Short Communication

Self-Forgery: An Oxymoron Taken Seriously

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Self-forgery, also called auto-forgery, auto-simulation or self-imitation, is an oxymoron. Forgery in this context does not mean a fraudulent making or uttering of a false document for unjust economic gain. The term self-forgery does not mean fraudulently writing one's own name without permission, since the owner of the name writes the name deliberately and knowingly. That fact alone should have inspired people to refuse to use the term self-forgery. I wrote repeatedly to an internet forum on why it is an inept term, but it seems far too many of us appear compelled to employ it when the long-established term "disguise" is the perfect term to use for the kind of writing taking place. Of all the possible kinds of forgery, let us limit the discussion to the writing of the signature and thus keep it elegant and simple but still applicable to all the other kinds of forgery. The circumstances in which handwriting experts seem most likely to encounter a writer writing one's own signature in an altered, disguised manner is when signing a promissory note. Someone writes one's own signature so it looks as if someone else wrote it so that the true writer can later claim not to have written it. The writer will assure the creditor it is a forgery: "Look at this letter, it is not the way I make a capital P. Therefore, I do not owe you the money, whoever it was that borrowed it.

A disguised signature is the altering of one's normal style of writing so that others will think the true writer did not make it. An imitation or simulated writing is one written in someone else's style so that people will think that this someone else wrote it. Now, the auto-forgery, or whatever one wants to call it, is one's name written by oneself with the intention that others will think someone else wrote it. The writer will change something in the way one writes in order to accomplish this. That is the definition of disguised writing. If one "imitates" one's own writing, one will endeavor to make it look as good as possible, as genuine as possible, since that is the object of imitated handwriting. In such a case, the writer will end up writing in one's own, normal, unaltered style, so that everyone will easily know who wrote it. Someone may argue that the writer will try to make the new signature look like a specific genuine signature, and thus go slowly and leave behind indications of forgery. In that case the writer has adopted a particular kind of disguise, namely going slower than usual. Alternatively, one might say the auto-forgery was done by putting the document to be signed on top of a genuine signature and writing that way. In that case we have a tracing, so that it is still a disguise since the normal way of writing has been deliberately altered so that others will think the real writer did not write it.

I do not know who first thought of the idea of a self-forgery, but I can see how the inventor will have pride in having done it. But we are professionals and should investigate everything critically, especially our own work product. The invention shows promise for the inventor, a creative and unique mentality that can be nourished towards richly endowed inventions. Someone referenced a writer who provided an example of self-forgery when she faked her signature. That was a disguise. Faking one's own signature has always been a disguise and is still a disguise. It is not an imitation, which means trying your best to get it right, but it is an effort to get it wrong which is a disguise. Let us avoid that peculiar expertise that takes good words and uses them in other than their plain dictionary meaning whereby simulation is to try to get another's style as right as I can. A disguise is to try to get my own style wrong enough, so I hide my identity as the writer. If a writer truly simulated one's own signature, the writer would try to get it as right as possible, which means there would be nothing to indicate it was not a genuine signature, making the effort quite fruitless. So, keep in mind:
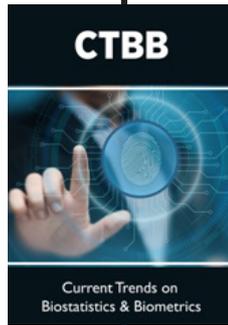
a)   Disguise: Try to get your own writing very wrong.

b)   Imitate or simulate: Try to get another person's writing correct.

c)   Self-forgery: There is no such thing even if called by any other name: auto-forgery, self-disguise, auto simulation, self-imitation, self-simulation, etc.

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