

## Plagiarized Corpus | M.M. Valencia

Books are rarely signed, nor does the concept of plagiarism exist: It has been decided that all books are the work of a single author who is timeless and anonymous.

—Jorge Luis Borges,  
"Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"

Three students stopped by her Office Hours today.  
Not bad for her.

She halts the flourish of her typing fingers, and the many burnished rings stand still.

But...why does she do it? Yet again, compelled.

She wheels her chair over the vinyl tiles, peddling herself to the door whose fiberboard nudity is censored by the poster of a poet (the fact that this poster hasn't been torn down and burned is a sign that our composition teacher is only an adjunct instructor here). She cracks open the door under the pretense of letting fresh air from the air-conditioned hallway into her windowless cubicle, when she catches a glimpse of one of Professor Maya's students across the way, reclining, almost too casually, inside the frame of her doorway. Dr. Lo, squeaking in her chair, wrestles for the best vantage in that narrow vertical slit she is peeping through, as if she's a birder who has stumbled through their binoculars on a secret vista spying into a nest and onto the promise of a hatchling's flight.

Or their fall. Must be a slow day, usually they flock these halls in halted migrations, the students swarming to consult *their* Professor Maya (at least those who cannot dead-reckon but who must rely on the draw of magnetic north for their grades), occupying her whole hour, even extending into after-Office Hours, before the long meditations in their squeaking shoes down hallways alone and into the sleepless, daydreaming nights beyond them. *I very much would not like to live rent-free in anyone's head, thank you very much! Nor as little magnetite crystals attracting the squawking of birds.*

"Hey Dr. Lo," the student waves perfunctorily. What a juxtaposition and a contrast, to turn from your favorite professor and see this other one who made you write an Annotated Bibliography last semester, just peeking out through her partially opened doorway. Not weird. Dr. Lo gives a rictus of a smile, endeavoring to act natural by opening her door wider (as if this was the plan all along). After following the student with the eyes in her motionless head, watching as they clear the frame of her doorway, Dr. Lo glances across the hall again, her gaze drifting one door to the left: over to Professor Maya's office. Her door is open, as usual, from which a greater light shines than anywhere else in that white corridor, because she has a window in there.

Meanwhile the student has already forgotten about Dr. Lo's lurking and is currently forcing themselves not to look back, don't look over your shoulder, just keep walking down this cold hallway, don't look back, she's not even thinking about you anymore, don't run back to Professor Maya's office... don't confess.

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"Darkling I listen..."  
—John Keats,  
"Ode to a Nightingale"

Still staring in a diagonal trajectory across the hall, she suddenly hears sweet music begin to play from Professor Maya's room, a song sounding very contained and private due to the rest of the doors besides them being closed, as if she's playing it for the two of them and it will vanish a few feet away like a scented candle's odor.

Probably the result of the pot of coffee she drank before her 1:00o'clock class, her sensory faculties are all-astir. She can't work, clearly. The smell of her teriyaki chicken blends with the strong perfume whiffing from Professor Maya's open doorway. Dr. Lo suspects it might not actually be an expensive number or a potent blend but that the aroma is being amplified, electrified, from having recently mingled with her clothing and having touched her body.

Dr. Lo feels her always-manicured nails as they dig into her desktop, an electrocuted tetany of her muscles unlike on other, lighter days when she would scrawl into its wood and inscribe there forever using the almond-shaped tip of her fingernail, two big initials separated by the symbol of addition, the two letters offering the solution to this cryptic algebraic expression:  $L + M$ . Now sitting and gripping her desk she is seized by a self-conscious pang stemming from the contamination of cooked poultry in her cubicle. She puts the styrofoam container at the bottom of a drawer, burying its scattered innards of gristle and thigh bones like she's hiding a mutilated corpse—which is a dumb move, like whenever you try to cover-up a crime, she reflects, so she grabs it and decides to throw it away outside. However, since this is a public university, the nearest wastebasket to dispose the evidence in is down two flights of stairs and to the right. This path will inevitably force her to walk right past Professor Maya's office, the scopophobic consideration of which causes her to become aware her heart is beating—and since picking up on your own autonomic reverberations is never a good sign, like a hospital patient with renewed vigor stirring to rise from their bed, this pulsating signal in turn makes her second-guess her whole resolution. Oh my god, what is she a schoolgirl again?

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"But as with Maxwell's Demon, so now. Either she could not communicate, or he did not exist."

—Thomas Pynchon,  
*The Crying of Lot 49*

The "schoolgirl" metaphor narrated as ambiguous indirect discourse at the end of the paragraph above, might be less of an interpolation by Dr. Lo's into the patriarchal conventions and turns-of-phrases reducing a women's emotions to the precarious tremulousness of having a really big crush, and more to do with the self-reflexive awareness that she has spent most of her life at school. Although she did marry a statistician as an undergraduate, so in this sense, being a "schoolgirl" was a stereotypically "giddy" time for her. They finalized their divorce two years ago. Out of the four friends she's had who are also compositionists: one of them married a history professor (when they were both students),

one of them married an anthropology professor (shortly after one of them was a student), one of them married another history professor at some point, and one married a man who gave up at law. Secretly she has fantasized about meeting someone who doesn't put such unnatural emphasis on macro-analysis (although she acknowledges its importance), maybe someone with a similar interest in writing, maybe someone who doesn't just read words as supplements to numbers, as thin qualitative discourses spreading throughout aggregations, but who enjoys conferences, maybe someone who is in this same department. But for the past two years Dr. Lo has been married to her work. And she's never been so productive.

She has to admit the increase in her output has a lot to do with her being taken on the faculty at the university. There is a great sense of solidarity fostered in the department among all of the diverse English studies—an “all for one and one for all” type of vibe pervades among novelists, compositionists, poets, distant readers, digital humanists, queer theorists, qualitative methods analysts, and fan fiction and pop cultural and the fringe “pure” Humanities scholars alike. So it was unusual for any member of the department to be out of the loop about immanent interdisciplinary developments, especially if it related to generative AI, LLMs, the pedagogical value of these tools, or anything about Foucault.

The collectivist view on knowledge in the department also influences the faculty's local ecology by instituting a more inclusive layout for the delegation of offices, which, among English departments in the SU system, is considered to be progressive for its integration of adjuncts into the upper levels of its buildings, in an altered habitat, if you will, among tenure-tracks. This spatial orientation was accepted by the voting members of the department with total unanimity and seems to work out pretty well for everybody, including Professor Maya. Accompanying their egalitarian spirits, the permanent occupants of these halls tend to be curious about *how the other half lives* (meaning, how the adjuncts and Teaching Associates are getting along).

Moreover, if you haven't realized, it's not merely the spirit of the faculty *de dicto* that has been inspiring Dr. Lo as of late, it's also the faculty *de re*: as in *her*, the direct

referent of the discussion, Professor Maya. As an educator in this ideologically tight-knit department the pretty professor has also adopted a healthy interest in the new horizons opened by generative AI. So this can definitely be an icebreaker for them.

Dr. Lo and Professor Maya are the only residents on the floor who seem to regularly have their office doors open—most of the faculty opens them when expecting students to drop in, thereby saving the students from the awkward vacillation of considering whether they should knock or not knock...that is, since the doctor and the professor keep their doors open all the time, it causes one of them to develop the fantasy that maybe the other one is leaving their door open *just* for the one or other one of them. This is, the one daydreaming knows, only wishful thinking, and that more practically she's really just hoping one day the apparently and incredibly amiable and effusive and beloved and eagerly wait-listed Professor Maya, will just say hi to her.

"Hello darling," Professor Maya's inflection is in a mock Transatlantic accent, making it infinitely endearing. Dr. Lo, sitting at her desk with a box full of half-eaten chicken in her bottom drawer, listens to the mellifluous voice as it intermingles with the tenor of a man's, his rehearsed chest-projecting resonance bouncing off the walls, infiltrating her small office through the ajar door as hot fast-moving particles darting around her head like the hooves of Maxwell's Demon have galloped in the room, disrupting her thermal equilibrium ("or am I having a hot flash? No no, too soon. Way too soon," she reassures herself). Maybe it's the heat of putting out too much energy in an effort to control the ineluctable drive toward entropy that is keeping her from doing useful work...but she is suddenly annoyed, as if this hallway—their hallway—has been intruded upon by an outsider. One of these men who bloviates like a modified car muffler, fatuously farting reckless noise. Although, really, it's not so dissonant listening to these literati speak to one another: her silvery tones harmonizing with the velvety notes sung in his low register. She recalls something from her Masters studies in Communications: the halls back then at her private college echoing with voices like TVs broadcasting the ready-for-network dialects of a diverse student population, all bottom-lip screeching the same Jabberwocky of

prestige.

She spent most of her Bachelor's studying Literature on a scholarship, back when she wrote on Punk Rock's DIY ethos and its aesthetic influence on Zine composition. This was where she first discovered a glimmer of interest in the study of rhetoric. Since, as she now says to pretty much every upper division class the department lets her teach: "there is no rhetoric without poësis." But she first got sidetracked (so she now thinks) studying Communications-styled rhetoric for her Masters—focusing on applying Counterpublics to a Public Speaking (specifically, a scholastic debate) pedagogy. This was when she was under the youthful impression she would still be on some stage somewhere. Maybe no longer as a *riot grrrl* but maybe giving a *Ted Talk* with enough tact to be able to drop an F-bomb two; or she in the wings as director, with her ragtag team of crafty debaters under the spotlight as her representatives.

Now she watches informational *Youtube* like everyone else, saving to a playlist the videos she might later show her undergraduates. Dr. Lo sits in her office untainted by the imperceptible smell of fowl. As musical as those songbirds in the hallway might sound—with Professor Maya's mezzo-soprano erumpent and rising like a thing plumed from an unseen garden, and his honeyed slow tones warbling beside the low shores of a mountain brook, the whole orchestration painting the scene of a tropical bird as it alights on the ledge of a gaudy hotel fountain—it is a veritable vocal copulation that makes her want to burst out of her office and shout: "in the name of decency!" She smiles to herself, the outraged old ninny. At least she has self-awareness of her occasional prudishness. This doesn't stop her from getting up and closing the door.

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[Quote missing]

The truth—something that might account for our doctor's severe reaction to this pedestrian interlude outside her office—is that over the weekend she created a burner account on *LinkedIn* so she could view and critique Professor Maya's résumé. This was initially meant to satisfy

her professional jealousies by allowing her to compare their CVs, subtract a few years and some white—excuse me, with skin like that—porcelain privilege, and then she was meant to come out the other side of the computer screen feeling consoled over this constant contest raging in her head and heart. Although why this task ended up taking her so many days and subsequent visits to the website—and why, had Professor Maya at any recent point checked her *Linkedin*, would she have noticed a continual uptick on her page as it was visited by one particular account titled MyahFavoriteDoorway—and why exactly Dr. Lo used this password below—

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all of this is the more difficult conclusion to come by. However, rather than attenuating her professional jealousies, the project just sank her into a bad depression.

And now she's back for the school week in her office with the lights off and the door closed. The computer screen sheds an underwater light on one side of the cramped enclosure, leaving the other side completely in the dark, creating an effect like the room is really a submarine or a Yin & Yang symbol squished into a cubical, like one of those tortured watermelons sold in Japanese supermarkets. She should be working, but working once again is like working against entropy, to do useful work is too much energy, to maintain this state of control too much work in itself...

And like clockwork, here come the blues and here comes the body issues. She does compare herself to her physically too, not just merely as a professional academic. Her 20/20 devil-blue eyes versus her own glasses worn for a lifetime, frames and lenses progressively getting thicker and then bifocaled and trifocaled until she's staring through a grid superimposed over the world and she's not even forty. Meanwhile, I present the evidence, your honor, of the diminishing returns to my self-esteem: exhibit two in our little forensic reconstruction here is of Professor Maya's tenured skin as it peeks into the sunlight from the ankle, but will it ever tan? While Dr. Lo...well, she's always had pretty hands. To her credit she's always known how to display them, while holding pencils and pens to conjure grades or misdirect the precocious questions of Honors student's with the sleight of her fingers and the wave of a wrist. Throughout her life she's accentuated them with

bracelets and rings, even a little tattoo half-hidden, look, a permanent rebellion against the status quo.

So yes, she's compared herself a lot to her. Can you blame her? Wouldn't you? Don't you? She's even compared their *Rate Your Professor* scores. This was a fatal mistake, and she knew it would be too. Sometimes it's almost as if we want to hurt ourselves. Sufficed to say, this convergence of psychic factors paves the way for our heroine's downfall into plagiarism.

The rich intellectual atmosphere of the department somehow justifies it too. The new, exciting dance between AI and human invention they're always going on about. "It's all a part of the recursive process," she reasons to herself aloud. More than that, inter- and meta-textually it's all one big discourse: all the words and ideas we share together—even with Professor Maya. She sure reasoned pretty well about all this recursion stuff to the English Chair last semester, when identifying the "needs and objectives" for funding her **ENG 900: Process Composition** course proposal. She found out a few weeks ago the course proposal has been accepted. But, as always, she soon lost access to the sunny vista of that academic success behind a gathering cloud of doubt.

Thus, face drowned by the computer light, the roaring of their voices outside in the hallway like a forbidding waterfall, there she is sealed inside her small office, an adjunct of darkness, committing to a deliberate, nearly thoughtful submersion into the grotto. The one justification she makes before slipping into the deep end is, "well, it's only ad copy."

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"Speech becomes indeed mere talk, simply one more means toward the end..."

—Hannah Arendt,  
*The Human Condition*

The first question she asks the chatbot is: "Give me a detailed explanation of what a successful portfolio for an ad copywriter looks like?"

Within a few weeks she has amassed two successful ad campaigns: one for an upstart social media company and another for an international flower shipping service. The former collection of digital ads the preliminary statistics project are maintaining the average span of a "scroller's" attention for nearly an entire extra half of a second (.47). She has also captured the attention of historically uninterested demographics. She had a peculiar knack for persuasion predating her collaborations with a computer, and this was no doubt a skill she possessed before acquiring her PhD in Rhetoric and Composition. Nonetheless, the combination of these two powerful factors (persuasion and artificial intelligence) have enabled her to become outrageously successful during her moonlighting as a copywriter.

Two of her digital ads remain completely uncensored in Saudi Arabia. And what is obviously even more noteworthy than this, is how she was able to work around certain cultural sensitivities about certain "women's issues" that prevented the product from being publicly advertised at all and in the first place. As for her print campaign for the international flower shipping service, we don't really have the space or the expertise to write about what many commentators call it less of a "success" in terms of sales, more of a "progress" in terms of the zeitgeist. No one expected the clever tongue-in-cheek profundity of her "Coming Out" flower ad campaign to further receive some acclaim domestically among the major Southwest Asian nation that commissioned it. (Although as cultural critics will surely point out once the ontological shock wears off that I think we're all experiencing at this point: in order to achieve such levels of persuasive control Dr. Lo used much of her framework from the unpublished research she did on "90s Gay Jokes: The Antagonism of Shock and the Agonism of 'Play' in the Neoliberal Acceptance of Queer Discourses". It does make her feel a little icky to resort to such sub rosa rhetorical techniques for her ad campaign, for she truly despises the notion of rhetoric as "dazzling yet mere talk" [sic] especially considering some of the particular enthymemes she deploys in her flowers ads are originally conceived in stand-up comedy routines that functionally do what some might make the accusation is "punching-down" against a marginalized group. The thought of the ensuing controversy kept her from finishing her paper; so, despite the general feeling of intellectual

knaveishness, she's also unmistakably happy her work is getting a second life.

Anyway, it would be a little premature to say that Dr. Lo shifted the sociopolitical paradigm in the middle east, but there are some rumblings (how satirical they are—how much they might issue from a sense of academic resentment, as well as how many uneasy feelings in the ad industry have been stirred by a sense of encroachment by an outsider—who knows? but), there are some who, ironically or not, refer to her recent work as “the Arab Spring” of advertisement campaigns.

In fact, this week she received two emails. The first one was sent from a Dr. Mudrov, a Continental Philosopher on her campus who she's never met of course. But the email was eager and promised a lunch, so when she met the professor/philosopher at the bar-grill on campus, it becomes apparent that Dr. Mudrov is interested in collaborating on a paper with her. She (the philosopher) wants to analyze the intersection between, as she (the philosopher again) refers to them, the “hyper-rhetorics” of feminist ad campaigns as a mode for the composition of identity and the dialectics of female liberation. Dr. Lo vocalizes some reservations about rhetoric being appropriated by any form of dialectics, since, as she sees it, “it is somewhat dubious what role dialectics plays in the persuasion of an audience. I actually have a couple of papers where I argue against it”; however, Dr. Lo does like the lady's energy. Despite secretly having to concede ignorance and nod with a smile when Dr. Mudrov begins talking about rhizomatic writing as a collaborative process for group authorship, she does offer a few comments about a theoretical framework for a possible agonistic inquiry into the (“interstitial,” Dr. Mudrov insists) spaces contested in feminist ad campaigns.

Dr. Lo feels good and that feeling of self-consciousness is resolved when her new colleague begins to listen intently and even take some notes. There is after all a bit of an intimidating mystique surrounding the Philosophy Department, but as is the case when you're on a really good date and after a few minutes the whole experience quickly begins to demystify itself, so suddenly that feeling of inarticulate smallness dissipated before “a real philosopher”. Although it's not like she's been on a date in

a really, really long time to be able to confirm this analogy.

Oh yes! The second email is from a government agency. It is worded with a very promising subject title. They are very interested in her copywriting techniques, particularly in the metrics she published on her *LinkedIn* demonstrating what are, by the standards of the ad industry, considered to be “enraptured” levels of attention-grabbing. When she gets to the time she’ll respond to this email too. But she little expects her reply to win her a new friend like she has met with Dr Mudrov.

Maybe she will collaborate on that paper.

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“This is only the beginning.”  
 —Possibly *Genesis 11:6*,  
 Winston Churchill, or popular  
 misquote of  
 “Death is only the beginning”  
 —by Anonymous

It was, of course, a particularly hard temptation to resist, one luring Dr. Lo at least partly into copywriting, the hope of finding a platform to mass-advertise her infatuation. What she didn’t take into consideration (what subsequent promptings of the AI help her to understand) is how, despite the English department teaching Technical Writing and Creative Writing (two useful skills when copywriting) — successful “(M)ad Women” don’t usually engage in exploits that grace the face of the English department’s Gray Lit section.

Two staff meetings have gone by since her unprecedented success and no one has congratulated her on it. So, since she cannot rest on her laurels, and despite at this point really preferring to avoid any discussion of AIs and LLMs, these topics are still her major avenue into a conversation with Professor Maya.

At the very least her newly obtained international fame (outside of the department) gives her the confidence she needs to pull out the styrofoam container from her bottom drawer and the courage required to throw it out

downstairs. Fortunately, Professor Maya's open doorway is by the stairwell, so she can walk by the first time, casually, maybe making casual eye-contact with her at her desk as she walks by—maybe not, it doesn't matter, 'cause it's casual, she's just going to throw something away. But on her way back to her office, when she's walking up the hallway, then suddenly she remembers something she wanted to tell Professor Maya. Oh, excuse me, I was just... just what?

She can't even think of anything to say. Something about AI...? When did she become so inarticulate? Has she been entirely subsumed by text-based expression? What happened to her voice? What happened to that Communications debater who once won a debate arguing for the continued production and circulation of pennies in the Fiat Currency System? Now she can't even say—

"Hello," announces that voice from the lounge car hitched to the dining car chugging along the Transatlantic railroad, booming in the hallway but ringing faraway in her mind, somewhere in the indistinct haze of their past lives it comes, from when they were traveling companions during a Gilded Age. (It can't be? Have we been transported? Have I died only to dream one last time?)

[Some time elapses; we can tell due to the transition from Professor Maya's upright position framed within Dr. Lo's doorway to her current counterpoised posture as she leans against the frame]

"Wow, that's so interesting you're also into this stuff too," Dr. Lo says like a robot, an appropriate way to refer to generative AI.

"Oh, you know, trying to stay relevant," Professor Maya tries to sound humble.

Then Dr. Lo blurts out: "I want all of our students to have the relevant knowledge," and then more subtly: "Eh, my focus is more on AI literacy right now."

"Well, they're not that good yet, are they? You think they read?"

"The students?" Dr. Lo elicits a laugh from Professor Maya, who responds:

"Well, I think we know the answer to that..."

"I know what you mean. Yeah, I think the LLMs are like a regular reader's digest."

"Is that reading though? Are we aware of the digestion process as we assimilate our food?"

"No no, not yet then. I guess they don't read," she says, quickly trying to agree with her.

But it does make her think about how an AI models language and if maybe it's like teaching a model of reading to a human. People who learn how to read in a second language, let alone in a new language later in life, need sometimes very sophisticated models. A bricolage of college words swirls in her head needing to be written down, but instead she begins obliquely referencing a paper she just read: "maybe you'll appreciate it, eh, because of your literary background—the interplay of meaning and meaninglessness prompted from the AI through iterative feedback. Kind of like what we find in poetry, I think. That is—what would Frege say?—a kind of sense with no reference."

Professor Maya smiles and looks away (maybe gets a little red? No that's her own face). "I see what you're saying. But I think it ends up becoming poetry because of some 'deeper' meaning it has." She makes two air quotes, and with each one the doctor has to fight the puppeteer slacking her head-strings and jerking her back-strings contrapposto, as the professor's pale fingers seek to fold her like a cabaret marionette forced to take a bow. Apropos of nothing, Dr. Lo thinks to herself: "my instrument while I dance is the reedy accordion."

The doctor manages to muster: "Yes, I've always thought of poetry as the closest form of expression we have to thought itself."

"Doesn't get any deeper than thought itself," Professor Maya quips with perfect kairos, causing Dr. Lo to

simultaneously become self-conscious and almost melt into a puddle right in front of her.

"Yes yes" (recovering) "also I'm sure you can find a lot of scholastic utility" (she's babbling now) "by for example investigating comparing and contrasting different prominent literary styles or even based on some of the literature I've read what's eh a common activity being performed nowadays is having students prompt the AI to produce multiple essays in different styles. Yeah. You know if we can just get them to write and reflect discursively on any perceived nuances of difference in styles, you know, that's er always a good thing."

"That's a good idea for one of my Intro to Lit classes," Professor Maya supports her clear enthusiasm on this topic. Sometimes Dr. Lo, as a remnant from her undergraduate years, is afraid that she won't be understood at all, but instead will be gawked at like a bleating goat. Hence, the rhetorically imposed concessions, the self-interrogating clauses, "you know what I mean?" and "if that makes sense?" tacked onto the end of more than serviceable sentences.

Professor Maya jokes: "Don't ask the computer to write a story about Borges though. It'll write a story about a mystic detective who gets lost in a maze of hedges chasing the truth."

"I'd read that story, even though it kinda just sounds like an actual Borges story," the doctor banters in return, trying to search her eyes, maybe they can have this moment.

She responds: "What is actual and what is seeming these days, right?" The professor laughs that laugh she does (you know the one).

Secretly, despite the joy, Dr. Lo does think that maybe Professor Maya is too swayed by the typical humanist whim to always first see the problematic in every situation—nonetheless at its core, Dr. Lo thinks it is incredibly noble the way the professor has such a deep concern about this or that medium losing its soul to "Enframing by technology" (Professor Maya quotes Heidegger here).

Most importantly, really all that matters, is the professor is standing in Dr. Lo's doorway right now, the way that so many have lingered in her own, unwilling to leave, as if just maybe at this one moment she too feels that anchor in the gut, that kindling smile in the eyes, that which defies you to end this conversation. So, they stand there talking about generative AI's function within, or its disruption of, the whole writing world.