



Earl Lagunsad shared Kenneth Goldsmith's post.



New Member · September 11 at 12:03am



Kenneth Goldsmith

September 10 at 10:00pm

Let me begin by saying that I know [Ira Lightman](#) and I like him. He's a good poet, who has been published on my own UbuWeb. When I was in Newcastle a few years participating at the [AV Festival](#) in the [Morden Tower](#), I was really thrilled that Ira was at my reading. He's an eccentric and lovely man. I had heard about his plagiarism poetry sleuthing a few years ago but didn't think much about it. So when I came across this Guardian piece [<https://www.theguardian.com/.../poetry-plagiarism-copying-may... >](https://www.theguardian.com/.../poetry-plagiarism-copying-may...) this weekend, I sensed something had changed. Ira has really, famously so, become the poet who outs other poets' plagiaristic moves. It's a strange thing to want to be known for, a force of law and order in a naturally anarchic field. And these sorts of move never really make you a historic poet; you're simply a footnote on the careers of greater poets. So not a great career strategy. But whatever... there is a lack of oxygen in the poetry world and any attention you can get, I suppose, is good attention.

So this is not really about Lightman as much as it is about the ridiculous ongoing plagiarism scandals in the digital age, which I've written about for the past twenty years. If poets are going to hide the fact that they are plagiarizing, they will be busted, if not by Lightman, then by somebody else. The strange thing, it seems to me, that in the digital age, when every word that has been written is copy, pastable—and searchable—is why people would even attempt to hide their plagiarism instead of celebrate it as a writing style? There's a lot of talk about intertextuality, but like sampling, it's Plagiarism Lite. If you're going plagiarize, then for fuck's sake plagiarize. Don't try to pass it off as anything else. That's dishonest.

If you are going to plagiarize, announce your intentions in advance so that everybody knows your game. You will be fine. I have plagiarized for three decades and nobody has ever come after me for that (god knows they've come after me for just about everything else). Nobody has ever accused me or outed me of being a plagiarist because everyone knows that I am a self-declared plagiarist and that this is, in fact, my method of writing.

When you plagiarize without telling anyone your intentions, everyone feels bad, including the persons whom you stole the work from. They feel cheated and ripped off. And you must feel bad because you know there are Lightmans out there waiting to bust you. Can we stop this nonsense? When will be decriminalize plagiarism? The answer: when we can accept it as an open, legitimate, and honest writing strategy.



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Consider: Mr. Goldsmith is not fighting against a system (this system, that system, or, even, “the system”—far from it, he has in fact aced “the system”!); no, Mr. Goldsmith is fighting his fellow poets, he is fighting the creators, the makers—he is exploiting the product of the labor of the workers who make things. Mr. Goldsmith, *you didn't build that!*

Mr. Goldsmith, condescendingly (—is he indeed a “greater” poet than?), laments that Mr. Lightman, an otherwise “good poet,” should instead become “a footnote,” known for his “plagiarism poetry sleuthing.”

Mr. Goldsmith’s general amnesty, while selfishly benefitting Mr. Goldsmith himself, takes no account of the aggrieved party—Mr. Goldsmith doesn’t feel bad for the aggrieved (left “cheated and ripped off”), he feels bad for himself, because “there are Lightmans out there waiting to bust you.”

For anyone who’s been stolen from—especially when it’s been by someone popular and with influence and with a blister of influential associates, against whom he feels helpless and powerless to act—how can Mr. Goldsmith’s attitude not seem selfish and conscienceless. . . ?

A “writing strategy”?

Consider: What would Ludwig Wittgenstein think of what Mr. Goldsmith does? Surely anyone wise to the temperament and sensibilities and exceptional creative genius of Wittgenstein will understand when I say, LW would think him insane, or, a mental defective.

There is this passage from an essay by Conrad Aiken (from “An Anatomy of Melancholy” (1923) collected in *T.S. Eliot: The Waste Land, A Casebook* (1969) edited by C.B. Cox and Arnold P. Hinchliffe): “It is as if, in conjunction with the Mr. Pound of the *Cantos*, he wanted to make a ‘literature of literature’—a poetry actuated not more by life itself than by poetry; as if he had concluded that the characteristic awareness of a poet of the twentieth century must inevitably, or ideally, be a very complex and very literary awareness, able to speak only, or best, in terms of the literary past, the terms which had molded its tongue. This involves a kind of idolatry of literature with which it is a little difficult to sympathize. In positing, as it seems to, that there is nothing left for literature to do but become a kind of parasitic growth on literature, a sort of mistletoe, it involves, I think, a definite astigmatism—a distortion. But the theory is interesting if only because it has colored an important and brilliant piece of work.” In my opinion Mr. Goldsmith’s work is neither important nor brilliant; it is low-hanging fruit. (Important and brilliant would be a study of the conditions that made Mr. Goldsmith marketable.) It seems to me that instead of striving to become a great poet (which, we recognize, is not for everyone), he is content to be a parasitic growth on literature. It’s a strange thing to want to be known for. And this is just where concerns Mr. Goldsmith himself. What about the plagiarism that passes itself off as originality?

Gregory Vincent St Thomasino