theory for Religious Studies*, there have been four other books in the series (including Mr. Auslander's). They have all, to some degree, used the first book's structure, and in some cases its exact words.

In *Theory for Classics: A Student's Guide*, by Louise A. Hitchcock, a considerable amount of the first book's content is reprinted verbatim. But Ms. Hitchcock, a senior lecturer at the Centre for

Classics & Archaeology at the University of Melbourne, does acknowledge Mr. Beal and Mr. Deal in her introduction, calling their book "the core text."

In an e-mail message, Ms. Hitchcock writes that she understood that her book was to be "closely based" on Theory for Religious Studies and points out that her introduction refers to the book as a "revision."

Mr. Beal and Mr. Deal say that, while they have been unhappy with Routledge's handling of the series, it is Mr. Auslander's book that they find most vexing. That's because they believe, for the most part, it is their book with a different cover.

Here is an example. In Mr. Auslander's five-page chapter on Roland Barthes, only about three paragraphs appear to be new material. The rest is verbatim from Theory for Religious Studies, except for minor changes. For example, he substituted the word "performances" for the phrase "religious ones." And "Here we will focus on Barthes's theoretical work during this second part of his career" became "Here I will focus on Barthes's theoretical work during this second part of his career."

The chapter on Barthes deals with, of all things, the death of the author. Quips Mr. Beal: "It's one thing to write about the death of the author, but it's another thing to experience it."