

DISCERNING PLAGIARISM: THREE EXAMPLES

Source: The Joker in the European pack was Italy. For a time hopes were entertained by her as a force against Germany, but these disappeared under Mussolini. In 1935 Italy made a belated attempt to participate in the scramble for Africa by invading Ethiopia. It was clearly a breach of the covenant of the League of Nations or one of its members to attack another. France and Great Britain, as great powers, were bound to take the lead against Italy. But they did so feebly and half-heartedly because they did not want to alienate a possible ally against Germany. The result was the worst possible: the league failed to check aggression, Ethiopia lost her independence, and Italy was alienated after all.¹

¹ J.M. Roberts, History of the World (New York: Knopf, 1976), 845.

Version A: Italy, one might say, was the **joker in the European deck**. When she invaded Ethiopia, it was clearly a **breach of the covenant of the League of Nations**; yet the efforts of England and France to take the lead against her were **feeble and half-hearted**. It appears that those great powers had no wish to alienate a possible ally against Hitler's rearmed Germany.

Comment: Clearly plagiarism. Though the facts cited are public knowledge, the stolen phrases are not. Note that the writer's interweaving of his own words with the source's do not render him or her innocent of plagiarism.

Version B: Italy was the **joker in the European deck**. Under Mussolini in 1935, she made a belated attempt to **participate in the scramble for Africa by invading Ethiopia**. As J.M. Roberts points out, this violated the covenant of the League of Nations.¹ But France and Britain, **not wanting to alienate a possible ally against Germany**, put only **feeble and half-hearted** opposition to the Ethiopian adventure. The outcome, as Roberts, observes, was "the worst possible: the league failed to check aggression, Ethiopia lost her independence, and Italy was alienated after all."²

¹ J.M. Roberts, History of the World (New York: Knopf, 1976), 845.

² Roberts, 845.

Comment: Still plagiarism. The two correct citations of Roberts serve as a kind of alibi for the appropriating of other, unacknowledged phrases. Some of Roberts' words are again being presented as the writer's.

Version C: Much has been written about German rearmament and militarism in the period 1933-1939. But Germany's dominance in Europe was by no means a foregone conclusion. The fact is that the balance of power might have been tipped against Hitler if one of two things had turned out differently. Take Italy's gravitation towards an alliance with Germany, for example. That alliance seemed so very far from inevitable that Britain and France actually muted their criticism of the Ethiopian invasion in the hope of remaining friends with Italy. They opposed the Italians in the League of Nations, as J.M. Roberts observes, "feebly and half-heartedly because they did not want to alienate a possible ally against Germany."¹ Suppose Italy, France, and Britain had retained a certain common interest. Would Hitler have been able to get away with his remarkable bluffing and bullying in the later thirties?

¹ J.M. Roberts, History of the World (New York: Knopf, 1976), 845.

Comment: No plagiarism. The writer has been influenced by the public facts mentioned by Roberts, but he or she hasn't tried to pass off Roberts' analysis as his or her own. The one clear borrowing is footnoted properly.

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