



By John Degen



5 Seriously Dumb Myths

about Copyright the Media Should Stop Repeating...

Media coverage of copyright issues can influence policy and legislation around this crucial protection for authors' rights. Unfortunately, much of that coverage deals in copyright mythology rather than fact.

Here is a simple primer debunking five of the most inaccurate myths perpetuated about copyright.



5

Artists Feel Restricted by Copyright



Right... and cyclists feel restricted by bike paths.

Drivers feel restricted by the network of roads and highways.

Pilots feel restricted by lift and drag.

Truth:

Professional, working artists who respect their own work also respect the work of others. Ask one - you'll see.

Anti-copyright crusaders love to shout about *remix culture* and how copyright aims to stop it. Real artists understand:

a) Remix culture was not invented by the Internet. Original works of art have been referencing and remixing other original works of art since the dawn of... well, art.

b) There's a difference between creative remixing and uncreative copying. That's a line all professional, working artists recognize by instinct, and it's a line professional artists are happy to have defined by law.

4 Copyright Harms the Public Domain



Truth:

First of all, there is no “public domain” without copyright. By definition, the cultural public domain consists of those works of art and expression that have for one reason or another fallen *out* of copyright protection. You can’t really have one without the other.

Secondly, can we please stop conflating copyright with a lack of access? Anti-copyright activists are weirdly proud of how they “liberate” books into the public domain when copyright terms end. *The Little Prince* fell out of copyright protection almost everywhere but France at the beginning of this year. Was it more difficult to find, obtain or read a copy of *The Little Prince* before January 1st, 2015 than it is now? Are the French suffering culturally because the book - one of the most popular books in the world - is still protected where it was written, and income is still flowing to the estate of the brilliant man who wrote it?

Just because a work has its economic and moral interests protected by law, this does not mean it’s unavailable to those who wish to access or use it.

Works outside the public domain are simply still economically alive, which means folks still believe they’re *worth* being economically alive. In other words, there’s a functioning economy for cultural works.

That’s a good thing, right?

3 Copyright is an Attack on Artistic Freedom

I have been a working, professional writer for close to thirty years. I've felt my artistic freedom threatened by a great many things - state censorship, all manner of fundamentalisms, Internet bullying and shaming... to name but a few.

Copyright law is not on that list, and it will NEVER be on that list. The very foundation of copyright is the insistence that *if I create an artistic expression, I own that artistic expression*. And if I own something, you best believe I will protect it from those who want to impose their restrictions on it.

Truth:

My right to own and profit from my free expression is part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Enough with the Orwellian doublespeak about copyright attacking my rights. Copyright IS my right, dammit.



2 Copyright Costs Consumers

In a recent, weakly-researched piece on copyright, Canada's *National Post* published without challenge the claim that copyright term extensions for music in Canada will cost "the public billions of dollars in the long term."

Well, duh. We call that "the economy."

You know what else will cost the public billions of dollars in the long term?

- a) all jobs
- b) the continuation of human existence
- c) time

Truth:

Paying artists for works we want to consume is how we have a cultural economy. As long as we live in market-based economic systems, the exchange of money for works, goods and services is going to be an essential mechanism. Oh well.



1 Copyright only helps Corporations

This is the whopper of anti-copyright mythology.

Anti-copyright activists love to invoke the specter of “big content” in their relentless drive to weaken artists’ rights. They claim protections under copyright really only help the bottom lines of huge corporations who grab rights from working artists. As a working artist, I am concerned about my contract terms with large corporations, absolutely - but at least there is a contract. The existence of a contractual offer for my rights means my right of ownership is being acknowledged and respected. I sure don’t remember being offered a contract for the use of my work when it was pirated online.

Guess who profits the most from this ridiculously inaccurate and misleading line of anti-copyright reasoning? *Giant corporations* who have built a business model on free content.

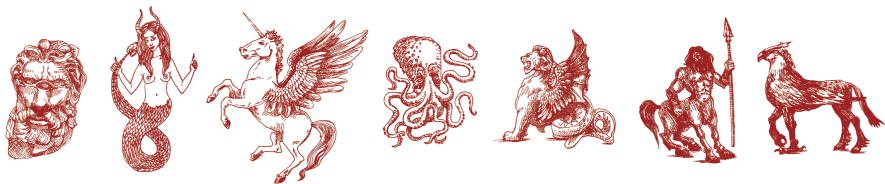
Truth:

Say what you want about large media corps, publishers, music and film companies, etc. - they’ve made way, way more of a tangible contribution to the livelihoods of the working artists I know than Google ever intends to.



Here's a final, simple, rule of thumb for writing about copyright.

If you want to understand how a working artist feels about copyright, talk to an actual working artist.



John Degen is a novelist and poet. He is Executive Director of **The Writers' Union of Canada**, an organization representing more than 2000 professional authors. He is also Chair of the **International Authors Forum**, which currently represents close to half a million professional authors worldwide.