

Tainted Texts:

Plagiarism and Self-Exploitation in

Solar and Perlmann's Silence

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ABSTRACT. This article analyses two novels on academic plagiarism, namely *Solar* by Ian McEwan and *Perlmann's Silence* by Pascal Mercier. Both novels describe experiences of academics in the second half of life who have lost contact with their areas of research and no longer seem able to live up to the daunting expectations associated with their international status, prominence and fame in the natural sciences (*Solar*) and in the humanities (*Perlmann's Silence*). The novels are analysed on three levels (*knowledge, power* and the *Self*) distinguished by Michel Foucault, pointing out how scientific plagiarism is connected with new forms of knowledge production and with power relationships in contemporary research. Most attention, however, will be given to the ethical dimension of the Self: the ways in which the academics involved fail to constitute themselves as responsible subjects, vis-à-vis the integrity challenges emerging in contemporary research practices. From a science ethics perspective, a more optimal scenario could have been available, but a close comparative reading reveals that both perpetrators face a far more devastating form of crisis, for which available guidelines fail to provide a fix. *Both* the challenge (loss of contact with their field of research) *and* the solution (plagiarism) are symptomatic of a structural problematic pervading the current research system, which I will thematise as *self-exploitation*, resulting in the eradication of a former, prolific Self, an experience that is articulated in *Perlmann's Silence* in psychoanalytic (Lacanian) terms, namely as an experience of 'splitting' (*Spaltung*). In both novels, plagiarism is enacted as a desperate (but faltering) attempt to achieve what *Solar* refers to as 'conflation': i.e. the effort to somehow restore an integrity (or wholeness) that already eroded long before the plagiarism was actually committed. Thus, science novels may contribute to our understanding of plagiarism and other instances of scientific misconduct.

KEYWORDS. Research ethics, plagiarism, research integrity, scientific misconduct, psychoanalysis, continental philosophy of science

I. INTRODUCTION

Besides fabrication and falsification, plagiarism (i.e. the appropriation of another person's creative work, presenting it as one's own without appropriate credit) is widely regarded as one of the three standard forms of scientific misconduct.¹ As such, it has become an object of concern, not only among scientists and scholars, but also among managers, funders and publishers of research (European Science Foundation 2010; Drenth 2010). Plagiarism is addressed in various types of discourse, such as (i) reports, guidelines and codes of conduct published by various types of research organisations; (ii) empirical studies (often from a sociology or scientometrics perspective); (iii) normative and/or conceptual analyses (often from a science ethics or philosophy of science perspective) and (iv) editorials by editors of academic journals.

In the present contribution, plagiarism will be studied from a somewhat different, *oblique* perspective, namely by reading two 'science novels' (i.e. novels about contemporary scientists and contemporary research practices) devoted to this topic: *Solar* by Ian McEwan (2010/2011) and *Perlmanns Schweigen*, translated as *Perlmann's Silence*, by Pascal Mercier (1995/1997). Although at first glance these novels seem fairly dissimilar, a comparative analysis reveals a series of common concerns. They both enact experiences of academics in the second half of life who have lost contact with their areas of inquiry and no longer seem able to live up to the daunting expectations associated with their international prominence. While *Perlmann's Silence* addresses plagiarism in the humanities (more specifically, linguistics), *Solar* focusses on the natural sciences (more specifically, photovoltaics and artificial photosynthesis research) and in this respect they can be seen as complementary documents.

Both novels, I will argue, offer a window into contemporary research practices, as imaginative laboratories for exploring the various dimensions involved in academic plagiarism. In my experience, a large part of the established discourse on plagiarism tends to be fairly repetitive, general

and predictable, and novels may help us not only to understand, but also to open-up and broaden the issue, especially because they entail a multi-dimensional approach, allowing us to study plagiarism from multiple perspectives, seeing the current wave of deliberations concerning scientific misconduct as symptomatic of a broader transformation in the way in which scientific knowledge is currently produced and valued.

Plagiarism will be studied from three dimensions, in accordance with the three ‘axes’ of inquiry (*knowledge*, *power* and the *Self*) distinguished by Michel Foucault (1984; cf. Zwart 2008). First of all, the focus will be on the *epistemological* dimension: on the ways in which scientific plagiarism is connected with new forms of knowledge and knowledge production. Secondly, the *power* dimension will come into view, focussing on the extent to which plagiarism reflects power relationships in contemporary research. Thirdly, particular attention will be devoted to the dimension of the Self, i.e. the *ethical* dimension: the ways in which academics manage or fail to constitute themselves as responsible subjects vis-à-vis integrity challenges emerging in contemporary research practices. On the basis of these analyses, the following argument will be developed. First, I will argue that both novels address, on the (individual) micro-level, a recognisable problem in contemporary research, namely the vicissitudes of mid-life academics who (notwithstanding their academic status) have lost interest in and/or contact with their area of research. Subsequently, both novels flesh out how such prominent academics subsequently try to ‘solve’ their problem through abuse of power, namely by committing (and subsequently concealing) acts of plagiarism. In *Solar*, the victim is a young post-doc, exploited by a research manager on whom he is completely dependent for his future career. In *Perlmann’s Silence*, the victim is a marginalised Russian colleague deprived of access to Western academic networks. In both cases, plagiarism occurs in situations where, from a science ethics perspective, a more optimal solution (a more acceptable scenario, ethically speaking) could have been available. Nevertheless, a psychoanalytic rereading reveals that both academics are facing a more devastating form

of crisis, for which the available guidelines for proper research conduct fail to provide a fix. Indeed, I will argue that both the challenge (loss of contact) *and* the solution (plagiarism) are symptomatic of a more structural problematic pervading the current research system, which I will thematise as *self-exploitation*, resulting in the loss, the eradication of a former, more prolific Self, articulated in *Perlmann's Silence* as an experience of 'splitting' (*Spaltung* in German). In both novels, plagiarism is enacted as a desperate (but faltering) attempt to achieve what *Solar* refers to as 'conflation': i.e. the effort to somehow restore an integrity (or wholeness) that had already eroded long before the plagiarism was actually committed.

I will start, however, with a short resume of the novels involved. Although *Perlmann's Silence* was published earlier (in 1995), I will begin my analysis with *Solar* (published in 2010), because this allows me to move from science to the humanities and from a (credible, but nonetheless at times) exaggerated and stereotypical portrayal of a plagiarist in *Solar* to a more nuanced and psychological treatment of the same theme in *Perlmann's Silence*.

II. THE NARRATIVES: A SHORT RESUME

Solar tells the story of Nobel laureate Michael Beard, a science celebrity who, as a young theoretical quantum physicist building on the photovoltaic work of Albert Einstein and others, made his name with the so-called Beard-Einstein Conflation: a quantum explanation for the emission of electrons, suggesting new ways of harvesting energy from sunlight. But all that is long ago and Beard has now entered the emerging field of 'big' applied solar energy research, attracting large amounts of funding as the Scientific Director of the newly established *National Centre for Renewable Energy*. The idea is to use chaos theory and quantum photovoltaics for optimising the production of wind and solar energy as a key contribution to mitigating the emerging global impact of climate change. From the very beginning of the novel, however, it is clear that Beard is no longer

the devoted young researcher he once was. Rather, he has evolved into a spoiled, egocentric and obese opportunist who spends his time giving public lectures, indulging in hedonism and accepting invitations to privileged places (ranging from Italian lakes to Spitsbergen), realising that, due to laziness, boredom and ageing, he has utterly lost track of the physics and mathematics on which the advanced research activities (which he is supposed to be leading) ultimately depend.

After the accidental death of a promising and multi-talented post-doc named Tom Aldous, however, he comes into possession of the latter's notes, explaining (in abstruse mathematical equations) how nano-scientists may understand and effectively reverse-engineer or mimic the ways of plant leaves, using sunlight as “natural solar panels” (234) to produce biomaterials and oxygen. Beard decides to decipher Aldous's legacy and to present the deceased post-doc's ideas as his own, translating his notes into useful applications on an industrial scale. He mobilises ample funding for building a prototype solar energy plant (the LAPP: the *Lordsburg Artificial Photosynthesis Plant*) near Silver City, New Mexico, while filing a series of promising patents for personal gain. When he is about to proudly present his project to the world, as a “world-historical event” (361), however, a lawyer pays him a visit, claiming to represent a client who apparently copied Aldous's original files and is now accusing him of theft of intellectual property.

Perlmann's Silence takes us into a completely different world. Philipp Perlmann, a prominent German professor of language studies, is invited by a high-ranking representative of *Olivetti* (an Italian firm famous for producing word-processing machinery) to organise a small-scale international expert workshop in a hotel on the Italian Riviera. He is suffering from a mid-life crisis, however, due to the death of his wife (a photographer who died in a car accident), but aggravated by a paralysing decline of interest in his research field. As the host of the workshop, he is expected to present a high quality paper, but unfortunately he can think of nothing whatsoever to say. Instead of working on a paper of his own,

he squanders his precious time translating a manuscript written by an unknown Russian colleague named Leskov (whom he had invited to the workshop, but who had failed to secure a travel permit). In despair, and in order to conceal his intellectual impotence, Perlmann decides at a certain point to present the English translation of Leskov's manuscript as his own work.

But then catastrophe sets in. While the text is being distributed, Perlmann receives news that Leskov will be able to attend the meeting after all and he plans a series of desperate attempts to conceal his deeds. This includes the destruction of a second manuscript by Leskov, which the latter had wanted to present during the meeting. But then Perlmann discovers that, due to a series of misunderstandings, a loose collection of impromptu notes has been distributed among the colleagues instead of the translation. Although nothing untoward has actually happened (besides the pointless destruction of Leskov's second manuscript, which he manages to partly reconstruct), Perlmann is unable to recover from this moral trauma, which he experiences as the disastrous end of his career.

In the following sections, I will analyse both novels in accordance with the knowledge-power-Self scheme outlined above, starting with *Solar* and moving from there to *Perlmann's Silence*.

III. THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL DIMENSION

Solar quite convincingly explains how, as a young researcher, Michael Beard had been an isolated, introverted, highly committed, hyper-individual quantum physicist. As an ageing scientist, however, his situation has completely changed. A new arena of 'converging research' has emerged, in the intermediate zone between nano-technology, photovoltaics and climate politics. From the 1950s onwards, physicists (with their high-tech contrivances and advanced mathematics) migrated toward the life sciences, employing their powerful physical technologies to understand

and mimic the basic processes of life. Artificial photosynthesis, as a sub-field of bio-mimesis (i.e. the use of biotechnology to mimic living nature on the molecular level), is an exemplification of this trend.

Thus, the epistemological backdrop of the narrative is a transformation that is actually taking place in laboratories world-wide, where biotechnology is evolving into bio-mimesis, i.e. mimicking ('copy-pasting') nature on a molecular scale (Church and Regis 2012; Zwart *et al.* 2015). In principle, this biomimetic turn entails a positive ambition. The aim is to develop technologies that, although highly advanced, are nonetheless more sustainable and nature-friendly than the technologies that human-kind has managed to produce so far. Indeed, artificial photosynthesis basically aims to envisage plant leaves as biological factories from which human technology still has a lot to learn in terms of efficiency, sustainability and circularity. Nature is the paradigm, the teacher (*natura artis magistra*) for molecular life scientists and bioengineers, particularly on the quantum or nano-scale. The downside is that there is a lot of investment, prestige and politics involved in this type of research, such that it runs the risk of becoming tainted by privatisation, commercialisation and politicisation.

This transformation (presented in *Solar* as an emerging scientific-industrial 'revolution, [36; 211; 336]; as a "new chapter in the history of industrial civilisation" [293]) is quite credibly reflected in the novel, and it is clear that Ian McEwan has conducted a considerable amount of preparatory research.² Although Beard is said to hold "[...] an irrational prejudice against physicists who defected to biology, Schrödinger, Crick and the like" (121), he basically follows in their footsteps, moving from 'pure' quantum physics³ to 'applied' molecular life sciences research. The most dramatic discontinuity in his career, however, is not the shift from basic physics (studying photons and electrons) to bio-mimesis, but from original research to big science management. Due to this shift, Beard increasingly neglects and loses contact with his science. He is now performing on a completely different podium as it were, basically working

for the “plutocrats” (211): for funding agencies, investors, venture capitalists, managers, international policy makers, the international media and the like, by giving lectures to non-physicists and joining the artistic elite on expensive expeditions. Superficially, there still seems to be some continuity in his life, insofar as his work is still related to elementary particles physics, to which his youth had been devoted, but “[...] that was when he was a scientist, and now he was a bureaucrat and never thought about electrons,” at least no longer in a scientific sense (57). He travels as a VIP, occupying expensive airplane seats paid for by others, addresses conferences attended by institutional investors and pension-fund managers for “unnaturally large” fees (154), and is even paid for “contractual mingling” with the audience, while owning a dozen or so serious patents. All this fuels his megalomania and narcissism, but it also increasingly estranges him from his original scientific inspiration, from his scientific past. He deteriorates physically, as an “overweight”, “dysmorphic”, “pink mess” of “human blubber” (7), but also morally: falling victim to a chronic state of “restless boredom” (67), becoming increasingly cynical and “anhedonic” (3).

But the most significant damage occurs on the intellectual side. Whenever he introduces himself as a “theoretical physicist”, it sounds like “a lie” (90) because he has “done no serious science in years” (92). As a result, he feels increasingly ignorant and incompetent. He no longer has the “mathematical reach” to keep up with those still actively contributing to the field, and experiences “inner and outer decay” (92). And yet, as a prominent scientist and Nobel laureate, he is faced with staggering expectations, which he is increasingly unable to live up to.

This situation, although at times presented in a somewhat exaggerated and comical way in the novel, is not unlike what we may see happening in real science. The plagiarism committed by Beard, one could argue, is an exaggerated version of what too often has become common practice, namely researcher managers (who once were researchers themselves, but now have lost contact with the actual handiwork of science)

profiting from the work of early-stage researchers employed by them (PhD researchers and post-docs), notably in the form of ‘honorary authorship’ (Alberts 2010), which seems as ineradicable as it is controversial. Although the managers involved no longer actively contribute, neither to the publications written by younger colleagues nor to the research on which the publication is based (because of lack of time or knowledge, being absorbed by other priorities such as managerial duties and the acquisition of funding), they are listed as co-author basically because they chair the research institute and/or secured the financial means. In other words, McEwan’s novel works as a magnifying glass by exaggerating certain forms of contestable authorship and/or intergenerational exploitation that actually exist (Borenstein 2011; Macrina 2011), which are actually part of contemporary laboratory life, albeit usually in less dramatic and outrageous forms. What is extreme in Beard’s case is that, while real managers are usually willing to settle for co-authorship (which may already be regarded as problematic in many cases), Beard takes this one step further by trying to deny and obfuscate his dependence on Tom Aldous’s work *completely*. As a rule, managers (whose names often appear last on the author list) grant their early-stage colleagues (who still have to build their career on actual scientific work) the honour of first authorship. But Tom Aldous, as was already mentioned, accidentally and tragically died before his manuscripts could be turned into research papers and proposals. For that reason, Beard sees shared attribution as meaningless (259). In short, the type of plagiarism committed in *Solar* is not unconnected with issues such as honorary authorship as a symptomatic by-product of big science. Via the magnifying glass of literary imagination, Beard’s situation enacts existing integrity challenges of research managers in their role as scientific co-authors, notably in large-scale, converging fields of research such as bioscience and nanoscience. Far from justifying Beard’s misdemeanours, this does provide an epistemological backdrop in terms of the typical challenges that individuals like Beard, in their role as research managers of large-scale, private-public consortia, are actually facing.

The humanities seem much less infected by the dynamics of commercialisation and privatisation, or by the increase of pace and scale that is pervading the natural sciences. In *Perlmann's Silence*, mid-life scholars still tend to act as single authors and they are still regarded as producers of their own work. And although there are rumours about elderly colleagues who increasingly fail to publish new results (214), this allegedly does not apply to the academics brought together in the context of the Mediterranean workshop. They are all expected to present and defend original material, which they have written themselves.

Still, some of the tensions documented in *Solar* can also be discerned in *Perlmann's Silence*. To begin with, the workshop is funded by a multinational company that clearly has expectations concerning the outcomes of the work. Given his mid-life prominence, Perlmann, like Beard, is regularly invited to give lectures as a key speaker at prestigious international gatherings. These activities, in combination with teaching responsibilities, distract him from his intellectual work, thereby aggravating his basic problem, namely that he has lost his inspiration and feels increasingly inhibited to commit himself to desk research again.⁴

Moreover, an epistemological development similar to that in *Solar* can likewise be discerned in Mercier's novel, namely the fact that linguistics is also becoming increasingly interdisciplinary and applied. During the expert workshop, the more established academic approaches (represented by experts like Brian Millar from New York) are challenged by new contributions coming from various adjacent fields, such as psychotherapy, ethology and introspection (phenomenology). Because of his loss of intellectual commitment and fatigue, Perlmann (unlike others) is unable to seize the opportunities offered by this paradigm shift. He is unable to really try something new. His efforts in this direction remain sketchy, impromptu improvisations, relying on a kind of automatic writing, switching off his self-censorship in order to subdue his epistemic inhibitions, but discarding the results as un-academic 'kitsch'. As a language studies expert, he is unable to reset his research agenda and reinvent himself.

IV. THE POWER DIMENSION

Building on the epistemological dimension, the power dimension notably reflects the institutional and interpersonal inequalities at work, such as the divide between early-stage researchers (who usually remain more or less invisible or anonymous) and mid-life elite academics, noticeable in both novels.

In *Solar* the scientific work is actually done by early-stage researchers, a team of six hyper-talented post-docs employed by Beard, who struggles to “tell them apart” (27). His biggest problem, however, is that he finds it utterly impossible to keep up with them. They speak and think incredibly fast, while the physics they take for granted in their conversations is quite unfamiliar to him. The length and complexity of their calculations is simply beyond him. Once, when he himself was in his twenties, he had been a person just like that, highly intelligent, excessively devoted to research and scientifically quite up-to-date. But now, during the second half of life, suffering from boredom, lack of self-discipline and alcohol abuse, he looks back at his youth in astonishment, as if this person he once was and who experienced “[...] those blessed months of frenetic calculation” that lead to his discovery is actually someone else, someone completely alien to him. Indeed, he finds it increasingly difficult “[...] to recall the driven kind of person he once was” (69). Moreover, it seems to Beard “[...] that he had coasted all his life on an obscure young man’s work, a far cleverer and more devoted theoretical physicist than he could ever hope to be [...] That twenty-one-year-old physicist had been a genius. But where was he now?” (69).

Yet, while he has lost his former Self, expectations continue to increase. Beard had always assumed that, at a certain point, competition would become less severe; allowing him to reach a kind of “plateau” (10),⁵ but now it dawns on him that this “calm plateau” of “simply being” will never appear (311). Quite the contrary, expectations assume staggering proportions, notably because he promises the plutocrats who invest

in his work that, in the context of the upcoming industrial revolution, exemplified by Beard's programme, "colossal fortunes" will be made (211). Being in big science is like running next to the Red Queen who, in *Through the Looking Glass*, keeps crying "Faster! Faster!" (Carroll 1871/1965, 135). In the international big science arena, standing still equals catastrophe. But Beard can neither increase his pace nor expand his knowledge. All he can offer, in his competition with his six post-docs, is power. They are all completely dependent on him. He can make or ruin their career, and they know it.

The posthumous appropriation of Aldous's file, moreover, is not the only act of plagiarism Beard commits. Before solving some of the basic challenges in artificial photosynthesis, Tom Aldous had already designed a quadruple-helix rooftop wind turbine, which Beard subsequently claims as his own initiative, although later, when the project falters, he immediately distances himself from this "ridiculous wind turbine" project (347).

A similar situation is enacted in *Perlmann's Silence*. Perlmann likewise looks back in astonishment on his earlier career. He now painfully realises that, as a promising academic, exclusively committed to research, he had hardly lived at all. He had always existed out of contact with his present.⁶ While glancing through a cheap, second-hand, popular, illustrated book about high publicity post-war events, he feels like a convict who had just been released from prison and who is now discovering the world outside, reading about all the things that had passed him by. He now realises that, at the time of their occurrence, all these events had hardly been allowed to enter his insulated existence, which had been completely dedicated to academic research, sacrificing everything else in order to achieve his current state of prominence.

Notwithstanding computerisation and word-processing equipment, provided by companies like *Olivetti*, linguistics is still a single-author field. Therefore, instead of exploiting a post-doc, another power dimension is activated in Mercier's novel. In the arena of international scholarship, the US (represented by Millar) is definitely the leading super-power. This

entails first of all a power of language: all conversations during the workshop are in English, although Millar is the only native speaker, while some other participants, such as an Italian psychiatrist, are hampered by lack of verbal fluency. But Germany also plays a prominent role. Perlmann himself, for instance, just received an invitation for a professorship in Princeton. It is clear that this is an elite gathering.

In Perlmann's case, the victim of plagiarism is an obscure Russian colleague who still writes single-copy manuscripts, either by hand or with the help of an old-fashioned typewriter, and who has somehow managed to survive outside the international networks of mainstream discourse, far removed from the world of prominent professorships and conferences. He shared his manuscript with Perlmann in the hope that international recognition will help him to a fixed position and a salary. Strictly speaking, his approach (introspective phenomenological psychology) is quite old-fashioned but, in view of the epistemological transitions outlined above (i.e. the erosion of traditional methodological standards of mainstream academic performance), even introspective phenomenology can now be rehabilitated and presented as something potentially acceptable and innovative. So once again, the plagiarism is a symptom of power relationships: a prominent scientist, no longer able to live up to international academic expectations, commits fraud at the expense of an outsider, someone who, because of power relationships, is regarded as insignificant (plagiarism without too many risks).

V. PLAGIARISM: THE ETHICAL DIMENSION

For both Beard and Perlmann, plagiarism is an act committed out of sheer desperation. In Beard's case, the costly research of his newly established Centre is running aground. He is spending huge amounts of funding, which is getting him nowhere. The plagiarism allows him to leap from a faltering wind turbine project into the bright, inviting future of solar panels ("Let there be light!" [199]).

In the case of Perlmann, the emerging catastrophe is of a much more personal nature. Perlmann is suffering from a burn-out, at least partly caused by the death of his wife, as we have seen, but the idea of straightforwardly confessing (before the assembly of elite colleagues) that he failed to prepare a proper manuscript, simply because he could not think of something interesting to say, is out of the question. Frantically, he considers alternative solutions and the option of plagiarism only enforces itself upon him when all the other alternatives have evaporated. In other words, in Perlmann's case, plagiarism is not presented as a positive choice, but rather as the only remaining route to take (besides suicide, which is also seriously considered, although one could argue that, for a scholar, an *author* like Perlmann, plagiarism is actually a suicidal act). It is not a conscious and voluntary decision, but rather a process that unfolds more or less automatically, an act that commits *itself* as it were: a course of 'action' that deeply shocks and paralyses its perpetrator. And as soon as he (erroneously believes that he) has committed the dreadful act, a pervasive sense of guilt torments him. The terrible word 'plagiarism', uttered by his highly sensitive conscience, becomes a chronic and relentless self-accusation.

From a third-person perspective, an intermediate, more acceptable solution – a moral compromise as it were – could have been considered in both cases, namely: co-authorship. We already addressed this with regard to *Solar*. During his internal, first-person deliberations (long before the accusation of plagiarism is actually put before him), Beard argues that, although Tom Aldous indeed produced all the valuable ideas, it was Beard himself who recognised the true value of Tom's work. In fact, while Tom was basically an intellectual, Beard had been the person who had done the 'hard work': securing patents, assembling a consortium, managing the lab work, involving venture capital (258). Via Beard's activities, Tom's work would endure. Moreover, Beard continues to work on Tom's file while involved in the New Mexico solar project. At the certain point, for instance, he finds himself "[...] thinking with strange lucidity about his

old friend the photon and a detail in Tom Aldous's notes about the displacement of an electron. There might be an inexpensive way of improving a second generation of panels, when he was back in London he would blow the dust off that file" (363). In other words, the 'collaboration' between the two continues long after Tom's death. Both Tom's original work and Beard's 'translations' are necessary to turn the former's brilliant ideas into a functioning prototype, one could argue. And towards the end of the novel, when he is actually accused of plagiarism, Beard defends himself by claiming that Tom and he had indeed worked together "intensively" (370) on artificial photosynthesis. But then again, Beard relapses into his fatal strategy of down-playing and obfuscating the value of Tom's contribution completely, claiming that he, Beard, had done most of the "thinking and talking", while Tom had only made the notes. Beard's work had been in light, in energy, in photons and electrons, ever since the age of twenty.

Although these claims are clearly invalid (Tom had written his notes without any intellectual support from Beard), there is some validity in the argument that Beard (as a manager, not as a researcher) had significantly contributed to their joint achievement (the translation of theoretical ideas into useful applications). He could have 'solved' his problem, in accordance with formal standards concerning intellectual property, by explicitly *sharing* the honour with Tom, by formally *acknowledging* the latter's decisive contribution. Technically, a solution could have been fleshed out, and it would even have been *genuine* co-authorship rather than mere honorary authorship. The problem is that Beard opted for "sole attribution" (259), partly for financial reasons: because of the patents involved, but first and foremost because he desperately needed Tom's legacy so as to compensate for the loss of his former self (but I will come back to this decisive issue in the final section).

A similar situation can be discerned in *Perlmann's Silence*. Perlmann could have contacted Leskov. He could have suggested presenting their work as a collaborative effort of two academics working on similar

themes. He could even have settled for the role of translator and interpreter, as part of his responsibilities as the workshop's chair and host. And indeed, at a certain point, Leskov, impressed by the way in which Perlmann verbally elucidates and defends his ideas, suggests that they should write something together. It would perhaps have been an insult to Perlmann's academic narcissism to accept a subordinate role in the ensuing collaboration, but it would have offered him an acceptable way out, in terms of research ethics.

But this presupposes that plagiarism is a moral infringement which (i) can be more or less clearly defined and (ii) is consciously committed. In the next section I will argue that the situation is more complicated than that. If plagiarism could have been prevented, *Solar* and *Perlmann's Silence* would merely serve as ethical vignettes, presenting problem situations for which more acceptable and sophisticated solutions (in accordance with guidelines and codes of conduct) are available. In both novels, however, the very *concept* of plagiarism is thoroughly problematized, so that guidelines, policies and best practices are challenged rather than supported by the dilemmas and experiences they present. Moreover, the plagiarism cannot exclusively be attributed to acute individual dilemmas (which could have been solved or averted, perhaps). Rather, it is embedded in the long-term dynamics of the academic system as such.

VI. WHAT IS PLAGIARISM?

Both novels not only *stage*, but at the same time *problematize* the concept of plagiarism. After giving a lecture on solar energy, for instance, outlining options for mitigating climate change during the upcoming industrial "revolution", Beard meets a language studies expert who analyses climate discourse from a humanities perspective and is interested in "[...] the narrative that climate change has generated", seeing it as "an epic story, with a million authors" (203). From his perspective, all versions of the climate change narrative (including Beard's own lecture) emerge as

parasitical contributions, as inoculations building on an anonymous, multiple-author discourse that is already available out there. He subsequently analyses Beard's own lecture, pointing out that Beard not only employed a series of well-known rhetorical tricks and stock phrases (without quotation marks), but also that a certain anecdote Beard used to convey the message, and which he claimed to have experienced himself, was actually the enactment of an "unconscious, archetypal" script (218), abundantly used in stories and novels, and intensively studied in the language studies field. Telling such anecdotes is academically known as "communal re-creation", the expert explains.

Initially, Beard is outraged and vehemently rejects the (implicit) accusation that he is an inauthentic "plagiariser" (259), but gradually (retelling his anecdote at various occasions) it dawns on him that he is indeed constantly reshaping the story and even "plagiarising himself" (250). Actually, what the language studies expert tried to bring across is that we are constantly plagiarising existing discourse: its concepts, its arguments, its archetypal scripts, and that we cannot do otherwise. Our discourse is replete with the discourse produced by countless anonymous others, and we can only partially account for this via academic references and explicit acknowledgements. In other words, plagiarism is, discursively speaking, the default. We commit plagiarism as soon as we begin to speak or write. Originality is a fiction; or exceptional at best. And indeed, Beard himself is well aware of this, discarding the image of "the revolutionary lone inventor" as "a fantasy of popular culture" (26). Scientific discourse is being continuously produced and reproduced, and originality can only exist in the folds and margins of a collective, pre-structured, multiple-authored discursive enterprise.

Moreover, Beard's research field *as such* already constitutes a form of plagiarism. Biomimesis basically means: plagiarising nature. According to Ohno (1987), for instance, plagiarism is the basic principle of life and all living organisms are continuously 'plagiarising' the molecular techniques that nature (notably microbes) produced in the course of evolution

(Zwart *et al.* 2015). Even human biotechnology amounts to ‘plagiarising’ (adopting and adapting) the inventions of these microbial pioneers (Ohno 1987; cf. Church and Regis 2012). If we follow this line of thinking, then all the basic biotechnological processes and techniques currently in use in laboratories worldwide were already developed billions of years ago. Human biotechnology is ‘plagiarism’. And this notably applies to artificial photosynthesis: “copying the ways of plants, perfected by evolution during three billion years” (McEwan 2010, 142). Again: plagiarism is the default, acknowledgement the exception.

In *Perlmann’s Silence*, the question ‘What is plagiarism?’ is also explicitly addressed on various occasions, and again, concepts such as authorship and intellectual property are problematized in various ways. At a certain point, for instance, while reading through copies of his previous publications (with all their painfully accurate academic references), Perlmann finds it extremely difficult to believe that he, Perlmann, had actually authored all this.⁷ He now reads his own work as if it was written by another person and feels completely estranged from his oeuvre. How can he still be meaningfully credited for it? He no longer recognises it as his output, no longer values it at all. He is no longer able to read it from within. In contrast, while reading Leskov’s manuscript, he has the opposite experience. He realises with astonishment that he had these same thoughts, or at least parallel ones. Precisely these very ideas, articulated and typed out by Leskov, had gone through his own mind. He had not written them down the way Leskov had done, but he *could* have done so. He is struck by the astonishing proximity between their theories, and Leskov himself likewise recognises in Perlmann a kindred spirit, the only one who really understands him. Someone who, at a certain point, even seems to understand him better than Leskov understands himself and who has really internalised his ideas and words. For that very reason, Leskov suggests at a certain point that they should start writing papers together, as co-authors. In other words, Leskov’s text seems much closer to his own authentic ideas than his formal academic output had ever been.

But for Perlmann, co-authorship is no longer an option, because it would still suggest that authorship and co-authorship are meaningful concepts, while in fact he has become completely allergic to terms like ‘author’, ‘original’, ‘copy’, and the like. For Perlmann, all forms of academic discourse, all textual materials have become ‘garbage’ and ‘trash’; – the German word *Schutt* (‘trash’) is used as a standard term to refer to written materials throughout the novel. Academic discourse is something to be thrown away, something to be disposed of as quickly and irreversibly as possible. Throughout the novel, Perlmann is destroying and desperately trying to get rid of huge amounts of texts. For him, academic literature has become textual *litter* in a literal sense:⁸ waste, trash, garbage, rubbish, kitsch, debris; – basically because, from now on, he sees all forms of academic discourse as infected and tainted by plagiarism.⁹ His most important activity, in a novel that otherwise stresses his utter *lack* of activity, is the deliberate, systematic destruction of manuscripts, books, diskettes and other carriers of textual content, consistently referred to as a discursive ‘mess’: as litter, filth, dirt, etc.¹⁰ That is the existential paradox in *Perlmann’s Silence*. On the one hand, plagiarism is experienced as a catastrophic trauma that literally *cleaves* his personality, while at the same time discursivity, authorship, originality and everything connected with it have become completely meaningless to him. He commits plagiarism because he does not *want* to be an author anymore, because the very idea of academic authorship, of academic writing, *nauseates* him (and this includes co-authorship, of course).

And precisely here, an important first lesson from Lacanian psychoanalysis can be learned. Both in his *Écrits* and in his *Seminars*, Lacan discusses a case study published by Ernst Kris (1951/1975) concerning an academic patient whose career is seriously thwarted by an obsession with plagiarism (Lacan 1966, 393ff.; Lacan 1966-1967, 119-120). His compulsion to steal other peoples’ ideas gives rise to a chronic inhibition: an inability to publish his research. At a certain point, when he has finally managed to finish a manuscript, he discovers a book in the library that

allegedly already contains all his ideas. Kris asks for the book, reads it, ascertains that there is not much originality in it, and kindly informs the patient that his self-accusation proves unjustified. The self-plagiarism is ‘self-fabricated’ as it were. Moreover, it turns out that a close colleague has repeatedly stolen and published the patient’s ideas without acknowledgment, and as a result, when it comes to plagiarism, he is a victim rather than a perpetrator. According to Kris, what is troubling the patient is the conviction that only ideas conceived by others can be truly interesting. In response to this interpretation, the patient makes an awkward confession: his favourite dish happens to be fresh brains.

In his comments on this clinical vignette, Lacan argues that the patient’s culinary confession actually shows us that we should not too easily assure someone that there is no reason to feel guilty. In fact, according to Lacan, the question whether or not plagiarism has actually been committed is quite irrelevant. The guilt stems from the unconscious *desire* to copy others, fuelled by the paralysing conviction that only the thoughts of others are worth publishing. Only ideas taken from others have substance, and the patient discards his own ideas as worthless. This is also the meaning of the favourite menu: the desire (i.e. brain-picking) is still there, but has found a new target (a psychic mechanism known as displacement): a regressed, oral form of *incorporation* of brain content has been adopted to act-out the secret wish.

In fact, Lacan considers plagiarism as an impossible concept. According to him, there is no such thing as intellectual property (cf. Borch-Jacobsen 1990, 14). We cannot ‘own’ ideas, for they are always already there. We would not be able to think or write at all in the absence of a discourse already established, a stream of ideas and signifiers already thriving, and to which we will only marginally contribute. It is not *I* who speak, rather *it* speaks (‘ça parle’). We are born parasites, and originality is something marginal at best, occurring in the folds and margins of a λόγος that already pervades and pre-structures our world and always did (1958-1959/2013, 568). And Lacan himself produces texts in accordance

with this conviction. As Borch-Jacobsen (1990) phrases it, he absorbs words and ideas continuously and his discourse bulges with allusive references, so that almost every sentence flowing from his mouth or pen contains one or more (usually hidden) quotes. Borch-Jacobsen calls him an ‘honest’, ‘deliberate’ plagiarist, someone who wilfully immerses himself in the discourse of multiple others, although in real life Lacan (as an author who experienced strong inhibitions when it came to publishing his writings) tended to be quite sensitive whenever he felt plagiarised by others, for instance by Ricoeur or Derrida (or their followers). Derrida reasons along similar lines, by the way, when he argues that the dynamics of ‘intellectual theft’ and parasitism is deeply embedded in language as such (Riley 1997), while both Lacan and Derrida not only build on linguistic theories (developed by De Saussure, Jakobson and others) concerning the anonymity and chronic dependence of speaking subjects on language, but also on Heidegger who relentlessly emphasises the thralldom and subjugation of humans vis-à-vis language; – as indicated by one of his most famous phrase, uttered on several occasions: *Die Sprache spricht* (‘language speaks’).

Lacan’s downplaying of intellectual property may sound radical, but (like *Solar* and *Perlmann’s Silence*) he does challenge us to explicitly consider a concept that is too easily taken for granted in mainstream integrity discourse (which increasingly revolves around a neoliberal framing of the scientist as a textual entrepreneur, scoring citations on the discursive stock market of citation indexes, known as academic publishing). But I will come back to this discussion in the final section.

VII. WRITING AS SELF-CONSTITUTION AND AS SELF-EXPLOITATION: BETWEEN *SPLITTING* AND *CONFLATION*

In both novels, the protagonists have lost contact with their fields. They experience a discursive vacuum, a paralysing deficiency or lack. The challenge facing them is to restore their integrity or, to use the Foucauldian

phrase: to reconstitute themselves as moral subjects. But the optimal route to achieve this, namely via academic writing *as a practice of the Self*, is no longer accessible to them.

In *Solar*, after a series of internal moral deliberations, Michael Beard consciously perseveres in his plagiarism (which actually began as a desperate impromptu ‘reflex’). His moral deliberations amount to rationalisation and self-justification. The accusation is literally externalised: voiced by a lawyer accusing him of plagiarism on the eve of what should have been his triumph. It indicates regression rather than moral growth. Confronted with the plagiarism charge, Beard continues to believe that there will be an escape, even when, towards the end, reality is clearly closing in on him.

Beard does display some interest in ethics, however, both theoretically and practically. In a discussion concerning the implications of Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle for morality, Beard explains that it does not imply the “loss of a moral compass” (106). If there is any moral analogy at all, it would be to re-examine a moral problem a number of times before arriving at a conclusion. Elsewhere, Beard argues that, to steer contemporary civilisation toward a less disruptive, more sustainable course, virtue alone is insufficient: “[...] virtue can motivate individuals, but for groups, societies, a whole civilisation, it’s a *weak force*” (206; *italics mine*). As to the moral issues involved in climate change, while not being a climate sceptic in the strong sense of the term, he does seem convinced that climate research operates as a self-serving industry (208).¹¹ Plagiarism functions primarily as an act of denial, an effort to obfuscate his sense of failure, of moral and intellectual decay.

For Perlmann, things seem dramatically different. He is an extremely conscientious and sensitive person, morally speaking, and plagiarism is an internal, introspective, existential affair. No accusation is raised against him and although he is tormented by the prospect that his misdemeanour may be discovered, this evolves into a neurotic projection, a private obsession. The paralysing experience of guilt is directed at his illicit *intentions*, unknown to others. His basic activity in the novel, besides systematic

text destruction, is excessive and relentless self-critique, a vehement rejection of his own published works and views, an “orgy of self-criticism” (91): an at best cathartic, but actually quite destructive (rather than reconstructive) practice of the Self.

As a humanities professor, writing had been Perlmann’s sole vocation, but now he experiences chronic ambivalence, or worse. At a certain point, Leskov explains how, as a political prisoner in Soviet Russia, writing became a practice of the Self for him, allowing him to restore his integrity. For Perlmann, however, discursivity *as such* now means imprisonment. Academic discourse (the necessity to publish) equals lack of freedom. He realises that, throughout the years, his academic career has insulated him; that he never really developed a rapport with the present; that he had been keeping reality at bay. Locked-in in his academic existence (and in his expensive Italian hotel), he realises that he has become anhedonic: insensitive to the pleasures of life.¹²

He could perhaps have re-constituted himself by developing a different style of writing: less academic, but it seems too late for that now. Discourse as such has become ‘trash’, as we have seen, although there are some noticeable exceptions: examples of more positive relationships with texts, but this consistently applies to texts *by others*. His work on the translation, for instance, seems like a craft, because it involves hardly any creative input from his side.¹³ For a “man without views”, interpreter seems the ideal profession (163), or even therapy. Another exception is his painfully dedicated effort to restore Leskov’s second single-copy manuscript, which he initially tried to destroy (by throwing it out of a rental car on a highway, fearing that it would reveal the plagiarism he did not really commit). When he discovers that the act of plagiarism has been thwarted (due to sloppiness and misunderstandings on the part of the hotel staff), and realising that Leskov’s career prospects depend on it, he tries to atone for his mistake by retrieving and carefully restoring the document (drenched, muddy and incomplete), as if it were “a highly valuable archaeological find” (473). This activity not only allows him to

partially restore the text, but also to temporarily regain some sense of integrity, subduing his paralysing sense of “cleavage” or “splitting” (170). Translating and restoring texts written *by others* works as a form of therapy or healing.

Life in academia entails an ascetic life-style, an ethos of self-renunciation. In order to succeed, Perlmann had to relinquish life and live for his work only, at the expense of everything else. He never experienced any special talent for languages and had achieved everything through hard work, desperately trying to ban the prospect of failure by investing in a future competence. But now that this state of competence and prominence is finally reached, he feels like a prisoner, hopelessly unable to enter and interact with the real world. Now that, due to his status, he should have felt invulnerable, he experiences a paralysing inner “splitting” (*Spaltung*), which disables him to regain a sense of integrity.

Besides translating Leskov’s Russian manuscript as a kind of practical therapy, Perlmann is fascinated by its thematic content. This manuscript, written in prison, actually addresses the very symptoms and concerns that are now tormenting Perlmann. Leskov’s basic theorem is that the active process of producing a convincing and coherent autobiography is basically a form of integrity work (170). It is through the creative appropriation of one’s past that the paralysing sense of fission or *splitting* (*Spaltung*), which Leskov *had* been experiencing, and which Perlmann currently *is* experiencing (66; 112; 170), can be overcome, so that the subject’s integrity can be sutured. Only an active, therapeutic process of verbalising one’s own reminiscences may avert psychic disintegration. This theorem captures quite convincingly the existential crisis Perlmann is experiencing: the feeling that his personality is about to “cleave” (179); that he is about to ‘split’ himself.¹⁴ In fact, the German word *Spaltung* is not, coincidentally, a psychoanalytic, Freudian-Lacanian term (Lacan 1966, 842).

The term *Ichspaltung* (‘splitting of the ego’) was briefly introduced by Sigmund Freud in one of his final unpublished, fragmentary notes (1938/1941, 60). Jacques Lacan even considers *Ichspaltung* to be Freud’s

“final word” (Lacan 1958-1959/2013, 544) and forges it into a key concept in his own oeuvre. As Lacan points out (1960-1961/2001, 81), the word splitting or *Spaltung* (διεσχίσθημεν) occurs in Aristophanes’ famous parable in Plato’s *Symposium*, about how human integrity was once deliberately demolished by Zeus, namely by splitting or slicing early humans in two, so that we (their descendants) are still frantically searching for our lost ‘other half’: the lost part of what we once were (Plato 1925/1996, 189E-191C). A similar experience of partial loss of Self is articulated in Beard’s outcry already cited above: “[...] that twenty-one-year-old physicist [i.e. Beard as a young genius, his lost former Self], where was he now?” (69). Beard has lost track of his former Self, his scientific ‘other half’, his prolific counterpart. And it is because he cannot regain his own lost former Self that he reverts to copying Tom’s work: as a substitute, a displacement: an *Ersatz* in the Freudian sense. Without this missing textual supplement (Tom’s notes), he simply would not have survived, scientifically speaking. The plagiarism “reinvigorated his life” (305), but eventually it proves a toxic strategy, for it obfuscates rather than solves his ultimate problem, his basic *Spaltung*.

In one of his seminars, Lacan explicitly compares the experience of *Spaltung* to the fundamental unpredictability of an electron, at one time Beard’s research object of choice. According to Lacan (1969-1970/1991, 119), ‘splitting’ basically means that the subject may occupy two discursive positions at the same time, may be involved in two diverging and incommensurable types of discourse that seem impossible to conflate. In Beard’s case, by painstakingly deciphering and applying Tom’s notes and claiming them to be his own, he both *is* and *is not* a plagiarist, he both *is* and *is not* a rightful author. On the one hand, he poses as the Master, the genius on whose ground-breaking work Tom still builds, but at the same time Tom is the real genius, the author of abstruse equations, which Beard tries to decipher, as Tom’s student and interpreter. In the same way, in his current role as manager, he both *is* and *is not* the quantum physicist he once was.

Perlmann likewise alternates between two mutually exclusive positions: he simultaneously *is* and *is not* a plagiarist. He did not really commit plagiarism, but he intended to do so. Instead of *being* a plagiarist, he *thinks* he is a plagiarist. He already produced the insights that Leskov painstakingly describes, and yet he has to translate and appropriate them. Likewise, he both *is* and *is not* the author of his previous publications, he both *is* and *is not* identical with his former prolific Self, from whom he has become so radically estranged. This basic uncertainty, this discontinuity, this radical eccentricity, this inability of the subject to coincide with his own position, his own Self, is (according to Lacan) the experience of *Spaltung* par excellence (Lacan 1969-1970/1991, 119). Moreover, in McEwan's novel, I would argue, the term 'conflation' not only functions as a physical-scientific concept (the conflation of two apparently incompatible positions of an electron into one), but also as an ethico-psychological term. The *conflation* (the piecing together again) of Beard-the-authentic-scientist and Beard-the-greedy-manager is a piece of integrity work that ultimately seems unachievable. Beard fails to recover his integrity in the (literal) sense of wholeness. As a manager, he cannot leap back into his former position, when he was still studying electrons, for the splitting has become so excessively profound that it can no longer be undone. While conflation-through-plagiarism (plagiarism as a morally objectionable Ersatz for what he really desires) is an unsatisfactory alternative (and a source of chronic, albeit disavowed concern), to take a quantum leap back into his former position of scientific author is simply no longer an option.

In *Perlmann's Silence* the same dynamics can be discerned. Via plagiarism, Perlmann desperately (but unsuccessfully) tries to overcome the paralysing sense of splitting (*Spaltung*); he tries to *conflate* his present position (of unproductive prominence) with his lost half, his lost former Self (as a prolific author). But committing plagiarism means falling into a moral trap. After the act, the very term – indeed: the dreadful 'signifier' *Plagiarism* – begins to haunt him, to torment him, to persecute him: literally *cleaving* him. He both *is* and *is not* a plagiarist, as we have seen, occupying

two apparently incompatible discursive positions at the same time. And this acute experience of cleavage reveals a more fundamental inner *Spaltung*: a dramatic process of psychic cleaving¹⁵ that already began long ago: the estrangement from his own authorship, from his being-an-author, from his oeuvre; a form of paralysis that perhaps *could* have been overcome (but that he *fails* to overcome) through developing a new writing practice (as a self-constituting, academic practice of the Self). But the traumatic experience of being *and* not being a plagiarist (both at the same time), definitely ruins his authorship, not merely as a profession, but as a meaningful way of being-in-the-world. From now on, all instances of academic discourse are tainted, are kitsch or trash.

Perlmann's plagiarism is not a calculated act of egoism, but a desperate effort to conceal the loss of his vocation, of his *voice* as an author (the experience that he has nothing to say). Although various possible causes are discussed in the novel (from failure anxiety up to mourning), the basic causal factor seems to be sheer exhaustion. For decades, he exhausted his intellectual resources. As a plagiarist he exploited a Russian colleague, but the real and ultimate damage is done to himself, via relentless and chronic self-exploitation, in order to live up to the expectations of the academic system. Now that he should have reached his plateau, he experiences hollowness and emptiness: the once productive other half seems forever lost, annihilated through self-exploitation. Like Beard in *Solar*, in his frantic efforts to succeed, or at least not to fail, Perlmann has burnt himself out, has emptied himself, and this relentless self-exhaustion now fires back at him in the form of discursive nausea.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Authors build on and respond to previous authors and dwell in a profoundly literate and discursive ambiance, so that all our writing is replete with influences, fragments, allusions, appropriations and borrowings (both consciously and unconsciously) and profoundly dependent upon

collectively shared languages (Laroche 1999; Sadler 2012). We *work* with and on ideas, but cannot meaningfully claim to *own* them. Indeed, given the chronic dependence of humans in general and of scientific authors in particular upon discursivity, which is always already there, the concept of intellectual property is difficult to uphold. We are continuously paraphrasing, repeating, glossing, recombining or parodying the words of others. Research, therefore, is not about intellectual property, I would argue, but about intellectual *labour* (Zwart 1999). Or to put it in psychoanalytic terms: academic discursivity is about *Durcharbeiten*: about ‘working through’, a precarious process that unfolds between input and output. Citations and references acknowledge labour (effort) rather than property, for we do not really *own* our concepts, but we do work on them.

In the two novels we have analysed, it is precisely this process of working-through that becomes disrupted. In the case of Beard and Perlmann, the suffering (or even crisis) results from the ‘death’ (the obliteration) of *the former self as author*. Due to a basic experience of rupture (splitting), both academics have lost contact with their former prolific self and are therefore no longer able to appropriate and build on their own intellectual labour of the past (on a life of effort, resulting in arithmetic dexterity or erudition, for instance). The prestige is still there, but they have lost their former ability to work-through. They no longer take to writing as a practice of the self, an activity that would have enabled them to suture the paralysing gap. And precisely *because* they can no longer connect with their former self, they resort to developing parasitical relationships with compensatory others: Leskov in the case of Perlmann, Tom Aldous in the case of Beard. Their perpetrations build on the conviction that only the unpublished ideas of these (absent) others are worth looking into and propagating. Indeed, it is only as a translator of Leskov’s manuscript that Perlmann is able to work, and it is only as a translator of Tom’s obscure equations into readable and usable text that Beard can continue to function. In both cases we are dealing with an absent other (Tom has died, Leskov is marooned in Russia) as a replacement of an obliterated former

self. Plagiarism is literally brain-picking and the ‘brain’ of a prolific other (Leskov, Aldous) has become the perpetrator’s object *a*: an inaccessible entity that is both life-saving and devastating, both alluring and toxic, both familiar and foreign.¹⁶ While intellectual labour (working-through as a practice of the self) would have resulted in self-edification and self-repair, this option is no longer available to them. Due to the experience of splitting, the subject becomes ‘kenotic’ (empty), falling victim to discursive erosion. Only the appropriation of the ideas of the other can stem this entropic disruptive process and compensate the loss.

Both novels to some extent individualise the problem, addressing plagiarism via a case history, but the systemic ambiance is also addressed. It is in the contemporary academic arena that individuals are spurred into self-exhaustion, and Beard’s and Perlmann’s crises can be seen as symptomatic of the scientific production system as such. In other words, both novels amount to a diagnostics: not only of individual deviance, but also of the current academic crisis as such. At the same time it is clear that, as academic individuals, both protagonists dramatically fail to live up to the challenge of re-establishing themselves as authors within a new constellation, for instance by consciously presenting their writing practice as a collective effort, or by consciously positioning themselves as stewards of an absent voice. Such a position is captured by the term *kenosis* (κένωσις, ‘emptying’) in the sense that the experience of emptiness (presented as a profound *crisis* of authorship) may give rise to a shift in discursive position towards productive discursive servitude (consciously giving the floor to the voice of the absent other and acknowledging the priority of this other) as an alternative scenario for plagiarism (i.e. appropriating the voice and picking the brain of the other as a strategy to fill the gap).

Science novels contribute to the research integrity debate neither by condoning nor by denouncing plagiarism (or other forms of misconduct), but rather by forcing us to reconsider some basic conceptions and challenges of academic authorship from multiple (normative, political and epistemological) perspectives. Thus, they provide insight and inspiration

to explore feasible scenarios that may help us to address (as individuals and as research communities) the current crisis of academic authorship.¹⁷

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NOTES

1. In 2000, the US Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) defined research misconduct as "[...] fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism (FFP) in proposing, performing, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results." Martinson *et al.* (2005) refer to this as the 'narrow' definition of research misconduct.

2. In an appendix, the expert advice and input from Graeme Mitchison of the Centre for Quantum Computation, Cambridge, is explicitly acknowledged, notably for his guidance concerning the physics and mathematics discussed in the novel (McEwan 2010, 389).

3. Claims made by Beard such as "Let the philosophers of science delude themselves to the contrary, physics was free of human taint" (11), refer to this pure version of physics: the type of research conducted by researchers such as Paul Dirac, "[...] a man entirely claimed by science, bereft of small talk and other human skills" (34); an irrevocably lost world, perhaps. Still, although Beard himself becomes morally tainted during the process, the basic idea is that the world as a whole, polluted by fossil fuels, will be 'cleansed' by his photovoltaics (159).

4. "Es war ihm der Glaube an die Wichtigkeit der wissenschaftlichen Tätigkeit abhandengekommen [...] Er fand einfach nicht mehr in die Konzentration zurück, in das Gefühl der Ausschließlichkeit, aus dem heraus seine wissenschaftlichen Arbeiten bisher entstanden waren [...] Er fand den Weg zum Schreibtisch immer seltener..." (Mercier 1995/1997, 17).

5. A term probably borrowed from anthropologist Gregory Bateson who noticed that at a certain point, in activities such as music, drama, dance and quarrel, a continuing ‘plateau’ of intensity is substituted for the relentless drive towards climax (1973, 85).

6. This is already indicated by the opening sentence of the novel: “Philipp Perlmann war es gewohnt, dass die Dinge keine Gegenwart für ihn hatten” (9).

7. “Er war erstaunt über das, was er las. Maßlos erstaunt. Nicht nur darüber, was er einmal alles gewußt, gedacht, diskutiert hatte. Auch seine Sprache überraschte ihn, sein Stil, der ihm einmal gefiel und dann wieder gar nicht, und der ihm sonderbar fremd vorkam” (Mercier 1995/1997, 220).

8. The Joycean association between literature and litter is a crucial theme in Lacan’s later seminars (1971/2006, 113ff.; cf. Zwart 2016).

9. When speaking about texts, Perlmann, the professor of linguistics, consistently uses phrases like “Bergen von Schutt” (mountains of trash), “einen dicken Stoß Kitsch” (a thick thrust of kitsch [332]), “Papierwust” (a mess of paper [363]); “Stoß Blätter” (a thrust of pages [364]), etc.

10. The novel is reminiscent of the famous story about Thomas Aquinas, an extremely prolific medieval author who (toward the end of his life) experienced a spiritual revelation that so affected him that his opus magnum the *Summa Theologiae* was left unfinished. To his secretary (Brother Reginald) he confessed that he had come to regard everything that he had written as so much straw (Weisheipl 1975).

11. When a close colleague becomes concerned that climate change may in fact be a matter of ‘framing’, a mass delusion, a conspiracy, a plot, so that the socio-economic importance of their LAPP endeavour might be seen as questionable, Beard’s replies by saying: “It’s a catastrophe. Relax!” (298).

12. Perlmann is a contemporary version of Faust in his study, realising that, now that he has finally become an acknowledged authority, the unworldliness and lack of relevance of his activities are more obvious than ever.

13. Note that Perlmann’s careful translation of Leskov’s text plays a similar role in Mercier’s novel as the “slow deciphering” (331) of the Aldous file in Solar.

14. “Es beschlich ihm das unheimliche Gefühl, daß er dabei war, sich von sich selbst abzuspalten” (112).

15. “Er hatte vergessen, wann genau es angefangen hatte... Der Beginn lag in einer Zeit als er, von außen betrachtet, auf der Höhe seiner Produktivität war” (Mercier 1995/1997, 18)

16. Cf. Lacan (1966-1967,119) who argues, in his commentary on the plagiarising patient, that the brain of the other (the target of brain picking, but also the plagiarist’s favourite dish) has become the impalpable object of desire: the plagiarist’s object a.

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