

## **Authors' rights versus phantoms**

Dear Commissioners Juncker, Oettinger, Ansip and Navracsics,

As a child, I used to believe that all writers were dead. Their silent spirits sported grey beards and moustaches. Books grew on library and book-shop shelves, fecundated by the inspiration which, naturally, was heaven-sent. I wrote. I didn't dream of being a writer, because only books were real.

I became a novelist. With a body. A stomach. I pay for the roof over my head, for my healthcare, I go on holiday, dance and live – and authors' rights feed this body that creates. The ghosts of my childhood have made this possible: writers such as Beaumarchais, Balzac, Victor Hugo and George Sand established and promoted authors' rights before they died, building a fair and just alternative to patronage and private income, to feed this body.

But I gather that in Europe there is a move to return to the days of phantoms: works on the internet – a powerful tool for disseminating culture – should be free; exceptions from authors' rights, already numerous and justified (the disabled, educational, library loans etc.), expanded as part of an ongoing drive to increase access. We may as well simply leave creativity to algorithms that wouldn't cost anyone anything, why not?

Undermining authors' rights does not strengthen those of the reader: to do so is to send authors to their grave, and with them, creativity. Authors have bodies. Authors' rights are not an impediment: they allow artists to be remunerated and respected; authors' rights safeguard cultural diversity and vitality and freedom of expression.

We are not ghosts.

**Valentine Goby**, Novelist, President of the French Permanent Council of Writers

**Maureen Duffy**, novelist

**Erri de Luca**, Novelist, poet and playwright

**Nina George**, Novelist

**Juan Pedro Aparicio**, Novelist and essayist

**Philippe Gelluck**, Cartoonist

(Translation: Ros Schwartz)