

Maria Pallante, Register of Copyright
U.S. Copyright Office
Library of Congress

Re: Orphan Works and Mass Digitization
(FR Doc. 2012-25932; Copyright Office Docket Number 2012-12)

Dear Ms. Pallante:

Stealing is stealing. Protecting my intellectual rights is a trust and duty to which I am entitled. Having worn the uniform of my nation I am fully aware that it was my responsibility to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States, and, thereby, the individual rights of the citizens of my country. Please do not strip me and others like me of our rights simply because we do not have the massive funding needed to protect ourselves from behemoths of the media. The government – my government – is designed and entrusted to protect the rights of the vulnerable from encroachment. I am asking you to protect me and my heirs by preserving my rights to my own property.

I endorse the comments submitted to the Copyright Office by the National Writers Union.

As a working writer, I oppose any "orphan works" legislation that permits use of my work without my knowledge or permission merely because someone claims they were unable to identify or locate me or any person or entity that they thought held certain rights to my work.

Any such legislation would violate my economic and moral rights. For writers outside the U.S., such a law would violate rights guaranteed by the Berne Convention and other treaties.

I am especially concerned that proposals for "orphan works" legislation fail to take into consideration the realities of working writers' lives and the difficulties we face in enforcing our rights so that we can earn a living from our writing. I believe that work to which I hold some or all rights could be deemed "orphaned," despite the fact that I am still attempting to earn money from it, including in ways that are not reflected in publishers' or libraries' records. Copies of my work made available under an "orphan works" law -especially those made available for free by a noncommercial entity - would unfairly compete with and destroy the value of my rights.

Before the Copyright Office or Congress considers any "orphan works" legislation, I urge you to hold hearings to learn from writers and other creators about how such a law would affect us. No "orphan works" legislation should be considered unless it respects the rights of creators.

Sincerely,

John M. Spafford