

Productivity Commission Submission:

Parallel Importation of Books Study.

As a young emerging author, I am concerned about the proposal to allow the parallel importation of books in this country. Australia, as is my understanding, has a much smaller publishing rate and books sector than say, the US or UK. So, what concerns me is that opening up the market, in allowing the parallel importation of books, Australia's publishing industry and widely, the books sector, will cease to grow and perhaps shall indeed recede. I, as I have already mentioned, am a young writer, I am twenty-three years old and I am yet to be published but I believe it will be myself and other young emerging authors who shall suffer most from the allowance of parallel imports of books.

Speaking from my personal experience, it takes many years to develop a book and then to seek publication. Generally, it is a long apprenticeship, if you like, to become a published author and I have spent most of my life writing stories and I would really hate for them to have been wasted. What concerns me most about my position and, that of others, is that I am yet to begin my writing career and in facing the market, I am worried, that should parallel importation of books go ahead, this career I have sought for myself may never eventuate. I believe that the publishing industry and the literary agents may have no desire to seek out new authors. The agents and publishers are already taking a bit of a risk when they accept a new and untried author yet, what should it be like if the market is already weakened? In allowing parallel imports to go ahead all Australian publishers will be forced to review their ability to take on new authors and will have to compete with cheaper imported copies of an author's books. It worries me that the Australian book sector may easily go under.

However, let me return to my own concerns. An 'open' market, as it is phrased, is a difficult place for any author let alone those at the beginning of their careers. The writing industry is a competitive one and from association with internationally recognised authors, I cannot help but notice that the international market is a very highly competitive place to be. Australia's writing industry and its publishing houses seem to me, the perfect place for an emerging author to begin their career and get 'a feel' for the industry and then seek publication and representation overseas. I, personally, would be worried about going straight into such an open market as there would be if parallel importation were allowed. Much time, money, faith and expertise are invested into the publishing industry and it would be a shame to see it slowly diminish for the sake of parallel importation of books.

There are questions that need to be addressed before the changes to the Copyright Act should go ahead. It is my understanding that there is an argument that parallel importation of books would allow books to be sold at a cheaper price by providing the consumer with imported copies. I am no economist so I cannot comment upon whether books really would be cheaper or not, but I can assume that some would be depending upon where they are produced. I can also believe that cheaper books would be good for the consumer, and as a university student as well, I can say I would be interested in cheaper books. However, does this end justify the means? Some people would indeed read more and purchase more books and others perhaps shall not.

What does need to be considered and considered well, is what impact imported books shall have upon young Australians? Would the Australian publishers still find it necessary to promote Australian authors? Would they continue to seek out new voices? I understand that this is of a concern also. If no Australian authors are appearing to be doing well, would this be encouraging for young Australians, for budding writers to seek a career for themselves? Would they want to write? To read and imagine if all they can ever read are books from overseas authors or books from a select few Australians? I think, if I were in their place, I would feel disheartened. Where are all the tales from Australian minds? Where are all the stories I can relate to? Even grammar and style would be foreign, would lack the unique Australian flavour. If we seek for our nation to grow, to allow new voices to be heard, for new stories to be told and new ideas to be born then we must preserve our Australian authors and allow our industry to continue to grow. Surely, these factors are just too important to be discarded for the sake of cheaper books?

Would parallel importation allow Australian authors to continue to be promoted? Probably those that are successful would be promoted very well and others not at all. Would new writers seek to get published if they are faced with a hostile market? Or would they feel daunted by the shrinking Australian market? It is a likely assumption that the entire Australian books sector would suffer because the publishing industry would be more select, agents would accept less and less manuscripts, less publishing houses taking on new authors and ultimately, less Australian books.

At current, our writing industry is small in comparison to the US and UK markets and as far as I can see, we as a nation, need it to grow, to allow it more success not less. I understand also that the stress of allowing parallel importation of books and changes to the *Copyright Act*, would ultimately be borne by our nation, not simply the publishing houses, the literary agencies or the writers themselves but it will stifle our national creativity, our national sense of self and this is not the atmosphere to encourage our youth to write.

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