November 2013

International Dateline -- OpenAccess Gathers Pace in Europe

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Recommended Citation
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4575

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HEIRS SING THE BLUES
by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)
A relentless blues historian tracked down the half-sister of Gibson guitar legend Robert Johnson, and she opened a musty old trunk to show him two photos. Johnson died flat busted and intestate in 1938, poisoned by a jealous husband.
The sleuth, Steve LaVere, persuaded the elderly Carrie Thompson to assign him rights to the photos, memorabilia and all the songs which until then were thought to be public domain.
A little money started to roll in. Seven figures worth. And then other heirs started to show up with lawyers. A 73-year-old gravel truck driver had a birth certificate with "R.L. Johnson, laborer;" as the father and an affidavit from an ancient woman who swore she witnessed the sexual intercourse nine months before the birth. Litigation has been going on for fifteen years.

BIGGER ISN’T ALWAYS BETTER
by Sandra Beehler (Lewis & Clark College)
Enthusiasm for further enlargement of the European Union is waning and it is becoming less likely that more eastern European countries will be able to join as full members. This change in attitude is due to increasing fears among people in the existing member nations that cheap labor represented by these poorer countries will undermine their own quality of life. Officials in Brussels have not given up hope of enlargement, believing that it will help to stabilize Balkan governments and, in Turkey, strengthen ties with the Muslim world’s only pro-Western democracy. However, voters fearful of losing their jobs and of security risks posed by extending the EU into the Middle East, are likely to vote negatively in any referendums on the enlargement.

TOP SECRET EXCESSES
by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)
And for all of you who enjoy paranoia about the Homeland Security Act, the feds have ordered airline pilots not to fly near nuclear power plants on pain of being forced down by fighters — but won’t reveal where the plants are. It’s Sensitive Security Information.
Under the Act, SSI can include anything that might help somebody defeat transportation security systems. The secrecy binge is running wild with agencies willy-nilly stamping things FOUO (For Official Use Only) — like a farewell breakfast invitation for retiring Federal Air Marshals.

ICANN NOT UN CAN
by Sandra Beehler (Lewis & Clark College)
Since the inception of the Internet, the U.S. has controlled the infrastructure that underlies it, through the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). Other countries have been lobbying to move that control to the United Nations, and the UN’s Working Group on Internet Governance released a report in July which favors inter-governmental oversight of the system. Pre-empting that recommendation, on June 30th the current U.S. administration announced its decision to retain control of ICANN, citing concerns over the Internet’s “security and stability.” It is theoretically possible to create a new system of naming that would bypass ICANN’s monopoly, but so far that idea has not been pursued.

International Dateline — Open Access Gathers Pace in Europe
by Peter T. Shepherd (Project Director, COUNTER) <pt_shepherd@hotmail.com>
The summer of 2005 proved a hot one in Europe, at least for those engaged in the funding and publication of scientific research. In May following the success of their initial experiments in open access publishing, Oxford University Press launched Oxford Open, which offers an optional author-pays model to authors of accepted papers in a range of journal titles. This was followed in June by a very significant statement from Research Councils UK (RCUK) strongly favoring open access (OA) to the outputs of the research that they fund. RCUK sought reactions to their proposals and these have kept the temperature of the debate high in the ensuing months. Nor was the heat confined to England. At a September meeting in Geneva CERN took another step to advance its OA policy by holding a meeting of authors and key managers to discuss different publishing models. Meanwhile, the number of European-based open access journals continues to grow. While there are literally dozens of open access journals in the life sciences, in some other fields they are rare indeed. One has now been sighted in chemistry, the Beilstein Journal of Organic Chemistry, published by the distinguished Beilstein Institute of Frankfurt, Germany and hosted by BioMed Central, the largest publisher of open access journals.

Research Councils UK Position on Open Access
RCUK represents the eight UK Research Councils that are the principal investors in publicly-funded research in the UK. In June 2005 they responded to the debate on improved access to research outputs by putting forward their emerging views on the issue. Their position was formed after extensive consultation with the research community, university administrators and with publishers. In launching the RCUK position statement Professor Ian Diamond said: "The Research Councils are responsible for supporting and promoting the activities of a research base that is vibrant, productive and sustainable. We’ve therefore committed to ensuring the widest possible dissemination of ideas and knowledge, effective quality assurance of research and its results, cost-effective use of public funds and the long-term preservation of research outputs. Our emerging position on the access issue should come as no surprise to those who understand our remit." RCUK argues that technology offers new possibilities to communicate the results of research through developments in electronic publishing such as open access journals and e-print repositories.

In summary, RCUK proposes:
• A requirement for all grants awarded from 1 October 2005 that, subject to copyright and licensing arrangements, a copy of any resultant published journal articles or conference proceedings should be deposited in an appropriate e-print repository (either institutional or subject-based) wherever such a repository is available to the author. Deposit should take place at the earliest opportunity, wherever possible around the time of publication.
• Research Councils will also encourage,
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but will not formally oblige award holders to deposit articles arising from grants awarded before 1 October 2005.

- Councils will ensure that applicants for grants are allowed, subject to justification of cost-effectiveness, to include in the costing of their projects the predicted costs of any publication in author-pays journals.

By actively encouraging the public availability of research outputs as quickly as possible after publication, the eight UK Research Councils are joining a movement already supported by other major European funders of research, such as CNRS in France, the Max Planck Society in Germany, the Swedish Research Council and the Welcome Trust.2

Response to the RCUK Position Statement

RCUK accepted comments on its position until 31 August 2005 and is now evaluating the feedback. Responses were received from a number of organizations, including ALPSP (the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers), the STM Publishers Group and JISC (the Joint Information Systems Committee). Sally Morris, Chief Executive of ALPSP expressed strong misgivings about the RCUK position statement.3 ALPSP is convinced that RCUK’s proposed policy will “accelerate the move to a disastrous scenario” that would bring financial ruin to many journals as librarians cancel subscriptions and would lead to the collapse of quality controls and peer review processes. This somewhat apocalyptic vision has in turn been roundly criticised by a distinguished group of UK academics, lead by Sir Tim Berners-Lee, creator of the Web. In an open letter they strongly support the RCUK position and hit back at ALPSP, saying that many of the ALPSP claims are unsubstantiated.4 In their rebuttal of the ALPSP position they state that “all the evidence to date shows the reverse to be true: not only do journals thrive and coexist alongside author self-archiving, but they can actually benefit from it — both in terms of more citations and more subscriptions.” 5 Berners-Lee et al further maintain that many researchers are currently hampered in their work because they don’t have access to all the articles they need, as no institution can afford access to all the journals its users need.

In their response the STM Publishers group, like ALPSP, expressed concerns about the effect of the RCUK policy on their members’ revenues. They think that the results of the RCUK policy will decrease diversity in journals, weaken the peer review process, threaten the value of investments made by STM publishers and improve neither access nor quality for scholars. They also fear that the overall costs of OA publishing model will turn out to be greater than those of the current system. A detailed rebuttal of the STM response has been published by Professor Stevan Harnad of the University of Southampton.5

JISC6 “welcomes the RCUK position statement.” Further support comes from three UK library associations, CURL, SCONUL and CILIP who, in a joint statement said “We believe that the statement is a responsible and balanced approach to current issues and has the potential to make significant improvements to research communication. We would urge RCUK to adopt the statement as its policy as soon as possible.”

European Publisher Open Access Activities

Oxford University Press’s expanded OA project, Oxford Open6 commenced in July 2005. This service offers an optional author-pays model to authors of accepted papers in a range of Oxford Journals titles. The open access charge for each article will be £1500/$2800, with authors being given the option to pay this amount once their manuscript has been accepted for publication. Discounted author charges of £800/$1500 are available to authors from institutions that maintain a current online subscription. Interviewed for this column Dr. Janet Boullin, Editorial Director of Oxford Journals said “Following the success of our initial experiments in open access with Nucleic Acid Research we decided to offer authors an open access option for 20 of our journals. The response to date has been very good, especially in fields such as bioinformatics.” Meanwhile, a short punt ride along the Isis, Blackwell Publishing continue with their trial of their open access option, Online Open,7 through the end of 2006. During this period the author fee per article will be £1520/$2500.

Springer, the first major publisher to offer an author-pays option with Springer Choice,8 priced at $3000 per article, recently announced a boost to this initiative with the appointment of Jan Veterep to the newly-created position of Director of Open Access. Jan became a prominent champion of OA in his previous role at BioMed Central, which he left earlier this year. Asked about his new position at Springer he said “I will be an internal champion for OA at Springer, as well as an external advocate of it. It is important for the major publishers to embrace OA, as Springer has done, rather than fight it.”

While there continues to be a debate as to whether these publisher OA initiatives meet all the criteria of OA publishing as defined in the Berlin Declaration, there is no doubt that they represent very important steps in this direction. Their willingness to experiment with new access models is to be applauded.

Whither the Author?

A number of factors influence authors’ choices in where they publish the outputs of their research. One very important factor is the attitude of the agencies funding that research. Until now these agencies have not, on the whole, specified how and where the researchers they fund should publish their results. Nor have they, as a rule, funded author publishing charges. This is no longer the case: RCUK looks set to join a growing list of organizations that not only tell researchers how they would like their results to be published but are also prepared to fund author charges to allow open access. This will further encourage a shift by authors towards open access publishing.

References / Links
1. http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/access/index.asp