

## THE CULTURE OF READING AND BOOKS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

What has happened to reading in the age of the Internet? Will the digital age put an end to the culture of reading and books that has been nurtured over centuries? A two day conference to address these issues was held in Nairobi, Kenya. May 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> 2012. It sought to explore ways in which a culture of reading could be fostered in the digital age. Author Penny Grubb attended the conference as the representative of the International Authors' Forum (IAF).

Organisations taking part in the conference were the Kenya Copyright Board, the Kenya National Library Service, Kopiken, the Kenyan Publishers Association, the Kenyan Writers Union, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, the International Federation of Reproduction Rights Organisations, the World Intellectual Property Organization, the International Publishers Association, the International Authors Forum and the African Regional Intellectual Property Organization.

The topics addressed included:

- International legal frameworks for the protection of copyright and related rights in the digital environment
- The importance of copyright to society
- Literacy, publishing, libraries and reading
- Providing access to copyright works
- Digitisation of cumulative knowledge and cultural heritage
- Access for users with print disabilities
- Cooperation to enhance accessibility to copyright works

These are the presentations made at this conference by International Authors' Forum (IAF) representative, Penny Grubb, plus some further information on the IAF and some overall reflections on the conference.

### **An introduction to the International Authors Forum**

I am here as the representative of the International Authors' Forum, a body formed in 2009 to represent authors internationally (by authors I mean writers, artists and journalists). The IAF aims to work with national and international bodies with a view to bringing authors' organisations together to collaborate with a strong voice on the international stage. The IAF does not aim to duplicate or replace the work of other author organisations, but to facilitate cooperative work so that we can understand authors' needs and concerns and so that the author's voice can be heard on the international stage.

The IAF is based in London. It works in collaboration with existing networks of authors both through formal bodies such as the European Writers Council, the International Federation of Journalists and the European Visual Artists. It works with organisations in America, Asia and Australia and is looking to meet with South American authors later in the year. We would like to forge links with African writers and artists and their organisations and hope that this meeting will help to start a dialogue. The website is [www.internationalauthors.org](http://www.internationalauthors.org)

## Further information on the IAF

The aims of the IAF are:

- to represent the needs of authors (writers, artists and journalists).
- to promote and protect authors' rights internationally and to lobby in the international arena.
- to get authors' organisations collaborating and developing an international view on the importance of authors' rights
- to strengthen existing regional authors organisations and facilitate the sharing and communication of information.
- to emphasise the need for fair contracts

Through the IAF website ([www.internationalauthors.org](http://www.internationalauthors.org)) organisations can join, collaborate and share information with different author organisations worldwide. The IAF will undertake awareness-raising activities with existing organisations and institutions and will also look to address issues raised by those in the author community who currently see the open access movement as a preferred alternative to authors' rights and collaborative working with RROs (Reproduction Rights Organisations) and other stakeholders.

## The importance of copyright to society

In looking at any question like this I would always recommend starting with the basics and asking what is the purpose of copyright? The answer to this question has been given in many different ways. A useful answer comes from WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organisation): "the purpose of copyright and related rights is twofold: to encourage a dynamic creative culture, while returning value to creators so that they can lead a dignified economic existence, and to provide widespread, affordable access to content for the public."

The importance of content is that it is the tangible embodiment of knowledge. It is the means by which we share and pass on our experience, our culture, our observations, our thoughts and the results of our work; it is the physical record of our knowledge. Knowledge is important in the development of just about everything – in our understanding of ourselves and the world we live in. It's about the development and understanding of culture, diversity and creativity. Without knowledge, how can we even understand the value to society of using and developing what we know?

I would also like to quote the first stated purpose for copyright in US law. In 1788 the purpose of copyright was stated to be "To promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts". I quote that to demonstrate how far our thinking has developed. The 18th century view clearly saw the importance of creative content in allowing mankind to progress, without making explicit the need to protect and promote a creative culture in order to allow such progress. It is interesting too to reflect on how far our understanding of knowledge itself has progressed. The US legislators in 1788 made the assumption that science was useful *per se*, but the arts only sometimes.

One of the many things we've learnt in our quest to understand ourselves and the world we live in is that we should value and preserve knowledge even where its 'usefulness' is not apparent. We have learnt that knowledge should not be corralled into silos. To make the most of the

knowledge we have, it shouldn't be restricted according to artificial boundaries of trends, topics and political fashions. The world's greatest breakthroughs come from people looking at existing knowledge in new ways, looking beyond accepted norms and boundaries. The greatest leaps forward in mankind's history rarely begin with 'eureka!'; they begin with 'That's odd...' or 'What if...'

The importance of copyright is tied inextricably to the importance of knowledge; to allowing knowledge to be shared without unnecessary restraint. Shared knowledge sparks innovation, creativity and the advances that have brought society to where it is today – the good with the bad.

Copyright protects the physical embodiment of knowledge and it protects those who create these expressions of knowledge. Without the copyright framework, sharing of knowledge becomes patchy; content becomes imprisoned behind legislative walls. Would-be innovators and creators spend more time and energy on arguing the legal minutiae of what may and may not be used where and by whom. And without a protective copyright framework, creators are right to keep tight hold of their creations. Without the protection of copyright, their work can be debased, misrepresented and inappropriately exploited.

Which brings us round to the other side of the purpose of copyright as expressed so eloquently by WIPO – allowing creators to lead a dignified economic existence. Because if they can't, they won't have the means to keep on creating. Studies have shown the huge economic returns that come from successful creation and innovation by authors in all fields, but if the creator him or herself gains little or no economic benefit, they cannot continue to produce their best work, and often cannot continue to produce any work in the areas where they could benefit society the most.

Studies by the UK authors' collecting society ALCS (Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society) have shown that some best-selling authors financed their early careers through the money they received from secondary licensing and would not have been able to work as professional authors without it i.e. without the secondary income derived from the copyright framework such authors would probably never have written the best-selling work from which they and their local and national economies ultimately gained enormous benefit.

The need to share knowledge is usually quoted as a reason for copyright exceptions and it can be a superficially persuasive argument, but exceptions do not always provide the best access to knowledge. They can create new uncertainties for users whilst devaluing authors' rights. Instead, using and expanding upon existing licensing structures can provide a simple, workable framework for delivering access to content in a way that works and is fair to all.

As an example in the UK there is an educational licensing scheme operated by the Copyright Licensing Agency (CLA). There is also an educational exception that allows an educational establishment to copy 1% of a work per quarter. What does this exception mean in practice? If an English teacher wishes to use a poem of 100 words, s/he is allowed to copy one word of this poem per term for use in the classroom under the educational exception. This is an unworkable situation. Instead, educational establishments copy under their CLA licenses. These are low cost, comprehensive, tend to be negotiated centrally and are designed with the users' needs in mind. In the case of the English teacher, the whole poem may legally be copied under license as long as

the establishment has a legally purchased copy of the relevant anthology. Through the collective management organisations, the micro-payments generated by such licensing schemes pay money directly back to authors.

The detail of the copyright legal framework must be fit for purpose in the 21st century. It must evolve just as our understanding of knowledge evolves, but it is the copyright framework that allows creators to create, allows knowledge to be shared and allows society to benefit.

## **National writing as a means to foster a reading culture and the importance of local authorship**

“Whether or not people read; what and how much they read affects their lives in crucial ways”.

That is a quote from *To read or not to read: a question of national consequence*, one of the most comprehensive surveys of reading habits in the USA published in 2007. This study drew on several previous ones as well as drawing in data from across the States. The findings were profound:

Good reading skills correlate with success. Regular reading boosts the likelihood of an individual’s academic and financial success, and maybe more surprisingly skill in reading and the fostering of a reading habit correlates with a sense of civic responsibility and with positive social behaviour. Readers go to the theatre more often than non-readers. No surprise there. But readers also play sport more than non-readers. Reading enhances people’s lives.

There can be no doubt of the benefits to individuals and to society as a whole of the fostering of reading skills and a love of reading.

I’m here representing authors, and it is authors who create the raw material that provides the foundation for a vibrant reading culture. But we live in a society that doesn’t yet know how to put a proper value on a reading culture. The benefits are clear. The evidence is clear. And yet when economies hit trouble, governments still cut library budgets and remove the resource from literacy schemes in order to 'save' money. The evidence shows that if we put the resource into fostering reading skills and developing a reading culture we will develop better citizens who will be more successful and will earn more, thus repaying the economy that invested in them in the first place.

Governments need to be the custodians of their national book culture; they need to recognise that the benefits to society are worth pursuing long-term and they need to make the link that nurturing authors is a key part of this.

Literacy campaigns should be campaigns around fostering a reading culture; they need to signal loud and clear that society values the written word. Is there a downside? In the UK we’re in the midst of a very interesting public enquiry where the influence of tabloid journalism has come under the spotlight. It is claimed that tabloid rhetoric has determined the results of our general elections and that newspaper proprietors have had the power to influence public policy because of the huge numbers of regular readers they influence. If true, it points to significant numbers of people swayed by unevidenced rhetoric. What does this say about the benefits of fostering a reading culture?

Recognising bias requires critical reading and analytic thinking. But no one will learn to think objectively and analytically if they don’t or can’t read. A true reading culture fosters a love of reading, which encourages people to read widely, and this in itself is a step towards independent

thinking. This will mean a more informed population and one more likely to question what they see and hear. Such questioning, objective thinking and analysis are the cornerstones of a society that can and will progress. Good readers make better citizens.

For society to value a reading culture, then the material available to be read must reflect the values of that society. A love of reading comes from reading about things we know and can relate to; things that reflect our own world. Harry Potter stepped right into the heads of a generation and gave them their own books. This holds for all areas. With so much happening at a global level, we mustn't forget that readers are local. This is a key factor in educational writing. Educational material must reflect the lives of children and the values of the societies they live in before it can usefully address the wider world. We engage first with material that reflects our lives and values. Who else but local authors will produce this material? Who else knows the landscape well enough to bring it alive in the written word? We must value and nurture our local authors because the better the material we encounter when exploring the world of reading, the more likely we are then to branch out, to read and learn about other places, other values, other customs, other mindsets. This in turn widens our perceptions, sharpens our ability to analyse what we read and makes us into better thinkers. It is no wonder that good readers make better citizens.

Fostering a reading culture is such an important thing to do, it should have far more backing and resource from government level. It's an investment that will amply repay itself if we can only learn to recognise the value of it. There are practical things that can be done from government level:

- Literacy campaigns for pre school children should be supported and should aim to have every child start school already imbued with the joy of reading.
- Copyright awareness should be part of the school curriculum from the start. We teach our children that they must not damage or steal other people's physical property, but somewhere in the maelstrom of the digital revolution, we forgot about intellectual property or rather decided it was something that could wait to later. It can't.
- The fundamental principles behind copyright should be recognised as a vital component in developing and retaining a vibrant reading culture, notwithstanding that copyright laws should evolve to reflect 21<sup>st</sup> century values.
- Collecting societies and RROs should be valued and nurtured as a very efficient and effective means of allowing wide access to content whilst remunerating rightsholders. Such organisations too need to be fit for purpose in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the UK the collecting societies are drawing up voluntary codes of conduct to ensure they operate fairly and with integrity. Such codes should become regulatory.
- Proper funding of the public library system should be a priority at all times.
- Governments should encourage and take part in local, national and international dialogue around all aspects of a reading culture to embed the importance of reading into the fabric of our society. An good example would be this type of conference.

## Providing access to copyright works

In this session we are discussing the issue of how to provide broad legal access in a context where we currently have a big problem with illegal access. In order to understand what is happening on the ground we need to look at this. The problem is on the whole a business to consumer issue as opposed to business to business. For all sorts of reasons (explored in other discussions) this has allowed a mindset to develop that there is nothing wrong with illegal access at the individual level.

But what actually happens to creators and economies when piracy takes hold?

From *Stealth of Nations: The Global Rise of the Informal Economy* by Robert Neuwirth “In Peru, there are more pirated copies of books that are sold than there are of legitimate books. In addition, the pirated books publishing industry employs more people than the legal book industry and earns roughly the same amount of money”.

The Kenya Publishing Association reported that book industry loses \$22 Million (2 Billion Kenyan Shilling) a year to piracy.

Note that this is not a developing nations problem.

The book industry association in Germany stated that around 60% of all e-books downloaded in the country are pirated.

It is easy to find similar statistics for many other countries. These pirated millions do nothing to help the economies of these countries.

The good news remains that most people in the world would act within the law if they had the choice. Copyright infringement has been caught up in a digital tsunami and become accepted by the most law-abiding as a legitimate activity. We’ve lost a generation to it, but that doesn’t mean we’ve lost the argument.

We need to make the arguments for legal access. We need to make legal access as easy as we can. We need to generate far more awareness of the benefits of legal access and the damage done by illegal access. We need to counter the arguments that copyright is somehow outdated in the 21st century.

There is a lack of understanding of the real damage caused by illegal access: the far-reaching effects of denying creators fair remuneration for the use of their works; the problems that come from losing the integrity of the written word; the damage to economies from the loss of income; the uses to which these millions of pirated dollars are put.

We are faced with attacks on copyright as though copyright as a concept is somehow old-fashioned and out of date. It isn’t. Copyright as a concept is fit for purpose. It is the only means we have to protect our creative economies and allow them to flourish. I’ve heard it said that things have changed; that copyright itself has changed beyond recognition over the centuries and this is the basis of an argument to say copyright has had its day. Yes copyright has changed. The world has changed and copyright has changed with it. A lot of things have changed. The wheel has changed beyond recognition since the 1700s. You could not put a wheel from an 18th century farm cart on to a formula one racing car, but no one uses that as an argument to say that the wheel has had its day. The old wheel and the new wheel are two entirely different things but the

concept remains sound. The shape remains the same. The concept of copyright likewise is still sound. Copyright is the engine on which the creative industries run.

Some of the solutions to access are technical and not difficult although they might require investment.

Some of the solutions are political. It's down to organisations such as those represented here to push this agenda forward.

As I said earlier, the problem is largely B2C not B2B. We mustn't lose sight of the fact that we already have excellent systems in place for legal access in the B2B world. I would hold up as an exemplary model the B2B business model of the CLA in the UK which has supported authors and their writing for the past 25+ years to the tune of many millions of pounds.

And finally I would stress again that most people most of the time want to do things legally. Far more people will benefit from legal access than illegal. Our whole industry needs to talk. To each other as well as to the wider world. It is organisations such as those represented at this conference who are going to be key to getting the right messages across.

### **Digitisation of cumulative knowledge and cultural heritage**

The Digital Preservation Challenge is huge. And it's important. We don't want to see a sudden loss of knowledge because of inadequate storage. It was 2060 years ago that the world's greatest library and repository of knowledge, the Royal library of Alexandria burnt down in Egypt. The full extent of that loss will never be known. With the options we now have for digital storage, an equivalent event ought not to happen now, but the speed of the digital revolution puts us at risk once again. I spent a decade or so in the 1980s and 1990s working with medical data, and looking at how to use it in the digital world. I've seen heaps of paper records stored in basements rendered inaccessible by years of damp and rodent damage. Equally I've tried to work with data from 1950's and 1960's computerised medical systems which might as well have been eaten by rats. Even where the electronic data was accessible and complete, it often made no sense at all because of the way it had been structured. It may as well have burnt to cinders for all the use it was. I fought through the problems of data stored on punched cards, on audio tapes, on floppy disks – each of these media when introduced signalled such a step change from the previous that people were seduced into thinking this technology was here to stay. It wasn't. And a lot of data was lost in the transitions. No electronic storage media has yet come close to the longevity of the printed book.

We need to think about the scale, about digital formats and digital lifecycles. Although it's a huge challenge, we are better equipped to deal with it now than we've ever been. And I also think we understand the basic issues.

The task of preserving cumulative knowledge is huge and libraries in partnership with governments and through author and publisher organisations around the world are taking an increasingly proactive approach to the preservation of digital information.

Technical issues of storage, data architecture and standards are being tackled robustly. Through the UK writers collecting society, the ALCS, we're involved in projects looking at standard identification for works and authors, data sharing and digitization of academic collections. These do not present just technological challenges. There are copyright issues too if we are to retain the

integrity of the knowledge we store. Part of the role of the ALCS working with the publishers collecting society is in dealing with the issues around rights clearances.

All these areas are producing results and outcomes that need to be disseminated further. IFRRO (International Federation of Reproduction Rights Organisations) plays a key role in this and facilitates much of this sort of work, but it's a role for all the creative industries.

We face challenges of scale, digital formats and of the ever-shortening information life-cycle. I believe we have these challenges in hand. There is another angle and that is tied up in the problems of the attacks on copyright that we've been discussing during this event. That is the devaluing of creative works. Piracy devalues works, but some of the new publishing models seem to do the same. As an example, consider the rock bottom price of ebooks. Have books themselves become nothing more than loss leaders to advertise and sell the ereader? Does quality of content count for anything when price is simply a factor of amount and not of quality? We've seen this in music models where the premium on quality content is disappearing. We simply buy by the track at a generally uniform price. The business model is designed to sell the device not the creative content.

If we devalue content by whatever means, why would anyone invest in preservation projects? Why preserve knowledge that is deemed not to be of value? It's a dangerous trend. Are business models in the digital age setting us on a path to a modern Alexandrian disaster?

The benefits of preserving knowledge and cultural heritage vastly outweigh the costs of overcoming the technological challenges. A task for our creative industries is to ensure that the message is heard so that knowledge and cultural heritage won't be lost to future generations.

### **Access for users with print disabilities**

It isn't only individuals who lose out when they are denied access to the printed word. It is through accessing the knowledge and experience of others that new ideas develop and breakthroughs are made. It is how progress happens. People are denied access to knowledge when they cannot access the printed word, either through their inability to access the format with which they are provided (which happens through various disabilities such as visual impairment or dyslexia) or because they are denied all access e.g. because of their geographic location (we have heard of the problems of access for rural communities in Africa).

I spent many years working as a trades union negotiator and case-worker and I saw a big change in attitudes to disability during that time. From the late 1980s where it was not uncommon for employers openly to express reluctance to consider disabled people for employment, through a period of uneasy semi-acceptance to a wide recognition that disabled employees are no different from any other but might need adjustments to their working environment. We are lucky in the UK to have the legislative framework - notably the Equality Act and the Access to Work Scheme - that has brought disabled people into the workplace as equals and has helped bring about a genuine change in culture and attitude so that people can now be valued for their abilities and not judged on their disabilities.

The denial of access to the written word on the grounds of disability or geographic location is completely arbitrary and not related to people's ability to become innovators or authors of the

world's next great breakthrough in whatever field. Denial of access damages societies and economies.

And that aside, it should be every individual's right to access knowledge, to realise their own personal potential.

This is an area where I hope the IAF will be active.

### **General reflections on the conference**

We are a disparate group – authors, publishers, librarians, collecting societies and so on. And as such there are inevitable tensions. We have different aims and objectives because we're doing different things.

However, there are areas where we work together for common goals. Enhancing accessibility to works is one of them. We all have our ideal solutions within our own constituencies. However the reality is that there is no single solution that is the ideal for everyone. If there were such a solution, we would simply implement it. What we can find are solutions that work for everyone.

There is always a danger when many groups try to work together that the more powerful – through greater financial resources or those with greater political influence – will force through their own particular agenda simply because they have the clout to do so. But if this leaves us with a solution that works for some and not for others, it won't be a lasting answer. It will fail.

For example, a publishing contract that provided a huge advance, big royalties and that took control of none of the rights in the work might appear to be an ideal contract for an individual writer, one that would provide adequate reward for many months or years of effort whilst leaving the author free to exploit the work in other ways when opportunities arose. But such a contract would not produce a viable business model for a publisher. Likewise the contract that swept up all rights forever might look attractive to the publisher in terms of keeping control but would not be a viable model for the writer. The same problems and tensions exist to greater and lesser degrees and in the same and different ways for artists, photographers, journalists, academic writers, big publishers, small publishers, niche publishers, collecting societies, professional organisations and so on.

In his summing up of the first day of meetings, Jens Bammel put this very eloquently. We all think we hold the moral high ground, but the moral high ground is a big place. There is room for all of us.

We each have our own agendas but we have overarching aims in common – we need to recognise our common aims and keep reminding ourselves what they are and why they are important. In this way, we can acknowledge our differences, but still work together.

That's far easier to say than to do. In order to make things work for everyone, we have to put self-interest aside. We actively have to consider things from the points of view of all parties, even when that is a very uncomfortable thing to do and even whilst fighting for our own constituencies. It is the only route to the best solution. And remember that the best solution is not the one that is closest to the ideal for one party, it is the one that works for everyone. That is the only solution that will stick in the long term.

