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REVEALED: THE AUTHORS WITH STAYING POWER PLR releases decade of data on UK library borrowing

A fascinating 10-year picture of the nation's reading trends emerges from a decade of data on public library borrowing released today by PLR (Public Lending Right).

The PLR statistics which cover the ten years from 1996-2006, reveal that an unlikely duo has emerged as perennial favourites with UK library borrowers. The US romantic novelist Danielle Steel and children's author partnership Janet & Allan Ahlberg are the only writers to feature in the Top 10 Most Borrowed Authors list every single year for the past decade. Steel has over 60 novels to her name, whilst Janet & Allan Ahlberg's books for children include such classic titles as 'The Jolly Postman' and 'Each Peach Pear Plum'.

With total loans of over 13 million, current UK top-lending author Jacqueline Wilson has featured in the Top 10 for the past six years including the last four at Number One. Former champion lender Catherine Cookson who reigned supreme as the UK's Most Borrowed Author for 17 years, dropped out of the Top 10 during 2004/5 for the first time since records began in 1984. In 2005/6 Dame Catherine, who died in 1998, fell still further down the list to Number 30.

Jacqueline Wilson, Danielle Steel and the Ahlbergs still have a long way to go however before they equal Catherine Cookson's cumulative total of 25 million loans over the last decade. Despite dropping down the Most Borrowed Authors chart, her books are still clocking up over half a million loans annually. Danielle Steel's total loans for the decade stand at over 18 million; Jacqueline Wilson's at over 13 million and those of the Ahlbergs at over 12 million.

Ten years ago romantic fiction dominated the list of the Most Borrowed Adult Fiction titles. In recent years however, there has been a notable rise in the popularity of gritty crime novels and thrillers by the likes of Patricia Cornwell, Ian Rankin and James Patterson, with the result that only three romantic novels make the Top 10 for 2005/6.

The decade of data on the Top 10 Most Borrowed Non-Fiction titles reveals our growing obsession with who we are and what we look like. Whereas the Top 10 in 1996/7 featured Stephen Hawking's 'A Brief History of Time', and Jung Chang's 'Wild Swans', the Top 10 for 2005/6 is dominated by books such as 'You Are What You Eat' by Gillian McKeith and 'Change Your Life in Seven Days' by Paul McKenna, although Bill Bryson's 'A Short History of Nearly Everything' also gets a look in.

Public Lending Right became law in 1979 and plays a crucial role in the UK's creative economy by supporting authors financially. Public libraries across the country accumulate lending figures by ISBN for PLR which collates the data and distributes the money it receives from the government directly to writers. In 2005/06, 23,869 authors will receive payments at an increased rate of 5.98 pence per loan.

This income is invaluable to the nation's writers as is the data that PLR is increasingly able to provide to the creative industries that depend on writers. Such data can support public libraries, decision makers in the cultural sector, the reading industries and publishing by providing a fuller picture of the nation's reading habits.

Thanks to LEWIS, a sophisticated computer software programme, PLR is able to analyse the data it collects, identifying trends and changes in our national and regional reading habits and providing a fascinating insight into our preferences, pastimes and obsessions. PLR is currently testing this facility with public libraries as a potentially valuable tool to support decision making over book stock.

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Editors' Notes

1. PLR was established by an Act of Parliament in 1979. It gives authors the legal right to receive remuneration from government for the public's use of their work through the public library system.
2. PLR is funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). Culture Secretary, Tessa Jowell, writing in PLR's 2005/6 Annual Report expressed her delight that so many writers, illustrators, editors and translators benefited from PLR. She said of PLR: "It is now a well-established right, enjoying widespread recognition for the key role it plays in supporting the literary endeavours of the country's authors on which so much of the creative economy depends". The Annual Report is available on PLR's website (www.plr.uk.com).
3. PLR's funding from DCMS stands at £7.65 million for 2006/7.
4. In February 2007 - relating to book loans during the period July 2005-June 2006 - PLR is distributing £6.81 million to 23,869 authors at a record rate per loan of 5.98 pence.
5. Authors are eligible for payment if their PLR earnings reach a minimum of £1. There is a maximum payment threshold of £6,600 for the top-lending authors. This year 262 authors will receive the maximum payment.
6. Since its inception in 1979, PLR has distributed over £101 million to authors.
7. Author Simon Brett is currently Chair of the PLR Advisory Committee. Previous chairs have included writers Clare Francis and Michael Holroyd.
8. Authors living in other European Union countries also qualify for payment from the UK scheme for loans of their books from public libraries in the UK. Authors living in Ireland are the principal beneficiaries. British authors currently qualify for payment from PLR schemes in Germany, Austria and the Netherlands.

