

Lindey, Alexander, Plagiarism and Originality (New York: Harper & Brothers Pub.) 1952

Coincidence

p. 49 Newman Levy once wrote a piece of light verse about a golf player who became so exasperated with his wretched playing that he sold his soul to the devil for a bag of clubs with which he could invariably make a hole in one. He sent the poem to The Saturday Evening Post, only to learn that Bert Leston Taylor had hit on the same conceit years before, and had sold it to the Post.

While he was editor of The Atlantic Monthly, William Dean Howells received from a woman contributor a manuscript so closely paralleling a story of his own which he was about to publish that he felt it necessary to show her his proof sheets to convince her of his honesty.

Wagner set Heine's "Two Grenadiers" to music and inserted the "Marseillaise" at the finish. When he learned that Schumann had already composed a score for the poem and had also included the "Marseillaise," he became fearful he'd be accused of theft. He hastened to assure Schumann that he had written his piece the previous winter, before Schumann's version had been made available.

p. 50 In 1938 Jacob Rabinow, chief of the Ordnance Mechanics Section of the National Bureau of Standards, invented a three-dimensional motion picture system. He was bitterly disappointed to find, on making a patent search, that someone had anticipated him by nearly thirty years. "If I had not seen the date 1910 on the patent describing my three-dimensional movies," he says, "I would have sworn on a stack of Bibles that the drawing was a copy of my ideas, and the man who submitted it a thief."

Parallel-Hunting

p.53 Professor Wigmore was struck, some years ago, by the marked resemblance between Poe's "The murders in the Rue Morgue" and the files of an early French murder case. He did a superb job of sleuthing, and came to the conclusion that Poe had not plagiarized.²

2 John H. Wigmore, "Did Poe Plagiarize the Murders in the Rue Morgue?" 13 Cornell Law Quarterly 219(1927). This is an outstanding job of literary sleuthing. It shows a first-class legal mind at work. When Professor Wigmore first tackled the problem, everything pointed to Poe's guilt. But Professor Wigmore wanted facts. He ran down every clue, assayed every bit of evidence. When he finally absolved Poe, the verdict was unassailable.