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## **Introduction: censorship and creative freedom** [pp. 1-23]

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### **The speakable and the unspeakable: defining censorship**

*To be for or against censorship as such is to assume a freedom no one has. Censorship is.*

(Holquist 1994: 16)

Censorship has always been with us in some form in all societies, and may be simultaneously viewed as positive or negative. Much of the difficulty that occurs when discussing censorship arises from the fact that there are many types of censorship operating in different societies and some of these are accepted, or even welcomed, by majority groups or powerful minorities. Any discussion of censorship in recent history and as a contemporary practice is complicated by several factors. The term itself can refer to various types of restriction and control; and it is affected by changing social and political contexts. It is linked to a series of concepts such as freedom of expression, decency, political correctness, and the common good, which are also difficult to define and are open to conflicting interpretations. Indeed, the question of what constitutes censorship has been tackled by many influential thinkers and whilst their work is immensely valuable and addresses several important aspects of censorship in the context of both authoritarian states and liberal democracies, it is nevertheless clear that there is no consensus on the matter.

In the 1970s, seminal works by Althusser (1971) and Foucault (1978; 1979) rejected the notion of a simple definition of censorship as the imposition of state repression, and explored ways in which it can be seen as a constitutive or productive force in society. Althusser's influential essay, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation', stresses the crucial role played by a wide variety of state agencies in the maintenance of ideology. His description of the function of ideological state institutions, backed up by repressive state institutions, can most obviously be applied to the regulatory censorship practices in use in authoritarian regimes, but also go beyond the traditional interpretation of censorship as simply imposed by an authority on an individual.

Foucault's work on the integrated relationship between knowledge and power has had a bearing on much contemporary thinking on censorship:

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network, which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression. (1980: 119)

Drawing on Bentham's thesis, Foucault identified 'panopticism' as one of the keys to understanding censorship in contemporary liberal society, and his work is often applied to considerations of the operation of democratic bureaucratic and social systems where power regimes based on surveillance and self-censorship are internalised and normalised, rather than

imposed from above (Foucault 1979). He considered censorship to be a productive force, rather than simply a regulatory one, and his theories have influenced many later critics, such as Pierre Bourdieu and Judith Butler, who have written about the concealed presence and formative power of censorship within wider social communication in all societies. For his part, in his British Academy Lecture, *Censorship and the Limits of Permission*, Jonathan Miller asserted that

the rules, principles, policies, and ideals by which we live are as much constitutive as they are regulative, that is to say they exist not simply to prevent a ferocity which we otherwise dread, but partly to define the identity of the community which might otherwise be unrecognisable both to itself and to outsiders who look at it. (1971: 11)

Miller's discussion of censorship in terms of morality, harmfulness and offence anticipates the later debates engaged in by critics such as Malik (2008) and Collini (2010).

In the 1980s and 1990s, important contributions by Jansen (1988), Bourdieu (1991), Butler (1997) and Post (1998) have enhanced our understanding of censorship and cultural control, both regulative and productive. Pierre Bourdieu, for example, argues:

censorship is never quite so perfect or as invisible as when each agent has nothing to say apart from what he is objectively authorized to say: in this case he does not even have to be his own censor because he is, in a way, censored once and for all, through the forms of perception and expression that he has internalized and which impose their form on all his expressions. (1991: 138)

Susan Curry Jansen maintains that, in addition to what she terms regulative censorship, there exists a ‘constitutive or existential censorship’ which ‘is a feature of all enduring human communities – even those communities which offer legislative guarantees of press freedom’ (1988: 8). Butler too, takes issue with traditional interpretations of censorship which ‘presume that it is exercised by the state against those who are less powerful’, and puts forward an alternative view that is linked to discursive agency:

Censorship is most often referred to as that which is directed against persons or against the content of their speech. If censorship, however, is a way of *producing* speech, constraining in advance what will and will not become acceptable speech, then it cannot be understood exclusively in terms of juridical power. (1997: 128)

Censorship, she argues, ‘is a productive power: it is not merely privative, but formative as well’ (1997: 133). For Robert C. Post, the new, broader interpretation of censorship involves a move away from the binary opposition of traditional liberal versus conservative views on censorship and represents, he claims, ‘exciting and important intellectual developments’ (1998: 4). In its engagement with various forms of censorship, this book aims to contribute to these developments.

The continued relevance of censorship to our understanding of how society functions is highlighted in recent works by Dollimore (2001), Müller (2004), Reinelt (2006; 2011), Petley (2009), Freshwater (2004; 2009) and Collini (2010), among others. All have explored how censorship and cultural regulation are manifested in contemporary society, often focusing on the clash of rights that is at the centre of much discussion of the topic. Debates about censorship are,

in some ways, more complex in contemporary democratic societies than in authoritarian regimes; in other ways, they represent a return to some of the debates of the Enlightenment period and to a discussion of what limits, if any, should be placed on freedom of expression, including the freedom to offend and to be offended. Many people, particularly in contemporary western democratic societies, are willing to accept, if not to advocate, a range of limitations on freedom of expression, often linked to the imposition of restrictions on racist, homophobic, or misogynistic texts or speech acts, or for the protection of children. In her important article ‘The Limits of Censorship’, Janelle Reinelt contends that the generally accepted democratic right to free expression

must be balanced among competing alternative rights (privacy, respect, civility, among others) and sometimes those competing rights have been difficult to assimilate or fold into a larger good recognised by society’s members as necessary for its health and well-being. (2006: 6)

Freshwater too, in her discussion of the forced withdrawal of the play *Behzti* from the Birmingham Rep theatre in 2004 argues ‘that we have to face up to the tension between the liberal ideals of freedom of expression and respect for cultural difference’ (2009: 148). Others, such as Collini (2010) and Malik (2008), disagree with the need to balance other rights with the right to freedom of expression, insisting that the latter is a fundamental right. This argument rests on the notion that as certain protections, such as legislation regarding slander and incitement to hatred, exist in law, the need to limit freedom of expression is moot. Indeed, the United States Constitution (First Amendment, 1791), Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and the 1976 ruling of the European Court of Human Rights, all stress the

importance of freedom of expression as a fundamental right (Petley 2007: 187-88; 2009: 162-65).

Instead of preventing expression of disagreeable or offensive material, it is reasoned that the focus should instead be on the punishment of criminal acts. Yet as Irena Maryniak argues in *Offence: The Christian Case*, 'in societies bound up with displays of conventional order, propriety, stability and integration, disparaging, offensive or "blasphemous" expressions are very readily perceived as acts of defamation' (2009: 1). Her work reveals the complexity of this position and current divisions on the matter, which also relate to the asymmetries of power in many democratic societies.

This debate about balancing opposing rights or defending absolute rights, which often seems to dominate present-day discussions of censorship, is further complicated by the issue of blasphemy, and there are many in contemporary democratic societies who argue for the protection of minority religions and, by extension, communities, from criticism and negative judgement. Salil Tripathi, writing in *Index on Censorship*, stresses the limitations of this stance:

We have come to expect that if someone writes or paints or imagines something that others find offensive, the offended party will take the law into their own hands and impose silence. This should outrage us. Instead, some have been telling writers to think more pleasant thoughts, artists to curb their imagination, playwrights to tackle safer topics, and not provoke the beast within all communities and religions. (2008: 170-71)

Oliver Kamm is another who sounds a warning:

The notion that free speech, while important, needs to be held in balance with the avoidance of offence is question-begging, because it assumes that offence is something to be avoided. Free speech does indeed cause hurt – but there is nothing wrong in this. Knowledge advances through the destruction of bad ideas. (2007: 84)

Bernard-Henri Lévy too, argues that ‘the truth is that a world where we no longer have the right to laugh at dogma would be an impoverished world’ (2008: 130). Stefan Collini makes a direct link between such balancing of rights and consensus politics and what he perceives to be a growing trend in self-censorship resulting from the belief that there is a need to show respect to minority cultures, so as to avoid conflict. He acknowledges that ‘there may be situations in which it is prudent to refrain from expressing contentious views, but that does not at all mean that their contentiousness is a legitimate ground for prohibiting their expression in general’ (2010: 40).

While it is clear from recent discussions that censorship is more than top-down repression, the notion of a productive or constitutive censorship incorporating forms of cultural control not covered by the obvious apparatuses of official state regulation is both contentious and difficult to pin down. A wider definition of censorship is, as Müller suggests, in danger of muddying the waters in any discussion of the issue and comes, as Post contends, ‘at the price of a certain abstraction’ (2004: 4). Yet, in contemporary society, whether under autocratic or democratic rule, it is clear that non-regulatory forms of cultural control do have an impact on authors, spectators, and society generally. As long as there are asymmetries of power within society, the question of respect for minorities, protection for certain groups and the abuse of power on the part of dominant elites will remain part of the debate. Therefore, the essays in this volume encompass

a broad definition of censorship and cultural control, while remaining cognisant of the particular socio-historical contexts in which these emerge. We are not presenting a new theory of censorship in this volume, but we are considering its many manifestations both as constitutive process and as a tool of repression.

### **Types of censorship**

*If censorship is a technique by which discursive practices are maintained, and if social life largely consists of such practices, it follows that censorship is the norm rather than the exception. Censorship materializes everywhere. (Post 1998: 2)*

There is no single form of censorship that fits all places and circumstances. ‘Prior censorship’ attempts to prevent something from being publicly expressed, while ‘punitive censorship’ punishes someone for what they have already disseminated. Censorship can include deletions, rewritings and insertions within a text; the proscription of actions, inflections or visual components in performance; the prohibition of individual works; the withdrawal or cancellation of works; the blacklisting, imprisonment or exile of an author; and, in extreme cases, even the killing of authors whose works are deemed a threat to the established order. In keeping with new definitions of censorship, Richard Burt considers it to be a scale, moving from ‘soft’ to ‘hard’ forms of regulation (1998: 18). Judith Butler contends that ‘explicit and implicit forms exist on a continuum in which the middle region consists of forms of censorship that are not rigorously distinguishable in this way’ (1998: 249-50). For Freshwater too, censorship can be viewed as ‘a continuum, with the brutal extremes of incarceration and murder at one end and the constitutive operation of self-censorship at the other’ (2009: 11).



Drawing on the Foucauldian idea of pervasive networks of power, we can identify several less obvious forms of censorship, not always imposed by official bodies, and including the humiliation, harassment and exclusion of authors; the imposition of fines and travel restrictions; loss of employment; and public campaigns against writers. Other forms of censorship include practices such as restrictions on the length of performance runs and types of venue. This type of constraint can be linked to Richard Burt's model of censorship, which is about 'dispersal and displacement', rather than 'removal and replacement' (1998: 17). While criticised by many of those affected, such as Fernando Arrabal in Spain, controls of this sort may, paradoxically, be linked to the emergence of an alternative, underground theatre scene, as described by Ostrowska in her essay on student and independent theatre groups in Poland.

Nor is censorship confined to the author of any given text, as publishers, readers, translators and performers have also suffered various forms of censorship and punishment for their part in the dissemination of a text or a play. Threats, fines, restrictions on paper supplies and imprisonment may all be applied, and prizes and subsidies used to reward or exclude.

Conversely, editors, translators and publishing companies may also play the role of censor, in the preparation of a text for submission to the official state bodies or in response to social pressure. In some cases, as we shall see, this amounts to another layer of direct censorship where their intervention leads to an initial round of textual cuts. In yet other instances, they, like the authors themselves, may have internalised the cultural norms of the day and made suggestions for textual changes in a less conscious way. Arguably, as Bourdieu suggests, such forms of censorship are the most successful and hardest to challenge, as they are hidden or unconscious (1992: 138). For Butler, the distinction between explicit and implicit censorship must be made:

The latter refers to implicit operations of power that rule out in unspoken ways what will remain unspeakable. In such cases, no explicit regulation is needed in which to articulate this constraint. [...] Such implicit forms of censorship may be, in fact, more efficacious than explicit forms in enforcing a limit of speakability. Explicit forms of censorship are exposed to a certain vulnerability precisely through being more readily legible. (1997: 130)

Reflecting the fact that not all censorship is official or documented, several of the contributors to this volume comment on the network of bodies involved in censorship, as well as its invisibility and insidious nature.

All of the above demonstrates the complexity of censorship and the resultant difficulty when analysing its practice and impact. While censorship is legislated for and systematically applied in some places, it assumes a more shadowy threat in others. Though the essays in this volume describe the different formal and informal censorship procedures in place across several states with differing ideologies, it is interesting to note certain parallels within all systems and certain recurrent accommodations made to deal with shifting political goals.

Censorship is usually political or moral, and sometimes religious, or a combination of these. Several factors influence the decision to censor and the severity of the censorship applied, including consideration of the genre, the notoriety of the author, the political or moral content of a text, and the intended readership. In addition, the political context is always crucial, and censorship may be more or less strictly applied at particular moments, depending on

circumstances, including changes in political regime, internal personnel and wider society. The introduction or intensification of political censorship is often linked to moments of significant social transformation and, in the aftermath of conflict and regime change, is usually linked to the creation and protection of a new national political identity. Moral censorship, like political censorship, is closely allied to national identity and to xenophobia, as it insists on certain social behaviour and often a racial, as well as moral, purity that is essentially mythical.<sup>1</sup>

In certain circumstances, such as during a conflict or a struggle for independence, many people who would otherwise defend freedom of expression, may advocate certain restrictions. Hence, while it may initially be introduced and justified in extreme circumstances, and often as a temporary measure, as with the Soviet *Glavlit* in 1922, harsh censorship may subsequently be normalised, particularly in non-democratic contexts, as was the case in post-Civil War Spain, East Germany, post-independence Zimbabwe and South Asia, and Brazil under military dictatorship. Existing censorship legislation, be it from wartime, or a previous regime, may be retained and employed within a new social order. The continued reference to a threat to national security from an identified enemy of the people, and the protection against this provided by the state, aids the normalisation of censorship in such circumstances. As is clear from several examples given in this volume, politically-motivated agents, whose own interests are not entirely separable from what they claim to be in the national interest or the common good, are the people who argue most vehemently for, and attempt to justify, the continuation of official censorship. Yet censorship is presented as a reflection of widespread public opinion or consensus in society, rather than the reflection of the political interests of a few. This could be seen as the essential dishonesty of much censorship: its practice in the name of a common

good that is not, in fact, served. As we see in essays in this volume by Cabrera, Gombár and Zenenga, for example, this causes problems for those who wish to criticise the authorities or put forward an alternative political view, as their stance is represented as a threat to security, rather than as part of a rational political debate.

In certain countries where the church-state divide is blurred or non-existent, political censorship has a strong tendency to go hand in hand with repressive moral or religious censorship, which reflects the leaders' definitions of themselves as morally pure and superior, and their religious beliefs as untouchable. This can be seen in the essays on Spain, Portugal and Brazil. In Ireland, as Ó Drisceoil shows, the strict moral censorship demanded by non-state bodies, such as Catholic Action, was often supported by the authorities in a state that had constructed a strongly Catholic national identity and reflected a severely restricted view of sexual morality. Elsewhere, such as in Britain, the moral censorship that dominated the theatre until 1968 was a reflection of conservative Victorian values, as Nicholson highlights in his essay. Generally, with all forms of moral censorship, there is a concentration on traditional ideas of respectability and decency presented as constituting a natural social consensus, an obsession with the body and with sexual morality, and a strong resistance to outside influence and internal social change. As with political censorship, there is a mistaken belief that if literature and, in the case we are examining, the theatre, can be cleansed of obscenity, immorality, indecency and vulgarity, then the pretence that these do not exist in society can also be upheld.

### **The secrecy of censorship**

*It is a revealing feature of censorship that it is not proud of itself, never parades itself.*

(Coetzee 1996: 35)

The practice of censorship is often shrouded in secrecy, a fact commented upon by several of the contributors to this volume. Often, the bodies in charge of censorship are given titles that do not reflect the reality of their function, for example, *Glavnit*, the Soviet Central Administration for Literary Affairs and Publishing, the Ministry for Tourism and Information in Spain, and the Ministry of Education and Culture's ambiguously-named 'Operación Claridad' (Operation Clarity) in Argentina (Graham-Jones 2011: 102).

The censors, or readers as they are often called, tend to be anonymous, though this varies across states and times. The Polish censor, K-62, who admitted to being a frustrated writer himself and to being enticed by the financial reward, confirmed the secrecy and the ambiguity of the system there: 'A lot of things were settled by telephone. Various high-ranking people telephoned and gave word of mouth instructions, leaving no traces' (Kuhiwczak 2008: 48). Bonsaver refers to the 'half-written rules' of censorship in Fascist Italy (2007: 207), a practice common in Hungary also, according to Gombár in her contribution to this volume. There were exceptions, of course, and as well as presiding over censorship systems, the political leadership sometimes participated directly in control of the press, literature or the stage. In Italy, for example, Mussolini occasionally involved himself in censorship decisions, and in the Soviet Union, Stalin and Khrushchev were both hands-on censors (Bonsaver 2007: 64, 159; Talbot 2007: 151; Ermolaev 1997: xiii). Most censors are not political leaders, however, and see their job as an administrative task as banal as any other, as the Polish writer Fedorowicz suggests:

the people who work as censors are just like us, only maybe a bit weaker. Some bloke finishes his studies of the Polish language, has a wife and two kids, they offer him a job — he takes it. He does what he is told — nothing on his own initiative — he is not overzealous. (1985: 15)

Official state censors are often writers, journalists, priests, academics, critics, as well as civil servants chosen for their political allegiance and loyalty, rather than for their suitability for the task. Of course, as several of the contributors, such as Ó Drisceoil, Goldman and Houchin note in this volume, censorship may also involve several other bodies operating through complex social and political networks.

### **The threat from the theatre: freedom and change**

*Thanks to the effects of lighting, sound, costumes, scenery, gestures and intonations, a play was likely to make a stronger impression on the viewer than a book on the reader. (Ermolaev 1997: 7)*

It is worth remembering, as André Brink argues, that ‘censorship is not primarily a literary, or even a moral institution but part of the apparatus of political power’ (1981: 9). It forms part of a network of social control that aims to restrict change. Often employing censorship in the name of the protection of the common good and of political or social stability, the failure of such ostensibly positive concepts to withstand irony, criticism or debate points instead to the weakness of those who employ such terms to prop up a dubious or weak political power.

Milan Kundera contends, ‘ideology wants to convince you that its truth is absolute. A novel shows you that everything is relative’ (1977: 7). Literature, therefore, could be seen as the

enemy of certainty and of dogmatic thinking. As Ilan Stavans comments in an interview: 'Fiction has always been understood to have a double edge – it allows for an escape from routine and it also showcases the possibilities of freedom' (Albin 2005, n.p.). Literature encourages the exploration of alternative, and often controversial, perspectives and the confrontation of murky secrets and taboos.

On a more abstract but related level, literary works and genres that do not respect traditional structures or the prevailing stylistic or thematic norms foreground the possibility of change by their very form. Such was the impact of the work of modernists in Russia, for example, where their style was taken as evidence of decadence and interpreted as an affront to the politically-sanctioned forms and themes of social realism. In Spain, too, Fernando Arrabal's experimental theatre was interpreted by censors as evidence of his malice, his instability and his godlessness (O'Leary 2008).

While the parallels between literary and social freedom can be drawn generally, the theatre is often judged to be a particular threat because of its potential for political mobilisation. Theatre, like other forms of literature, constructs, reflects and critiques how we view ourselves and wish to be viewed by others. Yet, given its public and social character, it is also one of the best fora for the exploration of unusual perspectives and values, and speculation about alternative visions of society. The theatre can enact on stage behaviour that would not be tolerated elsewhere. It can force the public to face the unpalatable, and to reflect on the motivations and consequences of certain actions. It can also expose what is hidden in society, including the workings of ideology and implicit censorship, and denounce or ridicule those in power.

Moreover, when the press is not free, the theatre may be one of the places where people seek the political commentary, albeit veiled, that is absent from other media. Like all good art, the theatre can provoke a public reaction and the danger associated with it is often linked to its supposed transformative capacity. One of the strengths, but also one of the perceived threats of the theatre is the communal aspect of performance and the solidarity it can engender. Theatre, after all, gathers people together to share an experience in the relative safety and anonymity of the playhouse, at times in circumstances where free association or freedom of movement is otherwise restricted, as Zenenga, Tyszka and Ostrowska show. Moreover, theatre is unpredictable: because it is live performance, it can be adapted to fit the circumstances of its staging, a fact that has been both taken advantage of by many playwrights and recognised by many censors, who have regularly considered it necessary to view dress rehearsals and even performances in order to monitor aspects of staging such as the use of costume and the delivery of lines. Improvised or experimental theatre that is not text-based is harder to censor and therefore often attractive to those who wish to present a political message in circumstances where freedom of expression is curtailed, and several essays here comment on the emergence of such theatre in a variety of political contexts.

Authorities may also fear that dramatists, like other writers, may be more persuasive in their arguments than politicians, and more adroit at influencing the public. The fear may be that the world represented by the dramatist will seem more attractive than the everyday reality of the public and may encourage people to act to change their personal circumstances or society as a whole. Marcuse's comments on art can, therefore, be applied to the theatre also:



Art breaks open a dimension inaccessible to other experience, a dimension in which human beings, nature and things no longer stand under the law of the established reality principle. Subjects and objects encounter the appearance of the autonomy which is denied them in their society. The encounter with the truth of art happens in the estranging language and images which make perceptible, visible, and audible that which is no longer or not yet perceived, said and heard in everyday life. (1978: 72)

There have been many notable examples of theatre censorship, political, moral and religious, throughout the world over the last century.<sup>2</sup> While the geographical and ideological circumstances may differ, what these censored works have in common is their representation of alternative social, political and moral codes of behaviour; they focus on change and challenge the status quo.

### **The legacy of censorship**

*The way to get rid of weeds is to abolish fields.* (Václav Havel 1983: 4)

In his mocking reference to the censors and their impression on the literary landscape, Havel highlights the damaging and sometimes counterproductive impact of censorship. The effects and legacy of censorship are not always easy to measure, dictated as they are not only by political requirements and social mores of the day, but by various interpretations of what constitutes censorship and how it should be applied. It is impossible to calculate how many books were never written, or plays were never staged because of censorship. It is clear that censorship can have a negative impact on dramatists and theatre practitioners, on publishers and translators, on the public, and on the cultural landscape itself, both at the moment of

censorship and into the future. Non-contentious, non-political works become the mainstay of literary production under authoritarian regimes, while politically correct works may dominate in democratic contexts, a trend that can be seen in the discourse on offence and the need to avoid it in literature and society.

Censorship most obviously affects the domestic author but in addition may hinder the influx of foreign ideas through the censorship of foreign works and the control of translation. Censorship, therefore, not only limits what can be disseminated within a state, but may also try to influence the information flow in and out of a country in order to protect both the status quo internally and the state's reputation abroad.

For the writer unwilling or unable to work within the restrictions imposed, censorship can lead to anger, despair and hopelessness. The lack of opportunity for normal dialogue and exchange around political and moral ideas may result in the writer's self-imposed silence. Some decide to write, not for the censor, but for export, or for posterity, and resign themselves to the idea that their work will not be published under the prevailing rule; others simply give up. Still others choose or are forced into exile, although, as the Romanian dissident novelist Petru Popescu observes, another curious aspect of the complex and ambiguous relationship between the censor and the censored is the attempt sometimes made by the former to lay claim to people they previously denounced. This tends to happen once they are in exile and have an established international reputation: 'First, one is not allowed to create, which results in emigration, and then one is claimed as a shining example of the national genius instead of being acknowledged as one of its victims, or perhaps I should say survivors' (1976: 72).

One of the great consistencies in censorship, particularly but not exclusively in the context of restrictions imposed by autocratic regimes, is its function as a threat and a warning against future action. As Foucault and others have shown, this is what helps to create the fear that leads to self-censorship and the normalisation of compliance. Recent examples in democratic states, particularly in the aftermath of the Salman Rushdie affair, can be seen in publishers' decisions to play it safe and not to publish literature that might cause upset.<sup>3</sup> At its most successful, censorship is internalised and self-censorship is practised, consciously or unconsciously. Self-censorship is one of the most insidious and unquantifiable effects of cultural control and censorship can, as both Butler and Bourdieu have suggested, be a formative process, producing certain responses through internalised acceptance of social norms and self-policing.

In autocratic states, self-censorship often means that the writer is working with the censor in mind, rather than the public, adapting ideas and expressions to suit the prevailing cultural norms. This may be conscious and strategic, or unconscious and the result of the naturalisation of censorship within society. It not only affects writers, but also publishers, theatre producers and translators who play a role in conveying the work to the public and who also stand to be punished if the work in question is in breach of the rules. It is this form of censorship more than any other that can lead to a wider cultural impoverishment in society, as it undermines the core function of creative work by making it compatible with dominant political goals, rather than free to challenge them. Yet in terms of political correctness, as Janelle Reinelt reasons, self-regulation can be seen as either positive or negative, and it is a particular concern in contemporary democratic states. She maintains that 'if censorship is

suppression of expression by force, political correctness is suppression of expression by cognitive assent or social pressure' (2011: 134).

Perhaps unsurprisingly when one considers that certain limits are accepted in all societies, and given the increasing acceptance of censorship as more than a simple repressive force, some have argued for the recognition of its positive effects. It could be claimed, for example, that as a direct result of its censorship by the authorities, literature has come to enjoy increased importance in some societies; after all, if it is worth restricting, then it must be of some value. Writing about democratic societies, for example, Dollimore contends that 'to ban a book is to guarantee its place in cultural history' (2001: 95). Thus the very attempts to eliminate alternative views give them not only visibility, but also a certain weight and validity. For Butler, 'the regulation that *states what it does not want stated* thwarts its own desire', bringing into public discourse what it would like to make unspeakable (1997: 131-32). Censorship, it can be claimed, has led to the creation of political literature, for better and for worse, and has also led to increased creativity in the theatre. Another consequence of this is that, in post-authoritarian societies, cultural production suddenly freed from censorship may feel disappointingly insubstantial. After all, wherever censorship exists so too do imaginative efforts to evade and subvert it. These range from straightforward attempts to influence and negotiate with the censors, to Aesopian strategies of disguising or veiling a political message in order to ensure the authorisation of a work. The rise of symbolism and other techniques in experimental theatre in various autocratic states could, therefore, be viewed as a positive consequence of the restrictions imposed by the censors.

Several of the essays in this collection refer to the strategies and devices employed by dramatists and practitioners to parody or mock the authorities that would censor them. In Zimbabwe, as

Zenenga shows in his contribution, traditional theatrical devices were used as an evasion technique when making political theatre, and other creatively 'positive' outcomes can be seen in the emergence of experimental, non-text-based theatre in Poland, Portugal, Hungary and several other states, as other essays in this volume show. Jean Graham-Jones refers to such actions as 'counter-censorship', 'a constructive alternative to the double-bind of external censorship and internal self-censorship' (2011: 105). A further side effect of this may be a way of 'reading between the lines' on the part of a public looking for a hidden political message. For Holquist, 'one of the ironies that define censorship as a paradox is that it predictably creates sophisticated audiences' (1994: 14). Given the ideological imperatives at work in certain political contexts, the theatre should be, and often is, read in an 'interested' way, and the spectators are complicit in the contestation of censorship. This may be aided by editors, translators and publishers working with authors to counter the effects of censorship by presenting the work in a less provocative manner, while preserving the central point. Such positive 'framing' of a play is mentioned in Tyszka's description of the work of certain Polish critics, and also in Poniž's reference to the work of the director in the Slovenian context.

There is another side to this, of course, and the claim that censorship is a positive productive force is one favoured by many censors looking to counter the argument that they damage culture. The South African academic and censor J. M. Leighton insisted in 1976 that some of the best writers (he cites Shakespeare and Milton) completed some of their greatest works under harsh censorship. He further suggested that good writers will use their tools cleverly to say what they wish to say using the guile and wisdom of their trade, and that literature will be the better for it: 'the writer who is totally destroyed by censorship law is not a writer, but a mediocrity' (1976: 45). It is an argument that allows the censors off the hook for any harm they may cause. Not all

attempts to avoid or to counter censorship have been successful, however, and even where they are, few would argue that a creative outcome should be taken as justification for the imposition of censorship in the first place. Jansen, quoting the Polish novelist Tadeusz Konwicki, warns of the possible long-term, more negative effects of such attempts to outwit the censors:

Initially it may be positive because it forces an author to find subtle forms of expression to evade the censor's ban. But these forms soon become conventions, the secret language becomes public, and the censors will ban it too. So new, more subtle forms must be devised. And so it goes, on and on, the literature becomes increasingly more obscure, eventually losing all traces of life. (1988: 194-95)

Not always obvious, but nonetheless detrimental, one of the longer-term effects of censorship is its contribution to the cultural impoverishment of society. Dramatists, theatre companies and directors, publishers and translators who fall foul of the authorities see their possibilities for future work limited as their notoriety or association with blackballed writers or works is used against them. Censorship may lead to the growth of anti-intellectualism in society, where writers are seen as treasonous, untrustworthy critics, and normal discourse and creative processes are curtailed. Again, it is hard to predict the long-term damage that is suffered by the cultural professions that have to accommodate their practices to censorship, be it overt and systematic as in Spain, Poland or Argentina, for example, or unofficial and *ad hoc*, as in contemporary Western democracies. In states where censorship has been practised at the level of publication, readers may have been introduced to texts, both domestic and foreign, in a bowdlerised form and may never have had access to the original as created by the author; dramas, as conceived by the playwrights, may never have been staged. Yet, even where censorship

legislation has changed and new freedoms exist, a negative legacy may remain. School and public libraries, bookshops and private collections may still be filled with the censored versions of texts, as most publishers have not retranslated and republished works post-censorship and theatres do not necessarily stage previously censored works once the restrictive legislation has been rescinded.

The cultural heritage passed on to the next generation is, therefore, a distorted one with unexplained silences. When, if ever, the silenced authors are permitted to speak, they may find themselves confronted with an audience uninterested in dwelling on the past and a new generation of writers with an alternative focus. Thus, the negative impact of censorship on canon creation is also worth considering, though as we see in several essays in this collection, the link between censorship and canon is a multifaceted one, as the use of existing canonical works sometimes allows for challenges to orthodox views in societies where freedom of expression is restricted.

Overall it can be argued that the reach of censorship is long. The cultural poverty often engendered by strict censorship and the encouragement of both writers and public to self-censor can lead to a distrust in culture generally and a failure to embrace all of the possibilities that it offers society with regard to the exploration of important social, political and moral issues.

Today, as more previously unknown material is becoming available through the opening of archives and the examination of their contents, we have an opportunity to contemplate the impact of censorship on several areas in society. Archival research helps us to understand better the systematic nature of censorship and its motivations where it has been applied by

state censors such as the Lord Chamberlain in Britain, by state officials in Hungary, Poland, Slovenia and East Germany, and under military dictatorships in Spain, Portugal and Brazil. Archives, such as those considered in several of the essays in this collection may also reveal the difficulties encountered by censors in interpreting and implementing norms, and those encountered by authors, theatre companies and publishers in their attempts to protect and disseminate their work. An additional, often overlooked, outcome of such archival research is that it also allows for the correction of misinformation and lies propagated over the years about certain authors and books, and it alerts people to the fact that the version of a text that they read may not have been the complete, uncut version. Furthermore, opening the archives can be a cathartic experience, part of a process of truth and reconciliation following regime change, and it is therefore related to our understanding of our history and ourselves.

### **The essays**

Contributors to the volume are academics and theatre practitioners, and some fit both of these categories. Their essays explore theatre censorship across Europe, Asia, Latin America, the United States and Africa, often drawing on original material from state archives. The volume is divided into three parts. The first deals with first-hand testimony of those directly engaged in conflicts over freedom of expression; the second with historical and current examples of censorship in authoritarian regimes; and the third with analyses of censorship and cultural control in democratic states. There are, however, significant parallels and intersections between the three parts, allowing us to create a fuller picture of the censorship experience and its impact on society. Indeed, what emerges from the volume as a whole is a consistency in censorship practices, motivations and justifications across geographical, temporal and political divides. The contributions to this volume demonstrate the importance of studying censorship, while taking



cognisance of divergences and shifts in the political, social and historical contexts described, in order to enhance our understanding of the past, to counter falsehoods perpetuated about certain authors and works and, significantly, to further our knowledge of the human impulse to censor.

In the opening essay of part one of the volume, the playwright, poet, novelist and filmmaker Fernando Arrabal, banned by the Franco regime in Spain but celebrated internationally, perversely cherishes censorship as a ‘gift’ bestowed by those in power. His contribution constitutes an uncompromising defence of freedom of thought and expression. Proud of the fact that his entire oeuvre was banned in the final years of the Franco dictatorship, he attacks ‘inquisitors’ of all kinds and celebrates artists and thinkers he has known who maintain their independence and resist manipulation.

In his contribution, academic and theatre director Juliusz Tyszka addresses subversive student theatre productions of 1978 and 1979 in Communist Poland. While there was an office charged with censorship, its practice was far wider than the activities of this one centre, and we are reminded that ‘every institution in the country, especially those dealing with the diffusion of mass information, was totally controlled by the party-state totalitarian apparatus’. Tyszka describes the hardline theatre censorship during the Stalin years before going on to consider student theatre, of which he was a practitioner himself, during the thaw. He focuses in particular on one dissident group, Teatr Ósmego Dnia (Theatre of the Eighth Day) and how it was targeted by the censors. He points to the often-overlooked role of the critic in ‘framing’ a piece of theatre for public, or indeed official, consumption.

In considering the main phases and impact of theatre censorship in Spain under the Franco regime, Patricia W. O'Connor highlights other less obvious forms of control, such as the use of prizes to reward supporters of the regime, and press campaigns against its opponents. She argues that one of the consequences of censorship was long-term damage to the international reputation of Spanish theatre. Moving beyond her survey of Spanish theatre censorship, O'Connor also recounts her own personal clashes with the authorities while she carried out research in the 1960s and 1970s, which led to her arrest and deportation.

Playwright, campaigner and academic Abhi Subedi analyses the complexities and challenges of writing and performing theatre in South Asia, where the legacy of colonial censorship is still felt, and where overt and repressive measures are combined with more insidious forms of control. He shows how language, semiotics and silence have become tools for the artist, who is threatened by an uneasy authority and who, as a consequence, writes 'with tears, ink and fire'.

Theatre director Lisa Goldman explores contemporary theatre censorship in the UK and Iran, documenting her experiences in both places in 2010. She describes a time of political turmoil in Iran and a young population clamouring for change. Closed theatre workshops where opinions could be freely expressed contrasted with public discourse mindful of the ever-vigilant state spies. What emerges here is the recourse by playwrights to myth, symbol and allusion to discuss contemporary issues. As in Poland, it is acknowledged that the restrictions in Iran have led to certain creative innovations, but Goldman refutes the notion that these could be seen to justify censorship generally. Turning to discussion of her involvement with Sikh writer Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti's 2010 play, *Behud (Beyond Belief)*, itself a response to the censorship of her earlier play *Behzti (Dishonour)* (2004), Goldman highlights thorny issues in recent discussions of

contemporary censorship in democratic societies, such as the avoidance of social unrest and offence and debates around multiculturalism and consensus.

Shifting the focus from the experience of practitioners to the analyses of literary critics and theatre historians, the second part of the volume explores various examples of historical and current censorship across several repressive regimes. Slovenian theatre director and academic Denis Poniž considers the official reception of Arrabal's *The Architect and the Emperor of Assyria* in Yugoslavia and points to the variety of political bodies that were involved in cultural control there. The case of Arrabal's work in Yugoslavia is an interesting one, as the playwright was generally feted there as an enemy of fascism, but nonetheless, as Poniž shows, this play was interpreted negatively by the communist regime and concerns were raised about the possible interpretation of the play as a criticism of the country's leadership. Additional disquiet was expressed about the 'inappropriate' sexual content of the play and, more unpredictably, about a negative reference to God. The discussions about censorship of this play are also noteworthy for their exposure of divisions between a liberal and a more conservative wing of the ruling party.

Joanna Ostrowska's essay explores the complex and 'perverse' relationship between experimental theatre groups and censorship in Poland. She addresses the positive creative output of such companies, in what she describes as the practitioners' game of hide and seek with the censors. One of the consequences of this was the introduction of other types of restriction (on location, length of run, etc.) in order to regain the upper hand. The paranoia of the regime is highlighted by its exclusively political interpretations of experimental theatre: 'They could not understand that art without a political subtext could exist.' Given the mistrust of the censors and

the ambiguity of the system, Ostrowska explores the strategies employed by dramatists in order to evade or circumvent the censors. Much of the experimental theatre in Poland developed within the university system, a fact that allowed some protection for the artists, as the public and the works concerned were considered of minority interest and, therefore, less dangerous. She demonstrates how foreign connections were exploited, and street theatre grew, in mostly successful attempts to evade the harsh censorship of the authorities.

Barrie Baker's contribution concerns the ban imposed on a controversial play, *Der Georgsberg*, written in 1984 by Rainer Kerndl, the drama critic of the national newspaper in the former German Democratic Republic. Focusing on the insidious nature of censorship under communist rule and the regime's concern for its reputation abroad, this essay documents the fall from grace of a government supporter. Baker contends that there is still some mystery surrounding the prohibition of the play, and he puts forward some likely reasons for the negative assessment of the work and considers the political players who may have been implicated in the events.

The use of the canon to evade censorship is evident from Zsófia Gombár's contribution, in which she contrasts the reception of Shakespeare's theatre in Hungary and Portugal and points to some unexpected parallels across such ideologically opposed regimes. The most obvious difference she notes is that censorship in Hungary tended to be political, while in Portugal the focus was on moral control. Her essay, which draws on materials from state archives, also attests to the difficulties faced by the censorship researcher, as the evidence for indirect censorship methods is scarce. Gombár also questions the idea that the censor was unintelligent, and she interprets acts of tolerance on the part of censors as a way of diffusing certain tensions: allowing the public to see a

subversive play was a safe way of allowing opposition to be expressed, without any meaningful threat to the authorities.

Ana Cabrera's essay on censorship during the dictatorship in Portugal focuses in particular on the years 1950 to 1974, a period that includes the transition from Salazar to Caetano in which censorship practices were relatively stable. Based on research carried out in the state archives, she considers the difficulty of interpreting the vague and contradictory guidelines available on political and moral issues. Her essay highlights the censors' problems when dealing with canonical texts which were often a resource for practitioners to express criticism indirectly. As Cabrera demonstrates, in Portugal, just as in Spain and elsewhere, national authors were more harshly censored than foreign authors.

Mayra Rodrigues Gomes and Eliza Bachega Casadei trace the development and shifts in theatre censorship in Brazil from 1925 to 1970, using as a tool the documents held in the Miroel Silveira Archive in São Paulo. Their investigations not only give us insight into the workings of censorship across many decades and political transitions, but also highlight the importance of such archival work for the recovery of 'lost' or forgotten plays. From their examination of censorship documents, they are able to define types of censorship employed, to identify the genres most often targeted, and to consider the concerns of the censors both generally and at particular – often politically sensitive – points in time.

Drawing on her TRACE [TRAducciones CEnsuradas – Censored Translations] project, which mined the Spanish censorship archives for information on translated texts, Raquel Merino Álvarez considers the treatment of foreign drama in Spain under Franco. In addition to offering

us information about the translators not recorded elsewhere, this essay demonstrates how in Spain foreign drama was less harshly treated than domestic drama, and recounts how taboo topics were often introduced via foreign plays.

Praise Zenenga's contribution centres on censorship in post-independence Zimbabwe. He describes how the post-independence regime employed censorship legislation from its colonial past in an attempt to control critics of the new ruling elite. He illustrates the variety of controls, laws, detentions, beatings, intimidation and other forms of persecution used to target popular theatre, which, with its long tradition of political and social commentary in Zimbabwe, is considered a threat.

The third part of the volume reflects the kinds of censorship and cultural control that have flourished and continue to exist in democratic societies. Censorship in democratic societies is often considerably more nuanced and harder to identify and label than in authoritarian regimes, though it is striking that many of the same arguments, motivations and justifications arise. The examples here are both historical and current and echo discussions of the nature of censorship in writings by contemporary critics. Focusing on examples from Europe and the US, these essays consider the power of lobby groups, particularly where official censorship bodies are absent. Such hidden censorship is revealed in Donal Ó Drisceoil's contribution. He argues that while Ireland escaped official state censorship of the theatre under British rule and later under the Free State, 'indirect control was maintained, based upon the threat of revoking theatre licences, or even introducing an explicit censorship of the stage'. He exposes the authorities' attempts to impose political detachment in theatrical productions during WWII when Ireland maintained

an official neutrality. This was done despite the lack of formal legislation, but was often successful in its unofficial and invisible censorship methods of neutralising the stage.

Steve Nicholson presents an analysis of British theatre censorship up to 1968 and questions its effectiveness and its impact, noting that ‘no-one was killed by the British system of theatre censorship or had their life threatened, no-one was sent to prison, and probably no-one’s career was ended’. Whilst evasion was common and plays were often subjected to mild cuts or delays, the overall impact of censorship seems to have been minimal. Yet, he argues, ‘the struggle to abolish stage censorship was passionately fought’, and citing Sir Peter Hall, he suggests that ‘beneath the superficially genteel processes of control, the boot of the state remained ready and waiting to be called upon if required’.

John Houchin considers the legal battles prompted by the staging of the political rock-musical, *Hair* (Ragni, Rado and MacDermot, 1968) in the United States. The court cases took place during the Nixon Years, 1970 and 1975, a period that marks the transition between the freedoms associated with the 1960s and the consolidation of the New Right. He argues that the decisions made in this landmark case define the contemporary relationship between freedom of speech and performance in the United States.

Vicki Ann Cremona’s contribution documents the social debate and legal battles that began in Malta in January 2009, following the prohibition on moral grounds of the play *Stitching* by the Scottish author Anthony Nielson. The theatre company involved unsuccessfully challenged the ban, but has since taken the case to the European Court of Human Rights, where a verdict has yet to be delivered. The repercussions in Malta have been significant, and the censorship laws have

been changed. The essay not only demonstrates the impact of cultural regulation within a modern democratic state, but further highlights the complex and current issues surrounding public performance, morality, politics, and our understanding of theatrical representation as something that may reflect and explore the darker side of human nature without celebrating it.

Theatre censorship remains a current practice in many countries, sometimes tacit or hidden, at other times overtly imposed. The present collective volume aims to improve our understanding not only of theatre and its interpretation, but also and more generally, of the interactions between culture and the state. It allows us to create a fuller portrait of censorship – both repressive and productive – of the arts in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The plays that authorities or social groups choose to ban or to allow reveals much about the political situation and the moral climate of the day; changes in censorship and our understanding of it are, therefore, accurate markers of social and political transformation. Censorship is not simply a historical issue, but rather a complex and constantly contested live one. It merits our attention because it remains relevant in contemporary society and can both add to our knowledge of the past and help to inform current debates about freedom of expression. This volume encourages us to perceive common threads and parallels in censorship practice across ideologies, states and times, thus allowing us to draw some conclusions about the nature of censorship itself, its relationship with the theatre in particular and with the state more generally, thereby enhancing our insight on a human practice that shifts and mutates, but never dies.



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<sup>1</sup> For example, anti-semitism was a feature of censorship in both Germany and Italy in the 1930s (Heinrich 2006: 224; Bonsaver 2007: 172-74).

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of historical theatre censorship, see Jones (2001) and Sova (2004). Some more recent examples are gathered in Olyaie et al (2008).

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of this case and its legacy, see *Index on Censorship*, '25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Salman Rushdie Affair', online archive: <http://ioc.sagepub.com/cgi/collection/rushdieaffair>