

Introduction

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IF ONE WERE TO ASK the "average" American librarian what public lending right (PLR) involves, he or she would probably mutter something about censorship and intellectual freedom. Actually, although PLR is marginally related to those issues, the term refers specifically to schemes in place in some ten countries, and under consideration in a number of others, whereby authors are compensated in some way by virtue of the fact that their works are used by library patrons.

Whether or not public lending right is actually a right inherent in copyright law, or merely a means of subsidizing authors employing library use as a convenient rationale, is hotly debated in the pages of this symposium. Also at issue is whether an author's potential income is really affected by the presence of his works in libraries and by circulation from them. In virtually all cases,¹ PLR payments to authors do not come directly from library budgets; nevertheless, an economic issue is involved. In theory at least, libraries could be given the subsidy money to buy more books and thus benefit both authors and library users. Also at issue is the matter of whether the presence of a book in a library results in the patron borrowing it instead of buying it (the alternative hypothesis being that a library's possession of a book publicizes it and results in additional sales to book-oriented people, and thus more royalty to authors).

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Most authors, but not all, who are involved in the PLR question have a different view of the matter. They contend that PLR is an extension of the principle of performance rights in copyright law—that they are, indeed, entitled to benefit from each use, as well as each purchase, of a book.

The authors of the following articles also pay considerable attention to the remarkable variety of ways in which existing, and proposed, PLR programs are structured. Some plans reward authors on the basis of circulation of his or her books in a sample of libraries; others, on the extent to which copies are held in libraries. The former schemes tend to benefit best-selling authors; the latter are deemed better for beginning or specialized writers. Some plans do not benefit authors directly as individuals but rather are “social security” schemes, the funds going to pensions and subsidy payments based on need or other criteria. And so it goes. The details compose this issue of *Library Trends*.

The structure of this collection of reviews is simple. First, various aspects of the subject are explored; then developments in various parts of the world are discussed in detail. In such a plan, it is inevitable that a particular fact may be treated from different points of view—from author to author, and from topic to topic. Similarly, as this is an international symposium, styles of writing and subtleties of treatment vary not only by occupation of author but also by country. The editors have been careful to preserve this diversity rather than trying to homogenize the treatment. Differences in the approach of, say, an American professor of journalism and that of a Danish inspector of libraries, are perhaps as revealing of the variety of situations in which authors and librarians interact as is the subject matter actually discussed.

The reader may well note the absence of any professional writers from the roster of contributors. This absence has not resulted from any lack of effort on the part of the editors to recruit one. Rather, it stems from the same underlying tenet that motivates authors to campaign for PLR—i.e., writers who write for a living should be paid for what they produce. Scholarly publications like *Library Trends*, on the other hand, exercise reward systems which do not pay authors directly for contributions to the literature. An impasse results. However, the editors are confident that readers will find that Jack Hart—a writer, but in the scholarly, rather than the commercial, rewards system—has done an outstanding job of presenting the case of authors by means of interviews with a selection of them. Also, the reader will note that some of the librarian-contributors are sympathetic to the authors’ position; others have assumed a neutral posture; while at least one strongly believes that

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financial assistance to authors should not be via PLR plans. (Indeed, not all professional authors are pro-PLR.)

Obviously, this symposium comes to no consensus about this relatively new issue both in librarianship and—although it is of somewhat longer standing there—in authorship. The very diversity of approaches to what seems, on first encounter, to be a simple issue may well be the only common thread. In smaller countries, such as those of Scandinavia, the desire to stimulate and reward producers of indigenous literature has markedly shaped PLR. In large heterogeneous societies like the United States, serious discussion has begun only recently. Somewhere in the middle stands England, which is having difficulty implementing its scheme despite the closely knit concentrations of authors and librarians there.

Finally, there is an issue of information availability involved in dealing with PLR in *Library Trends* at this time. There are probably American librarians who would rather let this issue sleep for now—they have enough “awake” ones as it is. Similarly, although a majority of authors wish to raise public consciousness of PLR, *Library Trends* might perhaps not be their medium of choice. The choice of the editors is clear: to present as comprehensive and multifaceted a view of the subject as possible. The editors are neutral as to whether or not the effect of PLR is, or might be, favorable to particular interests. In short, we contend that the library community, and the public in general, has a right to know about public lending right.

As this issue of *Library Trends* was about to go to press, news came of the death on November 1, 1980, of Rudolph Charles Ellsworth, who was to have contributed the article on the situation in Canada and the United States. The issue editors hereby dedicate this symposium to the memory of Mr. Ellsworth, who served on the staff of the Douglas Library of Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, from 1967 to 1978, when he became Librarian for the Metropolitan Sanitary District of Greater Chicago where he served until his untimely death. The following statement was contributed by Katharine A. Benzekri of the Writing and Publication Section, the Canada Council:

Mr. Ellsworth was one of the strongest advocates and authoritative voices on the question of public lending right, and he contributed numerous articles on the subject to Canadian and international periodicals. Of course, the greatest tribute to Mr. Ellsworth and others who have promoted the principle will be the implementation of a system of compensating authors for the library use of their works.

This issue is the richer for the body of Mr. Ellsworth's published work to which the various authors refer so frequently, but the poorer because his own contribution never reached the editors. (There is evidence that he had completed the manuscript, but it could not be located.) All of us shall be also the poorer henceforth for lack of what he would have contributed had he lived.

Reference

1. Formerly, in certain situations in the Federal Republic of Germany, "library royalties" were chargeable to the institution making the loans, but this responsibility was transferred to the regional governments in 1975. See Dörnfeldt, Siegfried. "Der Gesamtvertrag zur Bibliothekstantieme," *Buch und Bibliothek* 27:648-56, July/Aug. 1975.