

"something borrowed:
should a charge of
plagiarism ruin your
life?" by malcolm gl...



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“ Something Borrowed: Should a Charge of Plagiarism Ruin Your Life?” by Malcolm Gladwell Essay Sample

Malcolm Gladwell writes the article, “ Something Borrowed: Should a charge of plagiarism ruin your life?” That article corresponds to a specific incident of plagiarism between a play writer and a journalist. The play writer is Bryony Lavery and she takes work from Gladwell and specific moments in the psychiatrist, Dorothy Lewis’ life. Gladwell, begins the article by telling a story about Lewis’ friend who is watching a play and realizes that the main character in the play resembles Lewis. After some time, Lewis notices that the play is getting positive recognition. Lewis receives a call to speak to the cast of the play. Lewis agrees and is sent the script. Once Lewis begins to read the play, she notices similarities between the main character’s life in the play and her own life. Pretty soon, Lewis begins to realize the play is about her.

In the beginning Lewis notices the line, “ It was one of those days” (Gladwell 2), in Lavery’s play. The script has specific scenarios that occur in Lewis’ life that Lavery takes. Lewis explains that she feels like, “ Someone has stolen my essence” (Lewis). As a result, Lewis decides to contact her lawyer and they make a chart of the similarities between her life and Lavery’s play. Not only does Lavery use Lewis’ life as inspiration and take from her, but Lavery also takes from Malcolm Gladwell. Gladwell notices Lavery uses words from a review he’s written to fill in her play. Gladwell then decides to send Lavery an email that says: “ I am happy to be the source of inspiration for other writers, and had you asked my permission to quote—even liberally—from my piece, I would have been delighted to Oblige. But to lift material without my

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approval is theft (Gladwell 5)." Gladwell is upset at first, but soon after he feels flattered in a way. Gladwell feels Lavery's borrowing complements him. Lewis on the other hand, is debating on filing a lawsuit against Lavery. Lewis asks Gladwell for the copyright to his article for her case and he agrees; he reads the script of the play and realizes the story isn't intended on being stolen, it has a completely different story and in a new form. Once Gladwell realizes the purpose of the play, he changes his mind and decides to not allow Lewis have the rights to his article.

The article continues explaining the different ways copyright laws can be broken. Gladwell uses the examples of music and medicine to explain the difference between copyright laws and intellectual property. Gladwell uses music as evidence to explain why ideas, such as intellectual property, cannot be owned. Gladwell applies this theory to how Lavery uses Lewis' life as inspiration. As Gladwell is listening to a list of songs his friend is playing him, he notices how they are extremely similar and realizes that taking an idea that isn't yours to make something different isn't stealing. Gladwell's perspective on copyright changes, and he quotes Thomas Jefferson who states, " He who receives an idea from me, receives instruction himself without lessening mine; as he who lights his taper at mine receives light without darkening me" (qtd. in Gladwell 5). Which, in turn explains that taking an idea isn't stealing, but merely borrowing an idea to enhance your own idea. The article ends with Gladwell and Lavery having a discussion at Gladwell's house. Lavery is explaining the idea of her play to and gives Gladwell the reasons to why she believes she isn't plagiarising. Lavery

admits to thinking she was using news and begins to cry as she is apologizing to Gladwell.

Work Cited

Gladwell, Malcolm. "Something Borrowed: Should a Charge of Plagiarism Ruin our Life?" *New Yorker*. 22 November 2004. Web. 10 February 2013.