

Barbara Ringer Wrote a Witty Ditty

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Barbara Ringer, famed Register of Copyrights from 1973 to 1980, is known as the principal architect of the 1976 Copyright Act. She was also a poet, but we didn't know it—until now.

Erik Bertin, attorney-advisor in the General Counsel's Office, recently discovered in the Office's historical files an unpublished handwritten ditty penned by Ringer. Bertin speculates that the untitled rhyme was written

in December 1964, perhaps while Ringer was participating in lengthy hearings leading to the revision of the copyright law. He generously provided *Copyright Notices* with explanations of certain terms in the poem.

Was Ringer writing verse during hearings? Was the poem a 1960s version of texting during meetings? We don't know, but we can enjoy her wit. ©

*Section 4311¹
Is good for thee
But not for me*

*Please don't import
Things of purport
Use any tariffs
But save our serifs.*

*I don't publish, I don't print;
Green stuff I don't mint.*

*So let me flourish, do
not stint:
Let dear Holland print
my Gynt.²*

*The Authors Guild
Has never willed
That "employer for hire"
Means any buyer.*

*Aversion to reversion³
Means elision of revision.*

*Words, like cud
Are chewed to crud
In the churning stomachs *
Of each spurning lummoX.*

**Cows have them plural
Don't you know these things
rural?*

*Each side says,
"J'accuse!"⁴
But lest they all lose
Or [illegible] they all
woos*

*I suggest
(For East and West)*

*The ruse of booze
Might make 'em choose
Between the views
Of the two pews.*

*Talk is cheap
And the pace does creep.*

1 A reference to the manufacturing clause, which appeared in section 43 of the 1964 revision bill. The provision prohibited "the importation into the United States of visual copies of a work consisting preponderantly of nondramatic literary material that is in the English language and is protected under this title ... unless the portions consisting of said material have been wholly manufactured in the United States." See Copyright Law Revision Part 3, Preliminary Draft for Revised U.S. Copyright Law and Discussions and Comments on the Draft at 31 (Comm. Print 1964).

2 Possibly a reference to Peer Gynt by Henrik Ibsen, a play that was written entirely in verse.

3 A reference to section 16 of the 1964 revision bill, which allowed authors to terminate or modify an

agreement that transferred the copyright to a third party. The provision stated that "If, at the end of twenty years following the execution by the author, after the effective date of this act, of a transfer of copyright or of any exclusive right under a copyright, the profits received by the transferee or his successors in title are strikingly disproportionate to the compensation, consideration, or share received by the author or his successors, action may be brought in any court mentioned in section 1338 of Title 28 to reform or terminate said transfer." See Copyright Law Revision Part 3, Preliminary Draft for Revised U.S. Copyright Law and Discussions and Comments on the Draft at 16 (Comm. Print 1964).

4 A reference to Emile Zola's open letter to the *L'Aurore* newspaper concerning the Dreyfus Affair.