

Meaningless apologies, disowned selves

Distancing ourselves from our mistakes: “Don’t blame me, blame my conduct”

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Santa Barbara News Press, September 14, 1997, pp. E1-E2

Think about the last time someone apologized to you. Did the offender say “I did it. I’m responsible. I’m wrong. I’m sorry I hurt you” ?

Or did you hear the 90’s version of an apology? “My conduct was reprehensible. I’m sorry. I’m so embarrassed. I won’t let it happen again.”

Both offenders express regret and sorrow for injuries suffered. Only one offender truly apologizes.

The Apology

The first offender confesses to sinning, declaring that ‘I’ -- an intact, whole, and undivided self -- caused injury to another. The ‘I’ is the ‘who’ that did the deed.

Our 90’s offender isn’t reprehensible, only our 90’s offender’s ‘conduct.’ The ‘I’ owns the ‘conduct,’ but the ‘conduct’ does the deed. “‘I’ don’t transgress, my ‘conduct’ transgresses,” says the 90’s offender.

The first offender takes responsibility, holding the ‘I’ both wrong and accountable for the injury incurred. The first offender says, “Blame ‘me’, hold ‘me’ liable.”

Our 90’s offender dodges responsibility, fixing fault in ‘conduct’ that distances and detaches the ‘I’ from culpability. “Don’t blame ‘me,’ blame my ‘conduct,’” says the 90’s offender.

The first offender acknowledges the other person’s injury -- the other’s pain -- and apologizes for hurting the person.

The 90’s offender acknowledges his or her own discomfiture and neglects the other’s pain. Our 90’s offender is self-focused and expresses regret for only the embarrassed ‘I’ and the ‘I’s reprehensible ‘conduct.’

Our first offender directly atones, reforming the sinful ‘I’.

Our 90's offender reforms only the severed, distanced, and isolated 'it.' The part called 'I' won't let the part called 'it' do that again.

Genuine apologies confess to sins. They admit liability and take responsibility for hurting others. Genuine apologizers own up to their culpability and hold themselves answerable.

Pseudo apologies distance the sinner from the sin. They attribute blame and assign responsibility to an objectified, separated, and distanced part of the self. Pseudo apologizers disavow responsibility and shrug off personal accountability.

Genuine apologies are rare. Pseudo-apologies are in style.

The Romance Novelist, 90's style

Just recently, much published (93 books) romance novelist Janet Dailey, 'apologized' for plagiarizing passages from rival Nora Roberts' novels, blaming her conduct on a psychological disorder.

Janet Dailey -- the intact, whole, and undivided, 'I' -- did not plagiarize. Instead the dirty deed was done by "my essentially random and non-pervasive acts of copying," Dailey said. "I don't know what that means," said Nora Roberts.

Janet Dailey -- the single, one and only self -- wasn't responsible. Dailey said her "acts of copying" were "attributable to a psychological problem that I never even suspected I had." Dailey suffered stress when her husband contracted lung cancer and she lost two brothers to cancer. "They had a dog that was 13 years old that died, too," said Dailey's Los Angeles publicist Sanford Brokaw.

Janet Dailey -- the "admitted" plagiarizer -- didn't sin and isn't to blame. Janet Dailey's "acts of copying" committed literary theft. And Janet Dailey's "psychological problem" made it happen.

Nora Roberts perceives Dailey's pseudo apology for what it is, an excuse, and isn't accepting it. "I would sympathize with any problems she may have, but plagiarism under any circumstances is a line that cannot be crossed," Roberts said.

Though distanced and isolated, Janet Dailey at least "owned" her conduct and her disorder, calling it "my conduct," "my acts of copying," and "a psychological problem I had." Not for long, however.

Dailey quickly and neatly severed and banished these troubling parts of herself. Calling these parts of herself “the disorder” and “this behavior,” Dailey cast out these terrible ‘its’ from her land of ‘I’.

But it gets better. Dailey felt very bad -- but only about her own embarrassment. “I can only apologize to Nora whom I’ve considered a friend, and to my readers for any pain or embarrassment my conduct has caused,” Dailey said. Who is pained here? Who is embarrassed here? Only Janet Dailey.

Nora Roberts isn’t pained. Nora Roberts isn’t embarrassed. Nora Roberts is upset. Janet Dailey’s admission is “very, very upsetting,” said Roberts. “I considered her a friend. I do not consider her a friend at this time.”

Janet Dailey apologized for causing pain and directed the apology to her readers and Nora Roberts. Yet Dailey’s injured party is herself. Who else is pained here? Is Nora Roberts pained? No. Are Dailey’s readers pained? No. Is Dailey’s publisher pained? Most likely. Is Janet Dailey pained? Almost assuredly. Dailey apologizes to her readers and Roberts not for their injury and upset, but for her own self-inflicted embarrassment and the pain of her publisher. Dailey directs an apology to targets she doesn’t acknowledge hurting for her own pain rather than the injury she did to them.

Indeed, Janet Dailey minimizes and denies Nora Roberts’ pain by declaring her acts of copying “random and non-pervasive.” Dailey’s copying evidences a “disturbing pattern of plagiarism,” said Roberts, “It seems pervasive to me.”

Reforming the disembodied sin rather than herself the sinner, Dailey insinuates she can reform the stress of the past that made her psychological disorder blossom. “The plagiarism took place while I was under professional and personal stress,” Dailey stated, “I have already begun treatment for the disorder and have been assured that, with treatment, this behavior can be prevented in the future” (emphasis added).

Unfortunately, Roberts has already found other examples of plagiarism by Dailey, most notably in a manuscript Dailey just submitted for publication. “This wasn’t just a matter of the early ‘90s, since an upcoming manuscript was also copied and it’s now the late 90s,” said Roberts, “There’s a pattern here.” Kathy Onorato, Roberts’ publicist said that “only the tip of the iceberg” has been discovered so far.

Despite headlines to the contrary, Janet Dailey didn’t apologize. “Sometimes Love Means You *Do* Have to Say You’re Sorry” says the Los Angeles Times. “Romance novelist admits plagiarism, apologizes to rival” says the Santa Barbara News Press. The headlines do more than Janet Dailey does. Janet Dailey admitted to random and non-pervasive acts of copying, not plagiarism. Janet Dailey blamed a previously unknown

psychological disorder incurred during a stressful time for these random and non-pervasive behaviors. Janet Dailey expressed regret to her readers and Nora Roberts for her personal embarrassment and publisher's pain. Janet Dailey entered treatment for her stress disorder. Janet Dailey did not apologize.

Nowhere did Janet Dailey say, "[I did it:] I plagiarized. I took what was yours and declared it as mine. [I did wrong:] I was dishonest. I committed literary theft. I stole. [I am responsible:] While I can explain why I copied from your work, nothing justifies or excuses my having done so. I should never have plagiarized no matter what, under any conditions. [I caused injury to you:] I have betrayed you. I have upset you. I have caused you distress. I have hurt you. [I am remorseful:] I am filled with remorse. I am sorry. I apologize. [I am answerable:] I will identify every part that is plagiarized in every book to make sure what is yours is declared to be yours rather than mine. I will undergo treatment for my dishonesty. I will accept the punishment I am due for committing theft. [I beg forgiveness:] I beg your pardon. I ask your forgiveness. Please forgive me."

Nora Roberts hasn't accepted Dailey's pseudo apology, nor should she. Janet Dailey tendered an excuse for her behavior, not an apology for wrongdoing.

Confessing to some disembodied part of oneself's commission of a crime is not a genuine apology. Blaming another disavowed part of oneself for the disembodied part's deed does not genuinely apologize. Expressing regret to others for one's own self-inflicted pain is not a genuine apology. Reforming discarded parts of the self to make amends does not genuinely apologize.

A genuine apology requires a person to admit to wrongdoing. A genuine apology requires a person to accept blame for wrongdoing without excuse or justification. A genuine apology shows personal remorse to the injured party for the injury done to that party by the person. A genuine apology asks forgiveness and grace for the self.

Janet Dailey begged forgiveness, but she never accepted responsibility and never sought grace. Perhaps it is fitting that "Notorious" is the name of Janet Dailey's currently released and partly plagiarized novel. Dailey's apology would make a fitting sequel and could be published under the same title.

A settlement with Dailey has been reached to make a contribution to the Literary Volunteers of America, though Nora Roberts notes, "It isn't settled." Roberts still has yet to receive a true apology. And Roberts says she plans to look through all of Dailey's recent books before accepting one.

Janet Dailey offered an excuse, the much too frequent 90's pseudo apology.

Nora Roberts never received a genuine apology.

When was the last time you received a genuine apology?

When was the last time you offered one?