



## PLAGIARISM SCANDAL EXPOSES WORLD OF BOOK PACKAGING

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*A college-aged author, whose debut novel has been permanently pulled from book stores after accusations of plagiarism, has exposed the complicated world of "book packaging" in the publishing industry.*

Kaavya Viswanathan's novel, "How Opal Mehta Got Kissed, Got Wild and Got a Life," is the story of an Indian-American girl's quest to get into Harvard University. It fictionally parallels the real-life pursuit of the author, who is a sophomore at Harvard. It also contains over 40 similarities to another author's work, according to the publisher of the copied works.

The Harvard Crimson, the student newspaper at Harvard, first reported on the plagiarism scandal. Viswanathan is accused of lifting passages from two works by Megan McCafferty, "Sloppy Firsts" and "Second Helpings."

Among the passages that caused concern was Viswanathan's passage, "I had even begun to recognize his cologne (sweet and woody and spicy...)," which mirrored McCafferty's, "He smelled sweet and woody, like cedar shavings."

### **Reaction to the accusations**

During an interview on NBC's "Today" show, Viswanathan apologized for the similarities but said it was not her intention to steal from the author.

"I completely see the similarities. I'm not denying that those are there, but I can honestly say that any of those similarities were completely unconscious and unintentional, that while I was reading Megan McCafferty's books, I must have just internalized her words. I never, ever intended to deliberately take any of her words," she said.

Viswanathan has since been accused of copying ideas from an additional two authors and her publishing company, Little, Brown and Co., has permanently pulled her novel from bookstores and canceled her two-book and movie deal, reportedly worth close to \$500,000.

### **What are book packagers?**

Like many authors, Viswanathan worked with a book packager, Alloy Entertainment. Book packagers craft ideas and proposals for books that are then sold to publishing houses.

Although technically not secret, they are not a publicly well-known or discussed part of the book industry.

"They're used quite often. What they do is they come up with book ideas. They work very closely with authors to shape manuscripts; they edit manuscripts; they come up with concepts; and they find authors to write the books," Karen Holt, deputy editor of Publishers Weekly, a magazine that covers books and the book publishing industry, told the NewsHour.

Book packaging companies share the copyright with authors as well as any advances or royalties the author might receive.

"In a way it's kind of like working on a television show," Cindy Eagan, editorial director at Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, told The New York Times. "We all work together in shaping each novel."

Even classics such as Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys mystery series used book packagers.

"This is not a new practice. I think it's more prominent now, and in some ways it reflects the greater commercialization and the emphasis on the bottom line, but this is something that's been done for decades," Holt said.

According to Holt, publishing companies use packaging companies because they help with copy-editing and creating book covers.

"In a sense, in a lot of cases it's kind of a form of outsourcing for the publisher, where a lot of the editorial functions that you would assume that a publisher is doing actually the book packager is doing," she said.

### **Who is responsible?**

Although many people might work on a novel, the ultimate responsibility for the integrity of the work rests with the author.

"There really is no process for checking, for vetting any book to see if there is plagiarism. I mean, clearly, they rely on the honesty of their author; you know, clearly they have the expectation that this is original work," Holt said.

Viswanathan's publishers said she was responsible for her novel.

"Our understanding is that Kaavya wrote the book herself, so any problems are entirely the result of her writing and not the result of the packager's involvement in the book," Michael Pietsch, who published Viswanathan's book, told The New York Times.

*--Compiled by Annie Schleicher for NewsHour Extra*

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