

Plagiarism and The Red Badge of The Great Gatsby

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The Red Badge of Gatsby

Last week, several journalists accused me of plagiarizing entire passages in my most recent novel, "The Red Badge of Gatsby."

My accusers claim that in this book, my 27th in the last three years, I lifted sections from, among other sources, "A Tale of Two Cities," "War and Peace," "Pride and Prejudice," "Goldfinger," "Go, Dog. Go!" and the [Lands'](#) End holiday catalog.

Friends have urged me to follow the example of another celebrated author who recently responded to similar allegations with a public apology. I must remind them, however, that copying what other writers have already done is exactly what got me into this mess.

Let us take a look, then, at the passage my accusers allege I appropriated from [Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter"](#):

" 'Hester Prynne,' said he, leaning over the balcony and looking down steadfastly into her eyes, 'thou hearest what this good man says, and seest the accountability under which I

labor.' "

Now, here is the so-called similar passage from my work:

" 'Hester Prynne,' said he, leaning over the balcony, and looking down steadfastly into her eyes, 'it was the best of times, it was the worst of times, and what is up in that tree? A dog party! A dog party! A dog party in the tree!' "

Those determined to find evil intent will, of course, focus on certain surface similarities between my passage and Hawthorne's. But readers who expect an author's work to be totally free of literary influences are, I believe, hopelessly naïve about the writing process, imagining that an author creates a book by arduously filling up blank pages with words of his own.

When I write a book, I never go anywhere near a blank page. Instead, I buy an already written book and start crossing out the words I have no intention of using.

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