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On Being Plagiarised

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On 17 May I received an email from a stranger in Qatar, telling me that someone in England had plagiarised one of my poems. Patty Paine, who teaches at the campus I did not know Virginia Commonwealth University has in Doha, and edits [Diode](#), an online poetry magazine, pointed me to the site of another zine. There I saw a something that reflected my poem as if in a mirror that's been through a house fire.

Throughout the day, a quickly assembled posse – mostly poets, mostly in the UK, mostly collaborating on Facebook – exposed more and more cases. Mortification was expressed at every turn. The editors of targeted publications are in some ways more obviously victims than the poets plagiarised.

My first reaction was: what a dim thing to do these days. The tracking and shaming of the perpetrator, one David R. Morgan of Luton, took not many hours. Within days the trail of his thefts was [known to thousands](#). Poems affected include one or more by Wendy Battin, Henry Braun, James Cervantes, Denise Duhamel, William Greenway, Halvard Johnson, Colin Morton and who knows how many more. Most of his first discovered thefts were of poems in the [Contemporary American Poetry Archive](#), a home for out-of-print books created by Wendy Battin and housed quietly, if not as obscurely as Morgan perhaps imagined, at Connecticut College, where I teach.

What bothered me was not being robbed: I still have the original poem, and since [Poetry](#) magazine published it in 1974, my ownership, if that is the right word, could hardly be questioned. The insult was partly that the plagiarist assumed my poem