1937

Byron's plagiarism as judged by his contemporaries

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Byron's Plagiarism
as
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Investigation.

In discussions of Byron's poetry, very often the subject of plagiarism is introduced. I have heard Byron criticised severely for this weakness, while not a few have either attempted to disprove the charge or excuse it. For some time I have been curious to know just what the poet's contemporaries have said regarding Byron's plagiarism, and, equally important, what the accused replied to his critics. Therefore it is my purpose, in writing this thesis, to review any criticisms and refutations which appeared in Byron's own time.

I consider it important to the student of Byron to consider any charges and countercharges on the subject of plagiarism, in order to approach the study of Byron's poems with a critical attitude, and thus be better able to evaluate Byron's contribution in the field of poetry.

Sources of Information.

Fortunately for my investigation, literary magazines abounded in the early nineteenth century, and editors and contributors praised writers highly or criticised severely. People in those times kept their correspondence, and wrote copious diaries and memoirs. Many of these are available at the Boston
Public Library or Widener Library at Harvard University. I have perused records of conversations, letters, pamphlets and memoirs, and anything relating to the charge of imitation or literary piracy in Byron's poems I have noted.

**Conclusion Sought.**

Byron's attitude toward the subject, that of being unjustly accused by critics, but bearing the charges in silence, nobly, is entirely in keeping with the poet's character, as his admirers would say, or pose, as his amused or contemptuous critics might say. His reticence to refute the charges, however, has presented the greatest difficulty in procuring evidence in defense of the charge of plagiarism. Byron's few references to this criticism, nevertheless, I am adding to the opinions of numerous writers of his time, both friends and foes, in an attempt to come to some conclusion as to the consensus of opinion among Byron's contemporaries regarding plagiarism in his work.
CHAPTER II
PLAGIARISM

Classical Theory.

Although the statement has been made, that plagiarism is as old as literature itself, we find that the practice, once deemed innocent, has gradually come under condemnation, both from literary critics and from legal authorities.

In classical times the writers got not only inspiration but subjects and material from their predecessors. Original work was considered daring. "To the ancients, then, combining old material with new and expressing the combination in an original manner constituted originality. This originality was achieved by a composite process which may for convenience be divided into three steps: selection, reinterpretation, and improvement."

To conceal one's indebtedness, however, was contrary to the classical principles that imitation is a matter to be proudly acknowledged.

In defining the classical theory of literary production White says: "It encourages imitation, avoids independent fabrication, and holds the subject-matter of literature as common property. But it insists that imitation is not enough, and demands that individual originality be shown by choosing

1. White, Harold O., Plagiarism and Imitation During the English Renaissance, p. 18.
and using models carefully, by reinterpreting borrowed matter, and by improving on those models and that matter."

Establishment of Rights.

Chaucer embodied tracts of Dante in his writings, not to mention his borrowing the materials for some of his Canterbury Tales from Boccaccio, and it was not until the advent of printing, in the year 1450 A.D., that writers began to take an active interest in establishing the product of their intellectual labor as property, and to insist that their rights in it entitled them to a substantial reward.

Sixteenth century English writers before the accession of Elizabeth practiced the classical theory of imitation. In the third decade of Elizabeth's reign, however, to quote White again, "English literature grew articulate about its ideals and methods, with the resultant appearance of a canon of literary principles. Adverse criticisms of imitation vastly increased in number, as compared with the total found during the first three quarters of the century. There was a corresponding increase in the number and insistence of the demands for originality. ... Of all those who demanded originality of invention, not one used the term in its modern sense of individual fabrication. All sought originality just as classical critics declared that it should be sought: through individual adaptation, reinterpretation, and, if possible, improvement of the best which each writer could find in the
literature of his own and earlier days.

"Not only were Englishmen from 1500 to 1625 without any feeling analogous to the modern attitude toward plagiarism; they even lacked the word until the very end of that period."¹ People of that time still believed in the classical theory that originality of real worth could be achieved only through creative imitation.

During the early part of the seventeenth century, there seems to have been no marked change in the way in which plagiarism was regarded, though the practice seems to have been less common.

After the Restoration authors were beginning to feel an increasing indignation at being despoiled. Previously Butler and Milton had both protested, though the latter has been shown to have borrowed ideas and sometimes more from his predecessors. But Milton's defense was doubtless that he had presented others' ideas in better form, for he defined plagiarism as "borrowing without beautifying."

Increase in the Importance of the Subject.

"With the eighteenth century," writes Harry M. Paull, "we enter upon a new era, and the obligations of authors to one another became the subject of serious discussion. The Copyright Act of Queen Ann (1709-10) not only called the attention of authors to their rights, but compelled them to

¹ White, Harold O., Plagiarism and Imitations During the English Renaissance, p. 13.
be more careful as to the extent to which they appropriated the work of others. Already Pope, in a letter to Walsh (1706), discusses the question as to 'how far the liberty of borrowing may extend--------'. Pope himself was not free from this weakness which he condemned in others. He was nevertheless as severe on his fellow-culprits as if he were guiltless himself."

Plagiarism is frequently referred to by Dr. Johnson. However, he is by no means a severe critic of the practice, for which he finds excuses. It seemed to be the general habit for writers of this period to condemn plagiarism though guilty of it themselves.

Byron's Time.

In writing of Byron's times Paull says: "With the nineteenth century there comes another advance. Not that the practice of plagiarism sensibly decreased, but its condemnation became more decided and general. The critics made it their business to be on the watch for cases of imitation or borrowing, and they did not hesitate to pillory offenders."2

Because the term plagiarism is not easy to define, and because criticism for this literary offense depends entirely on the individual's interpretation of it as a crime, a decision as to the justification for criticism of Byron on

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1. Literary Ethics, p. 111-112.
this score must necessarily be a personal opinion. However, as proper behavior of any type depends, as to standards, on time and place, so any discussion of Byron's plagiarism must be based on the general attitude of early nineteenth century poets and critics toward this subject.
CHAPTER III

CONVERSATIONS, LETTERS, AND MEMOIRS

Conversation with Moore.

From conversations carried on with Byron, or concerning Byron, numerous side lights are cast on the subject of plagiarism. On one occasion Moore asked the meaning of a number of paper-marks in a book Byron was reading. "Only a book," he answered, "from which I am trying to crib, as I do whenever I can, and that's the way I get the character of an original poet."¹

John Galt's Biography of Byron.

In the biography of Lord Byron, by John Galt, we find some enlightening remarks. Galt writes: "There is a curious note in the memoranda which Lord B kept in the year 1813, that I should not pass unnoticed, because it refers to myself, and moreover is characteristic of the excoriated sensibility with which his Lordship felt everything that touched or affected him or his.

"When I had read the Bride of Abydos, I wrote to him my opinion of it, and mentioned that there was a remarkable coincidence in the story, with a matter in which I had been interested. I have no copy of the letter, and I forget

¹ Moore, Thomas, Life of Lord Byron, p. 236, Vol. IV.
the expressions employed, but Lord B seemed to think they implied that he had taken the story from something of mine.

"The note is:

'Galt says there is a coincidence between the first part of 'The Bride' and some story of his, whether published or not, I know not, never having seen it. He is almost the last person on whom anyone would commit literary larceny, and I am not conscious of any witting thefts on any of the gems. As to originality, all pretensions are ludicrous; there is nothing new under the sun.'

"The most amusing part of this little fracas is the denial of his Lordship, as to pilfering the thoughts and fancies of others, for it so happens, that the first passage of the Bride of Alydos, the poem in question, is almost a literal and unacknowledged translation from Goethe, which was pointed out in some of the periodicals soon after the work was published.

"Then, as to his not thieving from me or mine, I believe the fact to be as he has stated; but there are singular circumstances connected with some of his other productions, of which the account is at least curious."¹

Galt tells about being engaged in composing a poem in the Spenserian measure during the passage with Lord Byron from Gibraltar to Malta. It was intended to describe, in

narrating the voyages and adventures of a pilgrim, who had embarked for the Holy Land, the scenes Galt expected to visit. Byron knew about this poem, and considering that he started Childe Harold in Albania, Galt says, "..... it must be considered as something extraordinary, that the two works should have been so similar in plan, and in the structure of the verse.

"His Lordship has published a poem, called The Curse of Minerva, the subject of which is the vengeance of the goddess on Lord Elgin for the rape of the Parthenon. It has so happened that I wrote at Athens a burlesque poem on nearly the same subject..... which I called The Atheniad; the manuscript was sent to his Lordship in Asia Minor, and returned to me through Mr. Hobhouse.

"It was, indeed, an early trick of his Lordship to filch good things.

"However, I have said quite enough on this subject, both as respects myself and his seeming plagiarism, which might be multiplied to legions. Such occasional accidental imitations are not things of much importance."¹

The following extracts from Thomas Medwin's account of his conversations with Lord Byron shed some light on the poet's reaction to criticism.

"I am taxed with being a plagiarist," Byron said to Medwin, "when I am least conscious of being one; but I am not very scrupulous, I own, when I have a good idea, how I came into possession of it. How can we tell to what extent Shakespeare is indebted to his contemporaries, whose works are now lost? Besides which Cibber adapted his plays to the stage.

"The invocation of the witches was, we know, a servile plagiarism from Middleton. Authors were not so squeamish about borrowing from one another in those days. If it be a fault, I do not pretend to be immaculate. I will lend you some volumes of Shipwrecks, from which my storm in 'Don Juan' came. .... As to originality, Goethe has too much sense to pretend that he is not under obligations to authors, ancient and modern; -- who is not."¹

Medwin, in recording Byron's conversations, tells of the poet's handing The Deformed Transformed to Shelley, as he was in the habit of doing with his daily compositions, and remarking as he did so, "Shelley, I have been writing a Faustish kind of drama: tell me what you think of it."

"I like it least," said Shelley, "of anything I ever saw of yours. It is a bad imitation of 'Faust' and besides, there are two entire lines of Southey's in it."²

¹ Medwin, Thomas, Conversations of Lord Byron, p. 199-201, Vol.I
Byron's Comment on a Resemblance.

In his notes to his poem The Siege of Corinth, Byron writes: "I must here acknowledge a close, though unintentional, resemblance in these twelve lines to a passage in an unpublished poem of Mr. Coleridge, called 'Christabel.' It was not till after these lines were written that I heard that wild and singularly original and beautiful poem recited; and the MS. of that production I never saw till very recently, by the kindness of Mr. Coleridge himself, who, I hope, is convinced that I have not been a wilful plagiarist. The original idea undoubtedly pertains to Mr. Coleridge, whose poem has been composed above fourteen years."

But to Medwin he said: "Some eight or ten lines of 'Christabel' found themselves in 'The Siege of Corinth.' I hardly know how;........"

Byron and Wordsworth.

At one time Medwin remarked that Byron was accused of owing a great deal to Wordsworth, adding, "Certainly there are some stanzas in the Third Canto of 'Childe Harold' that smell strongly of the Lakes-----

"Very possibly," replied Byron. "Shelley, when I was in Switzerland, used to dose me with Wordsworth physic even to nausea; and I do remember reading something of his with pleasure."

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1. Medwin, Thomas, Conversations of Lord Byron, p.24-25,Vol.II.
Byron and Scott.

At another time Byron was reading a new novel of Sir Walter Scott's.

"'How difficult it is,' said he, 'to say anything new. ——-This page, for instance, is a brilliant one; it is full of wit. But let us see how much of it is original. This passage, for instance, comes from Shakespeare; this bon mot from one of Sheridan's Comedies; this observation from another writer (naming the author); and yet the ideas are new-moulded,—and perhaps Scott was not aware of their being plagiarisms. It is a bad thing to have too good a memory.'

'I should not like to have you for a critic,' Medwin observed.

'Set a thief to catch a thief,' was the reply."

The Siege of Corinth.

One other instance shows how candid Byron could be in a conversation. To Medwin he declared that Vathek was another of the tales he had a very early admiration for. "You may remember a passage I borrowed from it in 'The Siege of Corinth', which I almost took verbatim."

In considering remarks made by Byron, it is well to keep in mind, however, that it is difficult to determine when he was serious and when he was facetious.

1. Medwin, Thomas, Conversations of Lord Byron, p.32-33. Vol.II.
CHAPTER IV
REVIEWs OF POEMS

Criticism for Plagiarism.

Although it is quite generally admitted that the reviews of Byron's very early poems were severely harsh, and that those critics of *Hours of Idleness* well deserved the satire of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, treatment of the poet henceforth appears to have been fair, and, for the most part, free from ill will or envy. Nevertheless, plagiarism was the literary sin with which many of the reviewers reproached him.

The following are excerpts from reviews in literary pamphlets of Byron's times.

Favorable Reviews.

1815 - July -- *Hebrew Melodies* in *Electic*

"...these songs...stand a fair chance of rivalling in popularity the compositions of his friend More, (sic.) of which indeed they often reminded us."

1816 - October -- *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* in *The Quarterly Review*

"We have said that Lord Byron occasionally, though without concealing his own original features, assumes the manner and style of his contemporaries. ----It is impossible to read the Prisoner of Chillon without finding several pas-
sages—which strongly remind us of Wordsworth. There is another, called 'Churchill’s Grave,' for which Sonthey seems to afford the model. Two other pieces in this miscellany recall to our mind the wild, unbridled, and fiery imagination of Coleridge.

1817 - February -- Childe Harold's Pilgrimage in The British Review

In this review the critic considers that the ideas for the description of his wanderings "must have been" borrowed from Montgomery's "The World before the Flood.

1818 - August -- Childe Harold's Pilgrimage in the British Review

The writer here notes the similarity between Byron's lines and those of Cowper and Kirke White.

1818 - July -- Beppo -- in Elecic

"It shows that its author can imitate, like a nightingale, with surprising facility, the notes of inferior songsters;-----"

1818 - March 14 -- Beppo -- in The Literary Gazette

"To our minds Beppo is exquisite of its kind; it is the disporting of a genius-----. We are sure that every person of taste who reads it, will agree with us in thinking that it stands almost at the top of a style of writing with which England is not the most familiar -- that of ingenious
and playful satire. "---he has produced an exceedingly happy poem."

1821 - July -- Marino Faliero - in The Edinburgh Review

"But, in the main, it is original--being indeed merely another Venice Preserved, and continually recalling, though certainly without eclipsing, the memory of the first."

Unfavorable Reviews.

1821 - April 28 - Marino Faliero - in The Literary Gazette.

"The historical tragedy of Faliero ---is neither more nor less than a remodification of Venice Preserved. The action, the characters, the catastrophe, are nearly the same---persons of the drama, who, if not individually, do collectively repeat all the sentiments of the dramatis personae of Otway; and upon this point of resemblance, the author, who is precise in acknowledging the minutest obligations, treats us with the following exquisite piece of irony.

"One of his judges says, 'Thou tremblest, Faliero;' to which Faliero replies, 'Tis with age then;' and hereupon his lordship notes, 'This was the actual reply of Bailli, maire of Paris, to a Frenchman who made him the same reproach on his way to execution, in the earliest part of their revolution. I find in reading over (since the completion of this tragedy), for the first time these six years, 'Venice Preserved,' a similar reply on a different occasion by Renault, and other coincidences arising from the subject. I need hardly remind
the gentlest reader, that such coincidences must be accidental, from the very facility of their detection by reference to so popular a play on the stage and in the closet as Otway's chef d'oeuvre.'

"For ourselves, we know not what the gentlest readers may be inclined to credit; but we must declare, that if any writer can be allowed to plunder another in the way Lord Byron has plundered Otway, and plead in defence that the robbery was committed in open day, we may as well concede at once, that barefaced depredation in literature is not a cognizable crime; or that effrontery is a complete justification of it—-

"The Resemblances, or rather in many instances, the copy and adaptation, are so strong throughout, that we only wonder how it happens that Otway's is so interesting and Byron's so dull a play.

(The reviewer then calls attention to specific instances of similarities.)

"His (Byron's) great fault is, want of originality; for the tragedy is a mere compound of that to which we have so frequently alluded, with plumbs from other plays, such as Othello, Measure for Measure, & c., and a little of the noble author's own."

1822 - December 29 - Werner - in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine.

"We are not so absurd as to say, or to think, that
a Dramatist has no right to make free with other people's fables. We all know that Shakespeare himself took his stories from Italian novels, Danish sages, English chronicles, Plutarch's lives -- from anywhere rather than from his own invention. But did he take the whole of Hamlet, or Juliet, or Richard III, or Anthony and Cleopatra, from any of these foreign sources? But here Lord Byron has invented nothing absolutely, positively, undeniably, nothing. There is not one incident in his play, not even the most trivial, that is not to be found in the novel from which it is taken; occurring exactly in the same manner, brought about by exactly the same agents, and producing exactly the same effects on the plot. And then as to the characters, why, not only is every one of them to be found in the novel, but every one of them is to be found there far more fully and powerfully developed."

1823 - Werner - in Eclectic.

"the poem is not merely less pleasing but less instructive than the tale (Miss Lee's Canterbury Tales).

with all his great talents, he wants the transcendent faculty of dramatic or epic invention. As much as this is almost tacitly admitted by the Author of Werner, when, having failed in his original dramas, he becomes, in this, a copyist, aspiring to no higher merit than that of an ingenious playwright."
CHAPTER V

CONTRIBUTIONS TO LITERARY PAMPHLETS

Severe Criticism.

It is in the essays contained in the periodicals of Byron's times, and the letters sent for publication to the editors of these pamphlets, that criticism of Byron's plagiarism is most pronounced.

Casual Remarks Concerning Plagiarism.

As early as the December, 1816 issue of The Edinburgh Review, the following allusion is made to Byron's imitation, although in no sense is he criticised for this element in his writing:

"Lord Byron, however, it should be observed, like all other persons of a quick sense of beauty, and sure enough of their own originality to be in no fear of paltry imputations, is a great mimic of styles and manners, and a great borrower of external character. He and Mr. Scott are full of imitations of all the writers from whom they have ever derived gratification; and the two most original writers of the age might appear, to superficial observers, to be the most deeply indebted to their predecessors."

A few months previous to this, however, in the April issue of The New Monthly Magazine, a letter addressed to the editor and signed "A Provincial Schoolmaster" con-
tained specific charges of plagiarism. The letter, which follows, is obviously not intended to be malignant.

"Some ingenious critics———have fancied that they have discovered the fountain of many of Lord Byron's most favourite images———have muttered the word plagiarism through lips half yellow with envy, and have brought forward their parallel passages accordingly. May I be permitted to have a guess of the same kind; and as I despair of emulating the fame of the noble author, to nibble for one moment at his claim to originality? In the magnificent Poem of the Corsair, Conrad says to Medora,

'Be thou my rainbow to the storms of life!" Might not the illustrious bard who, in spite of some unhappy appearances to the contrary, is said to be a great reader of the writings of divines, have had an eye of recollection on the following passage from Bishop Home?

"No storm can overshadow a true Christian, but his faith will discern a rainbow in it."

Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine for June, 1817, contains an interesting letter sent to the editor by a person who, while traveling in Switzerland had had related to him by Capuchin Friars a tradition in which, to quote the contributor, "there appears to me such a striking coincidence in some characteristic features, between the story of that performance (Manfred) and the Swiss tradition that without further comment, I extract the latter from my journal, and send it for your
The Swiss story then follows, and the "coincidence" of the similarity is indeed "striking." At this point I call attention to the use of the word coincidence, for it is a term used innumerable times henceforth.

In the September, 1818 edition of The New Monthly and Universal Register appears an article entitled Coincidence between Lord Byron and Waller. I quote the following pithy comment from it:

"Lord Byron in his English Bards, in allusion to the death of Kirke White, by too intense application to study, says:--

So the struck eagle, stretched upon the plain,
No more thro' rolling clouds to soar again,
Viewed his own feather on the fatal dart,
And winged the shaft that quivered in his heart.

Waller has a similar thought in some verses to a lady on singing a song he had written.

"That eagle's fate and mine are one,
Which on the shaft that made him die,
Espied a feather of his own,
Wherewith he went to fly so high."

Three months later in the same magazine, the observations quoted below, contributed by a reader, were published. The contributor's attitude is the 'friendly one of a student, rather than that of a severe critic.
"The following coincidences of Lord Byron are not noticed with any invidious intention, but merely as curious and accidental\(^1\) resemblances, which to the literary reader may not prove unamusing."

The contributor then shows the marked similarity between many lines in Byron's poetry and in that of Mrs. Opie, giving also instances in that of Logan, Montgomery, Java, Dodsley and Campbell. The "coincidences" are quite remarkable. For instance, he writes:

"In addressing Italy, Lord Byron says,

Thy very weeds are beautiful.

Childe Harold, Canto 4

Speaking of Rome, Isabel observes, in the 'City of the Plague,,'

The very weeds how lovely! -- p. 77"

In the year 1821 the charges and countercharges of plagiarism in Byron's works brought the controversy to its highest point. Naive remarks concerning the "remarkable coincidences" gave way to forceful denunciation. In the February third issue of The London Literary Gazette appeared the short article quoted below. It undoubtedly aroused no special interest on the part of the average reader. In the light of the controversial articles which this pamphlet published in subsequent issues, however, the item seems to serve as an intro-

\(^1\) Note the number of times the words accident and accidental appear in any discussion of Byron's plagiarism.
duction, if not a foreboding, of the succeeding harshly cen-
sorious series of denunciations concerning Byron's plagiarism. The article was entitled, Origin of Copyright, and the first Literary Piracy.

"The first appearance of anything in the shape of a legal security granted to authors for their productions, is referred, by Mr. D'Iraeli, to the reign of Queen Elizabeth. No book was allowed to be published without the permission of the licensers of the press, who were instructed, for the better protection of literary property, only to give one license for the same book. In Queen Anne's reign, the office of licenser of the press was done away with, and literature received a more definite and decided protection: a limited term was granted to every author to reap the fruit of labours; after which a man's right in his own work ceased altogether. This has been the case ever since."

The article then cites an event which occurred in Italy in 1514 in which the exclusive right to print writings of Tacitus was granted to Beroaldo, an editor. Notwithstanding the exertions of Pope Leo X, who had granted the privilege to Beroaldo, "the work was pirated, and printed at Milan the same year by Manuziano. He was cited to appear before the Pope; but owing to the interference of his friends, the fine was remitted, and sentence of excommunication only passed upon him. A compromise was afterwards entered into between Manuziano and Beroaldo; and thus terminated the first literary piracy."
Harsh Criticism

The following articles, as their dates indicate, appeared soon after the item on literary piracy. That The London Literary Gazette had no ill-feeling toward Byron is indicated by the exceedingly favorable review of his poem Beppo, published in 1818. The articles are entitled, Lord Byron's Plagiarisms and contain too many illustrations to reproduce here. The editor's comments, however, and excerpts from the articles, are illuminating and convincing.

The London Literary Gazette -- February 24, 1821.

Editor's preface.--"There has been much dispute in the literary world, on the subject of plagiarism. ----- Whether the following exposition may exhibit Lord Byron as an authorized spoliator of other men's goods, or as a culpable pilferer, ----- it is not our province to determine. We candidly profess our opinion to be, that his Lordship has appropriated to himself the language and ideas of others beyond all precedent; and the detector of these piracies, Mr. A. A. Watts, having allowed us to copy from a MS. work of his upon the subject, such parts as may suitably find a place in our columns, we consider it an act of strict literary justice to extract a few of the leading points, though we have not room either for the reasoning which supports the charges, or for the detailed remarks which are adduced in proof of the coincidences being anything but accidental.

-----we do not think there is one assertion made, which Mr. W. has not ample evidence to substantiate; nor one imputation
which he has not strong ground to maintain, if impugned."

This first article, as the contents indicate, deals with the characters in Byron's poetry. Watts writes:

"A great deal has been said at various times, about the originality of Lord Byron's conceptions, as it respects the characters of the heroes and heroines of his poetry. We are, however, disposed to believe, that his dramatis personae (and especially such as appear in prominent parts) are mostly the property of exhibitors, although he may sometimes furnish them with new dresses and decorations; with 'sable hair,' 'unearthly scowls,' 'a vital scorn' of all beside themselves, and such additional improvements as he may consider necessary, in order to enable them to make their appearance with satisfaction to himself, and profit, or at least amusement, to the public."

Quotations from Byron's poems with similar passages from those he is accused of imitating are then given, the presentation of so many instances proving strong evidence in the author's contention. He shows that the character of the Giaour, the description of his person, and often the very sentiments he expresses, are derived immediately from Mrs. Radcliffe's fine romance, The Italian. His fairness is indicated by a footnote, referring to The Prisoner of Chillon, in which he says:

"The account of the death of the younger brother is beautiful and new; there are fewer signs of imitation in this
poem, than in anything Byron has written."

In speaking of Mazeppa, he says: "In this poem, beside many matters of less importance, derived from various sources, the transit of the wild horse is imitated from four five stanzas, in Mr. Shelley's Revolt of Islam."

Mr. Watts shows a delightful sense of humor in this part of his paper dealing with the Corsair:

"By the way, we had almost forgotten to mention that Lord Byron here, as in most of his pieces, sometimes masquerades himself as the hero of the action; and, sooth to say, there are few people better adapted to play the part of a Corsair than his lordship; for he is positively unequalled by any marauder we ever met with or heard of, in the extent and variety of his (literary) piracies, and unacknowledged obligations to various great men (aye, and women too) living and deceased, specimens of which may be seen in the annexed papers."

There then follow many indisputable proofs of piracy from Madame de Staël, Mrs. Radcliffe, Tasso, Milton, and numerous others. Mr. Watts quotes many lines copied word for word by Byron, for example:

Byron -- Something too much of this. -- C.H. Ch. II, S. 8.
Shakespeare -- Something too much of this. -- Hamlet, Act III, S. 2.
Byron -- Hissing, but stingless -- Darkness
Milton -- Hissing, but stingless. -- Paradise Lost

The London Literary Gazette -- March 3, 1821.

"There are few writers to whom Lord Byron is under such extensive obligation as he is to Dr. Young. Besides innumerable imitations of the style and diction of this poet, his Lordship has frequently transferred whole lines into his productions. ——-and it is well worthy of remark, that although he quotes Young on one or two unimportant occasions, he is inflexibly silent when his own credit would seem to demand an acknowledgment of the source of plagiarisms, numerous and palpable beyond all precedent, from the same author. ——-

"Subtract from many of the most popular passages in his compositions, the single line, or the tissue of nervous and forcible diction, which he has borrowed from other writers, and what will remain? ——-and if poets are permitted to borrow lines, or half lines (constituting sometimes the soul of an otherwise tedious description), with impunity, where is the line to be drawn, and how is plagiarism to be defined, and consequently detected?"

In a note to this article, the editor, referring to lines copied from others, writes: "These, and a multitude of similar passages, are precisely what the public have been accustomed to entitle Byronisms, and to consider as constituting the main feature of Lord Byron's poetical style. Deprive him of these, and what will remain to distinguish him
from other poets? Yet these, we see, are borrowed!"
The London Literary Gazette -- March 10, 1821.

"It is an extraordinary fact, but no less strange than true, that there is scarcely a poet of any reputation, whom Lord Byron has found occasion to satirize (whether in his English Bards or Don Juan,) that he has not also taken occasion to plunder. Stole Scott, -- ballad-monger Southey, -- simple Wordsworth, -- drowthy Campbell, -- lewd Moore, -- raving Montgomery, -- turgid Coleridge, and even sometteering Bowles,¹ have furnished him with very many of the most popular passages in his writings. This is no vague and idle assertion, but a serious and incontrovertible charge, clearly established in the present volume, by the adduction of the proofs upon which it is founded."

The writer says that his Lordship has been guilty of the most flagrant injustice, not to say ingratitude, to Sotheby. "Besides innumerable imitations of his style and diction, he has resorted to his pages, (as to a literary store-house known only to himself,) for ideas, language to clothe them in, and sometimes for principal portions of the machinery he employs in his poems. We shall produce testimony in support of this assertion anon.

"Mr. Sotheby's poetry is but partially known; and

¹. Such are the epithets applied to these gentlemen by Lord Byron, in his English Bards and Don Juan.
it is on this account, probably, that his Lordship considers he may steal and ride his Pegasus with impunity. But to ridicule a man, (after having robbed him of his best ideas, and most vivid expressions,) for getting no more than 'a nibble at a time at Fame,' is an anomaly in the history of literary justice, we confess ourselves unable to understand. Besides his version of Wieland's Oberon, which is one of the most faithful and spirited translations extant, Mr. Southey is the author of 'Constance de Castile,' a poem abounding in what is usually understood by the term Byronisms, and containing several passages which would not discred it the pen of the first poet of the day. From these, as well as his tragedies, ——Lord Byron has borrowed Style, Idea, and not unfrequently Incident."

Among the many quotations to prove the above statements, the following is given, as an example.

"Byron — When heart meets heart again in dreams
Elysian. — Bride of Abydos
Sotheby — Intoxicating sweet,
When soul weds soul, and hearts each other meet. ——Translation of Oberon — Ch. VII"

The following article seems to have been the last in the series from the manuscript of Mr. Watts.
"Should there be persons simple enough to assume that coincidences extraordinary as those pointed out in the present exposition, are more or less peculiar to all voluminous poets, we will beg to be informed in whose writings they are to be met with. For ourselves, we will engage to mention, at a moment's notice, twenty celebrated poets, and undertake for every plagiarism (imitation, or whatever politeness may refine the term to) instanced from their productions, to cite fifty from the pages of Lord Byron."

Instance after instance is then given of Byron's imitations from various poems of Sir Walter Scott.

In the March 31 issue of The London Literary Gazette there appeared an item entitled, "The unoriginality of Lord Byron's Style, as it respects Diction, considered." There is no indication of who the writer is, and the style differs from that of the previous articles by Mr. Watts. The final paragraph indicates the attitude of the writer toward this weakness, however,

"All these points of resemblance (in diction) can hardly have been accidental. The obligation ought not therefore, (as usual) to have been passed over without that acknowledgement, which the fact seems to demand."

Following the series of papers in The London Literary Gazette by A.A. Watts, there appeared this, (to quote the editor) "ingenious Article" which "has been sent by a respect-
An occasional coincidence of thought with other writers, has often afforded ground for a general accusation affecting the character and popularity of an author. In cases, however, of palpable literary piracy, where a regular system of plunder has been pursued, and where the validity of the charge does not rest upon half a dozen trifling similarities of idea, but is borne out by a cloud of testimonies, the critic who has reading enough to detect, and courage to expose the delinquent, whatever may be his popularity at the time, performs an act of strict literary justice, against which no protest will be entered, save by those who, conscious of having followed the example of the plagiarist, are in dread of a similar exposition.

The charge preferred against Lord Byron appears to be neither more nor less than that of having disingenuously, and to a very important extent, appropriated to himself the labours of those who have preceded him in the grand arena of poetry. This accusation so far from being one of frivolous and vexatious import, is substantiated by numerous proofs, singularly striking and conclusive. It is not, as we have already remarked, the obligation of a line or an idea, that should subject a poet to an indictment so seriously affecting his fame, as the one now preferred against Lord Byron. But it is the systematic recurrence of these obligations, which is
observable in every dozen lines of his Lordship's poetry; that so entirely deprive him of his claims to be considered as an original poet. It is not for lack of invention as it respects his plots, &c. (for this has been warranted by all writers, even our immortal Shakespeare), but for bona fide plagiarisms of language and idea that Lord Byron's literary honesty has been so severely called in question.

"The attack is not made upon an author struggling into notice, and incapable of defending himself with advantage; but upon one who is at the pinnacle of popularity and well able to ward off any ungenerous shafts that may be directed at his fame."

The "respectable Correspondent" gives many instances of Byron's "borrowing largely, and without the remotest acknowledgment, from various writers," in one of which he compares Byron's Lines on the death of Sir P. Parker with "Torquato," Tasso's celebrated epitaphial piece, and declares that, "A more barefaced plagiarism than this cannot well be imagined. Lord Byron has here given us, as an original poem, a translation - - - - ."

The writer, as many others have done, calls attention to the first twenty lines of the Bride of Alydos "which are almost literally translated from the German of Lessing."1

1. The writer evidently meant the German of Goethe.
Defense of Byron.

This "ingenious Article" resulted in the publication, in August and September of the same year, of two more letters to the editor concerning the charge against Byron of plagiarism. In the August issue of The Gentleman's Magazine a writer attempts to defend the poet against these accusations, but omits to refute singly any of the numerous quotations adduced by the "Correspondent," in support of his defense. He is content with generalities in his statements and does Byron's cause more harm than good because of the weakness of his attempt at refutation.

In The Gentleman's Magazine for September was published a letter to Mr. Urban (the editor) signed "Atticus". It also is a weak defense of Byron, in which the writer merely states that other poets, such as Pope and Milton, are indebted to their predecessors, so Byron should not be criticized for what others have also done. He ends with the statement that "since Envy follows Genius like its shadow, there will always be found persons ready to attack it, merely to indulge a malignant and petulant desire of dethroning established reputations."

Two more rather brief quotations will suffice to give an idea of the type of counter-charge which the accusations against Byron for plagiarism brought forth.

The New Monthly Magazine -- June, 1821

"------the charge in the Literary Gazette, made
against Lord Byron, of a plagiarism from Lessing, is an egregious blunder." The writer does not, in any sense of the word, disprove the charge, however, but is content with merely saying: "The truth is, there are far fewer ideas which are thoroughly original in the world, than we generally suspect. It is the province of genius, however, to detail and embellish these in a thousand different ways, and thus to instruct and delight us."

The Freeman's Journal -- 1821.

"One of those miserable 'talkers' about literature, so well described by this noble Peer, in his 'Beppo' —— is at present 'nibbling' at his Lordship's fame, in a series of dull and tedious articles in the Literary Gazette, wholly unworthy the reputation of that interesting publication."

Comments on Criticisms.

The contrast between these weak refutations and the extremely forceful accusations made against the poet, is again brought to our attention by the wording found in the preface to a review on Sardanapalus, which appeared some months later.

The London Literary Gazette — December 29, 1821.

"We are also particularly impugned by his Lordship's blind worshippers for entertaining the accusations of plagiarism which a correspondent did us the favour to offer for the Literary Gazette. To this we plead guilty. We can imagine no possible question in the whole circle of literature more
fairly open for discussion, than an investigation of this fact: it was candidly brought and treated in a liberal as well as able manner; and we must add, that we are not aware of any inquiry of the kind, where the truth of the assertion has been so irrefragably made out, as it has been that Lord Byron is a wholesale and retail plagiarist."
CHAPTER VI

COMMENTS BY CONTEMPORARY POETS

Condemnations Made by Poets

In the final analysis of Byron's culpability, however, the attitude of the fellow poets of his own period is of great importance.

After The London Literary Gazette had published the series of articles condemning Byron for plagiarism, Southey wrote to William Jerdan, the editor, to congratulate him on the exposure.1

The chief grounds on which Wordsworth complained of Byron in a letter to Henry Taylor, were as follows: that he did not acknowledge his "poetical obligations". In 1817 he wrote to Taylor -- "I have not seen .... Lord Byron's last canto of Childe Harold, where I am told he has been poaching on my manor, ...."2

In 1820 Wordsworth paid a visit to Thomas Moore which the latter records in his journal. Wordsworth "spoke of Byron's plagiarisms from him; .... the feeling for natural objects..... not caught by Byron from nature herself, but from him (W.), and spoiled in the transmission." He named "Tintern Abbey the source of it all."3

1. Paull, Harry M. -- Literary Ethics, p. 118
Defense of Byron by Poets

The relation of Manfred to Faust Goethe himself characterizes in the following words: "This poet, so eccentric and full of genius, has adopted my Faust and in a somewhat hypochondriacal manner has extracted from it the strangest food. He has employed the motives which suit his own ends in an original manner, so that nothing in his composition is any longer the same, and on this very account I cannot sufficiently admire his genius. It is such a remoulding, not of parts, but of the whole, that many interesting lectures might be delivered on this and on the resemblance to the original."

Goethe defended Byron against the charge of plagiarism. "All nature," he said, in reference to Byron, "belongs to the poet; and every creation of art which genius originates becomes also a part of nature, and consequently every later poet may as freely use such works, as he may any other phenomenon of nature...... Only by the appropriation of the treasures of others does anything great arise."

Sir Walter Scott, from whose works Byron has been accused of pilfering, declared that his generation had not produced any man who approached Lord Byron in originality—"the attribute of genius."

Sir Egerton Brydges earnestly defended Byron, quite possibly motivated by the feeling that his own lack of success

1. Elze, Karl -- Lord Byron, A Biography, p. 413
2. Ibid. p. 398 -- see foot-note.
as a poet was due to enemies hostile to his fame.

"There are those," he writes, "who accuse him (Byron) of systematic plagiarism:—this is not so: he produces no thoughts or feelings which are not his own; but his retentive memory recalls to him passages of others, when they agree with his own impressions; and then it is often impossible to avoid the recurrence to his own mind of similar language:—the prepared language rises with the thought, and, confident in the power of his own resources, he does not reject it, nor fatigue himself to invent a laboured variation, merely to avoid the charge of being an imitator, and of want of originality, which he considers to be too baseless to be worth guarding against." ¹

Thus we see that those who have come to the defense of the poet are anything but convincing. They do not face the facts, but content themselves with vague generalities regarding plagiarism.

¹ Letters on the Character and Poetical Genius of Lord Byron p. 68-69
Lack of Public Denial

In a letter addressed to Mr. Urban, the editor of The Gentleman's Magazine, and signed E. B., the writer makes feeble excuses for Byron, in discussing the charge of plagiarism, and toward the end of the letter says: "Nor are these remarks offered in justification of Lord Byron; his Lordship is living to defend himself."¹

But if the "blind worshippers" of Lord Byron expected him to make a public refutation of these serious and persistent charges, they were doomed to disappointment. His attitude towards the literary pamphlets, which contained unusually severe criticism of him for plagiarism in the year 1821, is shown in two letters which he sent to John Murray, parts of which are reproduced below.

Byron's Attitude Toward Pamphlets

September 24, 1821

"I have been thinking over our late correspondence, and wish to propose to you the following articles for our future:--

1. That you send me no periodical works whatsoever--

no Edinburgh, Quarterly, Monthly, nor any Review, Magazine, Newspaper, English or foreign, of any description. 5thly.

1. June, 1821 issue.
That you send me no opinions whatsoever, either good, bad, or indifferent, of yourself, or your friends, or others, concerning any work, or works of mine, past, present, or to come. .... Reviews and Magazines are at the best but ephemeral and superficial reading: who thinks of the grand article of last year in any given review?

"......but in Italy we know little of literary England, and think less, except what reaches us through some garbled and brief extract in some miserable Gazette."

October 23, 1821

"I see the way that he (i. e. Murray) and his Quarterly people are tending—they want a row with me, and they shall have it. I only regret that I am not in England for the nonce; as, here, it is hardly fair ground for me, isolated and out of the way of prompt rejoinder and information as I am."

The inconsistencies in these letters need hardly be pointed out.

**Remarks Made in Private**

In one of his conversations with Lady Blessington he assured her that he knew nothing of Mignon's song, as he was quite ignorant of German. The persistence of his critics, however, in calling attention to the similarity between the opening lines of The Bride of Abydos and Goethe's poem is hardly turned aside by such a remark. In a letter to Murray he stated, regarding Faust: "His Faust I never read, for I
don't know German; but Matthew Monk Lewis, in 1816, at Coligny, translated most of it to me *viva voce...." It is possible that a like translation was rendered many of Goethes's poems. This, in view of Byron's remarkable memory, discounts to some extent his reply to Lady Blessington regarding *The Bride of Abydos*, for in a letter from Mr. George Finlay to Colonel Stanhope, the writer says: "The memory of Lord Byron was very extraordinary; it was not the mere mechanical memory which can repeat the advertisements of a newspaper and such nonsense; but of all the innumerable novels which he had read, he seemed to recollect perfectly the story and every scene of merit."¹

That this keen ability to recall passages read, was responsible for many instances of Byron's plagiarism is undoubtedly true. With respect to the unconscious use and employment of the thoughts and images of others, Byron says that "in order to be entirely original,... we must think as much as possible, and read as little as possible; but then we cannot learn to think without first reading, much, and thus it becomes unavoidable, that the thoughts of others should be blended inseparably with our own, and should afterwards be expressed as our own."²

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1. Elze, Karl -- *Lord Byron, A Biography*, p. 496
2. Elze, Karl -- *Lord Byron, A Biography*, p. 397
In a letter written to Miss Milbanke, dated September 26, 1813, Byron writes: "You say I never attempt to justify myself. You are right. At times I can't and occasionally I won't defend by explanation; life is not worth having on such terms."\(^1\)
CHAPTER VIII
CONCLUSION

First Denial of Plagiarism

In discussing this charge of plagiarism, it is interesting to turn back to Byron's preface in the first edition of Hours of Idleness. Here we find that the poet himself was the first person to use the term plagiarism in regard to his poetry.

"I have not aimed at exclusive originality," he wrote, "still less have I studied any particular model for imitation; some translations are given, of which many are paraphrastic. In the original pieces there may appear a casual coincidence with authors whose works I have been accustomed to read; but I have not been guilty of intentional plagiarism...." ¹

Thus with the publication of his first book of poetry, Byron declares his innocence of intentional plagiarism, and although Nichol has written that "Byron, like the rovers before Minos, was not ashamed of his piracy," ² the preface to Hours of Idleness certainly indicates that he considered the term approbrious.

Considerations in Forming Conclusion

Much of the material that referred to plagiarism in Byron's poetry was repetitious. Page after page of examples of Byron's plagiarisms would have been tedious. Therefore the innumerable

¹. Byron is, therefore, the first to use this term in his defense
². Nichol, John — Byron, p. 208
proofs have been omitted, to allow more space for the most enlightening statements of Byron's contemporaries. I have considered only the opinions of his contemporaries for the reason that the significance of the word plagiarism has changed from one literary period to another. Although from the statements made during Byron's times the meaning of plagiarism appears to have been no different from that of today, it is now punishable by laws which make the would-be plagiarist more cautious, and the offense more serious.

Evidence Against Byron

In weighing the evidence in the case, let us first consider the circumstances regarding the charges. As there is no means by which the motives of the critics can be determined, the personal reasons for criticizing Byron cannot be considered. We must not ignore the fact, however, that the publications which presented these blunt accusations against England's most popular poet of the time, were highly reputable pamphlets. The contributors did not merely rant. They accused Byron specifically of stealing from his fellow poets plots, words, and characters. Each one presented damming evidence for his assertions. Poem after poem was examined and found unoriginal in one or more aspects. And his accusers

1. Funk and Wagnalls define plagiarism as, "The act of plagiarizing or appropriating the ideas, writings, or inventions of another without due acknowledgment; specif., the stealing of passages either word for word or in substance, from the writings of another and publishing them as one's own."
were not limited to magazine contributors. His friends and intimates, and fellow poets with whom he was on the best of terms, brought the charge against him, and for every charge there was ample evidence.

**Byron's Answers**

Now let us consider the two types of answers which Byron made to his critics. One was that of naive innocence. Terms such as *coincidence* and *strange accident* are used so often as explanations of apparent plagiarisms that the credulity of his contemporaries was taxed to its utmost. At other times Byron resorted to the classical theory of literary rights. This theory, however applicable to poets of the classical period, and even later periods, was not satisfactory for the nineteenth century. Even in classical times, moreover, Byron would have been criticized for not acknowledging, entirely and definitely, his indebtedness to other writers.

**Byron's Silence in Public**

Finally, we have Byron's disinclination to make a public refutation of these merciless attacks on his literary integrity. If the poet had any sound material to work with, here was not only the opportunity but the necessity for a scathing rebuke to his critics. That he was capable of such a piece of work he had proved in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. Interest in the accusations was high, and publishers would have been eager to present his refutation.
Vigor and Definiteness of Accusations

I have not found it possible to come to a definite conclusion regarding the attitude of Byron's contemporaries toward his plagiarisms, for it is difficult to judge whether or not those who accused him of this literary crime were a majority. The evidence I have found does show, however, that there was widespread condemnation of Byron's plagiarism from various sources. Some of the poet's contemporaries, including writers he was accused of despoiling, arose to his defense, it is true, but compared to the weak answers of the poet and his champions, the strong, indignant, and above all, definite charges of the accusers cannot but impress the investigator.

Time, then, seems to have been kind to Lord Byron's literary reputation, for I have found that his contemporaries were much more vigorous in their condemnation of the poet for plagiarism than are the writers of today. Many men whose opinions were of importance in the literary world of the early nineteenth century, because of the ignominious stigma of plagiarism in Byron's poetry, placed him much further down in the ranks of poets than his compositions would otherwise warrant.
Digest
Byron's Plagiarism as Judged by His Contemporaries
by Ethel Florence Smith

The paper is an investigation of the charges of plagiarism in Byron's work, made in the poet's own time. The accusations and answers to them are recorded. The classical theory of plagiarism is presented and a brief history of plagiarism and the general attitude toward the subject during successive literary periods is shown. The conversations, memoirs, and letters of the period which are on record are for the most part critical of Byron in regard to imitation and copying. In some of the reviews of Byron's poems mention is made of similarity with works of other writers while a number of reviewers condemn the poet for downright piracy from others. Articles from the literary pamphlets are quoted to show that many editors and contributors called the public's attention to what they considered unwarranted use by Byron of others' ideas, characters, and diction. Instances of apparent plagiarism are noted in the Corsair, Manfred, English Bards and Scotch Reviewers, The Giavne, Mazeppa, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, The Bride of Abydos and numerous other poems. From 1816 to 1820 the criticism by these writers was mild but in 1821 an impersonal article concerning literary piracy was printed in The London Literary Gazette. This seems to have been a forerunner for the series of articles which this magazine published in sub-
sequent numbers, written by A. A. Watts, in which the contributor exposed, in no uncertain terms, what he considered unprecedented plagiarism on the part of Byron. These must have been trying times for the poet, for many others sent in contributions that year similar to those of Mr. Watts, while Byron's defenders in the pamphlets were few and their contributions negligible. Among his fellow poets, some criticised and some defended Byron regarding his use of others' materials. Byron's own defense was half-hearted and weak. He did not send in for publication any explanation or denial. Criticism of Byron for plagiarism seems to have been made during the early nineteenth century by many people, regarding parts or the whole of most of the poet's works.
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