

Search

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 Honours  
 London  
 Who's Who 2005  
 Conservative  
 Conference  
 Labour Conference

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Home  
 News  
 Britain  
 World  
 Business  
 Your Money  
 Sport  
 Comment  
 Travel  
 Entertainment  
 Law  
 Crossword  
 Driving  
 Property  
 Women  
 Health

## Britain

January 29, 2005

### Authors want cut of second-hand sales

By Jack Malvern, Arts Reporter

**AUTHORS** are blaming online and charity bookshops for depriving them of their livelihoods. Literary figures, including A. S. Byatt, have called for a change in the law to make booksellers pay royalties for second-hand copies.

Online book-selling is now so efficient that readers can easily find second-hand copies from bookshops all over the country.

On the Amazon website, a copy of A. S. Byatt's *Possession* costs £6.39 new, but can be ordered in "very good" condition for £4.20. Abebooks, a specialist second-hand book website, offers a "worn" copy from a bookshop in Suffolk for 70p.

The second-hand market also affects current bestsellers. Buyers can find *The Da Vinci Code*, the top-selling book last week, for £4.14 from Abebooks or as little as £3.50 on eBay, the internet auction website. The recommended retail price is £6.99.

Authors fear that the ease with which readers can find second-hand copies is shortening the shelf life of new books.

Dame Antonia Byatt has called for new rules to

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protect novelists using a system known as *droit de suite*, which guarantees artists a payment for each subsequent sale of their work. The rule is already scheduled to be introduced for visual art next year to ensure that painters receive a payment for second-hand sales of their work.

"*Droit de suite* is a very good way to protect us," she said. "I hope they do something because earnings for an author can be absolutely pitiful."

Charity bookshops such as Oxfam and Barnardo's have exacerbated the problem by expanding their book-selling divisions.

Oxfam has become the largest retailer of second-hand books in Europe, with sales estimated at £15 million in the current financial year. It is expanding its network of specialist bookshops from 70 to an estimated 100 by the end of the next financial year. Its book sales have doubled in the past five years and quadrupled since 1997. Sales are increasing at 10 per cent a year.

Barnardo's has also opened specialist bookshops and it sold more than a million books last year. Sales were so strong that the charity issued an appeal for customers to donate books to overcome a "book drought".

Mark Le Fanu, the general secretary of the Society of Authors, said: "We could try to get charities to make a voluntary contribution to authors, but it would be difficult." Enforced contributions were needed, he said.

A spokesman for Oxfam said that authors would face difficulties arguing for *droit de suite* because it would take money away from charity. "If you are having to add 50p, for example, to each book then it will make a difference to how the book sells," he said.

Some authors suspect that many books sold as second hand are actually remainders. Penny

## SUPPLEMENT



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Jordan, who writes romantic fiction, said: "Dealers can buy thousands of copies, on which the author does not receive any royalties."

## SECOND-HAND BOOK BARGAINS

- *Atonement* by Ian McEwan: recommended paperback price £7.99 **Abebooks.co.uk** — £1.29 "in good condition" **Alibris.com** — \$2.95 (£1.57) "very good" **Amazon.co.uk** — £0.90 "like new" eBay — £0.50 "as new"
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