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Back when I taught Advanced English Writing classes. I'd write "There are no new ideas" on the board and attribute it to Plato, and then say in my lecture that he probably stole that quote. Are we allowed to do plagiarism humor in China? They forgot to comment on that in my contract.

Anyway, dig this. Michael LaRocca, age 17, is crafting his award-winning THE BARGAIN in 1980, which I hype far too much. Somehow he stumbles upon something he will write in 2003. CAMEL BUTT. The total lack of anything redeeming depresses him so much that he never writes again. Thus, he doesn't write CAMEL BUTT.

Is this "time travel paradox" original? Yes and no. I believe this is why the US Copyright Office says you can copyright your words but not your ideas. I've never read a time travel paradox featuring a camel butt, but otherwise my little tale is far from original. If you were working in the Copyright Office, would you want to be the one deciding which ideas are and aren't new? Is it even possible?

This is my latest answer to every aspiring author who asks me, "How can I protect my idea?" Don't write it. Take it to your grave. Otherwise, it's fair game. Your words are always protected, but your ideas never are. And, since there really are no new ideas, not even death will protect "your" ideas. Learn to live with it.

Put another way, the ideating is the easy part. The hard part is publishing and marketing. This is also why I've never seen an idea worth stealing. It's too damn much work. Pick up something by your favorite author, and in my case that would be Shakespeare. Ignore the words and look at the ideas. How many will you see that are original? Zero, baby.

To be or not to be. To thine own self be true. A rose by any other name would smell as sweet. A coward dies many times before his death, a brave man dies but once. Ideas I fully agree with, but they aren't original. And, in this day and age, a damn hard sell. That's right, I can't even get rich ripping off Shakespeare, so what makes you think I can get rich ripping off YOUR ideas? Try ripping off my ideas and see how much cat food that'll get you.

Put yet another way, if you want to steal what I just wrote, you can't take my words. They're mine. Copyrighted the moment I clicked "send." But if you change CAMEL BUTT to WHOMPING THE YAK, then it might work. But be careful. I stole the words WHOMPING THE YAK from Dave Barry. If he decides to sue you, you're on your own.