WONDRIUM

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Literary Survey

Banned Books, Burned Books
Forbidden Literary Works

Guidebook

Maureen Corrigan

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

About Maureen Corrigan i
Disclaimer iii
1. Bowdlerizing the Bard 1
2. *Ulysses* on Trial 9
3. The Defense for *Lady Chatterley's Lover* 18
4. Censors from the Inquisition to the Puritans 26
5. Anthony Comstock's Moral Crusade 35
6. Books on Fire: The Reformation to Rushdie 43
7. Allen Ginsberg's Alarming "Howl" 52
8. Holden Caulfield's Subversive Voice 59
9. Artistry, Morality, and Nabokov's *Lolita* 67
10. Authors Who Censor Themselves 76
11. The Hidden Dangers of Fairy Tales 85
12. Contested Classics of Children's Literature 95
13. New Kids' Books, Old Objections 105
14. Canceled Authors 114
15. *Huckleberry Finn* and Race in America 123
16. *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Then and Now 131
17. Young Adult Fiction and Its Discontents 139
18. Attempts to Suppress #MeToo Books 148
19. The Battle over Critical Race Theory 157
20. Alice Walker and Toni Morrison under Attack 165
21. The Textbook Wars 174
22. The Backlash against Harry Potter 183
23. *Fun Home*: An All-Too-Graphic Memoir 191
24. Contesting the Great American Novel 200

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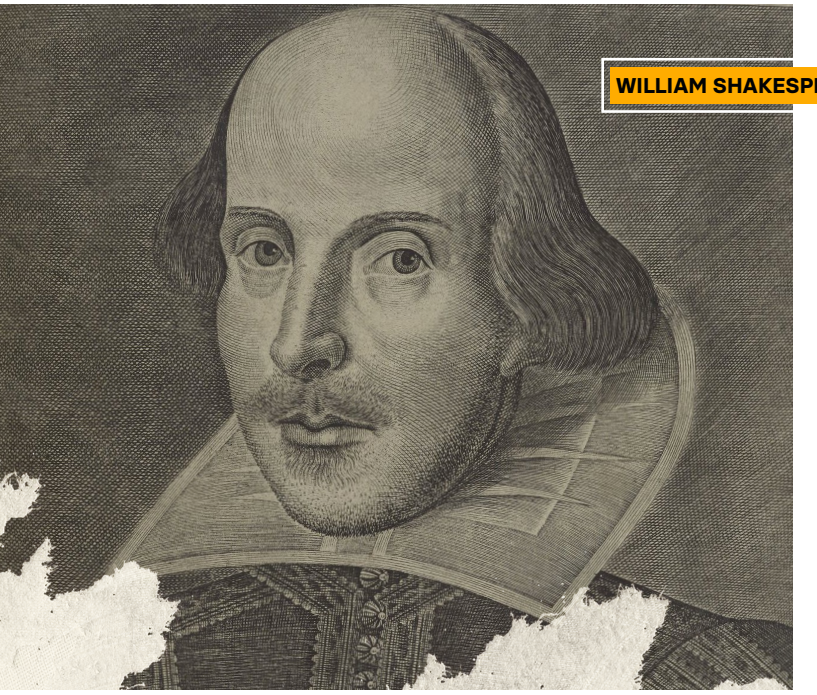
1

BOWDLERIZING THE BARD

This course will cover some of the so-called greatest works of literature ever written in English and some literature that's considered not so great. What all these works have in common is that someone thought they were dangerous enough to challenge, ban, or even burn. These lectures will trace the history in the United States and Great Britain of the challenges to books, the censoring of books, book bannings, and book burnings. You'll explore the common reasons books have been and continue to be banned, including profanity, heresy, illicit or sexual content, racism, and violence. You'll also trace the shifting trends in why books are challenged.



CENSORING SHAKESPEARE

It's a crucial part of critical thinking to make evaluative judgments about works of literature. Many factors feed into this determination of deciding why one book may be better than another. Language or literary style is one such factor; the subject—and especially its social relevancy—can be another. The identity of the author can be another in these days where people are so much more aware of the urgent need to affirm their commitment to a more inclusive culture. More and more these days, books are censored or banned because of the identity of their authors and, especially, because of perceived or suspected transgressions those authors have committed. The idea that some books are too dangerous to read implicitly affirms the power of literature to shake readers up, inspire or frighten us, and spark large-scale political and cultural changes.

Regarding William Shakespeare and his current contested place in the literary canon, on library bookshelves, and in school curriculums, how did his works become essential reading? Why are they sometimes the target of censorship and banning? Given the conviction with which so many scholars and readers defend Shakespeare's literary supremacy, it's ironic that little is known for certain about his life. Even Shakespeare's birthday is something of an educated guess. A similar ambiguity informs the textual history of Shakespeare's plays. For starters, scholars don't even know for certain how many he wrote—at least 37 is the accepted baseline number.

Considering the complicated textual history of Shakespeare's plays, the most crucial fact is that no substantive written manuscripts survive from the main body of Shakespeare's canon. The play manuscripts that Shakespeare produced would have become the property of his acting company. For most of his professional life, this was the Lord Chamberlain's Men. The plays would have gone through at least five different stages of revision and transcription as they were, for instance, annotated for inclusion in the theater company's promptbook and prepared for provincial touring companies. Nineteen of Shakespeare's plays were published individually in quarto format before the appearance of his collected plays in 1623 in the First Folio. Second, Third, and Fourth Folio editions appeared through the 17th century. In 1709, dramatist Nicholas Rowe produced the first edited text of the plays. Shakespeare's second editor was Alexander Pope, who brought out his edition in 1723.

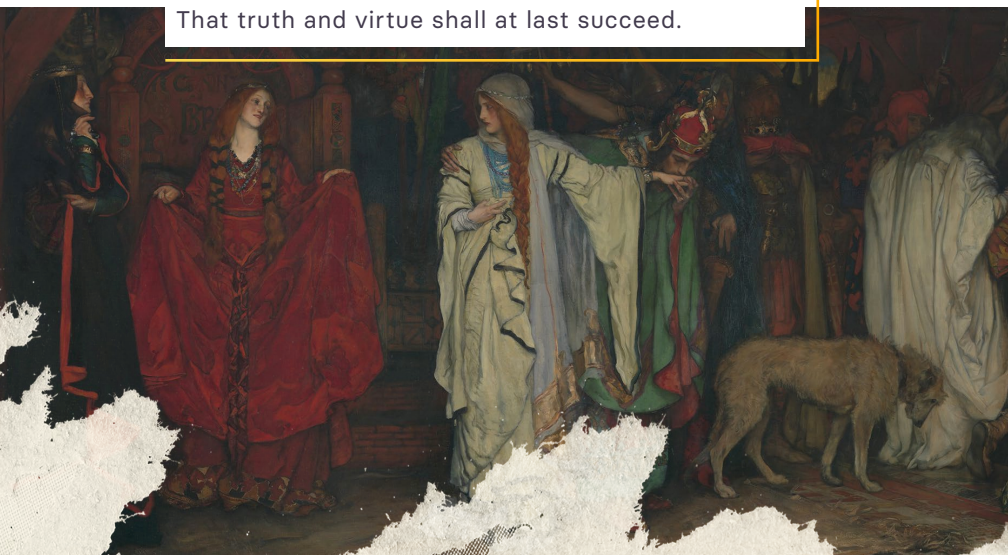
Pope, who was then England's leading poet, was rather impressed with himself. Consequently, he inserted his own opinions into the texts of Shakespeare's plays. G. Blakemore Evans says Pope would mark

> the "good" or "moral" [passages] with inverted commas and relegate the "bad" to the bottom of the page as the illiterate interpolations of the ignorant actors and unworthy of a place in the text. If he did not understand a word or construction, he often changed it, and he worked assiduously to regularize Shakespeare's metre.

Evans adds that "it took over a hundred years for Shakespeare's text to recover from the well-meant but misguided ministrations of both Pope and Rowe." Pope, for instance, found Shakespeare's puns and bawdy sexual allusions distasteful. Thus, he proceeded to clean up or excise them altogether.

The Second Folio of Shakespeare's plays, which appeared in 1632, was censored in Spain by the Holy Office (otherwise known as the Inquisition). That censor, Guillermo Sanchez, excised what he considered sensitive sexual and religious material. He even cut out *Measure for Measure* from the Second Folio edition. Moreover, English poet laureate Nahum Tate took it upon himself to rewrite *King Lear* in 1681, giving it a happy ending. His version remained popular until the mid-19th century. The Fool is absent from Tate's cheerful version, Cordelia and Edgar fall in love, and Lear recovers his mental faculties and gracefully retires at the end of Act V. Edgar gives the closing benediction:

> Our drooping country now erects her head,
> Peace spreads her balmy wings, and plenty blooms.
> Divine Cordelia, all the gods can witness
> How much thy love to empire I prefer!
> Thy bright example shall convince the world
> (Whatever storms of fortune are decreed)
> That truth and virtue shall at last succeed.



THOMAS BOWDLER

The most notorious Shakespearean censor was Dr. Thomas Bowdler, who was born in 1754. For his tone-deaf work in making Shakespeare fit for early 19th-century family reading hour, Bowdler was immortalized by the creation of a new word in the English language: To *bowdlerize* means to expurgate in a puritanical and clumsy fashion. In 1807, Bowdler brought out *The Family Shakespeare*, a version of the Bard's plays "in which nothing is added to the original Text: but those words and expressions are omitted which cannot with propriety be read allowed in a Family." This was Shakespeare without his characteristic ribald jokes.

Thomas Bowdler's name appears on the title page of *The Family Shakespeare*. However, as scholars have long contended, he most likely was not the volume's only—or perhaps even its chief—author. Two manuscript letters that were unearthed in Cambridge University's library in the mid-1960s refer to "Mrs. Bowdler's Shakespeare," who, along with her brother, had "done a good deal toward moralizing Shakespeare." Thomas Bowdler had two sisters, Jane and Henrietta. Since Jane had died in 1784 and Thomas Bowdler was by then unmarried, Henrietta was the sole candidate for this reference.

Whichever of the Bowdler siblings did the lion's share of the excising in that first edition of *The Family Shakespeare*, their motives were well-intentioned. *The Family Shakespeare* was a cheaper edition of the Bard's work, as opposed to the fine private editions owned by the wealthy and by university libraries. The Bowdlers also wanted to make Shakespeare more accessible to everyone by making his work suitable to be read out loud around the family hearth.

However, from such good intentions came these abominations: In all of Shakespeare's plays, "God!" is replaced with "Heavens!" In *Henry IV, Part 2*, the prostitute Doll Tearsheet is omitted entirely. In *Hamlet*, Ophelia doesn't commit suicide but rather is a victim of accidental drowning. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the racy line in which Mercutio declares that "the bawdy hand of the dial is now upon the prick of noon" was cleaned up to read "the hand of the dial is now upon the point of noon." One of the most infamous examples of bowdlerism, however, may be a myth: namely, that the Bowdlers revised Lady Macbeth's famous line "Out, damned spot!" to read, "Out, crimson spot." The Bowdlers' legacy is remembered on Bowdler Day, July 11—a day to reflect on censorship and the necessity for free speech. Unfortunately, however, bowdlerism is still in practice today.

MODERN BOWDLERISM

In an essay titled "Star-Crossed Platonic Lovers, or Bowdler Redux" that appeared in 1985 in the periodical *English Journal*, contributor Maureen F. Logan identifies herself as an American English teacher who's taught in colleges and high schools for the past 15 years. She writes:

> I had always considered myself fortunate that censorship had never entered my classroom or affected my selection of books. Over the years, I introduced such high-risk titles as *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, *Black Boy*, and *My Darling, My Hamburger* without causing the slightest stir. ... I hardly anticipated how calmly and quietly censorship, when it did arrive, could creep into my classroom.

Her Rhode Island high school's English department recently adopted an updated edition of *The Pelican Shakespeare* and was dismayed to discover this disclaimer in the teacher's manual: "This version omits trivial or ribald wordplay and especially difficult, static passages of poetry." Any language with sexual connotations or references to parts of the body, sexual passion, or pregnancy got the editorial ax. In the case of *Romeo and Juliet*, a large part of the play was eviscerated; the rest lost much of its flavor. One key example Logan cites in her article is from Friar Laurence's introductory soliloquy that conflates birth and death in act 2, scene 3. Lines crucial to the introduction of the tomb as a key image are deleted:

> The earth that's nature's mother is her tomb,
> What is her burying grave, that is her womb;
> And from her womb children of divers kind
> We suckling on her natural bosom find,
> Many for virtues excellent,
> None but for some, and yet all are different.

Confronting an editor of this new edition at an English conference, Logan was told that the cuts were made at the request of teachers who "were uncomfortable dealing with certain words and themes."

The arguments over the teaching of Shakespeare will continue as long as Shakespeare is taught in schools. School boards, PTAs, and library systems are the most common enforcers of censorship or outright banning of books. It was in 1996 in a much-talked-about case when a New Hampshire school system banned *Twelfth Night* by a rule titled "prohibition of alternative lifestyle instruction." This meant that teachers in the district were forbidden from discussing homosexuality in the classroom. Recall that the plotline of that Shakespearean comedy involves the heroine, Viola, dressing for most of the play as a boy, during which time she falls in love with Duke Orsino.

The Merchant of Venice continues to be Shakespeare's most uncomfortable play to read and/or perform. According to a 2013 exhibit on the censoring of Shakespeare mounted by the Special Collections library at California's

Occidental College, since World War II, *The Merchant of Venice* has been banned in more schools than any other Shakespeare play. That "since World War II" is important because awareness of the anti-Semitism baked into the Jewish character of Shylock the moneylender became especially acute in the wake of the Holocaust. The fact that *The Merchant of Venice* was a favorite of Nazi Germany hasn't helped the reputation of the play.

Schools and libraries aren't the only arbiters of what people can or cannot read. The prison system controls which readings inmates have access to. According to a story in *Huffington Post*, in 2017, an edition of Shakespeare's sonnets was banned by the Texas prison system (granted, it did have images of unclothed children in it). However, Hitler's *Mein Kampf* was permitted.

These days, challenges to Shakespeare in the curriculum are just as, if not more, likely to come from progressives as conservatives. The group #DisruptTexts is a crowdsourced coalition of teachers who advocate "disrupting" the traditional ways canonical works have been taught. For instance, a teacher in New Jersey teaches *Romeo and Juliet* "through the lens of adolescent brain development with a side of toxic masculinity analysis." Another teacher at a prep school in the Twin Cities uses *Coriolanus* "to teach Marxist theory." There are critics who'd like to cancel or ban such interpretations of Shakespeare, especially in high schools. The debate over what and how to read rages on and always will. Books wouldn't be a target of censorship and banning if they weren't so powerful. Ironically, sometimes, the best way to publicize a book, increase its audience, and secure its legacy is to attempt to ban it.

READING

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2

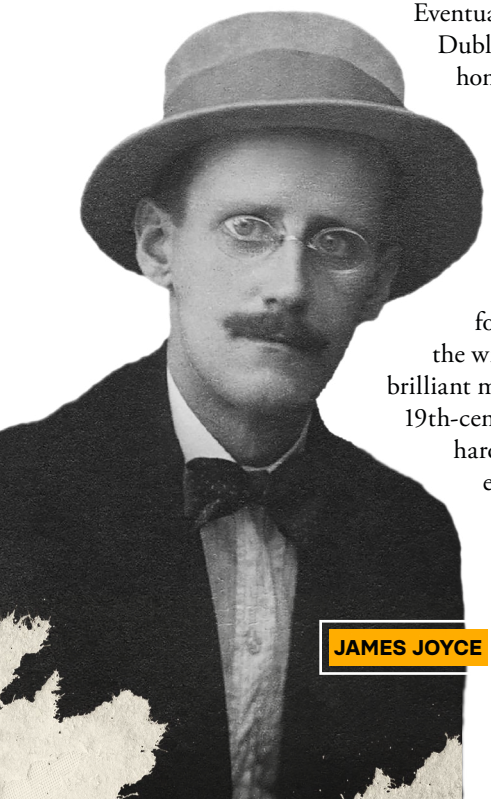
ULYSSES ON TRIAL

Ulysses by James Joyce was published in book form in 1922. It was promptly banned as obscene throughout most of the English-speaking world for over a decade. *Ulysses* is the novel that ushered modernism into the mainstream. One of the chief aims of modernism was to do away with Victorian pruderies. As critic Kevin Birmingham says, "nothing in *Ulysses* is unspeakable." Why was it unprintable? As shown in this lecture, that question would fuel two epic censorship battles (and one appeal) that would determine the fate of *Ulysses* and most of the controversial books that have followed. The fact that people even assume these days that free expression in art is a given is due to *Ulysses* and the trials that the book and its author endured.

JAMES JOYCE'S EARLY LIFE

An excellent biography on James Joyce to read is Richard Ellman's massive, authoritative 1959 classic called *James Joyce*. Joyce had the kind of childhood that many people try to forget. He was born in 1882 in Dublin. He was the eldest of 10 surviving children of John Stanislaus Joyce and Mary Jane Murray, a talented piano player. John Stanislaus had inherited enough money to live in middle-class comfort. However, he was a violent drunk who lost his job as a tax collector. After that firing, he became increasingly lackadaisical about supporting his family. The family would eventually move 14 times throughout Joyce's childhood.

At age six, Joyce was sent to a Jesuit boarding school. He was pulled out a few years later because his family could no longer pay the fees. The young boy educated himself for the next two years until he was admitted as a scholarship student at a Jesuit secondary school in Dublin. Eventually, Joyce entered University College, Dublin. He graduated with second-class honors in Latin and a BA in 1902.



JAMES JOYCE

Along the way in his educational journey, where the Jesuits were his primary teachers, Joyce lost his Catholic faith. The sordid poverty of his childhood, alternating with periods of relative financial stability for his family, surely endowed Joyce with the wisdom that nothing is stable. For the brilliant modernist innovator who would take the 19th-century novel and make it modern, that hard-won wisdom about mutability was essential to his artistic career. It also, no doubt, helped Joyce weather the ups and downs of the sometimes-vicious reception of *Ulysses*.

In 1904, Joyce began writing the short stories that would become collected in *Dubliners*. The culminating story of that collection, "The Dead," is often considered one of the best, if not the greatest, short stories in the English language. Joyce met his future wife, Nora, in Dublin in 1904. She was working as a chambermaid at Finn's Hotel. The pair had their first date and first sexual assignation on June 16. These days, June 16 is known to Joyceans around the world as Bloomsday, after Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses*. People around the world dress like characters in *Ulysses* and eat the food mentioned in the novel, such as kidneys and gorgonzola sandwiches, washed down with burgundy wine. It's also a day that has grown contentious due to the incendiary content of *Ulysses*.

Joyce—who was always at war with convention—refused to marry Nora until much later in life. However, she nonetheless agreed to leave Ireland with him. Joyce worked as a teacher and a banker in Austria-Hungary and Trieste. The couple's two children, Giorgio and Lucia, were born in that city. They also lived in Zurich, where Joyce got a job teaching. The wandering Joyce family barely scraped by, even with the aid of friends and patrons.

ULYSSES

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Joyce's bildungsroman about growing up and growing into his vocation as an artist, was published in 1916. In February 1917, Joyce experienced the onset of horrible eye problems that would torment him for most of his life. The pain of his chronic iritis was so great that there are accounts of Joyce collapsing in the street in agony. Glaucoma and cataracts also developed, as did temporary onsets of blindness. Scholars continue to debate whether the source of Joyce's debilitating eye problems and eventual blindness was syphilis.

Joyce endured 12 operations and other invasive treatments for his chronic eye problems while trying to keep up his work and spirits and save his vision. Joyce named his and Nora's daughter Lucia in honor of the Catholic patron saint of the blind. One final observation about Joyce's serious eye troubles: Astute critics like Kevin Birmingham have pointed out how physical and rooted in the human body *Ulysses* is. It describes bodily pleasures and pains in granular detail. In the "Calypso" episode, for instance, Leopold Bloom reads a

racy story while having a bowel movement as he's sitting in an outhouse toilet. Joyce himself talked of *Ulysses* as an "epic of the human body"—a natural subject for a writer who, in some way, was such a prisoner of his own.

Joyce worked on *Ulysses* for roughly seven years, from 1916 to 1922. He envisioned the novel as a modern reimagining of Homer's *Odyssey*. Many critics have made parallels between Homer, the blind poet, and Joyce, his modern inheritor. The novel is a structural marvel. All events take place in Dublin on a single day: June 16, 1904. The novel revolves around three characters: writer Stephen Dedalus (whom Joyce's loyal readers first met in *Portrait of the Artist*); Leopold Bloom (whose wanderings throughout Dublin are meant to parallel Homer's adventures); and Bloom's wife, Molly (whose sexually charged soliloquy ends *Ulysses* and was one of the passages that determined the novel's fate in court).

Ulysses unfolds in stream-of-consciousness style: The readers are privy to all three of these characters' thoughts as they bathe, have sex, read, eat, and defecate. The novel is an English major's joy due to its many symbolisms and allusions. Each episode invokes a different art, science, color, and element. The "Aeolus" episode, for instance, is set in a newspaper office and is full of windy rhetoric. All this symbolism coexists with the Homeric correspondences that form the scaffolding of the novel.

Probably the most discussed section of *Ulysses* in the classroom, at least, is Episode 14, called "The Oxen of the Sun." It takes place in a maternity hospital. This witty setting allows Joyce to trace the development of the English language from Anglo-Saxon to his own present day. This development is paralleled with the growth of a fetus in the womb. Here is a passage that can provide you with a sense of the difficulty of this episode:

> In ward wary the watcher hearing come that man mild-hearted eft rising with swire ywimpled to him her gate wide undid. Lo, levin leaping lightens in eyeblink Ireland's westward welkin! Full she dread that God the Wreaker all mankind would fordo with water for his evil sins. Christ's rood made she on breastbone and him drew that he would rather infare under her thatch. That man her will wotting worthful went in Horne's house.

It's maddening and brilliant and exhausting to read. "The Oxen of the Sun," like most of *Ulysses*, is suffused with raunchy humor. However, when the novel was on trial for alleged obscenity, many of the readers, including the lawyers for the prosecution, had difficulty making out what exactly Joyce was saying. Literary obscurity, for Joyce, became a saving grace.

PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK V. MARGARET ANDERSON AND JANE HEAP

Even before it was completed, three episodes of *Ulysses* were published in 1918 in the *Little Review*. This was a literary magazine based in Chicago and run by publishers Jane Heap and Margaret Anderson. In January and May of 1919 and January 1920, the United States Postal Service seized and burned some issues of the *Little Review* containing those episodes on the grounds that Joyce's writing was obscene and supportive of anarchy. The Post Office, as Birmingham details, was "the cornerstone of the US censorship regime." The Post Office, during and immediately after World War I, was given the power under the Espionage Act to seize material it deemed unpatriotic or, by extension, corrupting of conventional morals.

In September of 1920, a New York attorney brought issues of the *Little Review* to the attention of John S. Sumner. Sumner was the secretary of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice. He filed a complaint against the magazine. A month later, Heap and Anderson were arrested and charged with obscenity for publishing the "Nausicaa" episode of *Ulysses* in the April 1920 issue of the *Little Review*. The episode features Leopold Bloom masturbating in response to the sight of a young woman, Gerty MacDowell, displaying her underclothes as she sits on a rock by the seashore. However, you have to be a discerning reader to unpack what's going on in that episode.

The obscenity trial of *People of the State of New York v. Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap* commenced on Friday, February 4, 1921. Three judges oversaw the trial. The two publishers were represented by John Quinn, who had had success in earlier free speech battles. As Birmingham recounts, Quinn tersely told the two women that they had two responsibilities: "to shut their

mouths and to surround themselves with 'window trimmings'" (or ladylike dress). Quinn personally disapproved of the pair for their radical politics and personal lives (both women were lesbians). However, he was a rabid defender of Irish literature and Irish writers.

Anderson later wrote that Quinn disregarded their insistence that *Ulysses* be defended on its inherent "beauty and truth." Instead, he focused on the obscenity charge. He argued that the novel might well be considered "disgusting in portions, but no more so than Swift, Rabelais, Shakespeare [or] the Bible." Then, inspired by an obscure argument launched by Judge Learned Hand in a censorship case of 1913, Quinn sought to persuade the judges that the standards of obscenity change with time and that *Ulysses* was a product of a new modern age. Joyce's obscurity, Quinn maintained, was also a key factor against its ability to incite lewd thoughts or actions. If all but the most sophisticated readers couldn't comprehend what was going on in *Ulysses*, how could they be sexually aroused? Judge McInerney agreed.

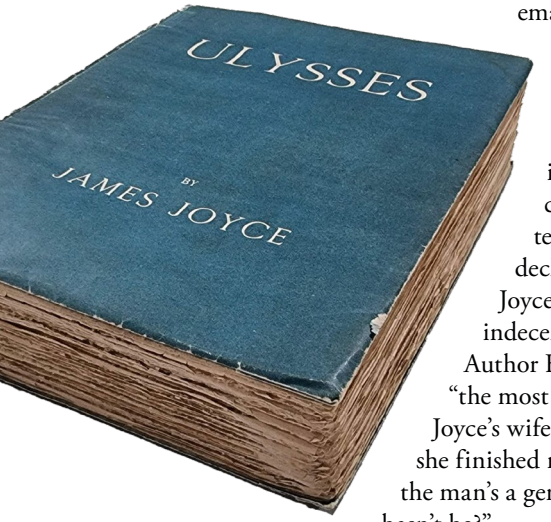
At the end of the trial, Judge Kernochan ruled that Heap and Anderson were guilty of violating the New York state law against obscenity. They were sentenced to serve 10 days in prison or pay a fine of $100, which they did not have. Fortunately, a wealthy female supporter paid their fine. The *Little Review* ceased publication of *Ulysses*. Rumor has it that the issues of the magazine seized by the Post Office were sent to the Salvation Army, where "fallen women" were put to work ripping pages apart.

THE PUBLICATION OF *ULYSSES*

That first trial set the stage for the second in US District Court in 1933. However, in between those two trials came another momentous event: the publishing of *Ulysses* in book form thanks to the courage of Sylvia Beach. Beach was an American who'd moved to Paris during World War I and remained to open a bookstore in 1919 that she called Shakespeare and Company. Beach was not wealthy. However, she mentored, fed, encouraged, and even sheltered some of the greatest of the "Lost Generation" writers, including F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway. Beach, of course, had read the excerpts of *Ulysses*. When Joyce struggled to find a publisher, Beach offered to publish it herself—even though she had never published a book before.

Ulysses (in book form) was published on Joyce's birthday, February 2, in 1922. For her monumental exertions on Joyce's behalf, Beach earned the enduring gratitude of the literary world but not much else. She had taken out loans to publish the book and accumulated a mountain of debt when Joyce betrayed her in favor of American publisher Bennett Cerf of Random House. Cerf made Joyce an offer he couldn't refuse for the rights to *Ulysses*.

The reviews of *Ulysses* were either raves or vicious pans. The first review, in the London *Observer*, pronounced Joyce "a man of genius." *The New York Times* review anointed *Ulysses* "the most important contribution that has been made to fictional literature in the twentieth century." The *Daily Express*, however, called *Ulysses* "the maddest, muddiest most loathsome book issued in our own or any other time … a book that … could only emanate from a criminal lunatic asylum." Virginia Woolf, writing a roundup review of modern novels for the *Times Literary Supplement*, dismissed *Ulysses* in one sentence: "a memorable catastrophe—immense in daring, terrific in disaster." D. H. Lawrence declared that the final chapter of Joyce's novel was "the dirtiest, most indecent, obscene thing ever written." Author Kevin Birmingham writes that "the most painful reaction" was that of Joyce's wife, Nora. After some months, when she finished reading it, Nora opined, "I guess the man's a genius, but what a dirty mind he has, hasn't he?"



UNITED STATES V. ONE BOOK CALLED "ULYSSES"

Ulysses was banned in America until it went on trial in 1933. Cerf was eager to publish the book. Thus, he arranged to have a French edition brought through customs, with the expectation that it would be seized and a trial

would result. That strategy almost backfired when the customs inspector on duty refused to confiscate the copy that a Random House lawyer pressed upon him. The Random House lawyer persisted, however, and *Ulysses* was reluctantly seized.

United States v. One Book Called "Ulysses" is arguably the most important literary censorship case ever tried in an American court. The case was waged over two years in two courts: first, in November of 1933, in the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York, and then, the next year, on appeal before the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit. Both cases were decided in favor of *Ulysses*—or, more precisely, in favor of artistic freedom. The fact that artistic freedom was upheld is largely due to the judge hearing the first case.

Judge John Woolsey was known as a liberal when it came to obscenity hearings. Woolsey was also a book collector and avid reader. When the trial began, the defense lawyer, Morris Ernst, argued against relying on the widely familiar Hicklin test, first established in the English case *Regina v. Hicklin* in 1868. That rule held that all material tending "to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences"—meaning specifically minors—was to be considered obscene. Ernst insisted that whether a literary work was obscene should be a matter measured by adult "community standards" rather than by the reactions of children. Ernst's argument also rested on judging the value of the novel in its entirety rather than by the isolated sections. Judge Woolsey struggled mightily with the novel. In the end, he wrote a decision that denied "the government's motion for a decree of forfeiture and destruction." Moreover, his decision affirmed the literary value of *Ulysses* with such astute critical insight that for decades afterward, the full text of his decision was included in every Random House edition of the novel.

In 1950, *Ulysses* was identified as the fifth best-selling book of Random House's Modern Library imprint. In 1998, an august panel of scholars and writers anointed *Ulysses* as the 20th century's most important novel. In addition to this landmark legal decision protecting *Ulysses* from censorship, the literary complexity of *Ulysses* keeps it "under the radar" with school and library boards. *Ulysses* is the kind of novel you would first read in upper-division elective literature courses in college. The audience for it, then, is largely self-selected.

The only recent controversies that have erupted over the book have to do with the claims of the Joyce estate to control the use of *Ulysses*. In 2000, for instance, there was a dustup over a planned broadcast of the entirety of the novel that would be available on the internet. In 2004, when a new James Joyce Festival was inaugurated in Dublin, one journalist wrote that some fervent Joyce fans "expressed fear that by popularizing Joyce and making his works the focus of family-friendly events, he will end up sanitized." For the always-defiant James Joyce, being rendered tame and family-friendly might be a fate worse than even censorship.

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3

THE DEFENSE FOR *LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER*

At the time of his death in 1930, D. H. Lawrence was widely viewed as one of the greatest writers in the English language. His work featured gritty yet pastoral depictions of rural England and its mining towns, the wars between the working and ownership classes, and the tensions between women and men. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was his final published novel, appearing in 1928. However, as discussed in this lecture, the controversy surrounding it lasted long after its author's death.

LAWRENCE'S MOST CONTROVERSIAL BOOK

Lawrence had been no stranger to controversy during his career, much of it about the sexually explicit passages in his work. Legal and law enforcement authorities had sought to block the distribution of his work for years. In 1929, after the publication of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Scotland Yard ordered postal workers to open a package containing a collection of poems, titled *Pansies*, that Lawrence had sent to his agent. Authorities insisted that Lawrence's publisher delete about a dozen pages from the collection; the publisher agreed. At another point, police walked into an exhibition of Lawrence's paintings and seized any painting which revealed the slightest bit of pubic hair.

Diagnosed with tuberculosis in 1925, Lawrence had been given only two years to live. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* represented his final attempt to depict the power of sexual relations between women and men. Lawrence was nothing but earnest about the deep, spiritual connection between love and sexual desire. Interestingly, Lawrence himself intensely disliked pornography and supported censoring it. He said that it "does dirt on sex, does dirt on life." However, he insisted that he himself did not write such work. In his subsequent justification for the work, called "Apropos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*," Lawrence wrote that he "wished men and women to be able to think about sex, fully, completely, honestly, and cleanly."

Lady Chatterley's Lover tells the story of Constance Reid, a free-spirited, sexually adventurous cultural bohemian. At 23, she marries a handsome aristocrat and coal mining magnate, Clifford Chatterley. After a month's honeymoon, Clifford goes off to fight in the Great War and returns paralyzed below the waist. The Chatterleys grow apart, physically and emotionally. Constance meets a gamekeeper on her estate, Oliver Mellors, also unhappily married and also returned from the war. Despite—or perhaps because of—the stark class divide between them, they fall into an affair, which eventually brings them a powerfully mutual commingling of body and mind.

Lawrence originally published the book in Italy and France. He knew that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* would be the most controversial of his books and that, just as many of his earlier novels and poems had been, it would be attacked as

obscene in the United Kingdom. Unable to publish the book commercially, he arranged instead to publish, in English, small, private print runs of the novel in Italy. These books were then sold to subscribers in the United Kingdom, the United States, and France. In 1932, different censored versions of the text were published in the United Kingdom and United States. Except for pirated copies that were smuggled into both countries, matters were left there until nearly 30 years later.

SUPPRESSION OF *LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER* IN THE UNITED STATES

The US case of suppression derived from the Comstock Act of 1873. Recall that Comstock was a former postal inspector who had founded an organization that sought to "suppress vice. " Comstock lobbied Congress to pass a law outlawing obscenity. State and federal courts came to define obscenity over the decades as works that "community standards" would regard as "lustful," "lewd," "lascivious," or "prurient." The act made it a crime to use the US Postal Service to distribute such work. This effectively gave the Postal Service discretion over written and visual material that depicted anything having to do with sex.

In 1959, Barney Rosset, owner and publisher at Grove Press, decided to test the law and published an unexpurgated edition. Rossett called *Lady Chatterley's Lover* a "Trojan horse." His greater interest was to challenge the banning of Henry Miller's 1934 autobiographical novel *Tropic of Cancer*. In late April, Grove deliberately took 164 copies of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* to the main New York City Post Office to induce postal officials there to seize copies of the book—which they did. On May 14, an all-day hearing was held before the Judicial Officer of the Post Office. The officer passed the case up to the Postmaster General, who, in turn, declared the book and the circular promoting it obscene. Rossett and Grove then sued the Post Office in US federal court. The case went to the US District Court for the Southern District of New York before Judge Frederick van Pelt Bryan.

At the time, the law seemed pretty cut-and-dry. Indeed, only a couple of years earlier, in 1957, it had been underscored by the Supreme Court in *Roth v. United States*. In that case, Samuel Roth, a New York bookseller, had been convicted of mailing obscene circulars and books containing nude photographs. Justice William Brennan wrote that obscene material was not entitled to the protection of the First Amendment. "The First Amendment," wrote the justice, was designed to protect the "unfettered interchange of ideas." The perceived quality of those ideas must not matter. However, obscenity was different in kind from even the most odious political ideas. Brennan wrote: "Implicit in the history of the First Amendment is the rejection of obscenity as utterly without redeeming social importance."

It didn't seem like Rossett had much of a case. Two years earlier, the Supreme Court had found no "redeeming social importance" in *American Aphrodite*, one of the publications Roth had been selling. How would the famously obscene *Lady Chatterley's Lover* fare better? As fate would have it, Rossett met a man named Charles Rembar. Rembar was a lawyer, but he had no expertise in constitutional law. At the time, he had never argued a case in court. However, he did have a feel for how publishers and authors could manage obscenity laws. Norman Mailer was Rembar's cousin. Rembar had advised Mailer to make a crucial revision in the manuscript of *The Naked and the Dead*, the blockbuster World War II novel that launched his career. Rembar told Mailer to evade obscenity controversy by converting every "fuck" uttered by his hard-bitten combat soldiers into "fug."

This advice was to start a remarkable career for Rembar in defending allegedly obscene texts. He later won obscenity cases involving *Tropic of Cancer* and the notorious 18th-century work of erotica *Fanny Hill*. However, in 1959, Rembar had not yet conceived the legal theory that would make him famous. He closely read Brennan's decision in the Roth case, and he thought he found a way to attack it. Brennan had set up two mutually exclusive categories: those works with "redeeming social importance" and those, such as obscene works, without it. Rembar then asked a novel question: What should happen if a work meets the definition of obscenity but also clearly has "redeeming social importance"?

Brennan had made it clear that he did not believe that any discussion of sex was, per se, obscene and prurient. He wrote that "sex and obscenity are not synonymous." To Rembar, this created the space he needed to undercut Comstock. In US District Court, the government's attorney, S. Hazard Gillespie Jr., thought otherwise. He noted that although Brennan insisted controversial ideas enjoyed "the full protection of the First Amendment," he also stipulated that some areas were "excludable because they encroach upon the limited area of more important interests." Surely one of those interests was preventing obscenity from having a public presence.

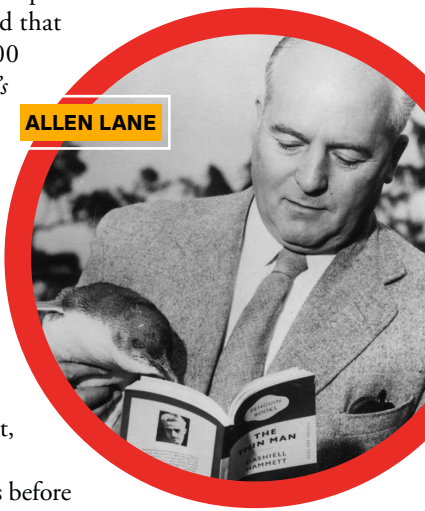
The defense's effort to demonstrate the artistic merits of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was not difficult. D. H. Lawrence was firmly in the canon of Anglo-American modern literature. In the May hearing before the Postal Service officer, the defense had called two prominent literary critics, Malcolm Cowley and Alfred Kazin, to testify as to the distinction and high-mindedness of the novel and its author. Kazin asserted that Lawrence's intention was to "make sex seem holy, beautiful, and free."

On July 21, 1959, Judge Bryan ruled in favor of Grove Press. Bryan's decision comprehensively dismantled the government's case. Bryan noted that the Postmaster General had no expertise in the critical analysis of literary texts. Nor did the Postmaster General challenge the publisher's assertions (and those of their expert witnesses) that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was a serious work of literature. Bryan found the novel to fall well within the strictures provided by Brennan in the Roth case. He ordered the Post Office to cease all restrictions on its distribution. An appeals court upheld the verdict. Within a year, Lawrence's last novel had sold 2 million copies.

SUPPRESSION OF *LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER* IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

For 30 years, publishers in the United Kingdom had feared prosecution for publishing an unexpurgated version of Lawrence's novel. However, in 1960, after the victorious US case, Penguin's cofounder, Allen Lane, was looking to provoke prosecution of the work under the United Kingdom's new obscenity law. Penguin had published every other novel by Lawrence.

In addition to the American ruling on *Lady Chatterley,* Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* had recently been cleared for publication. British customs officials seemed not to care when their citizens brought copies of the US edition of *Lolita* into the country. Reassured that the moment was right, Penguin printed 200,000 copies of a complete edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. As Lane hoped, this decision was what led to its prosecution.



The Department of Public Prosecution took a look at the novel. One of its lawyers came up with a proto-feminist critique of Lawrence's characterization of Constance Chatterley, viewing her as a one-dimensional character without any apparent interests besides having sex. Reginald Manningham-Buller, the crown's attorney general for the conservative government, read the first four chapters of the full text on a train. That was enough for him. Only nine days before the scheduled publication date, on August 16, Scotland Yard visited Penguin and left with a copy of the new book. A few days after that, Penguin was charged with publishing an obscene book.

For Penguin, the legal circumstances had just changed for the better. Britain's Obscene Publications Act had been revised in 1959. Crucially, the new law made it more difficult for the prosecution to win a conviction by focusing only on a work of art's most prurient passages. Before the enactment of the new law, literary merit was no defense. In 1928, for example, *The Well of Loneliness*, Radclyffe Hall's groundbreaking novel of lesbian self-discovery and what was then called sexual "inversion," was roundly attacked by the newspaper editor James Douglas. His nonstop pressure campaign resulted in a trial that was taken up by British authorities. The prosecutor homed in on one line—"and that night, they were not divided"—which he claimed would "induce thoughts of a most impure character and would glorify the horrible tendency of lesbianism." The magistrate agreed and ordered the destruction of the novel's entire print run. A wide range of prominent writers, including Virginia Woolf, attended that trial on behalf of the defense. However, the magistrate, as permitted under the 1857 Obscenity Act, refused to hear their testimony.

However, the new law stipulated that a work must be seen in its totality. It could be permitted for publication if the defense could demonstrate that it had literary merit and public value. The defense was now allowed to call expert witnesses to vouch for the quality of the work under scrutiny. Mervyn Griffith-Jones, a distinguished senior counsel for the government, opened the *Lady Chatterley* trial on October 20, 1960. He informed the jury that the book was little more than a compilation of 13 separate "bouts" of sexual intercourse. Griffith-Jones asked the jury to imagine how much damage would be done to the social order if such a text were to fall into the wrong hands: "Is it a book you could even wish your wife or your servants to read?" Ironically, three members of the jury were women. It was also unlikely that any jurors employed live-in servants.

Griffith-Jones's question, however, got at a key social issue that the trial would resolve: whether the ruling elite would allow the working class, the young, and women to read incendiary works. The defense counsel tackled this issue head-on. At the beginning of the trial, they refused to invoke a sexist law that would have allowed them to limit the jury to men. An all-male jury might have tried to protect women from the book. The legal grounding for this nebulous social anxiety went back almost a century, to the Obscenity Act of 1857 and the *Hicklin* case in 1868. In the British context, obscenity was defined by one crucial standard. Here's how Chief Justice Alexander Cockburn explained it in the *Hicklin* case: "whether the tendency of the matter is to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall." The Hicklin test for obscenity was decisive for over a century in a country without a written constitution or First Amendment that protected speech from government censorship.

Gerald Gardiner, the lead counsel for the defense, put questions of literary quality squarely before the jury. He praised Penguin and noted that it had published essentially the entire canon of British literature. He praised Lawrence, calling him perhaps the greatest British novelist since Thomas Hardy and surely one of the best half dozen of all time. The defense counsel also directly took on Griffith-Jones's argument that the price of the proposed paperback would encourage more vulnerable, lower orders of people to wallow in the novel's degeneration. Gardiner defended the right of the working class, the young, and women to engage the themes of the novel, and he made a blunt plea for cultural egalitarianism. After this opening, the magistrate

decided it would be best for the jurors to read the novel they were being asked to evaluate. He commanded that the case would be adjourned while the jurors read the text in the jury box.

When the trial resumed, Gardiner took full advantage of the new law. He called a distinguished group of expert witnesses to the stand. Among them, one loomed largest: the 81-year-old novelist E. M. Forster, a friend of Lawrence. For reasons of age, eminence, or a lack of remarks easy to attack, Griffith-Jones chose not to cross-examine Forster at all. However, the core issue of the prosecution remained that working-class readers could not be trusted not to lose control of themselves when reading sexually charged material. Here, the defense turned to two literary critics from a working-class background: Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart. Hoggart provided the perspective of an "informant" about working-class culture and whether Lawrence's novel authentically depicted it. Griffith-Jones depicted Hoggart as a know-it-all egghead and attempted to rattle him by interrupting his responses with dismissive statements. Given Hoggart's background and his job teaching working-class adults at a so-called red-brick university, painting him as an out-of-touch elitist was an odd strategy—and it failed.

After four days of testimony from the so-called experts, the lawyers made their closing statements. Judge Byrne then issued his closing instructions to the jury. Byrne made it his business to remind the jurors that the affair central to the book was just that—in other words, out-of-wedlock sex. He subtly took up the question of which classes of people had the sophistication necessary to read the text properly. Byrne seemed to view himself as the last defender of the old standards of decency. However, the jury deliberations were an anticlimax: *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was acquitted of all charges of obscenity. Everyone in the United Kingdom, whatever their class and educational background, was free to read it.

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4

CENSORS FROM THE INQUISITION TO THE PURITANS

Beginning in the 12th century, the Inquisition was an office founded within the Catholic Church to ferret out and punish heresy. Its worst manifestation was in Spain, where it carried out approximately 32,000 executions of Muslims, Jews, and other so-called heretics. Though sources disagree, most pinpoint 1826 as the year the last execution was carried out by the Inquisition. This lecture steps back in time to get the broader historical context within which more recent censorship efforts fit. By looking at the Inquisition and other early banning campaigns launched by both church and state, you'll learn about several motives and themes that resonate to the present day.

EARLY CENSORSHIP

In 16th-century Europe, the printing press had been around for several decades. Censorship was developing in tandem with the wider dissemination of printed books. During the reign of Henry VIII, for example, licensing acts were passed in England to prohibit the printing of works considered heretical for their religious or political views. Henry VIII was among the first rulers in Europe to issue an index of banned books, which came out in 1526. As chancellor to Henry VIII, Sir Thomas More arranged for the burning of early Protestant books which he considered to be

> pestiferous ... sent to this realm to pervert the people from the true faith of Christ, to stir them to sedition against their princes, to cause them to contemn all good laws ... to the desolation of this noble realm.

SIR THOMAS MORE

On June 22, 1530, More drafted a list of forbidden books, including a ban on books in English printed outside of England.

As contemporary commentators have pointed out, More is also the father of a literary genre that continually draws the ire of modern-day censors and book banners. That genre is utopian fiction and dystopian fiction. More's fantasy, *Utopia*, was published in 1516 to great acclaim. It was quickly translated into several languages. One wonders whether More himself would have run into censorship rather than acclaim if *Utopia* were published as a new release these days. After all, in *Utopia*, More advocates the overthrow of the rich, compulsory nudity for engaged couples, and a ban on lawyers. At the time that More wrote *Utopia*, the Catholic Church still held sway in most of Europe and was the most powerful censor of printed material.

In Spain, the first printed edition of the Talmud—the central text of Jewish law and religious practice—was published in the early 1480s. A few years later, in 1490, the Talmud became a focus of the Inquisition. The Grand Inquisitor, Tomás de Torquemada, burned Hebrew books by order of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. Soon after, more than 6,000 volumes "infected with" alleged "Jewish errors" were burnt in Salamanca, Spain. After a 1492 decree expelled Jews from Spain, all Jewish books were confiscated. Printing in Hebrew became impossible. Spanish Muslims never had much opportunity to print in Arabic. The Islamic population was initially forced to convert to Christianity in Granada in 1502. By the first decade of the 17th century, they were expelled from Spain altogether.

Of course, you can find acts of book burning and libricide taking place even earlier in the history of Christianity. One of the earliest instances is mentioned in Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament. It describes how a group of St. Paul's converts at Ephesus publicly burned a collection of their own books worth 50,000 pieces of silver. However, it wasn't until the Council

of Trent in the 16th century that the Catholic Church codified a set of 10 rules for the printing, selling, and censoring of books. The Council of Trent was a response to the Protestant Reformation and the challenges it posed to Catholic primacy. These 10 "Tridentine Rules" were accompanied by a list of forbidden books. Together, they formed the first *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* issued by the Catholic Church in 1564. The following six rules were included: All books by "heresiarchs" (heretical leaders) and theological books by heretics were prohibited. Theological writings in vernacular languages required correction and approval. Obscene or immoral works were prohibited. Classical works could be read only by adults. All books treating magic, superstition, astrology, or occult practices were prohibited. All books had to be licensed by the church prior to publication.

Authors who recanted and revised their works could have them removed from the *Index*. However, "known heretics," such as Martin Luther, were considered irredeemable. Notable authors whose works would eventually appear on the *Index* included Galileo, Descartes, Montaigne, and Copernicus. The decision to place a book on the *Index* came down to how that book deviated from orthodox Catholic teachings, which, in the church's view, provided the path to salvation. The teachings of Protestants and others who opposed the church ushered readers straight onto the highway to hell. These rules, expanded and modified over the centuries, remained the core determinants for Catholic censorship until the use of the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* was discontinued in 1966. This was due in part to the rise of mass literacy and mass communications. It took the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, which stretched from 1962 to 1965, to finally eradicate the *Index*.

AREOPAGITICA

Recall that Henry VIII instituted "licensing acts" to ensure that religious and political heresy would not be printed and circulated in England. These licensing acts, which continued into the 17th century, inadvertently inspired one of the greatest defenses of free expression ever to be written in English.

John Milton was born in London in 1608. His father was a prosperous scrivener, and the plan was for Milton, the firstborn son, to attend Cambridge and become a minister. However, "Roman-ish" reforms within the Church

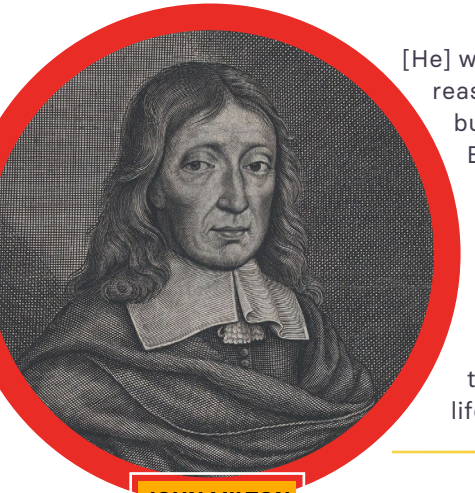
of England at the time made such a vocation distasteful to Milton. Thus, he moved home to make his mark as a Christian poet. As the author of the epic *Paradise Lost*, first published in 1667, it seems that Milton achieved his goal.

Milton lived during the chaos of the English Civil War. He published argumentative pamphlets on subjects including regicide, education, the abolishing of the office of bishops in the Anglican Church, and, most controversially, a defense of divorce. That last pamphlet, published anonymously in 1643, made the case that temperamental or spiritual incompatibility constitutes a legitimate ground for divorce. Not only did Milton's radical views in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* draw outrage from clergy denouncing the author as a sexual libertine, but he also got into hot water for publishing the tract without obtaining a license. The newly instated Licensing Order of 1643 stipulated that all publications must be approved by a parliamentary committee before being circulated. Milton had tried to comply, but he was denied permission. Undeterred, he had arranged for his pamphlet to be printed and circulated without a license. The censure his defiance incurred inspired Milton to write and publish *Areopagitica* in 1644.

The title derives, in part, from a speech called "Areopagitikos," written by the Athenian orator Isocrates in the 4th century BCE. It may also be a reference to a speech against false gods and teachings that Saint Paul made before the Areopagus—the name for the hill in Athens where tribunals gathered. Milton says in *Areopagitica* that he wrote the pamphlet "to deliver the press from the restraints with which it was encumbered." This is a reference to Parliament's Licensing Order of 1643. With those restraints in place, Milton argued, vigorous discussion and dissension would be squashed.

Drawing on his ecclesiastical studies, Milton eviscerates the opinion that books corrupt. Knowledge, Milton declares, whether of good or evil, "cannot defile, nor consequently the books, if the will and conscience be not defiled." There's also the argument that an attraction to the forbidden is part of human nature. In *Areopagitica*, Milton concedes that it's a futile project to regulate "the multitude of books" to control people's minds and baser desires. "Banish all objects of lust," he writes, "shut up all youth into the severest discipline that can be exercis'd in any hermitage, ye cannot make them chaste."

To centuries of readers, the most stirring sections of this essay are Milton's defenses of books as living beings, vital distillations of the human faculty of reason. Milton writes:



JOHN MILTON

> [He] who kills a Man kills a reasonable creature, Gods Image; but he who destroys a good Booke, kills reason it selfe, kills the image of God, as it were, in the eye. Many a man [is] a burden to the Earth; but a good Booke is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, imbalm'd and treasur'd up on purpose to a life beyond life.

Areopagitica did not achieve its immediate end of persuading Parliament to invalidate the censorship component of the Licensing Order of 1643. However, its influence has traveled far beyond the concerns of its immediate time. The United States Constitution, for example, includes a prohibition against prior restraint or prepublication censorship. As Milton put it, such prepublication censorship would interfere with the pursuit of truth. The Supreme Court has cited *Areopagitica* four times by name in free speech cases.

THOMAS MORTON

Scholars generally agree that Thomas Morton's book *New English Canaan*, published in 1637, was the first book to have been banned in America. Thomas Morton was born in Devon in or around 1579 to an Anglican family of landowners. He studied law in London, where he met the poet and playwright Ben Jonson, who would be a lifelong friend. Morton became a legal champion of his impoverished Devon countrymen. However, he decided to move to the colonies after his marriage to a well-off widow was, in effect, dissolved by the efforts of her concerned adult son. Morton first

sailed to America in 1622. On this first exploratory trip, Morton stayed for three months. He returned to England complaining of the intolerance of the Pilgrims in Massachusetts—an early sign that Morton would not "get with the program" of the religious and social strictures that prevailed in the Plymouth colony.

Morton returned in 1624, working as an agent for Richard Wollaston, an English sea captain, pirate, and founder of the Wollaston Company. The company brought indentured servants to the New World to establish settlements and trade in furs and other goods. Wollaston established a trade settlement called Mount Wollaston in what is now Quincy, Massachusetts. Morton loved the landscape of coastal Massachusetts. He also admired the native peoples, calling the Algonquins more civilized than their European counterparts.

Morton's practice of selling firearms to the native peoples also didn't endear him to the religious establishment. Wollaston and Morton fell out over the fact that Wollaston had sent some of his indentured colonists south to work as slaves on his Virginia tobacco plantations. Wollaston soon left for Virginia himself. This left Morton to reimagine and rename Mount Wollaston to Merrymount. For a short time, things seem to have been merry there indeed. Morton began enacting a utopian agenda in Merrymount. He declared his indentured fellow colonists free men and encouraged trade and intermingling with the Algonquins. What stoked the ire of his Pilgrim neighbors, however, was—in the colorful words of William Bradford—Morton's predilection for "dancing and frisking together" with the Native Americans. The "frisking" got out of hand in 1628, when Morton oversaw the erection of an 80-foot-high maypole in Merrymount and fastened a pair of deer antlers on the top.

Since this was the kind of base revelry that the Puritans sought to leave behind in the corrupt Old World, the party had to be shut down. A militia, led by Myles Standish, arrived at Merrymount and chopped down the maypole. Morton was arrested for supplying arms to the Native Americans and exiled to an island off the coast of New Hampshire, where he was left to starve. However, the resourceful Morton instead made it back to England, where he promptly sued the Massachusetts Bay Company. Drawing on briefs prepared for that trial, Morton wrote *New English Canaan* while sitting in London's Mermaid Tavern. His friend Ben Jonson may have helped.

NEW ENGLISH CANAAN

New English Canaan is composed of three volumes of history, nature writing, poetry, and lively satire and insult. It focuses sympathetically on the history, beliefs, and practices of the Native Americans in the region and decries the poor treatment the first Americans were receiving at the hands of the English settlers. He deems the Native Americans to be "most full of humanity and more friendly than the other," meaning the colonists. Later, Morton states the same idea in an epigram: "The more Salvages the better quarter, the more Christians the worser quarter I found." Perhaps even more radical were Morton's subversive policy ideas, which went so far as to recommend "demartialising" the colonies.

New English Canaan had a tough time finding a publisher. In *The Trials of Thomas Morton*, Professor Peter C. Mancall describes the manuscript's arduous journey to publication. In the fall of 1633, "The Worshipful Company of Stationers of London" recorded that Thomas Morton registered the title *New English Canaan*. A bookseller named Charles Green intended to sell the book in London. However, Green later wrote that "when some fewe sheets of the said booke were printed, it was stayed and those sheetes taken away by the meanes and procurement of some of the Agents for those of Newe-England." Green claimed that he had lost 400 copies of the newly printed book.

Four years after the debacle in London, Morton arranged for Jacob Frederick Stam to publish the book in Amsterdam. Some scholars point out that an Amsterdam publisher's name was a popular cover used by English publishers who wanted to avoid legal consequences for printing seditious books. This time, Mancall says, "English officials tried to seize every copy that entered the realm, citing a new statute that forbade the sale of English-language works printed in another country. Their efforts almost succeeded." The few copies that survived were condemned by the Puritans and Pilgrims who were vilified by Morton.

Thomas Bradford, the Plymouth colony's governor, called *New English Canaan* "an infamous and scurrilous book against many good and chief men of the country, full of lies and slanders and fraught with profane calumnies against their names and persons and the ways of God." When Morton

returned to North America in the 1640s, he was promptly arrested in Boston. After being imprisoned for a year, Morton was sent to a new English outpost at a place then called Acomenticus, the site of modern York, Maine. He died there sometime around 1646.

Peter Mancall points out that in the early 1800s, when John Adams and Thomas Jefferson were corresponding about Thomas Morton, it's possible that there were only two copies of *New English Canaan* available in the United States. One had been acquired by Peter Collinson, a book agent for the Library Company of Philadelphia. Collinson shipped it to Benjamin Franklin in 1755, along with other early histories of the colonies. It remains in the possession of the Library Company today. The other copy was acquired by John Quincy Adams. In 1883, the Prince Society, an organization dedicated to the printing of early American texts, reprinted the original Amsterdam edition of *New English Canaan* with a foreword written by John Adams's great-grandson, Charles Francis Adams Jr.

Opinion began to shift about Morton and his antiestablishment views in the mid-19th century. This started with the famous short story Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote about him in 1836 called "The Maypole of Merrymount." In more recent times, Morton has been celebrated as a visionary ecologist, champion of indigenous culture, and anarchic corrective to the dominant narrative of sober Pilgrims and Puritans.

READING

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5

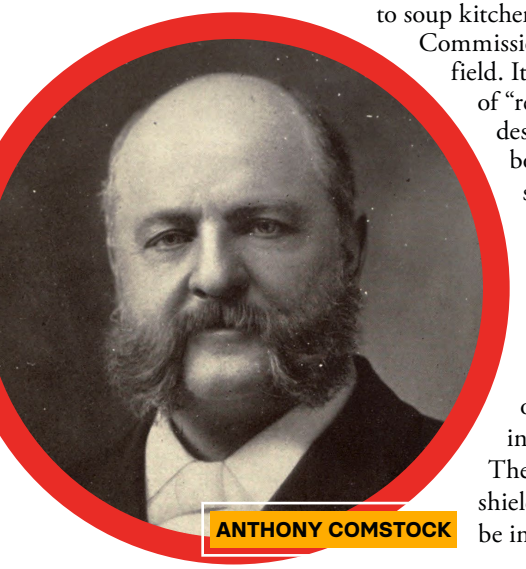
ANTHONY COMSTOCK'S MORAL CRUSADE

Anthony Comstock was a relentless late-19th-century enforcer of Victorian codes of sexual propriety. For his decades-long efforts to destroy any material that contained references to sexuality, birth control, abortion, or sexual pleasure, Comstock inspired the creation of a new word in English. *Comstockery* is a word that connotes "censorship because of perceived obscenity or immorality." This lecture explores early efforts at book banning and burning by focusing on the titanic legacy of Anthony Comstock. During his career of more than 40 years as a moral crusader, Comstock estimated that he was responsible for some 4,000 arrests. He claimed that he drove 15 persons to suicide in his "fight for the young." His legacy also included the destruction of approximately 15 tons of books, 284,000 pounds of plates for printing "objectionable books," and nearly 4 million pictures.

ANTHONY COMSTOCK'S EARLY LIFE

Anthony Comstock's moral zealotry was intimately bound up with two things: his own evangelical faith and the growth of the US Post Office. Comstock was born in New Canaan, Connecticut, and raised on Old Testament David-and-Goliath-type stories of underdog heroes battling the outsized forces of evil. From an early age, he righteously abstained from alcohol and tobacco. However, as writer Devin Leonard notes, Comstock's diaries reveal his early struggles with what was then called "self-abuse," or masturbation. It's tempting to draw a line from these guilty admissions to Comstock's fervent campaigns against pornography.

Comstock came of age during the Civil War. His older brother Samuel died at Gettysburg. After he himself enlisted, Comstock was stationed in St. Augustine, Florida. There, he was shocked by the vices his fellow soldiers indulged in. Comstock, an evangelical Christian, volunteered with the United States Christian Commission, an arm of the New York YMCA that was determined to save Northern soldiers from sin. In addition to soup kitchens and blankets, the Christian Commission sent ministers and Bibles to the field. It also sent small traveling libraries of "respectable" books and magazines designed to combat the "obscene" books and pictures publishers were sending to soldiers in the army.



ANTHONY COMSTOCK

In addition, the commission pressed for a provision in an 1865 Post Office bill making it a misdemeanor to send "any obscene book, pamphlet, picture, print or other publication of a vulgar and indecent character" through the mail. The act would ideally create a protective shield around a soldier so that he would be immune to the influence of moral

contamination. Comstock tried to persuade his fallen-away fellow soldiers to attend religious services with him. In response, they trashed his belongings in the barracks.

After the Civil War ended, Comstock became a clerk at a dry goods store in New York City and married a minister's daughter 10 years his senior. Fate stepped in to determine Comstock's vocation as a tireless campaigner against vice when a fellow employee at the dry goods store contracted a sexually transmitted disease. Apparently, this man's libido had been aroused by reading pornographic literature. Comstock checked out the bookstore for himself and returned with a police captain, who arrested the dealer. The story of "the valiant dry goods salesman" was picked up by New York newspapers. Comstock was encouraged to set off on his vocation as a purger of smut in the city.

One of the early casualties of Comstock's crusade was William Hayes. Hayes was a Brooklyn surgeon with a profitable side hustle as a pornographic publisher. Hayes committed suicide when he learned that Comstock had targeted him. Determined to put an end to Hayes's business, Comstock tried to purchase the pornographic printing plates from Hayes's widow, who wanted $650 for them. Comstock wrote to the YMCA asking for support to purchase the plates. Thus began Comstock's direct alliance with the New York YMCA, which had been formed in 1852 to offer safe havens providing "moral" recreation to single working men living on their own amidst the many worldly lures of the city.

Some of the most widespread of those temptations were the salacious books and newspapers that could be cheaply purchased at newsstands all over the city. In 1866, the New York YMCA circulated a private "Memorandum Respecting New-York as a Field for Moral and Christian Effort among Young Men." The focus of this memorandum was anything considered to be obscene literature. This memorandum spurred two YMCA board members to go to Albany to seek a New York state law, instituted in 1868, that prohibited the sale of obscene material—and even possession with intent to sell it. The YMCA and Anthony Comstock were a match made in Puritan heaven. In 1873, Comstock was installed as secretary of a YMCA committee that would eventually become the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice (NYSSV).

THE NYSSV

The NYSSV modeled itself on its venerable British counterpart, the Society for the Suppression of Vice, which was founded in 1802. The NYSSV concentrated its attention on pornographic materials. During his first year as secretary of the organization, Comstock seized more than 12 tons of pornographic literature and, as Devin Leonard puts it, "200,000 salacious items including photographs … song-lyric sheets, playing cards, and what [Comstock] referred to as 'obscene and immoral rubber articles.'" Typically, Comstock would send away for these items using an alias. After he received them, he would alert the police. The resulting sting operation would quickly result in the arrest of the publisher, bookbinder, news agent, or art gallery owner in question, along with a confiscation of their materials.

Comstock also vigorously pursued others who, to his mind, promoted lust over restraint and pleasure over procreation when it came to sex. For Comstock, free love advocates, suffragists, and birth control activists all fell into this morally suspect category. Certainly, one of the reasons the YMCA was interested in an alliance with Comstock was because of his partially successful attempt in 1872 to have the famous sisters Victoria Woodhull and Tennessee Claflin arrested and jailed for violating federal postal law. Woodhull and Claflin were suffragists, spiritualists, free love proponents, and the first women to open a Wall Street brokerage firm. Additionally, Woodhull was nominated by the Equal Rights Party in 1872 as the first female candidate in history for president of the United States. Woodhull was a charismatic lecturer who could pack in crowds of thousands with her fiery discourses about the liberating advantages of free love.

What put the sisters in Comstock's sights was an issue of the magazine these extraordinary sisters published. *Woodhull & Claflin's Weekly* was a 16-page organ for the sisters' various social and political views. It was the first magazine in America to print *The Communist Manifesto*. Woodhull was also known for saying, "Wherever I find a social carbuncle, I shall plunge my dagger into it up to the hilt!" She did exactly that in the case of the Reverend Henry Ward Beecher, the pastor of Brooklyn's Plymouth Church and the brother of renowned author Harriett Beecher Stowe. On October 28, 1872, Woodhull wrote an article for her weekly paper detailing the alleged adulterous affair between Beecher and Elizabeth Tilton, the wife of one of his most socially

prominent congregants. Once it broke, the scandal rocked New York society. It also ended the Tilton marriage and split the Beecher family into factions. Thanks to Comstock, the scandal also landed both Woodhull and Claflin in jail, on the charge that, as publishers, they were guilty of sending "obscene" literature through the mail. A jury, however, acquitted both Woodhull and Claflin since federal postal law at the time did not specifically cover newspapers.

THE COMSTOCK ACT

Undeterred, Anthony Comstock traveled by train to Washington DC in 1873 with a draft of a new federal law in his pocket and a satchel filled with a selection of the filthiest pornography he'd collected. Comstock was bent on lobbying government officials to ban not only immoral books and pictures but also the circulars and advertisements that sustained the pornographers' business. As scholar Kevin Birmingham explains, the history of the US censorship regime began in earnest with Comstock's momentous train trip. Comstock worked on overdrive in Washington, lobbying elected officials to join his fight against smut. One of his most effective tools was a sort of traveling exhibition of obscenities that he set up in various places around the capital.

After it wended its way through the House and Senate, Comstock's proposed bill was signed into law by President Ulysses S. Grant on March 3, 1873. The so-called Comstock Act made it illegal to transport via US mail any "obscene, lewd, or lascivious book, pamphlet, picture, paper, print or other publication of an indecent character." It placed the same restriction on items intended to prevent conception or induce abortion. The Comstock Act also gave judges the power to direct marshals to search for, seize, and destroy obscene materials. Not only was the mailing of such material now illegal but also secondary material about so-called indecent things—such as directions for the use of condoms—could not be sent through the mail without the threat of legal consequences. This stricture would set up Comstock's epic battles with birth control advocates such as Margaret Sanger. Furthermore, the Comstock Act granted search and seizure powers with warrants based on nothing more than one person's sworn complaint. Frequently, that person was Anthony Comstock himself.

As a direct consequence of the momentum generated around the Act, Comstock's own powers as a censor were vastly extended. As part of an appropriations bill, Congress simultaneously authorized a new position: that of

"special agent" in the US Postal Service. This agent would have the power to confiscate obscene material in the mail and to arrest its senders. The office was created with the understanding that Comstock himself would fill it without pay. Thus, from 1873 until his death in 1915, Comstock served simultaneously as a special agent of the US Post Office and as the secretary for the NYSSV.

In that capacity, Comstock faced off with multitudes of Americans whose occupations, tastes, behavior, and politics conflicted with his own. Many were guilty of simply violating Comstock's own sense of morality. One was a figure many regard as America's greatest poet: Walt Whitman. Comstock was set on suppressing the 1881 edition of Whitman's magnum opus, *Leaves of Grass*. To do so, he pressured Boston's district attorney to inform Whitman's publisher, James R. Osgood, that the book would have to be heavily revised before it could be published. Faced with this ultimatum, Whitman initially agreed. However, when he received Comstock's lengthy list of objections, he put his foot down and turned instead to another publisher in Philadelphia.

Comstock's attention was then diverted to two of Whitman's poems from that 1881 edition that appeared in a journal called *The Word*, published by Ezra Heywood. Heywood was an anarchist and free love proponent who'd been outraged by Comstock's attempts to censor Whitman. For his journal, he clearly selected two Whitman poems that were sure to shock: "To a Common Prostitute" and "A Woman Waits for Me." But to Comstock, its title would have been the only acceptable part of that poem, which opens with these lines:

> A woman waits for me, she contains all, nothing is lacking,
> Yet all were lacking if sex were lacking, or if the moisture of the right man were lacking.
>
> Sex contains all, bodies, souls,
> Meanings, proofs, purities, delicacies, results, promulgations,
> Songs, commands, health, pride, the maternal mystery, the seminal milk ...
> Without shame the man I like knows and avows the deliciousness of his sex,
> Without shame the woman I like knows and avows hers.

Heywood was arrested in October 1881 for distributing the two poems through the mail via that offending issue of *The Word*. The judge in the trial ultimately dismissed Whitman's poems as evidence of obscenity and acquitted Heywood of all charges. Comstock's publicized warnings to Whitman and his publisher and Heywood's trial boosted sales of the 1881 edition of *Leaves of Grass*.

MARGARET SANGER

Another famous American who survived a run-in with Anthony Comstock was Margaret Sanger. Sanger started her career in women's health in the early 1900s as a nurse in poor immigrant communities on the East Side of New York. She began publishing an eight-page monthly pamphlet in 1914 called *The Woman Rebel*. In it, she hoped to skirt the Comstock Act by discussing birth control but not dispensing how-to advice. Authorities were not amused. Most issues of the magazine were confiscated. By then, Sanger had abandoned such caution and published a birth control pamphlet called *Family Limitation*. To avoid arrest on the charge of distributing so-called obscene materials through the mail, she fled to England. Sanger's estranged husband, William, was arrested after he gave a copy of *Family Limitation* to one of Comstock's undercover agents. William Sanger ended up spending 30 days in jail. However, his trial helped publicize the issue of birth control as a civil liberty.

During the approximately 40 years of his reign, Comstock was targeted by death threats and physical attacks. There were at least two murder attempts, one by abortionist George Selden and another by book distributor Charles Conroy. In 1906, *The New York Times* reported that Comstock had been punched by a defense attorney, Hugh Gordon Miller, in a federal court hearing. By then, Comstock was such an unpopular figure that, despite his attempts to obtain warrants for the lawyer's arrest, nobody involved in the judicial system would help him. The battling defense attorney was portrayed as a hero in news coverage of the trial. No modern censor has wielded such power as Anthony Comstock. His life ended as World War I was raging in

Europe. This war's devastation and resulting social transformations would all but erase the Victorian piety and restraint that informed Comstock's worldview.

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6

BOOKS ON FIRE: THE REFORMATION TO RUSHDIE

For many people, the words *blasphemy* and *book burning* inevitably call to mind the destructive force of the Protestant Reformation as well as the Counter-Reformation, which devastated the libraries of Europe. This lecture gives an overview of these events and several other historical moments when it seemed as though the inheritance of Western civilization might go up in smoke. It will also delve into a contemporary incident where a novel was banned and burned in countries around the world because of what was deemed its blasphemous narrative power.

PROMINENT HISTORIC BOOK BURNINGS

The Reformation began in 1517 with the publication of Martin Luther's "Ninety-five Theses," challenging the authority of the Catholic Church, and continued into the 17th century. According to Richard Ovenden, it can be estimated that

> between 70 and 80 percent of the contents of the pre-Reformation libraries of the British Isles were lost, and a slightly smaller proportion of the books on the shelves of the European monastic libraries.

Ovenden cites descriptions of the first university library assembled at Oxford in the early 14th century. It was composed of texts from medieval times as well as works by ancient writers such as Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero. This rare repository of learning was ransacked when commissioners of King Edward VI visited the university between 1549 and 1550. By 1556, no books remained. It's been estimated that over 96% of the original books in the library were lost, burnt by the Reformers, or sold or given away. Only 11 volumes from that original Oxford Library survive.

The newly formed US also had such a moment when the flames of destruction triumphed, ignited by political discord. This was the burning of the Library of Congress on August 24, 1814. The library, then housed in a wing of the Capitol building, was one of the British army's key targets as it marched into Washington DC two years into the War of 1812. The library's collections were symbolic of a nation forging its identity through words and ideas. At the time, the catalogue of the Library of Congress listed over 3,000 volumes of maps and books, many of which covered legal and governmental issues. A contemporary account describes how British troops piled up books and other flammable materials within the library and set fire to it with rockets and gunpowder.

The new Library of Congress would rise from the ashes through Thomas Jefferson, who offered his personal book collection. It had been curated for over 50 years and was composed of between 9,000 and 10,000 volumes. Jefferson's offer, however, was not wholly altruistic: He offered Congress the right of first refusal for the collection because he needed the money to pay debts and he hoped his collection would remain intact after his death. There was some fierce opposition in the House of Representatives to some of the purported atheistic and immoral contents of Jefferson's library—specifically the works of Enlightenment thinkers such as John Locke and Voltaire. However, President Madison signed a bill in January of 1815 authorizing the purchase of more than 6,000 books for $23,950.

When the subject of book burning comes up, however, most people probably think of Nazi Germany. On the night of May 10, 1933, bonfires were built in over 90 locations in Germany. The contents of libraries and archives containing books written by "un-German writers"—a designation that included Jews, gays, and communists—were incinerated. In Berlin, a massive bonfire was held on Unter den Linden, the most important thoroughfare in the city. The bonfire incinerated thousands of volumes seized from libraries, bookshops, and the city's Institute of Sexual Science, which was founded by a Jewish intellectual named Magnus Hirschfeld. In Berlin that night, Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's minister of propaganda, gave a speech about the book burnings that was reported worldwide.

Sacred Jewish books and secular works by Jewish authors were the special focus of this destruction. However, various authors whose work the Nazis considered "liberal" or "decadent" were also targeted. The May 10 book burning was the forerunner of what's been called "the most concerted and well-resourced eradication of books in history." One leading German librarian named Wolfgang Herrmann helped compile a list of banned authors that would be used by Goebbels's National Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda to stir up anti-Jewish hatred. Herrmann's efforts resulted in bookshops, lending and university libraries, and private homes being purged of so-called undesirable books. It's been estimated that over 100 million books were destroyed in the 12 years from 1933 to the end of World War II.

With the advent of the Cold War in the 1940s and throughout the '50s, the United States witnessed its own share of book burnings. For instance, in 1940, members of the Board of Education of Binghamton, New York, proposed a public burning of textbooks considered "subversive." (In a crucial distinction from Nazi book burning, most American incidents took place on the local level.)

One such textbook series was written by Dr. Harold Ordway Rugg. He was a professor at Columbia University's Teachers College. He wrote popular history and social science textbooks that were used in some 4,000 US schools and sold some 2 million copies. His textbooks came under attack because, in the eyes of his critics, Rugg espoused some radical ideas. For instance, detractors faulted him for picturing the United States as a land of unequal opportunity. In 1938, Garden City, New York, banned Rugg's books from its public schools. In Englewood, New Jersey, a newspaper columnist and school board member named B. C. Forbes decried the Rugg textbooks as "subversive" and successfully agitated for them to be thrown out of the schools. In Brander, Ohio, Rugg's textbooks were seized and thrown into a bonfire. In Binghamton, New York, two members of the Board of Education proposed a public book burning.

In 1953, at the height of the American book-burning debate, the American Library Association and American Book Publishers Council issued a statement defending "the freedom to read." Only two weeks earlier, President Eisenhower had delivered a commencement address at Dartmouth imploring students, "Don't join the book burners." However, a report published that same year by *The New Republic* gave a damning overview of book banning and burning under the auspices of the House Un-American Activities Committee and officials in the Eisenhower administration. In particular, the report asserted that some 230 American libraries operating overseas had removed and burned books deemed "un-American" and/or written by authors "about whom derogatory information has been offered before a Congressional Committee."

For example, a score of books was removed from all Amerika Haus libraries in Berlin. They included the poems of Langston Hughes and Howard Fast's edition of the works of Tom Paine. In Bombay and Calcutta, the banned books included Clarence Streit's *Union Now*, Robert and Helen

Lynd's *Middletown*, *A Rising Wind* by Walter White (who led the NAACP for a quarter of a century), and *Washington Witch Hunt* by *New York Herald Tribune* correspondent Bert Andrews.

FAHRENHEIT 451

The year 1953 was a signal year in the history of book burning because of the publication of Ray Bradbury's dystopian novel *Fahrenheit 451*. Bradbury, who was born in 1920, grew up during the Great Depression. He didn't have the money to further his education. As a teenager, he moved with his family from Illinois to California. The Los Angeles Public Library became his "college" of sorts, where he read widely. Inspired by the terrible newsreel images of the Nazi book burnings, Bradbury wrote the first draft of what would become *Fahrenheit 451* in nine days at UCLA's Powell Library. That first draft was 25,000 words long. When Bradbury's publisher asked for a novel-length work, he returned to the library and spent nine more days doubling the story's length.

Fahrenheit 451 is a dystopian novel. It's set in the near future, a time when designated "firemen" are given the work of burning books banned by the government. The title refers to the temperature at which paper autoignites. Guy Montag, a fireman and the hero of his story, has his doubts about the morality of this mission. He eventually joins a band of exiles who have memorized essential books to save civilization and pass on its written inheritance to future generations.

Ironically, *Fahrenheit 451* has itself been subject to, if not burnings, expurgations and bannings. In 1957, Ballantine issued an edition directed squarely at the high school audience in which words such as *hell*, *damn*, and *abortion* were censored and some 75 passages modified. In the decades following, local school boards censored or banned the novel. In 1987, a much-publicized review of books assigned to students in Bay County, Florida, ordered the removal of *Fahrenheit 451* from all classrooms because of its "vulgarity." After a class action suit, extensive media coverage, protests by the local chamber of commerce, and a demonstration in which teachers and hundreds of high school students wore black armbands, the banning was withdrawn.

In 2006, parents of a high school student in Montgomery County, Texas, demanded that *Fahrenheit 451* be banned from their daughter's required reading list in English class. They objected to the alleged offensive language in the novel and to the description of a Bible burning. Ironically, this challenge to *Fahrenheit 451* came during the annual observance of Banned Books Week, which was the reason the novel was assigned in the first place.

THE SATANIC VERSES

The most infamous—and dangerous—case of a book being burned in contemporary history concerns Salman Rushdie's 1988 novel *The Satanic Verses*. In the summer of 2020, a public letter signed by various high-profile writers appeared in *Harper's Magazine*. The letter decried a "growing illiberalism of debate" and the public shaming and ostracism by many on the left of anyone whose opinions or work was deemed to be "inappropriate" or offensive. Among the high-profile writers who signed the letter was Salman Rushdie. As one opinion piece about the letter noted, Rushdie's signing of the letter was especially meaningful given that he's still under the fatwa, or death sentence, issued by Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini for writing what many Muslims regard as a blasphemous novel about the prophet Muhammad. Khomeini commanded Muslims around the world to kill not only Rushdie but also his editors and publishers. As a fatwa can be rescinded only by the person who issued it and Khomeini died in 1989, the fatwa still exists. A bounty of over $3 million remains in place on Rushdie's life.

The Satanic Verses is a thick satirical novel written in the style of magical realism—a Rushdie trademark. When the novel was published in the United Kingdom in September of 1988, it was well received and eventually became a finalist for the Booker Prize. However, objections to the novel's irreverent treatment of the prophet Muhammad's life were also immediate and steadily gathered force, particularly within Britain's Muslim community. On December 2, 1988, 7,000 people gathered in Bolton, England to burn the book. That public burning was followed by a smaller but more publicized one on January 14, 1989. Then, 1,000 protesters gathered in Bradford, England, a town with a large Muslim population. That protest marked a dramatic escalation in the controversy surrounding the novel because non-Muslim politicians gave support to the book's detractors. Responding to the book

burning, Rushdie said he and his American publisher, Viking, had received "fairly extreme threats" from people "who had not bothered to read the book." He also said he expected similar pressures in the United States and commented, "Viking has taken precautions."

Those precautions, sadly, turned out to be necessary. Not only did copies of *The Satanic Verses* continue to be burned but also places that sold and produced the book began to be targeted. The New York offices of Viking, for example, received bomb threats. In March of 1989, firebombs were thrown through the windows of two bookstores in London and two in Berkeley, California. Weeks later, two bookstores in London were also firebombed. No one claimed responsibility, but all the bookstores carried Rushdie's novel. In New York, Barnes & Noble was threatened and one location received a suspicious package, but no attacks occurred. Also, the Bronx offices of *The Riverdale Press* were firebombed on February 28, 1989. Many suspect that that incident was directly linked to an editorial that ran in the press, defending Rushdie.

Rushdie, a British citizen, was given around-the-clock police protection after the fatwa was issued in February 1989. Over the next decade, he was constantly shadowed by bodyguards and compelled to move each time the security services became aware of a new plot to kill him. Because, at the time, there were British hostages being held by Islamic extremists in Lebanon, Rushdie was advised by the authorities not to say or do anything that might antagonize their captors. Politicians remained at a safe public distance from him. Travel was a logistical and administrative nightmare. His marriage to fellow writer Marianne Wiggins, which was already shaky before the fatwa, fell apart.

On Christmas Eve, 1990, Rushdie issued a statement affirming his renewed faith in Islam and announcing that he would not release a paperback of *The Satanic Verses*. That evening, he was so disgusted with himself that he was physically sick. Years later, Rushdie would publicly say it was the largest mistake of his life. However, Rushdie's attempts to quash the fatwa didn't work. For years after, bookstores didn't display or even carry the novel. In July 1991, the Japanese translator of *The Satanic Verses* was stabbed to death. Ten days earlier, the Italian translator had been stabbed multiple times but fortunately survived. The Norwegian publisher of the novel was shot three times in the back in October 1993. The novel's Turkish translator was the intended target of an

arson fire in a hotel in Sivas, Turkey, that killed 37 people. The novel eventually was banned in India, Bangladesh, Sudan, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Thailand, Tanzania, Indonesia, Singapore, and Venezuela.

Eventually, Rushdie bravely decided to go on and live a more normal life. However, literary culture has radically changed. On the 20th and 30th anniversaries of its publication, as commentators looked back on the fiery reception of *The Satanic Verses*, they've inevitably asked: Who would dare write or publish such a book these days? The audience for satire—especially religious satire—has greatly diminished. Fear is not the only explanation for why something like *The Satanic Verses* wouldn't be published today, certainly not by a major publishing house. The other reason is cultural sensitivity. Would a book that satirizes some aspects of Muslim fundamentalism be regarded as funny in this era of heightened respect for difference? Probably not.

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7

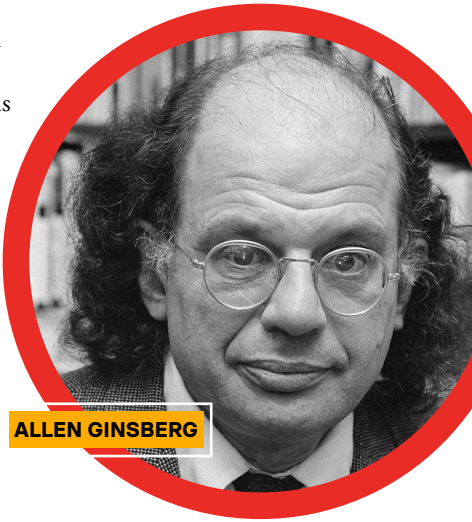
ALLEN GINSBERG'S ALARMING "HOWL"

Teaching is hard and so is determining the value of the literature being taught and that students read. To ban that literature from classrooms, libraries, and bookstores short-circuits those crucial conversations before they even begin. This lecture concerns one of the most controversial poems of all time: "Howl" by Allen Ginsberg. You will learn about the poem and how it came to be before diving into the famous obscenity trail and the outcry around it.

ALLEN GINSBERG

On February 23, 1977, the church of St. Mark's in-the-Bowery ran a series called The Poetry Project. This had become a mecca for performances by poets and musicians. That evening, it hosted a now-historic reading by poets Allen Ginsberg and Robert Lowell. Lowell and Ginsberg couldn't be more different: Robert Lowell hailed from a Boston Brahmin family who could trace their roots back to the Mayflower. Ginsberg was from Paterson, New Jersey, the son of middle-class Jews. Lowell's voice was ironic and erudite. Ginsberg's prophetic, incantatory poetry was influenced by William Blake and Walt Whitman. Lowell was married multiple times. Ginsberg was queer and a Buddhist. However, Lowell would be credited with helping to usher in the era of so-called confessional poetry, which had a large influence on the Beat movement that Ginsberg helped found. Moreover, both poets shared a diagnosis of bipolar disorder.

Ginsberg was a pioneer, a celebrity, and an American seer whose name was routinely linked with his idol, Walt Whitman. It was the fact that "Howl" had been charged with obscenity in 1957 by the San Francisco Juvenile Department that catapulted both the poem and the poet into the kind of widespread cultural fame and immortality that few artists ever attain.



ALLEN GINSBERG

Ginsberg was a New Jersey native who grew up in a Jewish household informed by poetry (his father, Louis, was a high school teacher), left-wing politics (Louis was a socialist, while Ginsberg's mother, Naomi, was a communist), and mental illness. Naomi became unstable in her thirties and eventually would be institutionalized and lobotomized. If you're familiar with "Howl," you can see that some of its themes—particularly its resistance to the American status quo and madness as a response to cultural and political repression—have their origins in Ginsberg's family history.

Ginsberg entered Columbia University in 1943 intending to major in prelaw but switched to English. By that time, he already knew that he was gay and destined not to conform to the tweedy strictures of 1950s academia. It was a gift of fate for Ginsberg to find his crew at Columbia. Gay men and women were closeted. It's impossible to imagine Ginsberg—who, in his prime, the scholar Fran Polek tells us, was known for taking off his clothes at poetry readings "to prove, as he put it, his purity of spirit"—finding his place as a professor, which is what he initially hoped to be. Similarly, the kind of poetry Ginsberg was destined to write would have been mocked by an academic establishment enamored with the intellectual poetry of T. S. Eliot and the formal rigors of Victorian poets such as Tennyson and Arnold.

However, even the company of like-minded friends couldn't save Ginsberg from the demon of depression. In 1949, the 23-year-old Ginsberg entered the New York State Psychiatric Institute, where he spent eight months. While there, he met a man named Carl Solomon, with whom he shared a commitment to left-wing politics and passion for literature. Eventually, Ginsberg would dedicate his greatest poem to Solomon. The years before that poem was completed were filled with travel and a conversion to Buddhism. When Ginsberg arrived in San Francisco in 1954, "Dharma Bums" Kerouac and Cassady were already there. The Beat movement was about to erupt.

THE BEAT MOVEMENT

If you tried to envision an artistic movement in the 1950s that was tailor-made to offend the sensibilities of Middle America and catch the eye of censors, it would be the Beat movement. Alienated from conventional society and horrified by the apocalyptic realities of the atomic age, the Beats embraced alienation and a personal form of artistic protest. The Beats copied the vocabulary and the look of jazz musicians—"hipsters." Indeed, they extolled the powers of jazz music, along with drugs, sex, and travel, to summon up mystic visions and doorways into a more authentic self.

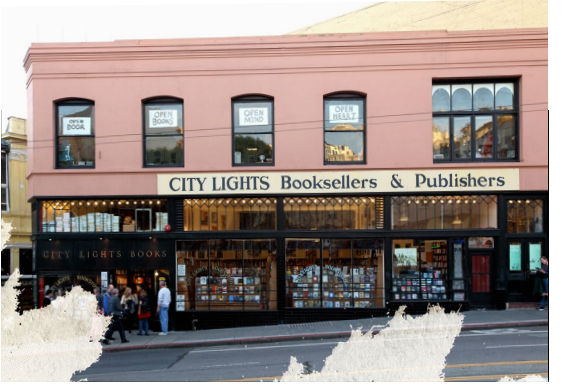
Their name, the *Beats*, has been accounted for in a variety of ways: *beat* as in weary, *beat* as in musical notation, *beat* as in beautiful. Note that the Beat movement was almost entirely male in its aesthetic, its codes of behavior, and its artists. There were women involved, such as Diane di Prima, Edie Parker, Carolyn Cassady, and Hettie Jones. However, most were allowed into Beat

circles through the relationships they had with Beat men. Joyce Johnson, who was Jack Kerouac's girlfriend in 1957 when the movement's landmark novel, *On the Road*, was published, wrote a haunting memoir about that time and its sexism. Her memoir is called *Minor Characters*.

Beat poetry and fiction were autobiographical, sexually explicit, and thick with obscenities. Beat literature's structure was rambling and seemingly improvisational. Ginsberg's famous signature phrase, "first thought, best thought," speaks to this artistic ethos of spontaneity. Beat poetry readings were off-the-cuff affairs. They were often accompanied by the music of progressive jazz, heckling from the audience and fellow poets, or the occasional shedding of clothes, in Ginsberg's case. They were the opposite of the formal presentations of most poets to this day, especially in academic settings.

"HOWL"

Ginsberg read from a draft of "Howl" for the first time at a historic evening at San Francisco's Six Gallery on October 7, 1955. Lawrence Ferlinghetti—who owned City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco, one of the central Beat gathering places, and who also ran an independent publishing company out of the bookstore—was there that night. The next day, he sent a telegram to Ginsberg that deliberately echoed Ralph Waldo Emerson's letter to Walt Whitman. The telegram read: "I greet you at the beginning of a great career. When do I get the manuscript?"



"Howl" was published by City Lights in the fall of 1956 in the form of a small booklet. Some of Ginsberg's other finest poems were included in this famous booklet, such as "Supermarket in California"—which pays tribute to Ginsberg's guiding mentor, Walt Whitman. The great cultural critic Greil Marcus suggests that Howl's widespread popularity was due to its publication in a

cheap pamphlet, meant to be read and passed on. It was also due to the fact that Ginsberg wrote it and read from it in California, where the strictures of acceptable language were looser than those in the East.

However, not everyone was a fan of "the poem that would change America," as "Howl" has been called. Fellow poet John Hollander dismissively wrote in the *Partisan Review* that "Howl" "proclaims, in a hopped up and improvised tone, that nothing seems to be worth saying save in a hopped up and improvised tone." Ginsberg's own father, Louis, sent a letter to his son, dated May 27, 1956, in which he opined that the poem "has violence; it has life; it has vitality. In my opinion, it is a one-side neurotic view of life; it has not enough glad, Whitmanian affirmations." However, these criticisms were mere irritations compared to the official government condemnations that Ginsberg's masterpiece would soon provoke.

In March 1957, US customs agents seized 520 copies of *Howl and Other Poems* as their shipping crates arrived from the London-based printer City Lights used. The charge was that the book was obscene. Ferlinghetti and Ginsberg had anticipated seizure of the volumes due to the sexual content of the poem, particularly its graphic homosexual content. Accordingly, they'd voluntarily bowdlerized its most graphic homoerotic line, about young men "who let themselves be f[…] in the a[…] by saintly motorcyclists, and screamed with joy."

One of the customs agents told reporters that "Howl" was being seized because "you wouldn't want your children to come across it." After months, the US Attorney's Office declined to prosecute, and the copies were released. Five days later, two undercover cops with the San Francisco Police Department's Juvenile Bureau went into City Lights Bookstore, bought a copy of "Howl," and arrested the store manager, Shigeyoshi Murao. Ferlinghetti was subsequently arrested for publishing the book. Captain William Hanrahan, who ordered those arrests, intended to make an example out of "Howl."

"HOWL" ON TRIAL

On August 16, the case came before Municipal Court Judge Clayton W. Horn. This did not bode well for the defense. Horn was one of San Francisco's four police magistrates and a regular Sunday school teacher. Shortly before the trial for "Howl" began, Horn had sentenced five women found guilty of shoplifting to go see the movie *The Ten Commandments*. Ralph McIntosh, the

prosecutor, was an elderly assistant DA who had a reputation for persecuting porn merchants. Thanks to the help of the ACLU, Ferlinghetti, Murao, and "Howl" were represented by J. W. Ehrlich, a veteran trial lawyer.

The trial garnered nationwide publicity. In his opening statement, defense attorney Ehrlich defended the literary merit of "Howl" in its entirety, insisting that obscene words do not constitute obscene books. He also claimed that *Howl and Other Poems* was not sold to arouse lewd thoughts. Ehrlich called two expert witnesses to testify to the literary value of the poem. The first was Mark Schorer, a professor of English and chairman of graduate studies in English at the University of California. Schorer testified that in "Howl," Ginsberg attempted to interpret his own human experience. So-called obscene words were necessary to that experience in modern times. Together with other defense witnesses, Schorer attested to the social importance of "Howl." Luther Nichols, a book editor and critic, testified that "the words [Ginsberg] has used are valid and necessary if he's to be honest with his purpose."

Buffeted by such testimony, prosecutor McIntosh closed his case by addressing Judge Horn. McIntosh asked the judge how he would react upon seeing the controversial words used in "Howl" in newspapers or hearing them in radio broadcasts. McIntosh stressed that the obscene words in "Howl" would offend the average person, who wouldn't be able to decipher the meaning of such an "arcane jumble" of a poem anyway.

Judge Horn took two full weeks to render his verdict. He used that time to read Ginsberg's poetry and to probe the legal precedents, including reading James Joyce's *Ulysses*. As explained in a 2019 essay in the *New York Law Journal* by Frank Colella called "Looking Back on the Allen Ginsberg Obscenity Trial 62 Years Later," the "Howl" case was the first to draw upon the new legal test for obscenity that had been handed down that past June by the Supreme Court in *Roth v. United States*. (Samuel Roth was a publisher who distributed a magazine that contained pornographic stories and photos.) The decision in the Roth case required the challenged work to be taken as a whole. It also required consideration to be given to whether the work had some "redeeming social importance." This was a defense-friendly standard. Given the parade of literary scholars and critics who testified on Howl's behalf, it was almost inevitable that Judge Horn would have to find that "Howl" did have value.

Judge Horn concluded that because "Howl" did have "redeeming social importance" and was unlikely to "deprave or corrupt readers by exciting lascivious thoughts or arousing lustful desire," it was "not obscene." This was the trial that transformed Allen Ginsberg into a literary superstar and brought the Beat movement into the public eye. After the trial, "Howl" flew off the City Light Bookstore shelves. The poem achieved an iconic status conferred upon only a select group of literary works. However, the trial did not end attempts to censor or ban "Howl," which had varying success.

In 2007, on the 50th anniversary of the obscenity trial, the New York City public radio station WBAI halted a broadcast of the poem because of FCC rules. Ironically, WBAI is the same radio station that took on the FCC in 1973 over the right to air comedian George Carlin's famous routine featuring "seven dirty words." The challenge led to a 1978 Supreme Court decision determining whether naughty words can be broadcast and when. Moreover, in the fall of 2019, in response to complaints by some parents and students, the Steamboat Springs, Colorado school district publicly apologized for a teacher who required students to read "Howl." The "pornography" that particularly offended them was Ginsberg's graphic descriptions of gay sex.

One parent subsequently sued the school district on behalf of his "traumatized" daughter, hiring a lawyer from First Liberty Institute, a religious right organization. Interestingly, the attorney, Jeremy Dys, used the language of #MeToo in condemning "Howl." Dys is quoted as saying: "In the age of Harvey Weinstein who has used sexual favors to gain control over women, I don't understand why Steamboat Springs would even come close to permitting that in their school districts here." However, the Steamboat Springs school district committee ultimately determined that "Howl" "has educational value and merit." It reached a decision in favor of the poem similar to the one that Judge Horn did in 1957.

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8

HOLDEN CAULFIELD'S SUBVERSIVE VOICE

The keen desire among young people to read *The Catcher in the Rye* and a corresponding desire among older people to prevent them from doing so have marked the history of J. D. Salinger's great work since its publication. According to some scholars, this novel was both the most widely assigned and the most widely banned book in the United States during the second half of the 20th century. "People never notice anything," Holden comments at one point in the novel. However, as this lecture will show, about that (and more than a few other things) he was wrong: People (ordinary readers, high school students, and censors) certainly have noticed—and continue to notice—*The Catcher in the Rye*.

"THE OCEAN FULL OF BOWLING BALLS"

The Special Collections department of Princeton's Firestone Library is a book lover's paradise. Among the many priceless tablets and manuscripts it holds, the number 1 item in American literature that people request to read is an unpublished story called "The Ocean Full of Bowling Balls" by J. D. Salinger. This is still the only place anyone can read it legitimately. The story is considered something of a prequel to *The Catcher in the Rye*, which came out in 1951. It is about the death of Kenneth Caulfield, who becomes Allie Caulfield, Holden's older brother, in *The Catcher in the Rye*. Salinger withdrew it from *Harper's Bazaar* before it was supposed to be published in 1947. In 2013, "The Ocean Full of Bowling Balls" was leaked online, expressly against Salinger's wishes. The terms of his bequest of the story to Firestone Library stipulate that it shouldn't be released until 50 years after his death, which would be 2060.

This anecdote about "The Ocean Full of Bowling Balls" contains some elements that are key to any conversation about Salinger and *The Catcher in the Rye*—namely, the reclusive Salinger's desire for control and the equally fierce desire on the part of his devoted readers to know everything they possibly can about his life and work. Immediately after Salinger's death in 2010, two biographies appeared, one by journalist Paul Alexander and the other by Kenneth Slawenski. Then came the controversial 2013 documentary film and accompanying book by Shane Salerno and David Shields. These broke the tantalizing information that Salinger left behind five manuscripts of as-yet-unpublished books.

There's also the infamous 1988 biography of Salinger by British critic and biographer Ian Hamilton. It is "infamous" because Salinger took legal action to stop Hamilton's biography from being published. He was successful in stripping the manuscript of any quotes or paraphrases from his letters. Subsequently, Hamilton wrote the meta-conscious biography *In Search of J. D. Salinger* about the court case that prevented him from ultimately writing the biography he set out to write.

J. D. SALINGER'S EARLIER LIFE

Jerome David Salinger was born in New York City in 1919. His parents had a so-called mixed marriage, which was rather unusual for the time. His Jewish father worked as a food importer, and his Gentile mother, Miriam, was of Scottish descent. They lived, with Salinger's older sister, in a large apartment in Manhattan. Salinger was such an erratic student that his parents eventually dispatched him to Valley Forge Military Academy in Pennsylvania. His college career was also erratic: He attended NYU for a year, then Ursinus College, and, finally, Columbia at night. There, he had the good fortune of finding a mentor in his English professor, Whit Burnett, who was also the editor of *Story* magazine. That's the magazine that would publish Salinger's first short stories.

Salinger's studies were disrupted by World War II. He was drafted into the army after Pearl Harbor and served in a counterintelligence unit because of his proficiency in French and German. Sergeant Salinger saw combat in some of the European theater's bloodiest battles. Traumatized by all he had done and seen, Salinger suffered a nervous breakdown and had to recover at a US Army hospital in Nuremberg. Shortly after his discharge, Salinger wrote and published in *Collier's* magazine a short story narrated by "Holden Caulfield." It's called, significantly, "I'm Crazy." An earlier story from 1941 called "A Slight Rebellion off Madison" also featured a character called Holden Caulfield. Holden, then, had been incubating in Salinger's imagination for a long time. In a real sense, Holden accompanied Salinger through those horrific wartime battles in the form of six chapters of the manuscript of *Catcher* that Salinger kept with him.

As critic Louis Menand says in a brilliant essay he wrote for *The New Yorker* for the 50th anniversary of the publication of *Catcher*, Salinger's novel is, at bottom, a 1940s novel—a war novel. Holden is reeling from death—the death of his older brother Allie, whose name, Menand and other critics point out, sounds an awful lot like the word *ally*. Two of his other short stories, "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" and "For Esmé—with Love and Squalor," are also post-traumatic war stories.

PUBLICATION OF *THE CATCHER IN THE RYE*

A couple of sections of *Catcher* were published in serial form in 1945 and 1946. However, the finished novel was turned down—not only by Harcourt Brace, the publishing house that had solicited it, but also by *The New Yorker*, which had published six of Salinger's stories. The editor at Harcourt Brace who passed on *Catcher*, Eugene Reynal, did so because he said he couldn't determine whether Holden was supposed to be crazy or not. That confusion, unfortunately, has been shared by some dangerously unstable readers of the novel who've identified with Holden's absolutist worldview.

For instance, Mark David Chapman, who killed John Lennon in 1980, had a copy of the novel on his person. Chapman reportedly came to regard Lennon as a "phony" because his lavish lifestyle was at odds with the counterculture messages of his songs. As the astute critic Ron Rosenbaum has observed in several essays he's written about *Catcher*, readers like Chapman make the elementary mistake of forgetting that Holden's own thinking on the subject of phonies is suspect. Apparently in imitation of Chapman, John Hinkley Jr., who attempted to assassinate Ronald Reagan in 1981, also had a copy of *Catcher* in his hotel room. In 1989, actress Rebecca Shaeffer was murdered by Robert John Bardo, who had a copy of *Catcher* on his person when he committed the crime.

After its rejection by Harcourt Brace, *The Catcher in the Rye* was picked up by Little, Brown and Company and published in July 1951. To date, it has sold more than 65 million copies and has been anointed as one of Modern Library's 100 best English-language novels of the 20th century. In the 2003 BBC survey called "The Big Read," in which people voted on the best-loved novel of all time, it came in at number 15. Salinger left New York and moved to the remote town of Cornish, New Hampshire, in 1953, the same year that his collection, *Nine Stories*, came out. From there on in, his reputation as a recluse defined him. Salinger's reclusiveness also helped make *Catcher* more than merely a novel but almost a guide for life. Salinger was regarded as what someone like Holden—with his loathing of "phonies"—would have become in middle and old age.

Some breaches of Salinger's privacy occurred over the years. Most notably, in 1972, Salinger, then 53, wrote a fan letter to the 18-year-old writer Joyce Maynard, who had written an autobiographical cover essay for *The New York Times Magazine*. Maynard moved in with Salinger, who was then divorced from his second wife, and lived with him for eight months. In 1998, she published her memoir, *At Home in the World*, which portrayed Salinger as a narcissistic predator. Opinion remains split on whether Maynard was prey or publicity-seeking predator and whether, in light of #MeToo, Salinger's reputation will be tarnished.

RECEPTION OF *CATCHER*

Holden's is perhaps the most vivid voice in American literature. His voice is suffused with anger, sad humor, nostalgia, and an insistence that authenticity is the highest virtue. Anything or anyone that isn't authentic is a "phony." Of course, the fact that he's in some kind of rest home or psychiatric hospital when the novel opens suggests that Holden's absolutist view is neither healthy nor sustainable.

It's interesting that in *Catcher*, readers have yet another controversial American literary work narrated in the first person. Statistically speaking, a fair number of the most challenged and banned great American literary works—*To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Lolita*, "Howl," and *The Catcher in the Rye*—are written in the first person. Perhaps there's something especially worrisome to censors about a powerful first-person voice that gets into a reader's head—especially a young reader's head. There is a mystical power to Salinger's writing, particularly *Catcher*, that has driven both its fans and its haters mad.

The novel was not universally praised when it came out in 1951. Reviewers were sharply divided. The *New York Times* initial review became something of a controversial classic itself in that the reviewer, James Stern, parodied Holden's voice, saying that Salinger "knows how to write about kids" before bringing down the full weight of Holdenesque contempt upon *Catcher* itself. Similarly, in *The New Republic*, Anne L. Goodman thought Salinger created in Caulfield an extraordinary portrait, but there is "too much of him." Other critics were more generous, though. S. N. Behrman in *The New Yorker* called *Catcher* "brilliant, funny, meaningful" and noted that "Holden's contacts with the outside world are generally extremely funny. It is his self-communings that are tragic and touching—a dark whirlpool churning fiercely below the unflagging hilarity of his surface activities."

It took the rest of the decade for the book's audience to grow. There was a tension at the heart of its narrative that led to much of the controversy around it: Was this a novel written by an adult, in the voice of a teenager, for teenagers? Or was it a novel written by an adult, in the voice of a teenager, for adults? Stern's *Times* review gets at the confusion. By writing in the slangy, agitated voice of Holden Caulfield, he, too, immerses himself in the mind of the 16-year-old protagonist. However, his review appeared in the prestigious pages of *The New York Times*, addressed to adult readers looking for insights into novels pitched to them.

HISTORICAL CHALLENGES TO *CATCHER*

It was the purported vulnerabilities of adolescents that spawned the earliest efforts to censor *The Catcher in the Rye* during the 1950s. The book found an audience of readers about Holden's own age. School districts assigned it in an effort to support their self-understanding. However, organized religion, which has historically been a crucial institution for the socialization of the young, sought to limit the spread of this social contagion. The National Organization for Decent Literature (NODL) undertook a national project to prevent *Catcher* from being taught in high schools or made available in high school libraries. The NODL was founded in 1938 by the Catholic bishops of the United States. Its founding credo stated that its goal was "to organize and set in motion the moral forces of the entire country … against the lascivious type of literature which threatens moral, social and national life."

The organization contacted school board members in 10 districts around the country, beginning in Marin County, California, in 1954, regarding a list of 20 books it put together, including *Catcher*. Later, it expanded its outreach to Protestant organizations, and its work was mirrored by the Reverend Jerry Falwell in the 1980s. For one thing, Holden's penchant for saying "goddam" outraged these organizations and the many subsequent protests that took up where the original NODL one left off. Interestingly, 1954 was the high-water mark of what became known as the second Red Scare, or McCarthyism, named after Wisconsin senator Joseph McCarthy. Just as McCarthy claimed to be defending American institutions from communist subversion, the NODL not only focused on *Catcher*'s sexual and "atheistic" content but also claimed (without substantiation) that it was "communistic."

Catcher continued to attract the attention of the offended and enraged throughout the culture wars of the '60s, '70s, and early '80s. In a second battle over the book's distribution in the public school system of Marin County in 1960, Reverend Thomas Grabowski, who was leading the protest before the board of trustees, claimed that the novel takes God's name in vain 295 times. Pamela Steinle found similar objections in other school districts she examined, including Albuquerque, New Mexico, in 1968 and Calhoun County, Alabama, from 1982 to 1983.

In their efforts to censor literature, the guardian elites of mainstream culture—religious organizations, school boards, politicians, and community leaders—tend to cast the offending texts as broadly subversive of conventional ideas about faith, family, sexuality, and social hierarchy. During the Cold War era, there was deep anxiety about artistic and popular expressions that broke from the period's conformist norms. All nonconformist art and behavior were linked to a collapse of American values, which might make young people vulnerable to baneful political influences. Sometimes this anxiety took a religious tone, and sometimes it was voiced as a broader secular fear that the book was somehow un-American.

Together, the opposition saw—and still sees—*Catcher* as insufficiently respectful of the dominant strains of American life and the rightful authority of parents, school, organized religion, or God. Holden's cursing, drinking, and encounter with a prostitute account for some of the reaction that *Catcher* engendered. However, because the protesters could not see the way that Salinger slyly complicated and even sometimes undercut his adolescent narrator—how he has Holden himself constantly questioning his own thoughts and actions—they took the anger he directs at "phonies" as a straightforward political screed.

MORE MODERN CHALLENGES TO *CATCHER*

The Catcher in the Rye continues to appear on challenged and banned lists annually. For example, it was challenged as required reading in California's Corona-Norco Unified School District in 1993 because it is "centered around negative activity." The book was retained, and teachers selected alternatives if students objected to Salinger's novel. *Catcher* was also challenged as mandatory reading in the Goffstown, New Hampshire, schools in 1994 because

of the vulgar words used and the sexual exploits described in the book. At Oxford Hills High School in Paris, Maine, in 1996, a parent objected to the use of the *f*-word, and the assigning of the novel came up for debate. It was retained.

Catcher was removed because of profanity and sexual situations from the required reading curriculum of California's Marysville Joint Unified School District in 1997. The school superintendent removed it to get it "out of the way so that we didn't have that polarization over a book." Moreover, the novel was banned but later reinstated after community protests at the Windsor Forest High School in Savannah, Georgia, in 2000. The controversy began in early 1999 when a parent complained about sex, violence, and profanity in the book. *Catcher* was also removed by a Dorchester District 2 school board member in Summerville, South Carolina, in 2001 because it is "a filthy, filthy book."

Controversy over *Catcher* has been so various and steady that it's attracted the scholarly attention of legal professionals. In 2009, Simon Stern, a professor of law and English at the University of Toronto, contributed an article on *Catcher* to *The First Amendment Encyclopedia*. He declared that "in recent years, the novel has … been blamed for promoting alienation among students responsible for high-school shootings." Stern's statement suggests that the trio of shootings by Hinkley, Chapman, and Bardo have, regrettably, become part of the legacy and legend of *The Catcher in the Rye*.

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9

ARTISTRY, MORALITY, AND NABOKOV'S *LOLITA*

This lecture covers a novel that stirs only extreme responses: *Lolita*. In June 1951, Vladimir Nabokov and his wife, Vera, set off from Ithaca, New York, on a road trip westward. Part of the impetus for this trip was the opportunity to do some on-the-road research for the novel *Lolita*, which would be published in 1955. It would forever after be hailed by many critics and readers as the greatest novel of the 20th century—and by many others as pornography that should never have been published in the first place.

NABOKOV'S WESTWARD ADVENTURE

American literary history has been shaped by "Westward Ho!" adventures. The American road narrative was—and still is—written by and about men. Thus, it's ironic that Vera Nabokov did almost all the driving on this particular road trip. Writer Landon Y. Jones, a scholar of the Lewis and Clark expedition, has traced Nabokov's tire tracks across the country. He estimates that between 1949 and 1959, Vera drove her husband over 150,000 miles. Jones points out that in riding shotgun on this trip, the Russian-born Nabokov experienced more of America than many of the most iconic native-born American writers.

During these road trips, Nabokov wrote the disturbing novel that he'd begun sketching out as early as 1947. On that first motor trip in 1951, Vera drove them from Ithaca, New York, through Arizona, Utah, Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana. Along the way, Nabokov scribbled down impressions of the landscape as well as descriptions of motels and snatches of conversation.

In his comprehensive biography, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*, scholar Brian Boyd goes into great detail about those summer road trips the Nabokovs took on the trail of butterflies and material for the novel that Nabokov hoped would be his popular breakthrough book. That road trip and the ones that followed gave Nabokov much of the local color, the idiomatic American turns of phrase, and the proper names that would inform his novel. The town of Dolores, for instance, becomes transformed into Lolita's actual given name: "Dolores, Dolores Haze."

By early winter of 1953, the end was in sight with *Lolita*. As Boyd recounts, Nabokov was putting in 16-hour days to complete the novel. He says:

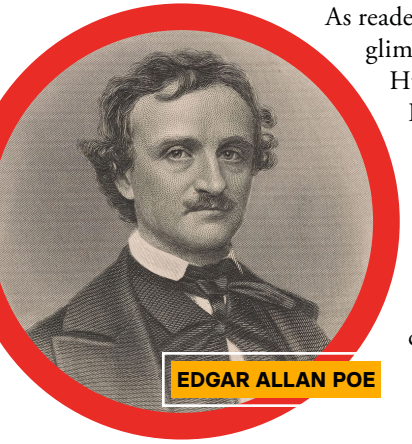
> In the second week of December 1953, Nabokov took to New York a corrected 450-page typescript of the book he had called a time bomb. He had no idea its timer was set so far ahead: *Lolita* would take nearly two years to be published and another three to explode across America.

OVERVIEW OF *LOLITA*

Lolita is an elegant trickster of a narrative. It opens with a foreword, written by a fictitious editor named John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. Already, in this foreward, you can see Nabokov poking fun at academic pretension and false humility. Ray justifies his dubious decision to edit the novel by saying it should serve as a moral lesson for future generations. Again, Nabokov is having fun here, tweaking conventional expectations about "uplift and edification" that middlebrow readers might expect from books. However, Ray informs, no lessons will be offered in the pages that follow, only questions and deep moral complexities.

Soon enough, Humbert is introduced—a self-aware, lively, erudite, droll, and deeply unreliable narrator. Through Humbert's eyes, you glimpse Lolita herself. It's one of the most memorable opening passages in all of literature. Here's Humbert speaking:

> Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth. Lo. Lee. Ta. She was Lo, plain Lo, in the morning, standing four feet ten in one sock. She was Lola in slacks. She was Dolly at school. She was Dolores on the dotted line. But in my arms she was always Lolita.



EDGAR ALLAN POE

As readers quickly discover, when Humbert first glimpsed Lolita, she was 12; he was 36 or 37. Humbert goes on to recall his childhood on the Riviera, where he met his first love, Annabel Leigh. Here, Nabokov is referencing the poem by Edgar Allan Poe—another older man who was sexually involved with a young girl: Poe was 27 when he married his 13-year-old cousin, Virginia Clemm. Humbert says he and Annabel Leigh never had a chance to become lovers since she died young.

Thus, forever after, he remains obsessed with young girls, whom he calls "nymphets." This is one of the many words Nabokov makes up throughout the novel that have become part of our lexicon.

Humbert eventually marries, divorces, and moves to America. There, he is a fish out of water in what he sees as the wasteland of post-World War II American suburbia. Renting a room in the house of a widow named Charlotte Haze, Humbert is transfixed by his first sight of Charlotte's 12-year-old daughter, Dolores—or, as Humbert calls her, "Lolita." Conniving Humbert marries the eager widow Charlotte to have access to her daughter. Soon thereafter, Humbert makes plans to kill Charlotte to get her out of the way—but no need. One day, Charlotte discovers evidence of Humbert's obsession with her adolescent daughter. In a blind fury, Charlotte dashes out of the house, is hit by a car, and dies. Dolores, or Lolita, becomes the ward of her predatory stepfather, Humbert. Humbert picks up Lolita from her summer camp and breaks the news to her of her mother's death. They spend a night together in a motel, and—according to Humbert—the 12-year-old Lolita seduces him.

Repulsive as this plotline is, there's also an undeniably farcical element to the way fate works in Humbert's favor in part 1 of the novel. Since Humbert is the most entertaining and witty character in the novel—and the narrator—it's hard for a reader to resist his charm. Perhaps some people's unease with *Lolita* lies in their awareness that they're enjoying it too much.

In part 2 of the novel, Humbert takes Lolita on a yearlong on-the-road odyssey across the United States. This is where all Nabokov's scribbled observations about crummy motels and flora and fauna come in handy. Throughout this excursion, Humbert repeatedly rapes Lolita. Humbert doesn't call his violations of Lolita rape, but sometimes her voice breaks free of Humbert's narration. For example, Humbert comments that Lolita sobs at night and quotes her as telling him in the car that she "could not sit, said I had torn something inside her."

Eventually, Humbert obtains a teaching position and Lolita enrolls in the local high school. As she begins to pull away, taking part in a school play and other peer-group activities, Humbert becomes more unhinged. He whisks her off on another road trip. On their last excursion, Lolita falls ill and enters a hospital. There, she vanishes, leaving with another man the nurses refer

to as "her uncle." Over the next two years, a frenzied Humbert searches for Lolita. At last, he receives a note from Lolita, now 17, married, and pregnant. She needs money. When the two are reunited again, Humbert discovers that Lolita was "kidnapped" by Clare Quilty, the aged playwright and author of the play that Lolita was to have acted in in high school. Enraged, Humbert murders Quilty and winds up in prison, where he'll die. Lolita, too, meets a sudden end when she dies in childbirth.

PUBLICATION OF *LOLITA*

This was the manuscript—an extraordinary, finely wrought tale of predation, grooming, kidnapping, rape and psychological abuse of a minor, and murder—that Nabokov brought to New York in December 1953. Nabokov himself was fully aware of the risky nature of his novel. He told friends he planned to publish it under a pseudonym so as not to endanger his teaching position at Cornell. All the publishing houses he offered it to turned it down on the grounds that prosecution for obscenity could not be avoided with a book like *Lolita*. Indeed, Boyd, Simon & Schuster's editors deemed it "sheer pornography."

Nabokov couldn't have been completely surprised by these rejections, but he'd hoped that the artistic brilliance of his writing would more than offset any objections to the novel's subject. In fact, you can read *Lolita* as the ultimate artistic challenge to readers, one that asks you: What do you value most in a work of art, subject matter or artistry? For a time, the verdict, at least from American publishers, was subject matter. Because of *Lolita*'s deeply offensive subject matter, they refused to publish the novel.

Ironically, that same subject matter made *Lolita* irresistible to one French publishing house, Olympia Press, which specialized in pornography. Olympia's publisher, Maurice Girodias, wrote to Nabokov telling him that "the book was admirable not only from a literary point of view, but … might lead to a change in social attitudes toward the kind of love described in *Lolita*." Boyd says that Nabokov was so delighted that his novel was finally finding a publishing home that he didn't take in the "strange odor" of statements like these from Girodias.

Lolita, which Nabokov wrote in English, was published by Olympia in the form of a pair of green paperbacks in September of 1955. Although critics took little notice of it, the first printing of 5,000 copies sold out. At the end of the year, a review of the novel appeared in the *London Sunday Times*. The reviewer, novelist Graham Greene, called it one of the three best books of 1955. In response, the editor of the *London Sunday Express* declared that *Lolita* was "the filthiest book I have ever read" and labeled it "sheer unrestrained pornography." The furious and ongoing debate over *Lolita*'s literary value had begun, and so had the debate over whether the reading public should have access to the novel.

LOLITA'S CONTROVERSIAL RISE TO FAME

In the United Kingdom, customs officers were instructed to seize all copies of *Lolita* entering the country; it was banned there until 1959. France banned the novel as obscene from 1956 to 1959. Argentina banned it in 1959. New Zealand banned it in 1960. It was also banned at various times in its early history in Australia, Burma, Belgium, and Austria.

In the United States, the publishing house G. P. Putnam's Sons brought out the first American edition of Nabokov's novel in August 1958 thanks to 26-year-old Rosemary Ridgewell, who worked as a showgirl at the Latin Quarter nightclub in New York City. She had picked up a copy of *Lolita* while she was in Paris. After a party in New York City in 1957, Ridgewell had taken home Walter Minton, the then-married publisher of Putnam's. Minton spied the notorious green paperbacks on her coffee table and stayed up all night reading the novel. By dawn, he was committed to publishing it.

Lolita came out in the United States on August 18, 1958. The influential *New York Times* reviewer Orville Prescott declared it "repulsive … highbrow pornography" and "dull, dull, dull." By the end of September, however, the novel was number 1 on the *New York Times* bestseller list and the first novel since *Gone with the Wind* to sell 100,000 copies in its first three weeks of publication. Nabokov had at last attained the commercial success he so desired. As several critics have pointed out, it's odd, given *Lolita*'s repulsive storyline, that the novel wasn't immediately banned upon its publication in

America. In his March 1958 book column for the *Los Angeles Times*, Robert Kirsch predicted that *Lolita* "will undoubtedly be banned in Boston and there may be countless harassing actions similar to those against Joyce's *Ulysses*." However, Nabokov's novel was not banned in Boston but only by two library systems: the Cincinnati Public Library and the Newark Library.

In a 2019 essay in the *Nabokov Online Journal* titled "We're Just Putting It in Our Files: *Lolita* at the Cincinnati Public Library," writer and educator Marianne Cotugno did a deep dive into that city's historic banning of the novel. Cotugno's analysis of some of the contemporary statements made by library director Ernest Miller highlights some of the reasons why institutions feel it is necessary to ban books. She writes:

> Director Ernest Miller's public statements on behalf of the CPL reveal a belief in the library as guardian and gatekeeper. About *Lolita*, [Miller] asserts that "the theme of perversion seems to be obscene," and [he] sees "no humor in the theme or situation." Miller defends the CPL's actions, claiming that the book "could do actual moral harm to sub-teenagers" by giving them the idea that the actions depicted in the novel are "typical or expected." ...
> By focusing on the effects the novel might have on youth, Miller's rhetoric echoes the language used in earlier obscenity law decisions. The director insists that the novel is for the "sophisticated" reader, and "most of your readers are not sophisticated." [The library director's] comments in the end convey a lack of trust in the public's ability to be discerning readers. Miller declared: "We try to give people what we want them to read as well as what they want. I don't think many people would want to read *Lolita*."

That pronouncement of Miller's certainly turned out to be wrong. *Lolita* became an instant bestseller in America. It's been made into two Hollywood films, a couple of operas, and a ballet. It also engendered a disastrous 1971

musical that closed before it reached New York and another doomed play that opened and closed on Broadway in 1981 after 12 performances. The novel, as Jenny Quigley notes, has since

> ascended to canonical status in English literature; in 1998 the board of the Modern Library voted *Lolita* number four on its list of the twentieth century's greatest English language novels ... [and] it has remained there ever since.

Lolita sits, albeit uneasily, on the syllabi of countless college or high school English courses.

FUTURE OF *LOLITA*

Lolita is an evergreen title on the American Library Association's Banned and Challenged Books list. In 2006, for instance, *Lolita* was challenged in the Marion County Public Library System in Ocala, Florida, for its themes of pedophilia and incest. That kind of challenge to the subject matter of the book has been a mainstay of *Lolita*'s history. The common defense of *Lolita* remains that the novel's artistry is so spectacular that every other consideration comes second. These days, however, the challenges to *Lolita* have become more politicized and genderized, inflected with the rhetoric, viewpoints, and energy of the #MeToo movement. In 2018, for instance, Professor Anne Dwyer, who teaches Russian literature at Pomona College, was required to defend her teaching of *Lolita* in a course devoted to Nabokov from the charge that she was "perpetuating trauma and may even be perpetuating rape culture."

There's the related argument that people have only tolerated *Lolita* for this long because it's the story of a white male privileged predator whose voice owns the narrative of the novel—something readers are accustomed to. Consider the case of Alissa Nutting's much-discussed novel *Tampa*, published in 2013. It tells the story of a 26-year-old-female teacher and her graphic seductions of her young male students. *Publishers Weekly* referred to *Tampa*

as "a *Lolita* meets *American Psycho* satire on the glorification of female monstrosity." Bookstores worldwide refused to carry the novel. However, its defenders pointed out that for decades people have tolerated—indeed canonized—the tale of Humbert Humbert. Nutting's fans argue that women should be allowed the same latitude as men to act like sexual monsters, too.

The vexed question of how to regard *Lolita* nowadays becomes even more fraught in light of the recent recognition that Nabokov's story is based on a horrific real-life abduction of a young girl. In her 2018 book *The Real Lolita*, writer and critic Sarah Weinman details the 1948 abduction of 11-year-old Florence "Sally" Horner by a 50-year-old mechanic, Frank La Salle. La Salle kept her on the move, driving across the country for some two years. Throughout that time, Sally was raped and psychologically manipulated by Horner. Though Nabokov himself steadfastly denied that his magnum opus had roots in that crime, Weinman assembles a substantial array of evidence to the contrary. She points to a telltale reference to the Horner case on one of the many index cards Nabokov scribbled on in his own cross-country trips. Moreover, toward the end of *Lolita*, Humbert asks himself, "Had I done to [Lolita] … what Frank La Salle, a 50-year-old mechanic, had done to 11-year-old Sally Horner in 1948?"

Without question, *Lolita* is a much harder book to assign in a college literature course these days. Professors need to contextualize the novel, issue regular trigger warnings, and foreground the question of whether the book is pornography. Perhaps, eventually, the novel will be quietly sidelined from syllabi. However, *Lolita* will always keep insistently intruding—into national conversations about sexual harassment and abuse, into pop culture references, and into conversations that people have about great literature and what they expect from art. Talking about *Lolita* can feel like being on a perpetual cartwheel of exaltation and apology: celebrating the novel's artistry while decrying the corruption that artistry captures.

READING

Quigley, Jenny Minton. *"Lolita" in the Afterlife*. Vintage Books Original, 2021.

Weinman, Sarah. *The Real Lolita*. Ecco, 2018.

10

AUTHORS WHO CENSOR THEMSELVES

This lecture considers the curious history of authors who've decided to burn, ban, or censor their own works. It begins with what surely must be the most macabre case of all: that of an author who buried his about-to-be-published book in the coffin with his recently deceased wife. That would be the twisted tale of Victorian poet and painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti. You will also learn about more modern authorial acts of annihilation, such as the case of Robert Louis Stevenson.

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

Rossetti was a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a group of painters that embraced medieval subjects. The Pre-Raphaelites were hyper-realistic in their attention to natural detail and were always on the lookout for women with spectacular hair to serve as the models for their medieval-style paintings. One day in 1849, the minor Pre-Raphaelite painter Walter Deverell spotted a young woman named Lizzie Siddal, who was working in a milliner's shop. She had a head of glorious golden-red hair. Pronouncing her "a stunner," Deverell persuaded the 19-year-old Lizzie and her working-class parents to allow her to sit for his painting of *Twelfth Night*. Siddal went on to sit for the other Pre-Raphaelites as well. She quickly became the exclusive model for Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who was 20 when he met and fell in love with her.

Their tormented relationship has been chronicled in novels and even in a cult 1967 film by Ken Russell. Siddal, who was plagued by stomach pain, became addicted to opium. Her drug dependency also may have been a way to cope with Rossetti's chronic infidelity. The couple didn't marry until 1860, when Lizzie seemed near death. There was a reprieve of sorts when Lizzie discovered she was pregnant the next year, but that baby, a girl, was stillborn. In February 1862, Lizzie fell into a coma and couldn't be revived. A vial of laudanum was found by her bedside. A suicide note was also found but suppressed so that Lizzie could have a Christian burial in the Rossetti family plot.

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

Tortured by guilt, Rossetti placed the only manuscript copy of a debut collection of his poems in the coffin with his wife. He explained why: "I have often been writing at those poems when Lizzie was ill and suffering, and I might have been attending to her, and now they shall go."

By 1869, Rossetti was suffering from eye problems and concerned that he would no longer be able to paint. He came to regret burying the only copy of his poems with Lizzie. Thus, on the night of October 5, 1869, Lizzie's coffin was disinterred. Rossetti was not in attendance. However, a witness reported that when the coffin was opened, the men were shocked to see Lizzie's magnificent red-gold hair, which had continued to grow, filling the coffin. Tangled in all that hair was a worm-ridden manuscript of what would be published the following year as *Poems*.

VIRGIL AND JAMES JOYCE

Rossetti's decision to bury his work was motivated by guilt, but many other authors bent on making their work disappear do so out of frustration. For example, according to legend, Virgil, who wrote his epic poem the *Aeneid* between 29 and 19 BCE, asked friends, including the emperor Augustus, to burn the poem after his death because he hadn't finished it to his satisfaction. Fortunately, Augustus gave the order to ignore his deceased friend's wishes.

James Joyce began working on the first iteration of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in 1903. After some 20 publishers rejected the manuscript, which was then titled *Stephen Hero*, Joyce threw it into a fireplace. His wife, Nora Barnacle, immediately snatched out the unburnt portions. Joyce himself would go on to "salvage" parts of *Stephen Hero* in chapters of the completed *Portrait*, which was published in book form in 1916. The surviving chapters of *Stephen Hero* were published posthumously in 1944, three years after Joyce's death. Even the most rabid Joyce scholars had to admit those chapters represented little more than a weak and disorganized first attempt at what would become *Portrait*.

HARPER LEE AND VLADIMIR NABOKOV

In the 1950s, Harper Lee chose destruction by ice for a draft of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Impatient with her own writing, she flung the manuscript pages out the window of her New York apartment on a snowy night. In tears, she then reached for the phone and confessed what she had done to

her sympathetic editor, Tay Hohoff. Hohoff ordered Lee to run downstairs and rescue that manuscript before it was ruined. For a long time, however, it seemed as though Lee would be much more successful in making the manuscript of *Go Set a Watchman*, an earlier first draft of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, disappear forever.

In 2011, the typed manuscript of that first draft was found buried in a safe-deposit box in Lee's hometown of Monroeville, Alabama. In 2014, Lee's new lawyer passed it on to her agent, who then arranged for publication. It's not 100% clear that Lee was in full possession of her faculties to give consent to the publication of this "prequel." By 2014, she was in a nursing home, blind and deaf. Her beloved older sister Alice, a lawyer and Harper Lee's gatekeeper, had died that same year. Many people who read *Go Set a Watchman* were sorry that this unedited and disillusioning first draft of Lee's masterpiece ever saw the light of day.

A few years earlier, in 2009, another manuscript whose author had consigned it to oblivion was published. Unlike *Go Set a Watchman*, the existence of Vladimir Nabokov's final novel, *The Original of Laura*, was well known in literary circles. Before Nabokov died in 1977, one of the last wishes he made to his wife, Vera, was that the unfinished manuscript of *Laura* be burned. However, Vera couldn't bring herself to burn what was one of the final products of her late husband's imagination. Thus, she deposited the manuscript in a Swiss bank vault.

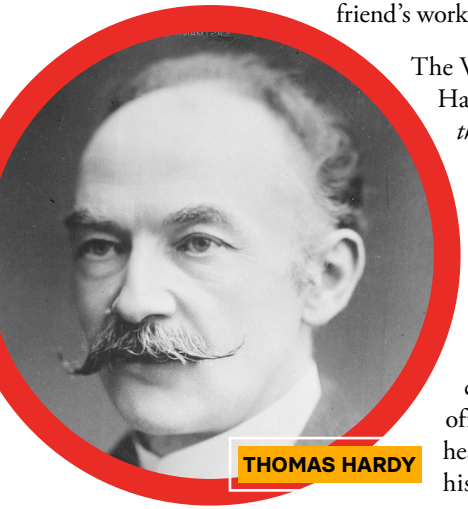
Upon Vera's death in 1991, the fate of the manuscript was put in the hands of the couple's only child, Dmitri. He wrestled with the decision for almost 18 years. Dmitri's dilemma was a popular subject with critics and other authors. When Dmitri finally made the decision to publish, he gave an interview to a program on BBC2 in which he said his father had told him that *Laura* was among his most important books. Dmitri concluded: "One doesn't name a book one intends to destroy."

When *The Original of Laura* came out in 2009, it was universally panned. The unfinished novel was composed of 138 notecards—notecards being a mainstay of Nabokov's writing process. The Brits, who excel at critical takedowns, were particularly scathing. Fellow novelist and Nabokov admirer Martin Amis declared in *The Guardian*: "When a writer starts to come off the rails, you expect skid marks and broken glass; with Nabokov, naturally, the eruption is on the scale of a nuclear accident."

THE LIBRARY OF LOST BOOKS

The most horrific known case of self-immolation by a frustrated author is that of Franz Kafka. He reportedly burned 90% of his work and gave directions that the rest be burnt after his death. Kafka, the literary high priest of alienation, felt conflicted about imposing his often horrific imaginative visions on the world. When he died of tuberculosis in 1924, Kafka was known in Germany as a minor writer. Stories such as *The Metamorphosis* and "A Hunger Artist" had been published in magazines to little attention. His major novels, *The Trial* and *The Castle*, existed only in manuscript form.

Facing death, Kafka wrote a letter to his best friend, Max Brod, and placed it in his desk, where Brod later discovered it. "Dearest Max," it began. "My last request: Everything I leave behind me … in the way of diaries, manuscripts, letters (my own and others'), sketches and so on, to be burned unread." Brod, who worshipped his friend, ignored his last wishes. Soon after Kafka's death, Brod signed an agreement to prepare a posthumous edition of Kafka's unpublished novels. *The Trial* came out in 1925, followed by *The Castle* in 1926 and *Amerika* in 1927. In 1939, Brod stuffed a suitcase with Kafka's papers and managed to board the last train out of Prague, minutes before the Czech border was closed. Brod spent the rest of his life publishing and promoting his late friend's work.

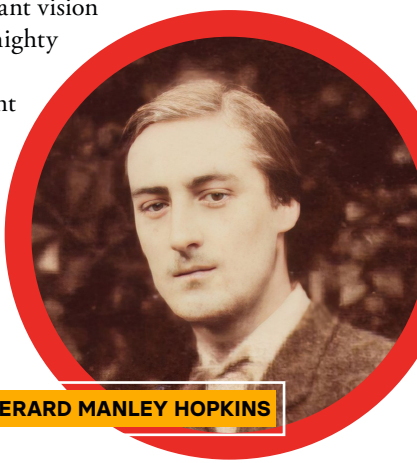


THOMAS HARDY

The Victorian novelist and poet Thomas Hardy is best known for works such as *Jude the Obscure* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. He began his career with a novel called *The Poor Man and the Lady*, which was finished in 1867. The novel was rejected by at least five publishers. Some of the rejection letters deemed that events in the story "hung too loosely together" and that the theme of class hostility—so central to much of Hardy's work—was off-putting. Hardy took the criticism to heart. In his future works, he encased his socialist sentiments in more nuanced

situations and fully fleshed-out characters. He also plundered some scenes from the manuscript—which he destroyed in his old age—for later novels. After Hardy's death in 1928, the executors of his estate burnt his letters and multitudinous notebooks. Only 12 notebooks escaped the conflagration.

Another Victorian, the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, famously felt torn between his secular love of art and his spiritual calling. Hopkins is credited with introducing a new poetic meter in English: sprung rhythm. He produced such anthologized poems as "God's Grandeur," "Pied Beauty," "The Windhover," and "The Wreck of the *Deutschland*." Hopkins's poems are incantatory and passionate, charged with a radiant vision of the beauty of nature and the power of an almighty God. He's also remembered for his scandalous conversion to Catholicism while he was a student at Oxford. And Hopkins didn't only convert—he entered the priesthood and became a Jesuit.



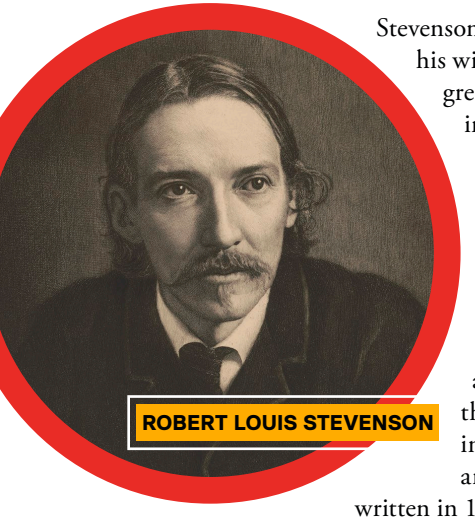
GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

When Hopkins took religious orders, he burned all the poems he had written up to that time. Scholars speculate that there was something shameful to the ascetic Hopkins produced during his time at Oxford. More recent Hopkins scholarship focuses on evidence from surviving private letters that Hopkins was gay, although he tried to suppress his sexual desires. Only some of those early poems survived because Hopkins had sent them to his friends, particularly his fellow poet Robert Bridges. After Hopkins's death in 1889, those early poems were distributed to a wider audience. In 1918, Bridges, who was then poet laureate, helped publish a collected edition of Hopkins's surviving work.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Robert Louis Stevenson is the author of *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped*. However, he also had a more sinister dimension as a writer—one that found expression in his 1886 novella *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. By the time he'd begun writing *Jekyll and Hyde*, Stevenson, who was always sickly, was bedridden in his home in Bournemouth, England. He was

recovering from a hemorrhage caused by chronic tuberculosis and weakened by the cocaine he took to alleviate his conditions. It's said that the idea for *Jekyll and Hyde* came to Stevenson via a cocaine-addled nightmare. The morning after, Stevenson began writing, trying to set down that nightmare. He wrote the first draft in three days.


ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Stevenson was in the habit of showing his drafts to his wife, Fanny, herself a published writer. She greatly disliked the novella and thought its immoral subject would better be served if Stevenson wrote the story as an allegory rather than as a "straight" tale of terror. Most 20th-century scholarship said that Stevenson threw his manuscript into the fireplace. In burning his manuscript, he forced himself to rewrite the tale in allegorical form, as recommended by Fanny. However, there were always questions about this incident. In the fall of 2000, there was an announcement that a two-page letter written in 1885 by Fanny to Stevenson's good friend, the poet W. E. Henley, had been discovered and was up for auction. The letter refers to *Jekyll and Hyde* as distasteful. Fanny tells Henley that Stevenson claims "it was his greatest work." However, she assures Henley, "I shall burn it after I show it to you." And so she did.

The ailing Stevenson spent the next few days in bed, furiously rewriting the story that Fanny had destroyed. In all, he produced his first and second drafts in six days. The novella was published a few weeks later and became an instant bestseller. Its message—that "man was not truly one but truly two"—inspired sermons in churches throughout Great Britain. It rescued the Stevensons from the debt that plagued them.

SYLVIA PLATH

In July 1962, Sylvia Plath learned of her husband Ted Hughes's affair with another woman. In a delayed response, weeks later, she built a bonfire in her backyard and burnt the draft of her second novel, *Falcon Yard*. This was to have been a romantic comedy about Plath and Hughes's relationship. Chapters have been found in archives in America and England. However, there's no known copy of the completed novel. In two more bonfires, Plath destroyed almost 1,000 of her own letters and several boxes of Hughes's papers. Plath then wrote her own record of these ritual conflagrations in a poem she called "Burning the Letters."

In the decades since Plath's death in February 1963, as her reputation has soared, speculation also has grown over the fate of her missing journals and of the manuscript of her third novel, *Double Exposure*. Some of Plath's journals are housed in her archive at the Smith College Library; others are unaccounted for. Ted Hughes, who died in 1998, admitted to destroying at least one journal written in the last month of Plath's life to protect the couple's two children.

Ted Hughes and Phillip Larkin are acknowledged as the two most important poets of England's postwar generation. Another thing the two men had in common was a propensity for making their own manuscripts disappear. Larkin was a lifelong diarist. In 1976, when a publisher suggested he publish some of his diaries, Larkin went back, reread them, and destroyed them. As he neared death in 1985, Larkin asked his long-term lover Monica Jones to burn his diaries. She understandably hesitated. However, his secretary (and former lover) Betty Mackereth was more decisive: She removed the covers from over 30 volumes of Larkin's diaries and shredded the contents, which she then burned. The diaries' covers are stored with the Larkin papers at Hull.

LORD BYRON

George Gordon's four-part epic poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* made him an overnight sensation when the first two cantos were published in 1812. He was 24. Gordon, or Lord Byron, was a founding member of the second generation of the Romantic movement in art and literature. Byron exemplified the radical intemperance of that movement. His aristocratic background and fortune

granted him the freedom to travel around the world, and along the way, he took scores of lovers. There were also rumors that Byron was engaged in an incestuous affair with his half sister, Augusta Leigh, who may have borne him a daughter.

Partly to quell those rumors, Byron married the irreproachable, educated, and wealthy Annabella Milbanke in 1815. Their daughter, Ada, followed in the footsteps of her mother and became a pioneering mathematician who would go on to work with the early computer scientist Charles Babbage. The marriage, however, was a disaster from the get-go. This was due to Byron's ceaseless philandering and Annabella's strong suspicions about Byron's intimate relationship with Augusta Leigh. The pair formally separated in early 1816.

Byron began writing his memoirs in 1818 and completed a draft in 1821. He entrusted the manuscript to his close friend, Irish poet Thomas Moore. With Byron's blessing, Moore sold the memoir manuscript to Byron's publisher, John Murray, with the intention that it would be published. By the time Byron died in 1824, the stories of his scandalous private life had made him an outcast to polite society in Great Britain. After Byron's death, Moore learned that Murray had changed his mind, deeming the memoir unfit for publication. Byron's estranged wife, Annabella Milbanke; his half-sister and executor, Augusta Leigh; and another close friend of Byron's, the radical English politician John Cam Hobhouse, also insisted that the manuscript be destroyed. A week after Byron's burial, that trio and the Byron family solicitors gathered in Murray's office to burn the manuscript in the fireplace.

READING

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Knight, G. Wilson. *Lord Byron's Marriage*. Routledge, 1957.
Ovenden, Richard. *Burning the Books*. John Murray, 2020.

11

THE HIDDEN DANGERS OF FAIRY TALES

Perhaps no other genre is so tenaciously scrutinized and policed by library committees, school boards, and parents as that of children's literature. Common wisdom holds that malleable young minds should be protected from material that's age-inappropriate (sexually or otherwise). However, the question of which narratives and images are deemed "inappropriate" has been the focus of fierce controversy and more than a few moments of absurdity. This lecture discusses some highlights—or lowlights—of the banning of fairy tales.

ORIGINS OF FAIRY TALES

The origins of fairy tales are impossible to nail down. However, there are some details that scholars agree on: Fairy tales were originally oral tales, part of a larger complex of myth and folklore that informs every culture known to humankind. The scholarly ferment that spilled from the Renaissance into succeeding centuries brought a heightened interest in collecting, setting down, and even codifying these tales. Frenchman Charles Perrault in the 1600s and the Brothers Grimm in 19th-century Germany were among the first people to study and write down fairy tales. The wisdom of relegating such tales to the category of "children's literature" has been questioned in the modern era. Fairy tales are filled with incidents of abandonment, violence, death, and a pervasive atmosphere of weirdness.

In 1976, the Austrian-born public intellectual and alleged Freudian psychologist Bruno Bettelheim published *The Uses of Enchantment*. The book won the National Book Critics Award for Criticism that same year as well as a 1977 National Book Award in the no-longer-extant category of "Writing on Contemporary Thought." In the book, Bettelheim argued that the horrors encased in fairy tales were helpful for children to be introduced to, as they raised and resolved problems such as separation anxiety and sibling rivalry. Bettelheim's academic credentials were later discredited, and sections of *The Uses of Enchantment* were found to be plagiarized. However, the central thesis of his book about the therapeutic benefits of exposing children to terrors safely contained in fiction is one that's still popularly accepted today as a defense of fairy tales.

"LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD"

Consider one of the most well-known and troubling fairy tales of them all: "Little Red Riding Hood." This story has been linked to tales from classical mythology and European werewolf legends as well as similar narratives from East Asia and Africa. The story that most people were raised on combines versions from Perrault, the Brothers Grimm, and Disney. It focuses on a young girl wearing a red cape who walks through the woods to deliver a basket of food to her ailing grandmother. The Big Bad Wolf stalks the girl

and eventually confronts her to ask where she's going. Little Red Riding Hood, being naïve and chatty, responds by telling her furry interrogator her destination. The Wolf races to Grandmother's house, swallows her whole, and disguises himself in Grandmother's clothes.

When Red Riding Hood arrives at the cottage, she senses something is off about her grandmother. The following exchange takes place:

> "What a deep voice you have!"
>
> "The better to greet you with," says the Wolf posing as Grandmother.
>
> "What big eyes you have!"
>
> "The better to see you with!"
>
> "What big hands you have!"
>
> "The better to hold you with!"
>
> "What big teeth you have!"
>
> "The better to eat you with!" says the Wolf.

Then, the Wolf swallows up Little Red Riding Hood, too. Satiated, he falls asleep. A woodcutter who happens to be in the neighborhood comes to the rescue by cutting open the sleeping Wolf and helping Red Riding Hood and her grandmother to step out of the Wolf's stomach. The three humans then fill the Wolf's belly with stones. This—depending on the version you read—either causes the Wolf upon awakening to collapse and die or to become thirsty and drink from a nearby well, which results in his death by drowning.

For centuries, parents have read versions of "Little Red Riding Hood" to their children. The tale ostensibly is meant to teach them to beware of strangers, to instill lessons of courage and resilience, and to caution them to listen closely to parental advice about staying on a well-lit path in life rather than wandering into the dark unknown. As kindergarten education became widespread in Great Britain and the United States by the mid-20th century, fairy tales crept into the curriculum. In tandem, people and organizations began to register objections about their disturbing content.

In the summer of 1947, for example, the Nursery School Association of Britain officially condemned "Little Red Riding Hood" as "cruel, deceptive and likely to create fear complexes among children." Jumping ahead, 1990

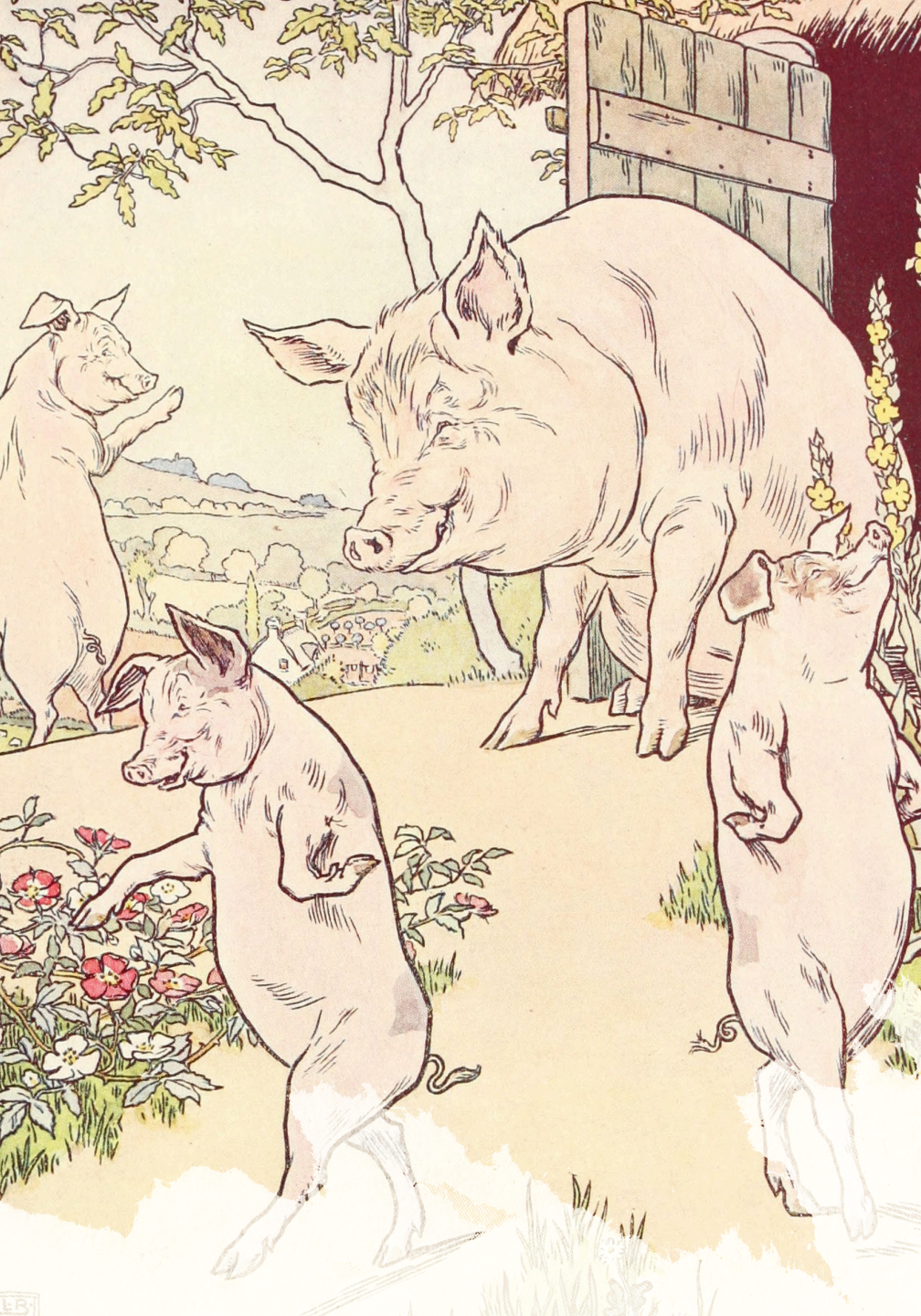
was a banner year in the United States for educators to denounce the tale because of the suggestion that Grandmother might be a little too fond of the wine in Little Red Riding Hood's basket. The cause was a new paperback edition of the fairy tale written and illustrated by Trina Schart Hyman. Hyman's version had originally come out in 1983 and had won several awards, including a Caldecott Medal for illustration in children's books. However, in the view of some parents and school administrators, Hyman's version endorsed the mood-elevating properties of alcohol.

In October 1990, the *Orlando Sentinel* reported that school officials in Florida's Levy County were reviewing the tale after an elementary school teacher objected to the wine Red Riding Hood is carrying to give to her ailing grandmother. In response, the executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union in Florida, Robyn Blumner, conceded that that organization probably wouldn't be caught up in a fight to keep "Little Red Riding Hood" in the Levy County schools. However, Blumner added that schools make a mistake when they put everything their students read under a microscope.

The same concerns were raised that same year by the Culver City Unified School District in California. There, "Little Red Riding Hood" was banned from first-grade classrooms. In Hyman's version, as Little Red Riding Hood sets out, her mother says to her: "I want you to take this loaf of fresh bread, some of this sweet butter, and a bottle of wine to your grandmother. She is sick in bed, and they will do her a world of good." After being swallowed by the Wolf and rescued by the Woodsman, Grandmother and Little Red celebrate by digging into the contents of that basket. Hyman's text reads: "Grandmother drank some of the wine and Red Riding Hood had a cup of blackberry tea. After a while, Grandmother felt quite strong and healthy." The illustration accompanying this text shows Grandmother flushed and cheerful with a glass of wine in her hand. The district banned the fairy tale out of concern that the combined text and illustration sent a message to first graders that drinking is an acceptable way to relieve stress and feel jollier.

"THE THREE LITTLE PIGS"

For decades, many controversial political and cultural meanings have been imputed to "The Three Little Pigs." In 1959, United Press International ran a story about a pro-segregation property owner's association in Dade County,



Florida. The association's president was lobbying legislators in Tallahassee to get a bill approved that would ban a 1950s version of "The Three Little Pigs" from Florida public libraries. The porcine trio was accused of being part of a "Communist-sponsored plot … [to] 'put color' into the familiar tale" and thus promote racial integration. The edition the property owners objected to depicted one pig as white, one black, and one "mulatto." What stirred the ire of these segregationists was that "the [pig] that outwits the wolf is [the] black [one]." That dust-up followed hard upon a story the previous week from Alabama. There, segregationists objected to a book titled *The Rabbits' Wedding*, written by Garth Williams. Apparently, the two betrothed rabbits in Williams's book were depicted as being black and white, thus violating the "color bar."

The reasons for banning particular books change with shifting cultural attitudes. A story that might have aroused protest among reactionary social conservatives can transform into a target for so-called politically correct progressives. Such was the case with "The Three Little Pigs" as the 21st century got underway. In March 2003, London's *Daily Mail* reported that "The Three Little Pigs," along with all other children's stories involving pigs, had been cleared off classroom bookshelves at a preschool in West Yorkshire. The headmistress defended the move as motivated by concern for the "religious sensitivities" of the students, some 60% of whom identified as Muslim. Muslim leaders, however, condemned the action. They accused the school of ignorance and "crazy" political correctness. A member of the Muslim Council of Britain pointed out that the Koran itself contains references to pigs and that religious prohibitions pertain to eating pigs, not reading about them.

The *Daily Mail* eventually ran a follow-up piece with still more examples of popular attempts to clean up fairy tale favorites. In 2007, it reported on a music festival in Kirklees, in West Yorkshire, where a junior school musical production of "The Three Little Pigs" had been renamed "The Three Little Puppies" out of concern for offending Muslims. Islamic leaders once again denounced the censoring of "The Three Little Pigs," noting that such decisions were turning Muslims into social "misfits." A more contemporary outcry over "The Three Little Pigs" has to do with their domiciles. In 2011,

Ellen Wolpert, an American educator who writes on diversity issues, urged her fellow educators to avoid teaching the tale to children. In an article titled "Rethinking 'The Three Little Pigs,'" Wolpert said:

> [The fairy tale] belittles straw and stick homes and the "lazy types" who build them. On the other hand, the story extols the virtues of brick homes, suggesting that they are built by serious, hardworking people and are strong enough to withstand adversity. Is there any coincidence that brick homes tend to be built by people in Western countries, often by those with more money? That straw homes are more common in non-European cultures, particularly Africa and Asia?

It's easy to ridicule such efforts to inoculate fairy tales against even the remotest danger that they might offend some readers somewhere. Ridicule is exactly what a Chicago comedian named James Finn Garner did in his book *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories*, which made the bestseller list in 1994. Here's the opening of Garner's version of "The Three Little Pigs": "Once there were three little pigs who lived together in mutual respect and in harmony with their environment. Using materials that were indigenous to the area, they each built a beautiful house."

Similarly, Garner mines "Little Red Riding Hood" for that tale's broad politically correct possibilities. In his tongue-in-cheek version, Little Red Riding Hood, a resolute young feminist, sets off to her grandmother's house with a basket of fresh fruit and mineral water. Garner writes:

> Many people believed that the forest was a foreboding and dangerous place and never set foot in it. Red Riding Hood, however, was confident enough in her own budding sexuality that such obvious Freudian imagery did not intimidate her.

Meanwhile, the wolf's "status outside society had freed him from slavish adherence to linear, Western-style thought," enabling him to wear Grandma's bonnet because he was "unhampered by rigid, traditionalist notions of what was masculine and feminine." At story's end, Red Riding Hood, Grandma, and the wolf "set up an alternative household based on mutual respect and co-operation, and they lived together in the woods happily ever after."

THE GREAT TEXTBOOK WARS

In summer of 1974 in Kanawha County, West Virginia, a battle began over the choice of reading materials for the county public school system. In accordance with new federal education guidelines stipulating that public schools include writings by and about people of color in their curriculums, the school board considered adopting a new set of textbooks for the district. The furor that erupted was primarily about race. It focused on selections and quotes from works such as Eldridge Cleaver's 1968 memoir *Soul on Ice*. However, fairy tales and other children's books also came in for fierce criticism.

Beginning in June 1974, the challenges to the proposed books turned into a months-long debate over whether the supplemental reading materials were antireligious, antiauthoritarian, anti-police, and, particularly, antiwhite. Alice Moore—a school board member, fundamentalist preacher's wife, and activist against sex education—instigated the protests. She was especially disturbed by language arts textbooks that promoted "ghetto dialect" instead of "standard American speech." However, "The Three Little Pigs" and "Jack and the Beanstalk," as well as *Pinocchio*, were also seen as cause for concern.

Some parents said that in one proposed textbook, "Jack and the Beanstalk" had been rewritten "to appear more sadistic and gruesome than usual." Some Kanawha County residents also objected to suggested discussion questions in a teacher's manual asking about Jack's motives for stealing from the giant and thus promoting "situational ethics." The proposed version of *Pinocchio* was denounced for portraying Pinocchio as "a mean, despicable brat." Some opponents of the new books also objected to parts of the story's plotline. For example, Pinocchio's father, Geppetto, is wrongly arrested for allegedly mistreating the puppet. Some angry parents saw that as "an attempt

to portray people in authority 'unjustly.'" Other parents in Alice Moore's circle specifically objected to works by writers of color, labeling the work of Langston Hughes as anti-Christian and those of James Baldwin as antiwhite.

Despite these objections, the Kanawha County school board voted to accept the new textbooks. The more culturally diverse textbooks, as well as other reading materials, were adopted. However, as the school year got underway in the fall of 1974, a substantial number of parents boycotted county schools by keeping their kids at home. The controversy then turned violent. Some parents felt that left-leaning and secular values were being imposed by the government upon their mostly rural communities. Kanawha County became the center of national attention. At least three elementary schools were attacked with firebombs and Molotov cocktails. Fifteen sticks of dynamite were thrown into the Board of Education building, causing a blast powerful enough to "lift a three-ton air conditioning unit off its foundation on the roof." In 1975, a fundamentalist Baptist minister and three associates were convicted in federal court on several charges in connection with those bombings.

Ultimately, the Great Textbook Wars died down, and all but one of the disputed books were introduced into county schools. However, the protesters did accomplish something crucial: They managed to persuade the board to promise that future textbooks must "encourage loyalty to the United States," "not encourage sedition or revolution against our government," and "not defame our nation's founders or misrepresent the ideals and causes for which they sacrificed and struggled." This incident has since been studied by political scientists and historians as a signal moment in the burgeoning of the New Right and its constituency of religious conservatives and white working-class men and women. More recently, commentators have referenced the events in Kanawha County when discussing the 2021 governor's race in Virginia. Republican candidate Glenn Youngkin appealed to many voters by insisting that parents should have the ultimate authority over what their children read in public schools.

READING

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12

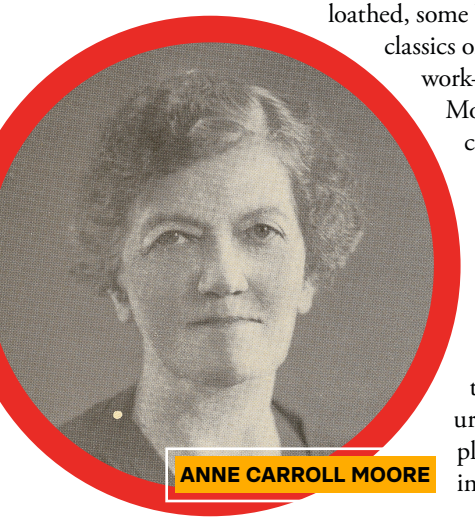
CONTESTED CLASSICS OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Anne Carroll Moore was a powerful figure—mostly for good—in the emerging professionalization of children's literature as a genre in the 20th century. As this lecture will show, in discussing various children's literature works that have been banned, such as *Alice in Wonderland*, Moore's story also reminds one that the banning of books can happen "undercover." There's no way to know how many times books have been and continue to be quietly exiled from library shelves because someone with a bit of power takes offense. It's helpful to remember that the bannings discussed here are the ones people know about because they took place in the public sphere of school, PTA, and library board meetings.

ANNE CARROLL MOORE

Anne Carroll Moore is a giant in the field of children's literature. She was the first children's librarian—a position she herself created. Moore was born in 1871 in Maine and moved to New York to attend the librarian program at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. Influenced by a paper she'd heard read at the 1894 meeting of the American Library Association, she organized a children's reading room at Pratt. At this time, children under the age of 14 were often forbidden to enter public libraries. Her children's reading room featured scaled-down furniture, reading nooks, programming such as story times and puppet shows, and librarians committed to stocking the shelves with good books. Moore eventually moved on to the New York Public Library, where she oversaw the Central Children's Room, which opened in 1911. She managed to turn the policy around so that children were allowed to take out books. By 1913, one-third of all the books borrowed from the New York Public Library System were children's books.

Moore, however, had certain fixed ideas about what kinds of stories were suitable for children. She approved of fairy tales and fantasy—genres that stretched children's imaginations. She is credited with introducing Beatrix Potter, among others, to American readers. However, she strongly disliked, even loathed, some books that have since become undisputed classics of children's literature. Because of her work—which also included book reviewing—Moore was a powerful gatekeeper who could damage sales and even ban certain children's books from the shelves of the New York Public Library.



ANNE CARROLL MOORE

One of the children's writers Moore vehemently disliked was E. B. White. Moore's reaction to White's first children's book, *Stuart Little*, was hard to fathom given the fact that she had urged him to write the book in the first place. Before *Stuart Little* was published in 1945, Moore had obtained the early

page proof. She wrote to White telling him that the novel was not fit for children to read. Stuart Little, she said, was "unruly and his story failed in every way to correspond to time honored patterns for fantasy." Moore then wrote to White's editor and insisted that the book should not be published. She followed this up with a 14-page letter to White's wife, Katherine Sergeant Angell White. Katherine was a groundbreaking writer and, for many years, the only female editor at *The New Yorker*. Thus, when Moore urged Katherine to pressure her husband to cancel the book, Katherine ignored Moore. Fortunately, the Whites had enough cultural clout of their own to get *Stuart Little* noticed in the literary world despite Moore's objections.

However, seven years later, Moore complained about what many readers consider E. B. White's masterpiece, *Charlotte's Web*. Moore's review of the book appeared in 1952 in *The Horn Book Magazine*, an influential periodical in the children's literature field. Moore praised other just-published children's books in her roundup column. Then, she turned to *Charlotte's Web*. She conceded that White portrayed farm animals with "great beauty and understanding." She liked the character of Fern but thought her mother was an idiot. Then, Moore committed the book critic's cardinal sin: She faulted White for not writing the book she would have written.

Moore also absolutely loathed Margaret Wise Brown's 1947 classic, *Goodnight Moon*. This loathing carried weight. From 1947 through 1972, the New York Public Library system did not contain one single copy of the book. Moore, who'd already retired by the time it was first published, still exerted such power at the New York Public Library that it simply wasn't ordered.

ALICE IN WONDERLAND

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland is a literary nonsense novel published in 1865 by Lewis Carroll. It has never been out of print since it was published. However, since its initial publication, *Alice in Wonderland* has made many adults uncomfortable—perhaps with good reason. It was written explicitly for one young girl, Alice Liddell, and her two sisters. Lewis Carroll, the pen name for Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, was an Oxford mathematician, an early photographer, and a puzzle maker. He befriended the three daughters of Henry Liddell, the dean of Christ Church College, Oxford. On July 4, 1862, Carroll and the Reverend Robinson Duckworth rowed up the Isis River in

Oxford with the three young girls. Along the way, Lewis Carroll entertained the sisters with one of the many stories he was wont to make up. He called this one "Alice's Adventures Under Ground." Alice asked Lewis Carroll to write it down. Two years later, he presented her with the manuscript.

When it was published, *Alice in Wonderland* was an immediate sensation. In the years since, it's been made into countless films and TV shows. It's also inspired novelists such as Vladimir Nabokov and James Joyce, and it has even been credited as one of the origins of surrealism as an artistic movement. Then, there's the neurological complaint dubbed Alice in Wonderland syndrome: It entails the misperception of objects as larger or smaller than they are.

As the 20th century got underway, and as Freudian theories gave people a different understanding of children's sexuality, more and more adult readers expressed concerns over Alice's adventures. In the early 1900s, the state of New Hampshire banned the book from all public schools because it was accused of promoting sexual fantasies and masturbation as well as "derogatory characterizations of teachers and of religious ceremonies." The discomforting sexual associations with *Alice in Wonderland* derive not only from the text itself but also from the possible erotic attachments of Dodgson. An avid photographer, Dodgson liked to take pictures of young girls, the daughters of his friends and acquaintances. Oftentimes, he photographed those girls naked. In Victorian times, this hobby was not cause for suspicion. However, it is interesting that, for a time, Dodgson was banished from the company of Alice and her sisters. It's been suggested that he may have proposed marriage to Alice. He would have been 31 at the time, whereas Alice would have been 11.

There's also plenty of material within the text of *Alice in Wonderland* itself to give library and school boards pause. The most controversial and oft-targeted scene takes place in chapter 5, after Alice enters Wonderland and meets the blue and—according to many censors—suggestively phallic caterpillar. The caterpillar sits atop a mushroom, smoking a hookah. He offers Alice advice on how to find the white rabbit. He also provides Alice with a piece of the mushroom that will alter her size to help her on her journey. The presence of the hookah and mushroom was an outrage to many schools, parents, and religious groups, especially as the psychedelic '60s got underway and the implications of such a "trip" became clearer.

The fact that Alice herself grows taller and smaller in this chapter has also been read by scrupulous school boards as a depiction of male arousal. In any case, *Alice in Wonderland* began to be frequently banned all over the United States during the 1960s and into the 1970s. Scattered bannings continue to this day. Perhaps the strangest objections to *Alice in Wonderland* arise from what seems to be a benign presence in the book: the animal characters. In 1931, the governor of the Hunan Province in China banned the book because of the talking animals, which he deemed "an insult to the human race."

WINNIE-THE-POOH

The objection to humanizing animals is not an uncommon reason for censoring books. *Winnie-the-Pooh* has attracted the same pushback. The first collection of stories by A. A. Milne featuring the honey-obsessed bear, called simply *Winnie-the-Pooh*, was published in 1926. *The House at Pooh Corner* followed in 1928. Pooh has since conquered the world. However, that fame has also been accompanied by some familiar denunciations. Milne's books sit at number 22 on the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom's Top 100 Banned and Challenged Books of the Twentieth Century. *Winnie-the-Pooh* has sometimes been challenged because the idea of animals talking—at the same level as their human counterpart, Christopher Robin—is considered an abomination by some religious groups.

The presence of Piglet, Winnie's sweet, nervous, and timid little friend, has also raised concerns: namely, that the character of a talking pig might offend Muslim and Jewish students who abstain from eating pork for religious reasons. Then, there are a few out-of-left-field objections to the tales of Winnie and his friends, one of which occurred in Russia in 2009. In that year, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that:

> Russia's Justice Ministry placed the book on a list of banned material and labeled it pro-Nazi because a depiction of Pooh bear wearing a swastika was discovered among the personal possessions of a known political extremist. If one extremist was in possession of a Nazi Pooh, the local courts concluded, then it stood to reason that others may follow suit.

In 2014, a small town in central Poland blocked Winnie-the-Pooh from being installed as a local playground mascot because of the bear's so-called improper attire and "dubious sexuality." A town official reportedly complained at a council meeting that Pooh "doesn't wear underpants because it doesn't have a sex. It's a hermaphrodite." Conservative members of the council agreed. Another member declared that Pooh "is half naked which is wholly inappropriate for children."

THE STORY OF FERDINAND

The Story of Ferdinand is a children's story written by American author Munro Leaf. It was published in 1936 and sold some 14,000 copies. By 1938, it was the number 1 best-selling book in America. The story took shape in 1935, when Munro Leaf was 29. A friend of his, illustrator Robert Lawson, needed work during the Great Depression. Thus, in October of that year, Leaf started scribbling a draft of a children's story that Lawson, who was gifted at drawing animals, might illustrate. Leaf decided to write about an animal that hadn't yet found a home in children's books: a bull. In less than an hour, he had written the story of a giant bull named Ferdinand who prefers to sit under a cork tree and sniff flowers rather than lock horns with his fellow bulls or take on a bullfighter in the ring.

When the book was published in the fall of 1936, it seemed destined to slip into obscurity. However, sales kept climbing. Ferdinand had entered the world months after the beginning of the Spanish Civil War and a few years before the start of World War II in Europe. For generations, readers have understood Ferdinand the bull as a pacifist—and Gandhi, as well as Eleanor Roosevelt, reportedly loved the story. Indeed, there were several international calls to award the Nobel Peace Prize to Munro Leaf and Robert Lawson. However, cultural critics debated the question of whether the book was a children's tale or a stealthy political tract. Newspapers of the era caricatured everyone from Franklin Roosevelt to Joseph Stalin as the passive bull. Adolf Hitler banned it in Nazi Germany, labeling it "degenerate democratic propaganda." Ferdinand's politics were read as pro-Franco; they were also read as anti-Franco. In any case, the book was banned in Spain until Franco's death in 1975.

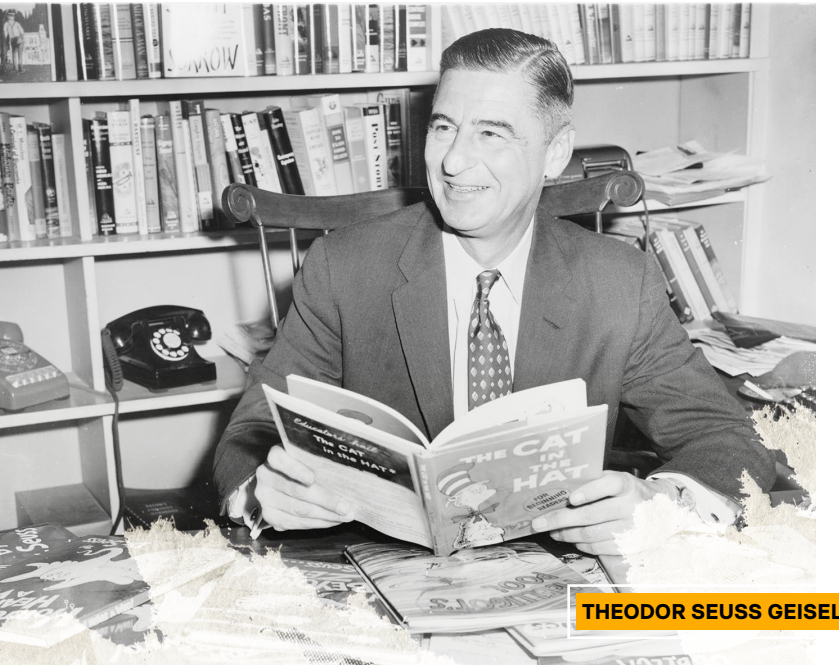
Poor Ferdinand has also been diagnosed as manic-depressive and schizophrenic. Some folks even found Ferdinand's supposed sexual identity something to worry about. Soon after the book came out, one columnist in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* accused Ferdinand of softening up the youth of America. To some adults of the early- to mid-20th century, and perhaps beyond, Ferdinand's passivity signified suspect masculinity. Among those who got worked up about Ferdinand's refusal to adhere to conventional masculine codes was the alpha male and bullfight enthusiast Ernest Hemingway. In 1951, Hemingway published a short, fable-like story in the travel magazine *Holiday*, titled "The Faithful Bull." Hemingway's target is clear:

> One time there was a bull whose name was not Ferdinand and he cared nothing for flowers. He loved to fight and he fought with all the other bulls ... and he was a champion. ... Everyone admired him and the man who killed him admired him the most.

However, Ferdinand, with his gentle but unwavering inclination to peaceful coexistence over violence, has triumphed over the Hemingways of the world and their exaltation of machismo. These days, as one critic has noted, "Ferdinand is hailed as an icon of gender nonconformity, his tale a celebration of 'difference'—a shift that serves as not a bad yardstick for how much the culture has evolved."

DR. SEUSS

Theodor Seuss Geisel, or Dr. Seuss, was born in 1904 and adopted his pen name as an undergraduate at Dartmouth. He studied for a PhD at Oxford. However, at the urging of his first wife, he began to take his inspired illustrations more seriously, soon making a lucrative career as a cartoonist and illustrator. His first children's book was published in 1937: *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*.



THEODOR SEUSS GEISEL

In 1954, *Life* magazine published a report on childhood illiteracy that suggested that children weren't learning to read because too many books for early readers were dull. The director of education at the publishing house Houghton Mifflin compiled a list of some 348 words that he felt first graders should recognize. He then challenged Dr. Seuss to write a story incorporating 236 of those words in "a book children can't put down." It took Dr. Seuss nine months, but the result was *The Cat in the Hat*. To this day, what became known as Dr. Seuss's beginner books, such as *The Cat in the Hat* and *Green Eggs and Ham*, still outsell most newly published books for young children.

The messages and images contained in those books, however, have become more contested in recent decades. Take *The Lorax*, published in 1971, for example. It's informed by environmentalist concerns over deforestation in the Pacific Northwest and the recklessness of logging companies. In *The Lorax*, the title character battles an ax-wielding family called the Once-lers, who

greedily harvest all of its colorful truffula trees to manufacture thneeds—multipurpose stockings. At the end of the book, the Lorax disappears—a victim, we suppose, of foul play. The evil Once-lers cut down the last truffula tree. The only ray of hope is that one of the Once-lers requests that a seed from the last tree be planted and cared for.

The book's publication caused an uproar in thriving timber communities in the Pacific Northwest. Indeed, controversy over *The Lorax* has had a long afterlife, sporadically enraging the timber industry. One such controversy occurred in 1989, in the small town of Laytonville, California. Two prominent logging families claimed that the book, which was required reading for second graders in Laytonville, was a thinly veiled attack on the lumber industry, which for decades had been the region's lifeblood. Indeed, two anti-*Lorax* logging industry members got themselves elected to the local school board to push for having the book removed from the "required reading" list.

More recent attacks on Dr. Seuss's work have come from critics on the left. Read Across America, a national literacy program celebrated annually on or near the birthday of Dr. Seuss, used to be dominated by teachers and students dressed like the Cat in the Hat, for example. Not so much anymore.

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13

NEW KIDS' BOOKS, OLD OBJECTIONS

Recall that Dr. Seuss once had to fend off demands by logging industry executives and workers that *The Lorax* be banned from local elementary school libraries and reading lists. Recently, other, much more widespread and successful challenges to Dr. Seuss's work have taken this challenge's place. In moving to contemporary controversies over children's books—including targets such as *Captain Underpants* and *Skippyjon Jones*—this lecture begins by looking at recent objections to old Seuss favorites and what they say about current reasons for challenging books designed for young readers.

CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING DR. SEUSS

In 1998, the National Education Association (NEA) in partnership with Dr. Seuss Enterprises launched a program called National Read Across America Day. On this day, elementary school children and their teachers would take part in events that highlight the pleasures and lifetime payoffs of reading. For decades, the emblematic image that's been associated with that program takes place on March 2, Dr. Seuss's birthday: Thousands of children sit with their teachers, all wearing giant red-and-white-striped Cat in the Hat hats and reading a Dr. Seuss book.

By 2017, those hats had attracted attention for a different reason. Educators and activists had begun questioning the roots of the Cat's striped headgear in the blackface minstrelsy tradition. One Seuss researcher noted that the Cat's physical appearance mimics that of blackface entertainers, "as does the role he plays as 'entertainer' to the white family—in whose house he doesn't belong." Another scholarly researcher working at Geisel Library at the University of California San Diego found a collection of Seuss's early work—World War II political cartoons—featuring racist drawings of Japanese Americans. Some cartoons lent support to the notion that Japanese Americans should be subject to internment.

Other educators, commentators, and researchers voiced concerns over how people of color were depicted in other Seuss books. In *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, for example, a character described as Chinese has two lines for eyes, carries chopsticks and a bowl of rice, and wears traditional Japanese-style shoes. In *If I Ran the Zoo*, two men said to be from Africa are shown shirtless, shoeless, and wearing grass skirts as they carry an exotic animal. Theodor Geisel's, or Dr. Seuss's, personal behavior came into question, too. In high school, he wrote a minstrel show and performed as the main character in full blackface.

In 2017, then–First Lady Melania Trump inadvertently fueled the controversy when she sent packages of Dr. Seuss books to one high-achieving elementary school in each state. However, one of the recipients was unenthusiastic about the selection of books. In an open letter to Melania Trump posted on a book

blog, Liz Phipps Soeiro, a library media specialist at the Cambridgeport Elementary School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, said that she would not be accepting the books. She said that her Boston-area school didn't lack for resources and that she took issue with the "racist" imagery in some of Dr. Seuss's books. In 2019, a pair of scholars published an article titled "The Cat is Out of the Bag: Orientalism, Anti-Blackness, and White Supremacy in Dr. Seuss's Children's Books." The authors found that only 2% of the human characters in Seuss's books were people of color. All those characters, they said, were "depicted through racist caricatures."

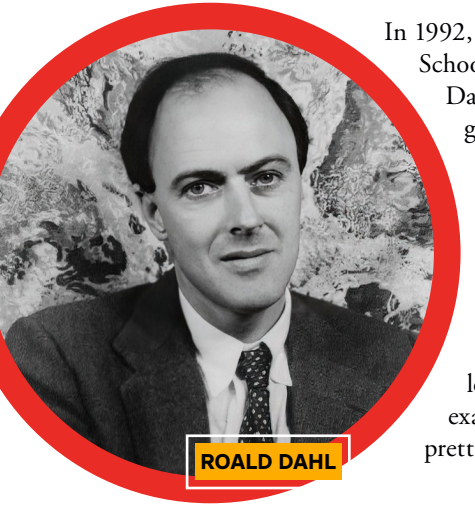
Then, 2021 saw an even more remarkable development. Dr. Seuss Enterprises marked his birthday in an unusual way: It announced that six Dr. Seuss books, including the classic titles *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* and *If I Ran the Zoo*, would stop being published because of racist and insensitive imagery. This predictably drew immediate reaction on social media from the critics on the right, who called it another example of "cancel culture." As conservative commentator and author Ben Shapiro tweeted: "We've now got foundations book burning the authors to whom they are dedicated."

The Seuss books are merely a sampling of the many other classic children's books that have been criticized—and sometimes banned—in recent years for the alleged racism in their stories and sometimes the racism and other objectionable political views of their authors. In his 2007 critical book *Should We Burn Babar?*, author and educator Herbert R. Kohl argued that the Babar the Elephant books exalted colonialism because of how the title character leaves the jungle and later returns to "civilize" his fellow animals. One book in the series, *The Travels of Babar*, was removed from the shelves of a British library in 2012 because of its alleged stereotypes of Africans. Educators and parents have also denounced the *Curious George* books for their premise of a white man—a white savior, if you will—rescuing a monkey from Africa. Meanwhile, Laura Ingalls Wilder's portrayals of Native Americans in her *Little House on the Prairie* novels have been criticized so often in recent years that, in 2018, the American Library Association removed her name from an annual lifetime achievement award it gives.

CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING ROALD DAHL

As more than one critic has observed, there's something to offend everyone in Roald Dahl's stories, including violence against women, racism, and anti-Semitism. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* is Dahl's most popular book. The Oompa-Loompas, little people of color who toil in Willy Wonka's chocolate factory, have long been an uncomfortable presence in the story. In 1970, when the first film adaptation was being made, the NAACP said that the importation of the Oompa-Loompas to the factory had overtones of slavery. Indeed, in the first edition of the book, the Oompa-Loompas were imagined as Black pygmies from Africa.

Dahl maintained that his vision of the Oompa-Loompas was not intentionally racist. However, he acknowledged the NAACP's objection and rewrote the characters for the second US edition, changing them to little white people who hailed from "Loompaland." After Dahl's death in 1990, his widow revealed that his original conception was that the character of Charlie himself was Black. However, Dahl had caved to concerns expressed by his agent that a book featuring a Black protagonist wouldn't sell well.


ROALD DAHL

In 1992, a teacher at the John W. Rodgers Middle School outside Boston read a selection from Dahl's book *Revolting Rhymes* to her sixth-grade class. *Revolting Rhymes*, which is a parody of classic fairy tales, was hailed by one critic as a work of "elegant butchery." Dahl's version of Cinderella features an ax-wielding prince giving vent to what some adult readers saw as his misogyny toward Cinderella's stepsisters and Cinderella herself. Having lopped off the head of one sister, for example, the Prince "smiled and said / She's prettier without her head." And when he spots

Cinderella, who peeks out from the kitchen where she's been peeling potatoes, Dahl writes: "The Prince cried, 'Who's this dirty slut? / Off with her nut! Off with her nut!'"

One of the Boston-area sixth graders was upset by the rhymes and complained to her mother, who then complained to the teacher, principal, school superintendent, and media. *Revolting Rhymes* was temporarily removed from the curriculum. However, the education professionals insisted that kids love Dahl's humor and understand satire. *Revolting Rhymes* has been the focus of multiple challenges and bannings, including one in a high school library in Iowa in 1990 and several school libraries in Carroll County, Maryland, in 1994.

Other objections to Dahl's work have been grounded in the questionable views he expressed during his lifetime. In 1983, Dahl had his works banned from Israeli television, which was then running a popular series based on Dahl's short stories. Israelis objected to a review Dahl had recently written of a book about Israel's invasion of Lebanon. In that review, Dahl said, "Never before has a state generated so much sympathy around the world and then, in the space of a lifetime, succeeded in turning that sympathy into hatred and revulsion." That same year, Dahl gave a now-infamous interview to the *New Statesman* in which he made anti-Semitic remarks, including: "Even a stinker like Hitler didn't just pick on them for no reason." Following this, the Royal Mint dropped plans to celebrate Dahl's life with a commemorative coin. In 2020, the Dahl family issued a public apology, saying, in part: "We hope that, just as he did at his best, at his absolute worst, Roald Dahl can help remind us of the lasting impact of words."

CAPTAIN UNDERPANTS

When it comes to more modern children's books, Captain Underpants is the imaginary hero of a best-selling grade school series of 12 books by Dav Pilkey that were published between 1997 and 2012. On his website, Pilkey gives readers an autobiographical peek into the sources of his series. As a child, he had an attention deficit disorder; in grade school, his desk was moved out into the school hallway. To appeal to the type of boy he was, Pilkey created two main characters, Harold and George, who outwit the sadistic teachers of Jerome Horwitz Elementary. The boys' chief adversary is Principal Krupp. In the first *Captain Underpants* book, Harold and George take revenge on

Principal Krupp by hypnotizing him into believing he's a superhero named Captain Underpants. Over the course of the series, the boys and the captain battle talking toilets, supersonic wedgies, and the threat of lifelong detention, among other things.

Since it first appeared, the *Captain Underpants* series has been a hit with young readers who delight in jokes about gas, poop, nostril nuggets, and upchucking. Not surprisingly, many school boards, libraries, and parents have not been similarly enchanted. In addition to objecting to its scatological humor, those groups have slammed the books for their poor spelling, grammar, disrespect for adults, and all-around antiauthoritarian themes. By 2005, the series had earned a place on the top-10 list of books that many grown-ups wanted to keep out of school and public libraries. That year, the captain was featured on American Library Association posters and bracelets for Banned Books Week. Librarians who weighed in on the choice of Captain Underpants as a mascot in the fight against book banning acknowledged that the series may not be great literature but that the books should be available. And lots of kids agreed. One eight-year-old boy said of the series that it's "100 percent funniness."

Pilkey, who shies away from interviews, has said in email responses to reporters that he's disappointed when schools ban his books. However, most of the mail he gets from teachers is positive. He's also got at least one powerful fan in his corner: J. K. Rowling has said that she loved reading *Captain Underpants* with her daughter Jessica when she was young. In a piece that ran in the *HuffPost* titled "My Book Makes Kids Laugh, and It Was Banned Anyway," Pilkey went into more depth about the oddity of being banned for essentially giving kids the gift of laughter.

SKIPPYJON JONES

The *Skippyjon Jones* series, which Judy Byron Schachner began writing in 2003, has been banned for issues of representation. The enormously successful series was nurtured from the ground up by the enthusiasm of independent booksellers for these picture books aimed at children ages 4 to 8. The hero of the series is a large-eared Siamese cat with a vivid imagination and a chronic identity problem. Given that he looks nothing like his mother, Junebug, or three sisters, Skippyjon has decided that he's a Chihuahua. He calls himself El Skippito the "Bandito" and speaks in a faux Spanish accent. He has imaginary friends he calls "the Chimichangos" who accompany him on his various adventures. The books have won the E. B. White Read Aloud Award, and a *New York Times* review likened Schachner's wordplay to that of James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

However, grumblings started to be heard a few years into the series. One review cautioned that "readers in search of authentic Latino representations should look elsewhere." As the popularity of the *Skippyjon Jones* books continues to grow, so, too, has pushback against what some parents, educators, and academics see as the series' demeaning ethnic stereotyping. As one scholarly critic has pointed out, in 2011, when the series was going strong, the number of children's books about Latino children was 53. That's 53 out of some 3,200 books published for young readers that year. The 2010 census, this critic also pointed out, tallied more than 50 million Latinos in the United States.

Even worse, say *Skippyjon Jones*'s detractors, is the fact that the hero imaginatively transforms from an English-speaking (white) cat to an allegedly Spanish-speaking (brown) dog. Moreover, by adding "o" to words, Skippyjon's pseudo-imitation of Mexican speech is what some scholars term a performance of "sonic brownface." Critics also insist that he plays the role of "Great White Hero" to the masses of brown "Mexican" dogs he often rescues from bad guys such as "Alfredo Buzzito" and "Bumblebeeto Bandito."

In 2018, the *Skippyjon Jones* books ranked number 8 on the American Library Association's annual list of challenged books. They were admonished for their offensive language and stereotypes of Mexican people and the Spanish-speaking community. Despite these controversies, however, the NEA has listed the series on its Teachers' Top 100 Books for Children.

GEORGE AND *MARLON BUNDO*

These days, many children's books are banned and challenged because of their LGBTQ+ content. Foremost among those books is *George* by Alex Gino, which was the number 1 banned and challenged book of 2020. *George* tells the story of a fourth-grade transgender girl who wants to audition for the part of Charlotte in a school production of *Charlotte's Web*. Her teacher won't allow George to audition because she's "a boy." School bullies also make George's life difficult. In 2020 alone, the American Library Association amassed more than 50 challenges to the book's LGBTQ+ content. Each case was determined individually. Some libraries restricted access, and others voted to reinstate the book to children's shelves if it had been removed.

Another children's picture book that has attracted nationwide attention for its LGBTQ+ content is *A Day in the Life of Marlon Bundo* by Jill Twiss. It is a parody of the book *Marlon Bundo's A Day in the Life of the Vice President* written by Vice President Mike Pence's daughter Charlotte Pence Bond and illustrated by his wife, Karen Pence. Both books were published in 2018. The original picture book imagined the Pences' actual pet rabbit, who was named Marlon Bundo, describing life in the vice president's mansion. The parody imagined Marlon Bundo as a lonely gay rabbit who wears a snappy bow tie and lives on the grounds of Grandpa Mike Pence's mansion. One morning, Marlon meets Wesley, a brown rabbit who wears glasses. They fall in love and decide to get married and hop around together for the rest of their lives. The pair's fellow animal friends are supportive. However, the "stink bug," who's "In Charge and Important" (and who bears a striking resemblance to Mike Pence), tells them that boy rabbits can only marry girl rabbits. The other animals speak up and declare that everyone is different in their own way. The stink bug is outvoted, and Marlon and Wesley marry and happily go off on their "bunnymoon."

A Day in the Life of Marlon Bundo made the number 2 spot on the ALA's Top 10 Most Challenged Books of 2018 and the number 3 spot a year later. Some critics said the book was "designed to pollute the morals of its readers." A patron of the public library in Terrell, Texas, objected on religious grounds. In Iowa, the book was challenged by members of the Orange City Public Library community "on the grounds that it indoctrinated children and pushed an

agenda the community did not agree with." In Seminole County, Florida, one grade school teacher even became the target of a school board investigation after he read *Marlon Bundo* aloud to his first graders.

In many, if not most, of these cases, school boards and libraries decided to keep *A Day in the Life of Marlon Bundo* on the shelves. However, the concerns reveal how children's books can spark some of the most extreme adult reactions. Such controversies foreground current debates about whether people should continue to read and teach books that may be problematic because of racial stereotyping or outdated attitudes toward gender relationships. With children's books in particular, this concerns early stories so powerful they often stay with readers for a lifetime.

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14

CANCELED AUTHORS

This lecture considers some striking recent instances in which authors' behavior—alleged or confirmed—has resulted in the challenging or banning of their works. Such a situation would have been unheard of a few decades ago, before social justice movements and before the advent of the internet, where people's personal lives are instantly available for public scrutiny. Think about where you stand on the question of separating the dancer from the dance, the author from the book.

BLAKE BAILEY

Coming to prominence in the late 1960s with his controversial novel *Portnoy's Complaint*, Philip Roth pulled off the rare feat of producing masterworks into his seventies. Such novels include *The Human Stain*, *American Pastoral*, and *The Plot Against America*, his speculative novel about Charles Lindbergh beating Franklin Delano Roosevelt for the presidency and the rise of fascism in America. Roth was a recipient, in some cases more than once, of the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award, the National Book Critics Circle Award, and the PEN/Faulkner Award, among others. However, he never won the Nobel, and that omission rankled.

Roth died in 2018, thus ending his quest for the Nobel, which is only awarded to living writers. Many fans were eagerly awaiting Blake Bailey's biography, called *Philip Roth: The Biography*, which was finally published in 2021. Bailey had authored highly praised biographies of Richard Yates and John Cheever. He had access to Roth's papers, including a full-length manuscript Roth had written titled *Notes for My Biographer*. It was allegedly devoted to refuting allegations made by Roth's ex-wife, the actress Claire Bloom, in her memoir, *Leaving a Doll's House*. As well as being a genius, Roth was reclusive and vindictive. He was also known as a "player" when it came to women and was accused of being misogynist in his real-life affairs and in his art.

The publication of that biography in April of 2021 turned out to be a fiasco—not because of its subject, but because of the author, Bailey. Early reviews were enthusiastic, even adulatory. However, a month later, the tide had turned. W. W. Norton, the publisher of the Roth biography, announced it was temporarily suspending the book's shipping and promotion. The reason? Sexual harassment and assault accusations made by several women against

Bailey. Female students of Bailey's, who'd taught secondary school in New Orleans for years, began to come forward to accuse him of grooming them for inappropriate relationships and, in one case at least, nonconsensual sex. The most sensational accusation (because it involved people in the publishing industry) came from Valentina Rice, a publishing executive. Rice said that in 2015, she was raped by Bailey when they both stayed overnight after a dinner at the home of *New York Times* literary critic Dwight Garner. Bailey denied Rice's version of events.

As these accusations surfaced, Norton stopped selling the biography. It also made the radical decision to pulp the remaining copies in its warehouses, thus incurring a significant financial loss. Bailey's literary agency, Story Factory, terminated his representation. In a move that surprised no one familiar with the publishing world, Bailey's Roth biography was then snapped up by Skyhorse Publishing. Skyhorse had also published Woody Allen's autobiography, *Apropos of Nothing*, after it was dropped by its original publisher, Hachette, when staff in its US office protested and walked out in solidarity with Hachette author Ronan Farrow and his sister Dylan, who accused Allen of sexually abusing her as a child.

The decision by Norton to essentially sweep the Roth biography off bookstore shelves and online sales sites opened up a generational rift in the publishing industry. An article about the debacle that ran in the Books Column of *The Guardian* newspaper quoted one publisher who asked to remain anonymous:

> It's an absolute intergenerational conflict … between the under-40s and the over-40s. The distinction … is between social media natives who don't treasure free speech because they've had a lifetime's worth and think it's overrated, and people of an older generation who … needed the patronage of newspapers and publishing houses to get their voices heard.

One member of that over-40 generation, British novelist Howard Jacobson, weighed in on Norton's decision to abandon the Bailey biography. He declared that "it's not the job of the publisher to censor the life of the person who writes the book." However, some younger editors and bookstore owners praised the decision to get rid of a biography that could be potentially triggering for some female readers.

The tumult over Bailey's Roth biography ties into crucial contemporary debates about censorship, freedom of expression, due process, and the ongoing examination of so-called toxic masculinity. However, the primary issue in this case is whether an artist and their work are so closely intertwined that the work cannot be understood, experienced, or judged without considering the artist's life. In his famous poem "Among School Children," W. B. Yeats asked: "How can we know the dancer from the dance?" These days, readers might follow up that oft-quoted question by asking, "Should we even try?"

JUNOT DÍAZ

In the 1970s, biographical criticism—the notion of understanding literary works by studying the lives of their authors—was dismissed as naïve. New Criticism—a movement that had emerged in the 1940s and stressed an exclusive focus on the text itself—remained influential. Even more dominant at the time was deconstruction. This mode of critical theory delighted in exploding the stability of literary texts and the stable identities of their authors. Deconstructionist critic Roland Barthes, for instance, wrote a now-classic essay called "The Death of the Author" that dismissed any attention to an author's biography as naïve. Only feminist theory and the emerging area of cultural studies—which included Black studies—regarded the connection between authors and their work as crucial.

To lift another Yeats line, that critical situation is "changed, changed utterly." While biographical criticism still has a faint whiff of the traditional about it, the lives and behavior of authors these days is a significant factor in how their work is regarded. Sometimes, even the behavior of a biographer may have an impact on whether a book about the life of someone else is well received or even published.

Consider Junot Díaz. He was born in the Dominican Republic and moved to New Jersey at the age of six. Shortly after receiving his MFA from Cornell, Díaz published his first book: an acclaimed short story collection called *Drown*. That was followed by a novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 2008. Díaz also won the MacArthur Fellowship genius grant in 2012 and secured a position as Professor of Writing at MIT.

In the spring of 2018, Díaz published an autobiographical essay in *The New Yorker* describing the years of sexual assault he endured beginning at age eight. Díaz called it a #MeToo story. The essay was regarded as especially brave and unexpected because it came from a Latinx male writer brought up in the code of "machismo." What followed, however, was also unexpected. A female writer, Zinzi Clemmons, publicly confronted Díaz at the Sydney Writers' Festival, accusing him of forcibly kissing her after she'd invited him to speak at Columbia University when she was a graduate student there. Carmen Maria Machado, a National Book Award finalist, quickly tweeted her support, saying that Díaz had berated her for her "prudery" after she asked him about male-female relationships in his work during a talk he gave at the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop. Other women, some of them students at the time of their encounters with Díaz, also came forward to talk of unwanted advances and sexual harassment.

The fallout was immediate: Díaz's lecture dates were canceled. He resigned as chair of the Pulitzer Prize board, which opened an investigation into his conduct. MIT also reviewed the accusations against Díaz, weighing whether to terminate his teaching position. Some critics of Díaz, such as Roxane Gay, speculated that his confessional essay for *The New Yorker* was a preemptive move, designed to elicit sympathy because he knew that accusations against him were about to surface. Meanwhile, academics—particularly Latino academics—debated whether to continue to teach Díaz's work. Taking

another tack, some wondered whether criticism of Diaz was especially harsh because he's a person of color. In May 2018, some two dozen mostly senior feminist scholars signed a letter to *The Chronicle of Higher Education* characterizing the media coverage of Díaz and social media tweets about him as a "full-blown … harassment campaign" as well as a bald attempt to "cancel" Díaz, his work, and any expressions of support for him.

At least one independent bookstore—Quill Books & Beverage outside of Portland, Maine—did "cancel" Díaz, pulling his titles from its shelves. In a newspaper interview, co-owner Allison Krzanowski explained that the bookstore had removed books by other men who had faced similar accusations. In that same interview, Krzanowski also challenged the notion that the bookstore's move was censorship: "There have been some people who think we are banning books, and to that, I say it is our choice not to carry products. It's not the same as a book being banned. We have a 'safe space' commitment, and that extends to our shelves."

The interview concludes with Krzanowski hammering that point home: "We have limited space. We want to use the space to promote writers that we want to support."

Díaz was ultimately cleared of misconduct by both MIT and the Pulitzer board. One professor who teaches Latino literature initially removed Díaz's work from his syllabus but has since reinstated him and teaches his work differently. This professor contextualizes Díaz's work in light of the controversy and also invites his students to write about why they should or should not be reading him. However, it's important to note that such an approach can take away time and focus from the study of the work itself.

SHERMAN ALEXIE

Junot Díaz wasn't the only author to have his work removed from the shelves of Quill Books. Another was Sherman Alexie, a Native American author who is best known for his YA bestseller *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. Apart from winning the National Book Award for Young People's Literature in 2007, the novel has the dubious distinction of being the most frequently challenged YA novel of the past decade. Alexie is a novelist, poet, filmmaker, and popular public speaker. However, in 2018, Alexie was also

identified as an author who used his reputation and power to try to pressure aspiring female authors into having sex with him. The fact that these two authors came under tough scrutiny for their private behavior in the same year is no coincidence. The fall of 2017 was when the Harvey Weinstein sexual harassment story broke. In the aftermath of that story, the public's attitudes toward sexual harassment were transformed and the #MeToo movement became an international phenomenon.

In the wake of the Weinstein story, a children's book author named Anne Ursu decided to survey women in the children's book business to see if they'd experienced harassment. Ursu asked the respondents to her survey not to name names to keep the focus on an industry—children's books—that is supposed to value kindness. However, that exposé, which was published on the website *Medium*, gave weight to the stories of sexual scandals that were already swirling around well-known authors such as Alexie. In fact, 10 women—most of them writers or aspiring writers—came forward to NPR and talked about meeting Alexie in professional settings and being coerced into having sex with him. Alexie subsequently issued a statement in which he admitted he had "harmed" others. He acknowledged that "there are women telling the truth."

The Institute of American Indian Arts removed Alexie's name from an MFA scholarship in his honor and renamed it the MFA Alumni Scholarship. The American Indian Library Association rescinded the Best Young Adult Book Award it had bestowed on Alexie in 2008 for *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. In what appeared to be a preemptive move, Alexie himself declined the Carnegie Medal for his memoir, *You Don't Have to Say You Love Me*. In April 2018, sales of *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* were down 39% compared with the same period the previous year. That same month, sales of Alexie's memoir also plummeted. The following year, several students in an Advanced Placement (AP) English class at Arcadia High School in Arizona refused to read Alexie's novel *Reservation Blues*, which was required for their advanced course.

DAVID FOSTER WALLACE

David Foster Wallace has been hailed by many as a genius for his 1996 novel *Infinite Jest*, which has also been called the epitome of lit-bro. This is literature that characteristically features a white male in his mid-twenties who's a know-it-all and

who has loudly professed chauvinistic convictions about literature, women, and life. The "bro" is smart but insufferable, which is how many people who knew and even loved David Foster Wallace describe him. Wallace struggled with depression, alcohol, and drugs for many years. In 2008, at the age of 46, he took his own life.

Within the literary world, stories had long circulated about Wallace's erratic behavior, particularly regarding women. Some of these stories made their way into a 2012 biography of Wallace titled *Every Love Story Is a Ghost Story*. In that biography, author D. T. Max recounts Wallace's obsession with the renowned writer Mary Karr, with whom he was involved in the 1990s. Max describes Wallace's abusive behavior in the midst of arguments, such as attempting to throw Karr out of a moving car, throwing a table at her, and stalking her. These stories were known by some in the literary world but conventionally regarded as Wallace being Wallace, a writer of genius with unruly passions and temper. However, in 2018, Mary Karr began telling her own story of their "relationship" on Twitter. She said Max underreported Wallace's abuse in his biography, mentioning only "about 2 percent of what happened."

Following Karr's testimonies, smart critical reconsiderations written mostly by women began to appear. They questioned the latitude granted to writers such as Wallace who are regarded as geniuses. Since Wallace isn't taught in high schools, the reservations about reading him typically surface in college or beyond.

LINDA FAIRSTEIN

There have been many instances in recent years of artistic prizes being rescinded or withheld because of scandal or controversy in an author's life. For example, in 2018, the Mystery Writers of America conferred its highest honor, the Grand Master Award, on Linda Fairstein, author of the long-running Alexandra Cooper series. Only two days after the award was conferred, however, it was rescinded.

Fairstein, for more than 25 years, had been the head of the largely male sex crimes unit of the Manhattan DA's Office. There, she was involved in several high-profile cases, including the "Preppy Murder" case. She was hailed back then as a champion of women's rights. However, Fairstein also oversaw the case against the so-called Central Park Five—a group of five young Black men accused of raping and brutally beating a white woman. The prosecution

LINDA FAIRSTEIN

of the case was problematic from the outset. In 2002, after another individual confessed to the crime, the convictions of the five young men were vacated.

Given Fairstein's involvement in what many regard as a racist miscarriage of justice, some members of the Mystery Writers of America went straight to social media to express their objections. In their opinion, Fairstein simply wasn't a suitable choice for the Grand Master Award. Faced with this pressure, the organization backtracked and then issued a bland statement pledging to review its awards process. However, for Fairstein, that wasn't the end of it. In 2019, shortly after the release of the Netflix series *When They See Us* about the Central Park Five case, *Glamour* magazine said that the 1993 Woman of the Year award to Fairstein was a mistake and that it was given to her before the full facts of the case were known. Fairstein's publisher, Dutton, dropped her. No more Alexandra Cooper novels have been published.

The process of evaluating contenders for an award is not clear-cut. Is the work the thing that's being judged? The life? Some mishmash of both? If the life is being factored into the process, must one's entire record of opinions and actions be unanimously judged to be humane and just? The American Library Association favors the position of focusing on the work—the dance, not the dancer.

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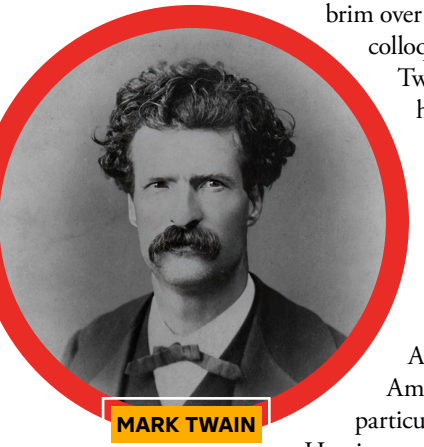
15

HUCKLEBERRY FINN AND RACE IN AMERICA

This lecture covers Mark Twain and the challenges to *Huckleberry Finn*, which, by most reckonings, is the most consistently challenged or banned of the Great American Novels. Why? Unlike, say, *Moby Dick*, which most American students don't encounter until college, if at all, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is likely to be required reading in high school. As you've seen, parents and local school boards exert power on what students can or cannot read. Twain's novel foregrounds the all-American subject of race.

MARK TWAIN'S LITERARY VOICE

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn made its American debut in 1885. With this book, Mark Twain demonstrated that American literature could sound American. This was during an age when American writers still looked to Great Britain as setting literary standards. However, Twain looked to the American West and Midwest for his inspiration. His short stories, memoirs, and novels—particularly his interconnected classics, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*—brim over with distinctly American slang, references, colloquial expressions, and regional dialect. Moreover, Twain's work depicts the raucous, rough-edged humor of American working people, con artists, and self-deluded gentlefolk living in or passing through port towns on the Mississippi River. Such humor, as Twain recognized, was an essential element of the American voice.



MARK TWAIN

To Ernest Hemingway, who was part of the "Lost Generation" of post–World War I American writers intent on forging a proudly American literary tradition, Twain's achievements—particularly in *Huckleberry Finn*—were a lodestar. Hemingway was not alone in his veneration of Twain. F. Scott Fitzgerald, H. L. Mencken, and T. S. Eliot all wrote enthusiastic encomiums to Twain's American achievement. Those tributes from fellow writers, scholars, and critics continue unabated to this day. On *Huckleberry Finn*'s 125th birthday in 2010, for instance, award-winning critic David Ulin wrote an astute piece for the *LA Times* in which he paid homage to Twain's innovations. He states:

> This is a novel meant to be read as ... a personal history, a bit of testimony. This is the first person point-of-view taking root in American literature, the voice of the outsider ... living beyond the strictures of society, while in the service of a bigger truth.

Those elements that make *Huckleberry Finn* distinctly American—its language and the "bigger truth" it discovers, specifically about race in America—are the same elements that have made the novel a prime target for censorship ever since it was first published. Race has always been a trigger for censorship in schools. *Huckleberry Finn* is written in the language of its time, which means it uses the *n*-word. There are more than 200 instances of the *n*-word in the book. However, 19th-century critics of Twain's masterpiece were initially more upset about other aspects of the novel.

MARK TWAIN'S EARLIER LIFE

Born Samuel Langhorne Clemens in 1835, Twain was the sixth of seven children. At the age of four, Twain moved with his family to Hannibal, Missouri. Twain admirers regard Hannibal with reverence since it's the Mississippi port town he would make famous under the fictional name "St. Petersburg." Twain left school early after the death of his father—a judge and attorney—when Twain was only 11. After several years working in the printing trade, he pursued his boyhood dream of becoming a steamboat pilot, learning the landmarks and currents of the Mississippi River between New Orleans and St. Louis. Thus did Samuel Clemens transform into "Mark Twain." Twain's pen name is the cry for measuring the river depth of 2 fathoms, or 12 feet, which was a safe depth for a steamboat.

Twain worked on the river until the Civil War broke out in 1861, when traffic was curtailed along the Mississippi. His wanderings took him to Nevada and then across the Great Plains and Rockies, until he finally ended up in California. His on-the-road experiences were captured in the fictionalized memoir *Roughing It*, published in 1872. Another literary product of this time was Twain's first successful story, "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County." It was published in 1865 and drawn from his experiences in the gold rush community of Angels Camp in California.

Working as a reporter, Twain traveled around the world, visiting Hawaii (then known as the Sandwich Islands), Europe, and the Middle East. His travel letters were eventually collected in *The Innocents Abroad*, published in 1869. In 1870, he married Olivia Langdon. Through the connections of her wealthy abolitionist family, he met Harriet Beecher Stowe, Frederick Douglass, and other luminaries. In 1873, the Twains built a house in Hartford, Connecticut,

next door to Stowe. There, Twain would write many of his novels over the next 17 years, including *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*. The Twains were married for 34 years until Olivia's death in 1904. Twain himself died of a heart attack on April 21, 1910.

It's quite a quintessential American story. A gifted young boy propels himself out of the crowd by dint of his curiosity, unceasing labors, vigor, outsized ambition, and luck. Huckleberry Finn, too, is graced by vigor, luck, and a grand curiosity about the world. The creation of *Huckleberry Finn* typifies the hard work that Twain put into his writing, involving false starts and drafts and rewrites. Initially, Huck Finn's story was to be a sequel to *Tom Sawyer* that would follow Huck into adulthood. Its working title was *Huckleberry Finn's Autobiography*. Twain, as was his custom, composed the novel—in all its various stages—in pen on notepaper, which gives scholars a precious view of his creative process. Paul Needham, who supervised the authentication of the manuscript for Sotheby's in 1991, stated, "What you see is [Clemens's] attempt to move away from pure literary writing to dialect writing."

CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING *HUCKLEBERRY FINN*

The novel was controversial from the get-go. It was published initially in Canada and the United Kingdom in December 1884 and in the United States in February 1885. Why was one of America's greatest novels published first elsewhere? The answer lies in the fact that many novels by popular authors in the 19th century were illustrated by pen-and-ink drawings. The American publication was postponed—thereby depriving Twain of lucrative Christmas sales—because someone added a few lines to an illustration of Uncle Silas, the husband of Tom Sawyer's strict guardian, Aunt Polly. Apparently, the lines emerging from Silas's groin were explicitly obscene.

Sales of the novel by subscription were brisk. More than 40,000 copies had been ordered in America by April 1885. Twain couldn't have been happy, though, about what could be kindly described as the novel's mixed reception. The *Boston Evening Transcript* opined that *Huckleberry Finn* was "flat, as well as coarse." Another reviewer, Robert Bridges, deemed it "especially suited to amuse children on long, rainy afternoons." Louisa May Alcott, however,

disagreed, saying: "If [Twain] cannot think of something better to tell our pure-minded lads and lasses he had best stop writing for them." Even more potentially damaging was the reaction of several libraries, which banned *Huckleberry Finn* from their shelves shortly after the novel's publication.

For example, in 1902—the same year that the University of Missouri gave Twain an honorary LLD degree—the Denver and Omaha public libraries took a less favorable view of the author. They excluded *Huckleberry Finn* for fear that the "immoral and sacrilegious" book would "put wrong ideas in youngsters' heads." An aged Twain was still around when yet another proposed library banning occurred: that of the Brooklyn Public Library, which objected to his novel's "bad word choice" and to the descriptions of Huck "not only itch[ing] but scratch[ing]," which the gatekeepers at the Brooklyn Library considered obscene. The library also objected to both *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* because of their "coarseness, mischievousness, and deceitful practices." The books were removed from the children's room of that library.

In September 1957, *The New York Times* reported a case that had a slightly different twist. This case brought about official reaction and garnered public attention for the conflict when the New York City Board of Education removed *Huckleberry Finn* from the approved textbook lists of elementary and junior high schools. The book would no longer be available for classroom use at those earlier levels but could be taught in high school and purchased for school libraries. Though the Board of Education acknowledged no outside pressure to ban the book, a representative of one publisher said that school officials had cited "some passages derogatory to Negroes" as the reason for its contract not being renewed. The NAACP denied that it had placed any organized pressure on the board to remove *Huckleberry Finn*. However, it nonetheless expressed displeasure with the presence of "racial slurs" and "belittling racial designations" in many of Twain's works.

As the 20th century wore on—and particularly in the wake of the civil rights movement—the novel's liberal use of the *n*-word became the particular locus of criticism and outrage. Those who defend such usage say the word represents the vernacular used in the 1840s. There's also the argument that Twain's story

is not racist because of its plot: Huck ultimately helps free his enslaved friend, Jim. Critics, however, respond by arguing that the frequent use of the word can cause emotional harm, particularly to African American students.

BANNING OF *HUCKLEBERRY FINN* FOR RACIAL SENSITIVITY

In 1996, a Black parent named Kathy Monteiro brought a class action lawsuit against her child's school district, objecting to the mandatory assigning of two texts in her daughter's freshman English class. Those texts were *Huckleberry Finn* and the William Faulkner short story "A Rose for Emily," which also uses the *n*-word. The lawsuit alleged that racial taunts at the school in question—McClintock High School in Tempe, Arizona—escalated after students had read the assigned texts and that school district officials ignored complaints of racial harassment. Ms. Monteiro sued the Tempe Union High School District

under the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits racial discrimination in programs receiving federal funding. The case received national attention. Here's how one periodical, *Education Week*, reported on the outcome:

> In his opinion in *Monteiro v. Tempe Union High School District*, US Circuit Judge Stephen Reinhardt acknowledged that the [*n*-word] is 'uniquely provocative and demeaning' to blacks. But requiring a district to accept a demand from a parent to remove a book such as *Huck Finn* would prompt challenges of other works.

According to Reinhardt's ruling, for example, *The Merchant of Venice* might offend Jews, and whites "could seek to remove books by Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, and other prominent black authors on the grounds that they portray Caucasians in a derogatory fashion." In a *Washington Post* article titled "Huck's Narrow Escape," renowned free speech proponent Nat Hentoff quoted Judge Reinhardt: "A necessary component of any education is learning to think critically about offensive ideas—without that ability, one can do little to respond to them." Hentoff then quoted what he deemed "the core of Judge Reinhardt's strengthening of the First Amendment in public schools." Reinhardt wrote: "[Courts cannot] ban books or other literary works from school curricula on the basis of their content … even when the works are accused of being racist in whole or part."

In February 2011, several years before Reinhardt rendered his opinion in the Monteiro case, expurgated editions of both *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* were published. In these editions, the *n*-word was replaced with the word *slave*, and the word *injun* was replaced with *Indian*. The revisions were carried out by an Auburn University English professor named Alan Gribben. He declared that he'd always been uncomfortable reading and teaching those Twain novels because of their widespread use of the *n*-word. These expurgated editions were mostly met with dismay, shading to horror, on the internet. Black journalist Elon James White insisted in an essay for *Salon* that, as the

essay's title has it, "The N-word Belongs in *Huckleberry Finn*." According to White, "the book, which deals directly with racism, is not better served by erasing the racial slur." By condoning efforts to bowdlerize the past, White asserts, "we will find ourselves with a generation that's woefully misinformed and it will be completely our fault."

Scholars of various racial backgrounds have also argued for decades that through his insistent overuse of the *n*-word, Twain is satirizing the racism of the 19th-century South. Bound up with the problem of the language in *Huckleberry Finn* is the problem of the character of Jim. An escaped slave who, by turn, is a best friend and father figure to Huck, Jim is also the butt of cruel jokes by both Huck and Tom Sawyer. In his gullibility, Jim is sometimes deemed something of a "minstrel stage Negro" by critics. Black novelist Ralph Ellison offers a less critical assessment of Jim's character in his 1953 essay "Twentieth Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity." He singles out *Huckleberry Finn* as especially suited to confront the question of race in modern America. Twain, Ellison says, renders Jim "not only a slave" but also a whole "human being" and a "symbol of humanity" itself. Other, more skeptical critics might say, "Perhaps."

What's indisputable is that Jim is an instrument of Huck's moral awakening. At an earlier point in the novel, Huck marvels that Jim's feelings for his enslaved family are powerful. However, is Jim—this catalyst for Huck's epiphany about the soul-destroying distortions of racism—realized on the pages of *Huckleberry Finn* as a full human being? Or is he rendered childlike or ignorant? Are his naive utterances intended to demean Blacks or poke subversive fun at white folks? The questions about Jim's character—and the novel he appears in—continue to be hotly debated. Sometimes those debates end in the banning of *Huckleberry Finn* altogether—as they have ever since the novel first appeared.

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16

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD, THEN AND NOW

This lecture covers *To Kill a Mockingbird*, one of the most read, most assigned, and most beloved novels in the American canon. It's also one of the most challenged and banned books in American libraries and schools. It regularly pops up on the Top 10 Most Challenged Books list of the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom. Nearly every element that would-be censors could find objectionable in a book is contained in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Those elements are explicit sexual references, slang and ungrammatical speech, curse words and obscenities, racial slurs, challenges to authority, unflattering descriptions of government and religious organizations, and the questioning of what are considered bedrock foundational beliefs in America.

The only hot-button element not explicitly present is LGBTQ+ content. However, given Scout's resolute tomboyishness, some critics in recent years have read the book as a covertly queer coming-of-age novel.

HARPER LEE'S EARLY LIFE

To Kill a Mockingbird is the only novel that Harper Lee ever published in her lifetime. Like most first novels, the book draws heavily from Lee's life. Nelle Harper Lee was born on April 28, 1926. She was the youngest of four children. Her mother was Frances Cunningham Lee (née Finch); her father was Amasa Coleman Lee. Like Atticus, Amasa (or A. C. Lee) was an attorney; he also served for more than a decade in the Alabama State Legislature. Harper Lee grew up in Monroeville, a small town in southwest Alabama. Her neighbor from the late 1920s to the early '30s was Truman Capote, who spent summers at his aunt's house on the same block as the Lees. Capote appears in *Mockingbird* as Scout's friend Dill.

Harper Lee was a scrappy tomboy in her youth, and she remained one all her life. Lee, who stopped giving formal interviews in the 1960s, once described feeling bound to Truman Capote by what she characterized as "a common anguish." She said of their shared childhood: "We lived in our imagination most of the time." For his part, Truman Capote recalled in an interview that the two often felt like "apart people." Both were voracious readers who shared a love of detective novels. They would retreat to a tree house and spend hours together reading mysteries. For their own amusement, they also began writing stories of their own on A. C. Lee's Underwood typewriter, one of them narrating as the other typed.

After high school, Lee attended Huntingdon College, a private women's college in Montgomery. However, she transferred after a year to the University of Alabama. Upon graduation, she stayed on to go to law school there but withdrew six months before graduation. It was Lee's older sister, Alice, who would have a long career as a lawyer and a steady proponent of the civil rights movement. In their old age, the sisters lived together in Monroeville, and Harper Lee would admiringly refer to Alice as "Atticus in a skirt."

Harper Lee moved to New York in 1949. Truman Capote was at least partly to blame for her temporary defection from the South. Capote continued to visit Monroeville in the summer, and, of course, the friends had stayed in touch. Capote published his first novel in his early twenties. Lee, encouraged by his success, moved to New York to write when she was 23. To support

herself, she worked for Eastern Air Lines as a reservation clerk. During that time, she was writing mostly essays and short stories, one of which would turn out to be the genesis of *Mockingbird*.

Through the generosity of some wealthy friends, Lee was able to quit her job at Eastern to write full-time. The story that she was working on was inspired by the only criminal case her father ever took: In 1919, A. C. Lee had defended two African American men against a murder charge. Like Atticus, A. C. lost that case. Note, as many scholars have, that Harper Lee was five years old when the trial of the African American "Scottsboro Boys" for the alleged rape of two white women was covered nationally in newspapers and on radio. Certainly, that notorious trial is also part of the origin story of *Mockingbird*.

PUBLICATION OF *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*

In the spring of 1957, Lee, then 31 years old, submitted a rough draft of what would become *Mockingbird* to J. B. Lippincott & Co. The company found the story intriguing but rough and urged more rewrites. Lippincott also provided Lee with the gift of a veteran editor, Therese "Tay" Hohoff. It was rare at the time for a woman to serve as a chief editor at a major publishing house. Even rarer would be the fact that Hohoff was about to become a legend in American literary history.

Hohoff later recalled in a corporate history of Lippincott that "the spark of the true writer flashed in every line" of Lee's manuscript. However, much work was needed before the promising draft would become *Mockingbird*. As Ms. Hohoff saw it, the draft was "more a series of anecdotes than a fully conceived novel." During the next three years, she and Harper Lee pored over drafts and revisions. One winter night, in frustration, Harper Lee threw her manuscript out the window of her New York apartment and into the snow below. When she called Hohoff to confess what she had done, Hohoff ordered Lee to retrieve that precious manuscript from the snow at once.

On July 11, 1960, *Mockingbird* was published by Lippincott. By the time of its publication, it had become a story of a daughter's love for her idealistic father, who risks his livelihood and even his life in defending a young Black man

named Tom Robinson against the charge that he raped a white woman. Aside from its inherent literary value, *Mockingbird* came out at a timely moment, in the midst of the civil rights movement. A week after publication, the novel rose to the top of the bestseller list and remained there for 88 weeks; 500,000 hardback copies were sold in 1961 alone. The novel was also offered as a Book of the Month club selection and as a title in the *Reader's Digest Condensed Books* series. Interestingly, however, reviews were mixed. Several reviewers regarded the book as what is now called a YA novel.

Despite this, the novel won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, and in 1962, it was made into a now-classic Hollywood film. In the years since it was first published, *Mockingbird* has never been out of print in hardcover or paperback. A 1991 survey conducted by the Book of the Month Club and the Library of Congress found that *Mockingbird* was second only to the Bible among books people cited as "making a difference" in their lives. In short, the book is that rare literary phenomenon: a popular novel quickly anointed an American classic.

CONTROVERSY OVER *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*

Mockingbird also quickly became a part of the standard English curriculum in secondary schools. In fact, a 2008 survey of books read by American students indicates the novel is the most widely read book in grades 9 through 12. Its widespread presence on secondary school syllabi is where the trouble began. One of the first school districts to raise objections was that of Waterford, Connecticut. The book was "held unfit for school use" by parents and board members.

The most notorious early effort to remove *Mockingbird* from school libraries and course reading lists occurred in 1966 in Hanover, Virginia. The banning was set in motion by a prominent physician named W. C. Bosher, who was the father of a Lee-Davis High School student as well as a school board member. Bosher looked over the novel his son was assigned to read and became outraged that it had to do with the subject of rape. He contacted his fellow school board members, warning them that the book was "improper for our children to read." The board voted to remove *Mockingbird* from the shelves of the Hanover County school libraries.

The controversy was covered in national newspapers and the local Richmond area press. Although no official reason was given by the state or local authorities for the removal of *Mockingbird*, the treasure trove of news stories, editorials, and letters to the editor written to local papers offers a rare, detailed record of the debate over a banned book. For example, a staff editorial titled "Mr. Bumble and the Mockingbird" appeared in the *Richmond News Leader* on January 5, 1966. Singing the praises of what he calls "a contemporary classic," the author challenges the school board's claim that *Mockingbird* is immoral. He then proceeds to describe the so-called Beadle Bumble Fund, which had been established in Richmond to (as its founder put it) "promote the repeal of foolish laws." Named for a minor Dickens character famous for saying "the law is an ass—an idiot," the fund was called into service against the school board. The fund, the editorialist writes, will send a "copy of *To Kill a Mockingbird* to the first 50 students of Lee-Davis High School who write in." Many of the readers of the *News Leader* were offended by this offer as well as by the existence of the Beadle Bumble Fund as a mechanism for circumventing the school board's book-banning decisions.

Harper Lee herself sent a scathing letter to the editor of *Richmond News Leader* dated January 15, 1966. After defending the Christian ethical code intrinsic to the novel, Lee wonders if the school board members have missed that obvious point because, perhaps, they never learned to read. She closes by stating that she is enclosing a contribution to the Beadle Bumble Fund with her letter—in the hope that it "will be used to enroll the Hanover County School Board in any first grade of its choice." The editors of the *News Leader* followed Lee's letter with a short commentary announcing that "the lady … [has] the last word." Ultimately, the novel was restored to school libraries. The Hanover School Board claimed that *Mockingbird* could be used in the classroom based on individual teachers' discretion so long as students bought their own copies.

ISSUES WITH RACISM IN *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*

As the 21st century loomed and the politics of identity were felt as a presence in classrooms and debates over books, critics began to take issue with what was perceived as Lee's own use of racist language. The *n*-word appears some 50 times in the novel, almost always in dialogue.

"What exactly is a n[…]-lover?" Scout asks Atticus in *Mockingbird*.

"It's hard to explain," he replies. "Ignorant, trashy people use it when they think somebody's favoring Negroes over and above themselves. It's slipped into usage with some people like ourselves, when they want a common, ugly term to label somebody."

In 2017, *The Washington Post* ran an article about *Mockingbird* being pulled from the eighth-grade reading list in Biloxi, Mississippi. The school board vice president, Kenny Holloway, said that "there is some language in the book that makes people uncomfortable." The Biloxi case garnered national attention precisely because *Mockingbird* is celebrated as a condemnation of the racist language—and attitudes—it offended readers with in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

The Washington Post described another pivotal moment in the reading of *Mockingbird* that occurred in 2004: Garvey Jackson, a 13-year-old student in Hillsborough, North Carolina, was disturbed by hearing his classmates speak the *n*-word as they read *Mockingbird* aloud in class. Thus, Garvey made a shirt covered in words from the book—the *n*-word and its many 1930s-era derivatives. He then wore the shirt to English class. "If it's good enough for the book, it's good enough for the shirt," Garvey informed his teacher. He was sent to the principal's office, where he declared that he wanted the book "out of the school system." Garvey's innovative protest methods represent one of many formal efforts to ban *Mockingbird*. According to the American Library Association, those efforts range from the purported "psychological damage" the novel inflicted on the racial integration movement in Warren Township, Indiana, in 1981 to a case in Accomack County, Virginia, in 2016, when the mother of a biracial student objected to the racial slurs in the book.

James LaRue, then director of the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom, said the Biloxi case was one of the vaguest challenges he'd ever run across. The school board, he noted, "just says [the novel] makes people uncomfortable. … [But] the whole point to classics is they challenge the way we think about things."

Even so, the objections to *Mockingbird*'s language have continued unabated in the 21st century. Those objections have recently been joined by another strain of criticism: that Lee's novel promotes a so-called white savior narrative.

Atticus, who's imbued with white privilege, single-handedly wields his authority and education to try to clear Tom Robinson, a Black man, of the charges that he raped Mayella Ewell, a young white woman. Atticus is the dynamic hero of this effort. Meanwhile, Black characters like Tom Robinson and the Finches' housekeeper Calpurnia have little opportunity to speak or act for themselves. In a 2018 *New Yorker* article on Atticus Finch's contested legacy, novelist Alice Randall, who is African American, asked whether a text "written by a privileged daughter of the Old South should still take up space in a curriculum that could be well used to expose students to literary voices on injustice … that have emerged in the past 50 years."

Most discussions about Atticus's alleged identity as a white savior happen within classrooms. In at least one case—in a secondary school in Edinburgh, Scotland—the discussion was fierce enough that it was picked up in the news. On July 6, 2021, the UK paper *The Sun* ran the story. The curriculum leader for English at the Edinburgh school defended his department's banning of the book as part of a bid to "decolonize" the syllabus due to what he described as "the use of the N-word and the use of the white saviour motif in *Mockingbird*." However, Ruth Davidson, a former member of the Scottish parliament, argued instead that *Mockingbird* is "about showing the entrenched disparity in [the] 30s South, where a black man can't get a fair hearing—no matter what the evidence or who pleads his case." In a similar vein, Calvin Robinson, a policy adviser to Britain's Department of Education, lamented: "It's sad we are … judging [classics] by today's standards rather than teaching them for their literary value."

Literary value is what so many of these arguments about book banning ignore. It is what makes a novel such as *Mockingbird* so much more than a flat public service announcement about how destructive racism is to an entire community, an entire country. Literary value is part of what keeps *Mockingbird* on syllabi across the nation and the world, even as readers are called upon to reevaluate the worldview of Lee's novel and its characters. In an essay, Aaron Sorkin, who adapted the novel for the stage, discussed how he had to grapple with all the issues talked about here—namely, all the problems involving *Mockingbird*'s language and its privileging of the "white gaze" in this story about race. Despite these challenges, Sorkin felt it was crucial to bring Lee's classic to the stage. Indeed, in defiance of those critics who feel that Atticus, the "white savior," is a failure in Lee's novel and that his

credibility as a "good man" had been irreparably harmed by the publication of *Go Set a Watchman*, Sorkin insisted on making Atticus the center of the play. He says: "*To Kill a Mockingbird* is about the nature of decency. What it means to be a person. In the novel, Atticus has the answers. In the play, he would struggle with the questions."

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17

YOUNG ADULT FICTION AND ITS DISCONTENTS

These days, young adult literature—or YA—is one of the most popular and profitable genres in the entire publishing cosmos. YA books also consistently top the annual lists of challenged and banned books put together by the American Library Association's Office of Intellectual Freedom. All have been banned or challenged for such reasons as being "anti–family values" in their portrayal of gay or transgender teens, promoting an anti-police agenda, being too violent or sexually explicit, or promoting witchcraft. However, as many of those who champion intellectual freedom argue, in the name of protecting children, book banners would leave young people ignorant of the world.

WHAT IS YA?

YA is a vast category that contains enduring censorship targets, such as Lois Lowry's *The Giver*, a 1993 futuristic dystopian novel. As literary historians point out, the phenomenon of YA literature wasn't possible until young adulthood was recognized as a life stage distinct from childhood and adulthood. The first appearance of the word *teenager* in print is generally credited to a 1941 issue of the magazine *Popular Science Monthly*. The creation of the teenager, however, was put in motion by the Great Depression: Since the job market in the 1930s was so weak, record numbers of adolescents started attending high school. In 1929, only 50% of 14- to 17-year-old Americans were in high school. A decade later, 75% of adolescents were enrolled.

Imbued with more leisure time to study than their predecessors, the teenagers of the late 1940s and '50s were creatures viewed by adults with some anxiety. Though juvenile delinquency was the primary worry, books that had the potential to fuel teenage alienation and restlessness were also a concern. You may recall that *The Catcher in the Rye*, which first appeared in serialized form

in 1945 to 1946 and then as a novel in 1951, was suspect for its disruptive influence on its first generation of teenage readers. *Catcher* is one of many novels written for adults that crosses over into the YA category. The first novel that was written expressly for teenagers was 18-year-old S. E. Hinton's 1967 novel *The Outsiders*. In fact, the book jacket of the original edition proudly trumpets Hinton's story about bullying as being "for teenagers, about teenagers, written by a teenager."

THE OUTSIDERS

Susan Eloise Hinton was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1948 and still lives there. As a 16-year-old high school junior, she failed her creative writing class. Undeterred, she worked on what would become her first novel, *The Outsiders*, which she finished when she was 17. Hinton's editor at Viking Press suggested that she use gender-neutral initials as her pen name to avoid alienating male book reviewers as well as the teenage boys who would make up a large part of her readership. As of 2017, its 50th anniversary, *The Outsiders* has sold more than 15 million copies. It changed the way YA fiction would be written evermore.

The average novel about contemporary life that was offered to teenage readers throughout much of the 20th century was a story about, in Hinton's own dismissive words, "Mary Jane [going] to the prom." *The Outsiders*, in contrast, was a gritty shocker. It depicts high schoolers smoking, drinking, and, as they said, "rumbling." The story focuses on the rivalry between two high school gangs, the "Socs" (or "Socials") and the "greasers," who are divided by economic status. The teenage Hinton wrote directly to an audience of her peers. She has been credited with empowering a generation of adolescents to demand more realistic stories about their lives. It's also important to recognize that *The Outsiders* was published at an ideal moment in American history. The social movements of the 1960s—and, in particular, the sexual revolution—were insisting that people "get real" about their personal lives. Books such as *The Outsiders* responded to this call for greater authenticity.

Any novel that has continued to enthrall generations of teenagers is certain to attract fierce scrutiny from parents, educators, and library boards. *The Outsiders* was ranked number 38 on the American Library Association's top 100 most frequently challenged books of the 1990s. The challenges came for a host of reasons, among them "drugs and alcohol abuse" and the fact

that "virtually all the characters were from broken homes." In 1992, the Boone School District in Iowa challenged *The Outsiders*. In 2001, George Washington Middle School in Eleanor, West Virginia, took issue with the book's focus on gangs and gang fights.

Throughout its history, *The Outsiders* has also been criticized from the pulpits of churches throughout the United States for its depiction of so-called ungodly themes. Critical clerics ascribe the violence and drug and alcohol abuse dramatized in the novel to the fact that the young characters have fallen away from Christianity. Pastors and parents have also complained that the novel doesn't contain any positive role models. Hinton and her many fans would no doubt respond that sometimes life doesn't afford much positivity.

With the rise of the politics of identity and other social movements in the early 2000s, books that have been challenged for decades by conservatives are now coming in for tough scrutiny from the left. Such is the case with *The Outsiders*—or, to be more precise, with the reputation of its author. S. E. Hinton has been accused of homophobia because of her brusque denials that two of her "greaser" characters are gay. Given that the novel depicts intense relationships among teenage boys, the homoerotic reading of *The Outsiders* has always been an interpretive option.

In 2017, however, a fan directly asked Hinton on Twitter whether two of her gang members—Johnny Cade and Dally—were secretly in love. The fan also opined that she thought it would be "cute" if they were. Hinton responded tersely that there was no evidence of homosexuality in her text and that, when *The Outsiders* was written in the 1960s, there was nothing "cute" about being gay. Other fans piled on, accusing Hinton of homophobia and also pointing out that her novels are primarily populated by white characters. Hinton declared that she didn't feel that she could write about LGBTQ+ characters since their experience was not hers. "I have no problem with anyone being gay," she tweeted. She identified herself as a supporter of LGBTQ+ rights before adding: "No, [my characters] are not gay. I wrote them, I ought to know." Hinton, who says she writes fan fiction herself, has explicitly welcomed the LGBTQ+ fan fiction *The Outsiders* has generated.

Other YA books quickly followed *The Outsiders*, especially when publishers realized the existence of this consumer niche. For instance, sports journalist Robert Lipsyte's debut novel, *The Contender*, appeared in 1967. It features one of the first African American protagonists to appear in YA literature: 17-year-old high school dropout Alfred Brooks, who lives in Harlem and aspires to become a contender in the boxing ring as a way of avoiding drugs and gangs.

JUDY BLUME

Over a career spanning more than 50 years, Blume has published nearly 30 books, most of them written for young adult readers. Her books have been translated into 32 languages and sold more than 90 million copies. In a 2014 interview, Blume reflected on how her prolific and boundary-pushing career has been affected by changing social attitudes and the growth of censorship in America:

> Children's reading was much freer [in the 1970s] than in the 80s, when censorship started; when we elected Ronald Reagan and the conservatives decided that they would decide not just what their children would read but what all children would read, it went crazy. My feeling in the beginning was wait, this is America: we don't have censorship, we have ... freedom to read, freedom to write, freedom of the press, we don't do this, we don't ban books. But then they did.

Blume was visiting London when she gave that 2014 interview. Although she wasn't traveling with a bodyguard at that moment, she did say that her publisher sometimes sent one along with her, particularly after she'd made statements in support of Planned Parenthood and received threatening emails.

For decades, that was the anxious reality of embarking on a book tour for the woman who is probably America's most beloved—and banned—living YA author. In fact, the American Library Association has already named Blume one of the most frequently challenged authors of the 21st century. Some

scholars of censorship place Blume second only to Stephen King as the most banned author in American history. Several of her books have appeared and continue to appear on banned book lists nationwide. Now in her eighties, Blume runs a nonprofit bookstore in Key West called Books & Books that she cofounded with her husband. She's also become an anti-censorship activist. Among other things, she's published advice on combatting book banning to her fellow authors, for "when it happens to you." She's also spoken out on the editorial pages of *The New York Times* against the bannings of the Harry Potter books for their alleged Satanism.


JUDY BLUME

Judy Blume, born in 1938, began writing in the 1960s. She was a young stay-at-home mother with two little children when her first book, *The One in the Middle Is the Green Kangaroo*, was published in 1969. In the decade that followed, Blume would write her most popular and controversial novels. Among them is her third novel, *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*, which was published in 1970. That novel ranks number 60 on the American Library Association's list of the 100 most frequently challenged books of the 1990s and number 99 on the list of most frequently challenged books of the 2000s.

Blume's main character, Margaret, is in sixth grade and is the product of an interfaith marriage—her father is Jewish, and her mother is Christian. One plot strand deals with Margaret's questions about the existence of God. The other focuses on Margaret's worries about puberty: Her body seems stuck in preadolescence given that her chest is flat and she hasn't gotten her period yet. Margaret longs for the day when she'll need to use belted sanitary napkins (changed to adhesive in later editions). She and some friends form a secret club called the Four Pre-Teen Sensations. They talk about menstruation, boys, kissing, Margaret's father's *Playboy* magazines, and bras. A much-parodied device of the novel has Margaret posing questions about her body to the God she isn't sure she believes in, such as this one-sided dialogue about her nonexistent bust:

> Are you there God? It's me, Margaret. I just told my mother I want a bra. Please help me grow God. You know where.

Since its publication, Blume's third novel has been challenged and sometimes banned in public libraries and schools around the country. For example, it was removed from elementary school libraries in Gilbert, Arizona, in 1980. In the local junior high school, parental consent was required for students to check it out. In 1982, the novel was challenged on the grounds of being "sexually offensive and amoral" in Alabama and Wisconsin. In 1983, it was challenged at the Xenia, Ohio, school libraries for its sexual content and "anti-Christian behavior." Perhaps the unkindest cut of all came from the elementary school where Judy Blume's two oldest children were then enrolled. When *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* was first published, Blume donated three signed copies to the school. Blume later found out that the books were never added to the library. She said:

> The male principal decided that the book was inappropriate because of the discussion of menstruation, never mind how many fifth and sixth graders already had their periods. [This was] my first experience with having a book banned.

Forever was published in 1975. Blume has often said in interviews that she wrote *Forever* at the urging of her daughter, Randy, to whom the book is dedicated. Blume recalls that Randy was "reading all these books, where a girl succumbed [to sex, and] she would be punished, sometimes she would die. And Randy said, 'Couldn't there ever be a book where two nice kids do it and nobody has to die?'" *Forever* ranks number 7 on the American Library Association's list of the 100 most frequently challenged books of the 1990s. It's not hard to understand why. Two high school seniors, named Katherine and Michael, are attracted to each other. As their relationship progresses, they talk about having sex. Their conversations focus on their emotions, the practical challenges of finding privacy, and, ultimately, the mechanics of sex.

There are scenes where Michael teaches Katherine how to hold his penis. When the two teenagers do have intercourse, it takes place on the living room floor in Michael's sister's apartment. Ultimately, the relationship isn't "forever," but neither of them regrets having sex together.

Forever has been challenged and banned for various reasons in various schools and libraries across the United States. For example, in 1982, schools in Scranton, Pennsylvania, challenged Blume's novel for its language as well as depictions of "masturbation, birth control, and disobedience to parents." In 1984, the school board in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, objected to the novel's "pornography" and charged that it "explores areas God didn't intend to explore outside of marriage." That same year, the public library in Holdrege, Nebraska, moved the novel to the adult section for being "pornographic" and because it "does not promote the sanctity of life, family life." Two years later, school libraries in Campbell County, Wyoming, challenged the book on the grounds that it would encourage children "to experiment with sexual encounters." In 1994, the Mediapolis School District in Wisconsin removed the novel from school libraries because it failed to promote abstinence or monogamy and because it "lacks any aesthetic, literary, or social value."

Literary culture still downplays the aesthetic value of children's and YA books. However, because of the impressionability of Blume's youthful readers, her books have sometimes been regarded by those who would ban them as potentially even more corrupting than *Ulysses* or *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. In fact, Blume was trending on Twitter in 2022 as book-banning efforts were gaining traction in GOP-controlled states across the nation. The multitudinous bannings of Blume's books and her activist response have made her an anti-censorship icon.

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18

ATTEMPTS TO SUPPRESS #METOO BOOKS

This lecture focuses on some of the books that have been embraced by or emerged out of the #MeToo movement. You will explore how they've been challenged, mostly by school boards. It's impossible to anticipate how books will be received, misinterpreted, used, or misused. As esteemed American culture critic Greil Marcus wrote in *Mystery Train*: "Good art is always dangerous, always open-ended. Once you put it out in the world you lose control of it; people will fit it into their minds in all sorts of different ways."

#METOO AND *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*

The #MeToo movement was born in 2006, when activist and sexual assault survivor Tarana Burke began using the phrase "me too" on the social media site Myspace. In this case, the phrase expresses solidarity with victims of sexual assault and harassment. The movement caught fire in October 2017 following the publicity around the sexual assault allegations against powerful film producer Harvey Weinstein. On October 15, 2017, actress Alyssa Milano tweeted: "If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote 'Me too' as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem." Her statement received thousands of replies, tweets, comments, and retweets from mostly women worldwide in response. The heightened awareness of the depth and scope of the problem in the years that have followed has been transformational, although it's but a beginning.

A novel that many people regard as the emblem of the #MeToo movement is Margaret Atwood's 1985 novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. You may be familiar with the plot of this novel from the recent popular Hulu television series

based on it. You also may be familiar with the news images of women at protest rallies wearing the iconic blood-red habits and face-obscuring white bonnets that identify the "Handmaids," or women capable of childbearing, in Atwood's dystopian novel.

The novel is set in a future United States that has turned into a far-right, religious, militarized country known as the Republic of Gilead. Events called "Prayvaganzas"—part religious rites, part public punishment ceremonies—provide some of the only entertainment. Under the regime, women are not allowed to read or write, own property, or handle money. Women are also deprived of all autonomy over their own bodies. Moreover, because of unchecked toxic environmental pollution, few women are still fertile. Those that are—called Handmaids—are assigned to ruling-class married couples and forced to have intercourse with the husbands, or "Commanders," to keep the human race going.

Atwood has said she was inspired to write *The Handmaid's Tale* by the rise of the Christian right in America in the 1970s and '80s as well as the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979. A revisionist historical reading of Puritan society in America also shaped Atwood's envisioning of the world of Gilead. Atwood rejects the reading of the Puritans as a group seeking religious freedom in the New World. Instead, she allies with historians who read them as more of a cultish, closed community.

When *The Handmaid's Tale* was published in 1985, women's reproductive rights in America seemed fairly secure. However, times have changed. Atwood is now considered by many readers to be something of a literary seer who foresaw political threats to women's autonomy that many others were blind to. Atwood has ruefully said in interviews that she's no longer criticized for how "unrealistic" *The Handmaid's Tale* is. As the #MeToo movement was gathering strength in 2017, Atwood, who was already at work on a long-awaited sequel called *The Testaments*, directly incorporated some of the movement's language and concerns into the new work. Thanks also to the popularity of the TV series inspired by it, *The Handmaid's Tale* has had a profound effect on political action in the real world as well.

After the 2016 election of Donald Trump, the nomination and confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court, and the successful attempts to roll back *Roe v. Wade*, the costume of Atwood's Handmaids has been donned by

protestors taking to the streets. Outside the United States, the Handmaids' costume has visually dominated women's reproductive rights protests in many countries. It has emerged as one of the most powerful contemporary feminist symbols of resistance. In an interview she gave to *The Guardian* in 2018, Atwood declared:

> In countries that prohibit birth control and reproductive health information, the state claims ownership of women's bodies through enforced childbearing. What the costume is asking viewers is: do we want to live in a slave state?

As some observers have pointed out, the shock of the scarlet color of the Handmaids' cloaks amidst the sea of men—in parliamentary or court settings—adds to their bold effectiveness. One of the most astute commentators on the reach of the Handmaids' costumes is Ane Crabtree. She is the costume designer who decided how the characters in the TV series should "dress for dystopia." Ane, who's in her fifties, has talked in several interviews about growing up in poverty in the Midwest as the child of an immigrant Japanese mother. Significantly, she also identifies as a victim of sexual abuse. In a 2019 interview with *Ms. Magazine*, Crabtree said this about the power of the Handmaids' costumes:

> I grew up quiet. I grew up multi-racial in a town that was bizarre, in a time, the 60s and 70s, when other races just didn't know what to do with me and my mom and brother. So, I have found ways to scream via my work. … I think other women have felt that—that's what they've told me—that's why they don the costume, because you don't have to say a damn word. … [People] are so petrified of the silence, and the powerful shouting silence, this costume brings.

CHALLENGES TO *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*

The Handmaid's Tale is a novel that dramatizes many controversial issues head-on: reproductive rights, sexual assault, the patriarchal ideology that grounds religious fundamentalism. Thus, it has been challenged or banned several times since its publication. The novel consistently appears on the American Library Association's Top 100 Most Banned and Challenged Books list. The language and explicit sexuality are frequent triggers for challenges and even banning attempts. However, Atwood's novel has also been occasionally criticized for its anti-Christian and anti-Islamic bias. Recall that Atwood said the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 influenced her writing.

A few years after *The Handmaid's Tale* was first published, some parents of high schoolers in Rohnert Park, California, demanded that it be taken off the senior English reading list because of its profanity and sexual explicitness. This challenge ended in a compromise. The children of the offended parents were allowed to read something else and skip class on the days that the book was being discussed. Attempts to have the novel removed from high school reading lists in Guilford County, North Carolina, and Wyomissing, Pennsylvania, in 2012 and 2017, respectively, were contentious enough to be covered by the local papers. However, the challenges ended unsuccessfully. An unrecorded number of other American high schools, however, have quietly omitted *The Handmaid's Tale* from their syllabi because of parental complaints or the anticipation of such complaints.

In 2019, the novel narrowly survived yet another attempt to ban it from the high school curriculum. This occurred in the Marietta, Ohio, school district. According to the quoted transcript of the debate, as reported by *The Marietta Times*, the Marietta school board president said that teaching of the book might be interpreted as an endorsement of it. "I appreciate your mission," he told the teachers who were supporting the book, "but I'm concerned about the vulgarity. … I like that it's thought-provoking, but I'm not feeling real good about this." Another board member agreed, saying that "profanity isn't needed to make people think." Taking the opposite side, a third board member said, "I don't think we can clean up literature that makes us uncomfortable and keep its meaning."

The district curriculum director—a woman—urged the board to evaluate the book in its entirety, saying: "This is a book that elicits conversations about what happens when the government takes this kind of control. … It was popular in the 1980s because of the rise of feminism. … [Atwood] didn't write about anything that hasn't already happened." The school superintendent added that banning *The Handmaid's Tale* "on the basis of profanity … opens a door, and we don't know what else might be behind it." This alluded to earlier conversations about other books with discomforting language, such as *Huckleberry Finn* and *Of Mice and Men*. The vote ended in a tie, and the book remains in the curriculum.

It seems that things lie under the surface of this conversation that aren't explicitly being said. Much of the "profanity" that the first two male school board members find offensive in *The Handmaid's Tale* is uttered in the context of the sexual subjugation of the handmaids. The sexual politics of the novel are not mentioned by these men. Instead, it's the female district curriculum director who brings up the charged word *feminism* and refers to the novel's dystopian vision of a world where the government is in control of women's bodies. This conversation may make you wonder how often books are banned, challenged, or—most often—never chosen for inclusion in high school curricula because of reasons that aren't completely articulated.

HUNGER AND *SHE SAID*

Hundreds of books and journalism works have arisen directly out of the #MeToo movement. That most of these have not been challenged or banned may speak to the fact that their audiences are self-selected and, for the most part, older. That is, they are out of high school and less likely to trigger the concerns of school boards and library systems. For instance, #MeToo topics and questions come up frequently whenever Roxane Gay talks about her 2017 bestselling memoir *Hunger*, which is widely read in college classes these days.

Hunger deals with Gay's gang rape at the age of 12 and her subsequent weight gain that tipped a once-slender girl into morbid obesity. At an appearance the year after the book came out at California State University Channel Islands, an audience member asked Gay about her thoughts on the burgeoning #MeToo movement. Gay called it a good start but said she cringes when she

reads about whether it has gone too far. "No, it has not," said Gay. "Until every sexual predator faces consequences for their actions, we have not gone too far."

The nonfiction book *She Said* by *The New York Times* Pulitzer Prize–winning team of reporters Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey is another recent #MeToo book that's now assigned widely in colleges and universities. In it, Kantor and Twohey reconstruct the suspenseful, true narrative of how they broke the Harvey Weinstein story for *The New York Times*. There have been no recorded book bannings of *She Said* to date. However, an incident on the 2019 book tour involving the two reporters and legendary *Washington Post* journalist Bob Woodward highlighted the generational and gender schisms that the #MeToo movement has exposed. That incident has also been talked about in terms of a "live-action censoring" of the female authors.

Here's what happened, as described in an article that ran on the website Vox on October 3, 2019: The onstage conversation took place at the historic Sixth & I Synagogue in downtown Washington DC. Woodward, who posed the interview questions, repeatedly interrupted Kantor and Twohey as they attempted to answer him. He also suggested that Weinstein's aggressive and threatening behavior to women could be interpreted as "weird foreplay." As Constance Grady, the author of the article, writes:

> the conversation ended up replicating the very power dynamics that Twohey and Kantor were trying to explain, the power dynamics that let Weinstein get away with what he did for so long: a man exerting his own institutional power over the women in the room with him, just because he could.

SPEAK

There is one #MeToo book that is banned much more routinely than *The Handmaid's Tale*. In fact, in 2020, this particular novel once again made the Top 10 Most Challenged Books list put out by the American Library

Association. It ranks number 25 on the list of Banned and Challenged Books for the years 2010 to 2019. *Speak* is a 1999 YA novel that tells the story of Melinda Sordino, a first-year student at Merryweather High who is raped at a party at a classmate's house one weekend. Melinda calls the police, who shut down the party. Traumatized, she cannot tell her classmates or the police why she called. Her classmates think of her as a snitch, and she's ostracized. In a fragmented narrative inflected by references to fairy tales and other novels, such as *The Scarlet Letter*, *Speak* traces Melinda's slow and sometimes brutal path to regaining her voice. Laurie Halse Anderson says she was inspired to write the story by her own experience of sexual assault when she was a teenager.

Upon its publication in 1999, *Speak* became a *New York Times* bestseller, a finalist for the National Book Award, and, in 2000, one of the books named by the American Library Association as a Best Book for Young Readers. It almost immediately also became radioactive when it was placed on high school syllabi. One instance of attempted censorship against *Speak* that garnered nationwide attention occurred in Missouri in 2010. The call for censorship was sparked by an op-ed in the *Springfield News-Leader* newspaper that was written by Wesley Scroggins, an assistant professor of management at Missouri State University. Scroggins opined that Anderson's novel "should be classified as soft pornography." He called on parents to get involved in the effort to ban *Speak* from the syllabi of Missouri's schools. "How can Christian men and women expose children to such immorality?" Scroggins wrote.

Anderson, who's the daughter of a Methodist minister and identifies as a Christian herself, was livid and garnered tens of thousands of messages of support on her blog. A hashtag on Twitter, #speakloudly, became instantly popular. Anderson said on her blog that "the fact that he [Scroggins] sees rape as sexually exciting (pornographic) is disturbing, if not horrifying. It gets worse, if that's possible, when he goes on to completely mischaracterize the book." Acclaimed YA author and anti-censorship activist Judy Blume brought the case to the attention of the National Coalition Against Censorship and rallied more support. Perhaps bowing to national attention, the Republic school district in Missouri voted to retain Anderson's *Speak* on its reading lists.

The subjects that #MeToo books address—sexual harassment, coercion, and assault—are red flags to many school boards and library systems. Battles over censorship will continue to be waged within those organizations as more

books inspired by the #MeToo movement continue to be published. In his own somewhat controversial 1891 novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde wrote that "the books that the world calls immoral are the books that show the world its own shame."

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19

THE BATTLE OVER CRITICAL RACE THEORY

The Black Lives Matter movement was initiated in 2013 by three Black organizers, all women, in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman, the white man who shot and killed 17-year-old African American Trayvon Martin in Florida in February 2012. This lecture explores some of the ways the Black Lives Matter movement has influenced the publication and reception of some recent books. You will also learn about the advent of critical race theory and the reception to it on both sides of the political spectrum.

DIVERSITY—OR LACK THEREOF—IN THE PUBLISHING INDUSTRY

In February 2020, in honor of Black History Month, the national bookseller Barnes & Noble had a bad idea: It planned to bring out a series of classic novels and plays in special paperbacks called Diverse Editions. What would make the editions "diverse" was their covers: These classic novels by white people, featuring characters who have always been assumed to also be white people, would have fresh covers that portrayed those characters as people of color. Barnes & Noble claimed it used artificial intelligence to look through 100 books to ensure that the classics selected made no reference to the race of their characters. However, *Moby Dick*, for instance, is structured on a crucial pairing of white characters with characters of color. The Diverse Editions were almost immediately shelved. Critics rightly asked why, if the bookseller truly wanted diversity, it didn't feature books written by or featuring African Americans. Some folks even referred to the project as "literary blackface."

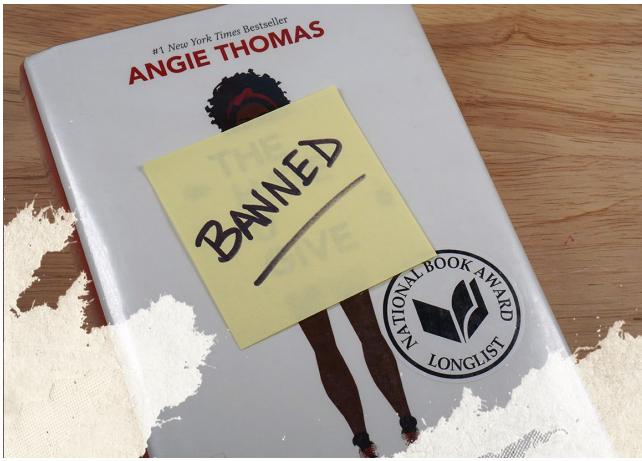
The Diverse Editions project was a particularly inept attempt to rectify the relatively meager representation of people of color on the bookshelves of libraries, schools, and bookstores. Particularly as the Black Lives Matter movement went viral after the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, the publishing industry began to come under increased scrutiny. The issues raised had to do with the fact that not only are most new books published every year written by white authors about white characters for imagined white readers but also the racial composition of the employees of the various publishing houses skews heavily white. In 2017, a survey commissioned by *Publishers Weekly* found that some 87% of publishing professionals identified as white or Caucasian. Only 11% identified as Black, Hispanic, Asian, or mixed. Indeed, throughout much of its history, publishing has been an industry run by white men—many of them wealthy.

Note that direct censorship is only one means through which books, ideas, and discourse are limited. Concerns about the threat of censorship can result in a reluctance of writers to produce work that will be banned or challenged. These fears can generate self-censorship as writers, consciously or not, tailor their work to what they think will be accepted. Self-censorship can ultimately reinforce a process called social censorship, which strengthens the voices and views of those who already hold power and muffles those at the margins.

There's also a variant of social censorship that some would say is reflexively practiced when only the same kind of people are in a room together. If the vast majority of decision-makers in a gathering are white, straight, and middle-class or above, it will take more of a conscious effort to reach outside that shared identity and bring in the work of those who don't fit into those categories. The civil rights movement, the second women's movement, and the gay pride movement of the second half of the 20th century helped expand the stories that are written, read, and seen.

BLACK LIVES MATTER AND LITERATURE

In 2017, a YA novel was published that had an unusual backstory. Angie Thomas started writing *The Hate U Give* when she was a college student in Jackson, Mississippi, in 2009 and heard of the fatal shooting of an unarmed 22-year-old African American man on a train station platform in Oakland, California. The transit policeman who shot Oscar Grant III was white. What especially shocked Thomas was the reaction of some of her white college classmates, who said Grant probably deserved to be shot. At the urging of one of her college professors, Thomas began writing. She feared that her novel, about a Black teenager who becomes an activist after her childhood best friend is shot, would be too controversial. However, 13 publishers bid on the book in an auction, and *The Hate U Give* became a bestseller.



Her novel is also a mainstay of the American Library Association's Top 10 Most Challenged Books list. Challenges to Thomas's novel have cited its drug references, profanity,

and anti-police message. By 2020, in fact, *The Hate U Give* and other books that touch on racial injustice and police violence toward Black people represented the majority of the titles on that year's challenged books list. In 2019, 8 of the 10 books on the list featured LGBTQ+ subject matter. In 2020, race became the dominant controversial subject.

In addition to *The Hate U Give*, the 2020 nonfiction title *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You* by Ibram X. Kendi and Jason Reynolds appeared on the list. *Stamped* is a juvenile version of historian Kendi's nonfiction book of the same title about the history of racist ideas in America. Two other books on the 2020 list—both YA novels—owe their plotlines to heightened national awareness of police violence against Black people. The first, *All American Boys* by Brendan Kiely and Jason Reynolds, is about a young Black man who's mistaken for a shoplifter in a bodega and is beaten by a white police officer. The town where the shooting happens breaks apart along racial lines. The other was *Something Happened in Our Town*. It delves into an act of police violence and the vastly different responses two families—one white, one Black—have to it.

In the spring and summer of 2020, as nationwide protests spurred by the murder of George Floyd roiled on, the demand for books about racism and police violence skyrocketed. By early June, almost all the top best-selling books on Amazon and at Barnes & Noble zoomed in on the subject of racism, including Ibram X. Kendi's *How to Be an Antiracist*, *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo, and *So You Want to Talk about Race* by Ijeoma Oluo.

As a consequence of the Black Lives Matter movement, though, another type of challenging happened—this time from the left. Calls were issued for the genre of police procedurals to be "canceled" or, at least, for its traditionally "pro-police" politics to be reversed. Most of the calls for canceling or serious revision of the genre focused on television shows, such as the *Law and Order* franchise. However, some crime writers talked about the Black Lives Matter protests as a wake-up call to rethink the valorization of police that pervades the genre.

CRITICAL RACE THEORY

The widespread protests and demonstrations following the killing of George Floyd generated an effort by school systems and other institutions to address the causes and pervasiveness of racism in the United States. Even before

that moment, in 2019, *The New York Times* published *The 1619 Project*, an ambitious reconsideration of US history composed by multiple scholars and journalists. *The 1619 Project* argues that American nation building began with the arrival of the first enslaved populations from Africa in 1619. The project provided an intellectual corollary to the Black Lives Matter protests by insisting that the history of chattel slavery has been integral to shaping the country to this day and should be central to the larger story of America that's being passed on to our children. That assertion has generated ferocious resistance. Many Americans believe that federal and local governments—as well as quasi-government institutions, such as boards of education funded with taxpayer dollars—are imposing an extremist ideology, developed by an unaccountable intellectual elite, upon children and their parents.

A key figure in galvanizing this resistance is Christopher Rufo, a journalist, former documentary filmmaker, and unsuccessful candidate for political office in Seattle. In 2020, as reported in *The New Yorker*, a city-of-Seattle employee sent Rufo a video of an antibias workshop. Rufo then began to make requests to the Seattle government to obtain more information concerning city-sponsored antiracism programs. On the website of *City Journal*, affiliated with the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, a conservative think tank, Rufo reported on the information he had obtained. He asserted that the city was "induct[ing] white employees into the cult of critical race theory."

Critical race theory is a school of thought that emerged from Black legal academics in the 1980s. It challenged the idea that color-blind law would eventually defeat white racism. This theory saw American racism as not merely explicit prejudice expressed by given individuals. Instead, it saw racism as a matter of what law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw called structured disadvantage—a form of prejudice that pervades American life and institutions. For example, Black and other minority populations bear a disproportional burden of dangerous environmental hazards, including the presence of toxic waste facilities in their communities. As a result, the residents of these communities suffer from higher rates of serious illness. Government and corporate officials naturally tend to build such facilities in places where citizens lack the power and prerogatives to object. This is structural racism. It is a result of the accumulated historical sediment of centuries of racial hierarchy that has seeped into American life.

According to proponents of critical race theory, the desire to move to a color-blind society must confront the barrier of this historical sedimentation. People can change history—and critical race theory scholars give full credit to the civil rights movement of the 1960s. However, a pronouncement that we are now a non-racist society cannot itself make it so. All these issues are argued out in law review articles and graduate schools of social science. Critical race theory, then, doesn't have much to do with teaching children or adolescents or even with antiracism workshops.

Rufo's *City Journal* piece on antibias workshops led to an appearance on Fox's *Tucker Carlson* show in September 2020. There, Rufo said critical race theory was "being weaponized against the American people." He also said that it was a kind of "cult indoctrination" that had permeated the federal government, including the Treasury and the Justice Department. Rufo urged President Trump to take action against the promulgation of critical race theory. Shortly thereafter, Trump issued an executive order banning federal contractors from offering diversity training that is "rooted in the … belief that America is an irredeemably racist and sexist country."

STATES' FIGHT AGAINST CRITICAL RACE THEORY

In April 2022, Florida's governor, Ron DeSantis, signed into law a bill that banned the teaching of critical race theory in public schools. The Florida directive says that classroom instruction "must be factual and objective, and may not suppress or distort significant historical events." More polemically, it equates critical race theory with Holocaust denial as "theories that distort historical events." It then defines critical race theory as saying "that racism is embedded in American society and its legal systems in order to uphold the supremacy of white persons."

Since 2020, Christopher Rufo has augmented his arguments about critical race theory with attacks on what he calls "radical gender theory." This essentially holds that gender is not a natural construct but one that is socially and historically contingent. What is most radical in gender theory to Rufo is the contention that gender fluidity extends to individuals who categorize themselves as something other than one of the two traditional

genders. Moreover, adolescents and even children might be drawn to become transgender and, sometimes with the support of their parents, seek to physically transform themselves into another sex. Rufo again obtained documents from government entities and school districts, some of which, he claims, are seeking to destroy what the materials call heteronormativity.

Has Rufo made all of this up? Clearly not—teaching modules on gender as a social construct do exist. There are books written for children and adolescents that engage the charged subjects of gender identity and racism. However, the crucial question lies in what judgment you make about these materials and books: Do they, as Rufo insists, socialize children into a kind of radical leftist perversion of what is typical and normal? Returning to critical race theory, do discussions of racism instill in white students what Governor DeSantis has called a hatred of their country and each other?

Rufo's second track, focusing on gender ideology, is rolling through the country, too. Florida passed a law in March 2022 titled Parental Rights in Education, which critics renamed Don't Say Gay. The law bars any discussion of sexual orientation or gender identity through grade 3 and, more vaguely, "in a manner that is not age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate for students in accordance with state standards." The law also permits parents to sue school districts over material taught and discussed in class (with the school district bearing the cost). Potential lawsuits might instill a fear in teachers of conveying any remotely controversial subject.

An idea of freedom is often contested—is it freedom for (some) parents to insist on eliminating some aspects of their children's curriculum? Or are they impinging on the freedom of other parents to have their kids exposed to that curriculum? The question becomes: How much do Americans want to know—and want their children to know—about the issues pertaining to racism, gender, and sexuality that certain books may raise? No doubt, vigorous discussions of race, gender, and sexuality will always take place as long as people are discussing ideas and the books that present them. However, the current moment—filled with the challenges and bannings of those books—is a particularly fraught one that sometimes threatens to bring such necessary discussions to a halt.

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20

ALICE WALKER AND TONI MORRISON UNDER ATTACK

During the 1970s and 1980s, in the wake of the civil rights movement, American literary culture provided a greater space for the work of nonwhite writers. However, the entrance of Black female writers, both into the marketplace and the critical conversation, generated a backlash. Alice Walker and Toni Morrison were the most prominent of this emerging post-1960s generation of Black female writers. They were also the most honored by the mainstream literary and academic establishment, which was still overwhelmingly white and male. Today, their work and views continue to generate fresh controversies. This lecture delves into Walker's and Morrison's most prominent novels, *The Color Purple* and *Beloved*, respectively, and considers the multitudinous ways readers, educators, librarians, and literary gatekeepers have objected to them.

THE COLOR PURPLE

Alice Walker was born in Eatonton, Georgia, in 1944, one of eight children of parents who were sharecroppers. She was educated and active during the height of the civil rights movement in Georgia. After receiving a full scholarship to Spelman College, a historically Black women's school in Atlanta, Walker came under the influence of two prominent white leftist academics who also were participants in the civil rights struggle: Staughton Lynd and Howard Zinn. When Lynd and Zinn left Spelman, Walker got a fellowship to Sarah Lawrence College and began her writing career. This was linked to her increased activism in the burgeoning feminist movement.

Walker's second novel, *Meridian*, recast some of her experiences in the civil rights movement. It particularly focused on the subordination of women within the movement. The book received widespread critical praise. However, it was her next book, *The Color Purple*, published in 1982, that became a career-defining sensation, generating both tremendous admiration and anger. The events described in *The Color Purple* span the early through the mid-20th century. This is an epistolary novel, meaning it's told mostly through letters—letters that are often addressed to God from a young Black woman named Celie whose life is brutal and heartbreaking. Celie's stepfather rapes her, forcing her to bear two children, whom he takes from her. He then passes Celie on to Albert, an abusive husband in love with another woman. For a time, Celie accedes to Albert's rage and contempt. Meanwhile, her sister Nettie (another object of Albert's lust) flees to Africa to become a missionary.

Walker slowly begins to construct a way out for Celie through the emergence of a resilient matriarchy that reaches out to her. Celie ultimately leaves Albert, moves to Memphis, and starts a business making clothes. She also forges a friendship and erotic relationship with the other woman Albert loves, a singer named Shug Avery. Over time, Celie's community grows to include Shug, Nettie (who returns from Africa), and Samuel (Nettie's husband). *The Color Purple* is a graphically violent, often grim novel. Walker illuminates a world in which men's contempt, rage, and violence toward women is nearly constant. Nevertheless, the book expresses a steady desire for a loving family and

extended community. That desire appears on the verge of being realized in its moving conclusion when even Albert is redeemed and a band of women and men, spanning generations, comes together.

The Color Purple received extraordinary acclaim. In 1983, it received a rare dual recognition: It was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the National Book Award. In 1985, Steven Spielberg directed a film adaption of the novel, starring Whoopi Goldberg as Celie. It was nominated for 11 Academy Awards, although, in the end, it was not awarded any. The acclaim *The Color Purple* received in both popular and high literary culture, however, was far from universal.

CRITICISM OF AND CHALLENGES TO *THE COLOR PURPLE*

Some Black critics worried that Walker's novel would undermine the so-called respectability of African Americans. Prior to the release of Spielberg's adaptation, for example, the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, an African American weekly newspaper, ran an article titled "The Color Purple: Blaxploitation or Art?" In their piece, the writers assumed that any depiction of homosexuality was inherently pejorative, as they equated it with "sexually abusive Black men." A more sophisticated critique came from the acclaimed Black writer David Bradley, author of the award-winning novel *The Chaneysville Incident*, about the desperate escape of a band of enslaved people. In 1984, Bradley wrote a cover story for *The New York Times Magazine* neutrally titled "Novelist Alice Walker Telling the Black Woman's Story." Bradley's piece contained excerpts from discussions he'd had with Walker. He admired her work yet also found much of it repellent and ludicrously anti-male.

The book also became a touchstone in the long-running censorship wars in America's schools and libraries. *The Color Purple* expressed several themes which made it particularly vulnerable to those wars, including many explicit descriptions of sex—straight, gay, and masturbatory. The book also included descriptions of men physically abusing women. The reactions to those scenes offended men put off by what Walker and others called a womanist perspective. All of these scenes, of course, were intended to be understood in the larger historical context of the virulent white supremacy

of Jim Crow. The first known example of a conflict over the teaching of the novel came at Far West High School in Oakland, California, in 1984. Donna Green, a parent of a 10th-grade girl at the school, petitioned the local Board of Education to ban the novel from the school system. In a letter to the board, Green claimed the book to be sacrilegious, ultraviolent, and sympathetic to lesbianism. She also claimed that the novel was offensive to African Americans like herself. She pointed specifically to what she called the book's "embarrassing" folk dialect. At a public meeting of the board, Green read aloud charged passages from the book, such as this one expressing female desire for another woman: "First time I got the full sight of Shug Avery's long black body with it black plum nipples … I thought I had turned into a man."

In a city with a large and politically active Black community, the accusations of this Black mother hit home. The controversy continued for nine months. The renowned Black writer Ishmael Reed suggested a compromise of sorts. In a letter to the *Oakland Tribune*, Reed granted that the novel deserved some of Green's criticism. However, he declared that the book should not be banned. Instead, Reed proposed that *The Color Purple* be assigned along with books by other Black female writers, such as Sonia Sanchez and Lucille Clifton, who had been critical of Walker's work. The Board of Education convened a committee of literary experts to determine whether the novel was sufficiently meritorious to be read in the classroom. The committee, including future US poet laureate Robert Hass, ultimately recommended that the book should remain in the high school curriculum. In early 1985, the board voted to accept this recommendation.

The Color Purple has faced similar, recurrent challenges in schools, libraries, and even Texas prisons to this day. During the 2000s, Walker as a public figure became even more controversial—and justifiably so—because of her frequently documented anti-Semitism. These attitudes were expressed through her writing and her public interviews. In a 2017 poem titled "It Is Our (Frightful) Duty to Study the Talmud," in reference to the ancient book of Jewish law, Walker extrapolated remarks out of context from the Talmud and asked:

> Are Goyim (us) meant to be slaves of Jews, and not only That, but to enjoy it?
> Are three year old (and a day) girls eligible for marriage and intercourse?
> Are young boys fair game for rape?
> Must even the best of the Goyim (us, again) be killed?

Walker has also promoted the work of a writer named David Icke. Among other things, Icke has written that a Jewish group funded the Holocaust; that Holocaust denialism should be taught in schools; and that there was a tribe of blood-drinking, child-killing alien lizard people whose descendants (mostly Jews) effectively control the world's economy and political systems.

In the spring of 2022, Walker was disinvited to the Bay Area Book Festival in Berkeley, California, several weeks before the event. The organizers claimed they had learned of her anti-Semitic writings and remarks and her endorsement of Icke's work. This cancellation generated a fierce defense of Walker by hundreds of writers and activists, including Angela Davis, who signed a letter calling for a boycott of the festival. The letter writers claimed that the festival's organizers had used a false allegation of anti-Semitism as a "pretext" to rescind her invitation. The real reason, according to the letter, was Walker's support for Palestinian rights and opposition to Israeli Zionism.

TONI MORRISON AND *BELOVED*

Toni Morrison was Walker's contemporary. However, her addition to the literary establishment was ratified by both an appointment at Princeton and the 1993 Nobel Prize in Literature. In a 2006 survey of writers and critics in *The New York Times Book Review*, Morrison's 1987 novel *Beloved* was voted the most outstanding work of American fiction of the previous 25 years. Nevertheless, widely praised writers often incur withering criticism precisely because they're so widely praised. The brilliantly acerbic Black cultural critic Stanley Crouch wrote a now-classic dismantling of *Beloved* titled "Literary Conjure Woman," which came out the same year the novel was published. Crouch first dismissed Alice Walker as prone to "melodrama, militant self-pity, guilt-mongering, and pretensions to mystic wisdom." In contrast, Crouch

considered Morrison a writer of real skill and nuance who had succumbed to writing "protest pulp fiction." Crouch ultimately deemed Morrison a "conjure woman" who sentimentalizes Black women, to the delight of craven white feminists, and turns Black men into "priapic demon[s] of sexism."

Toni Morrison was born Chloe Anthony Wofford in Lorraine, Ohio, in 1931. She attended Howard University in Washington and then received her MA in literature at Cornell. She worked as an editor at Random House from the mid-1960s through the early 1980s—and was the first Black woman to do so. While editing and raising two children following her divorce, she also began writing fiction. Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, published in 1970, established the distinctive Morrison voice—almost mystical in its depiction of Black community yet painfully lucid in its depiction of racism and the damage it inflicts upon Black people, especially Black women. *Song of Solomon*, which combined folk idioms and flights of magical realism, was published in 1977. It was awarded the National Book Critics Circle Award for best work of fiction. However, it is *Beloved*, published in 1987, that has proven to be the author's most remarkable and controversial work.

TONI MORRISON

The novel features one of the most shockingly powerful scenes in all modern literature: An enslaved woman cuts the throat of her own daughter rather than return her to the hands of the slavers in pursuit of them. Morrison drew on the real-life ordeal of Margaret Garner, an enslaved African American woman who, with her husband and four children, attempted to flee to Canada on the Underground Railroad in 1856. On their first stop, a house in Cincinnati, they were discovered. Rather than submit to arrest and enslavement once again, Margaret Garner made the split-second decision to murder her children and kill herself. When her pursuers entered the room where the family was hiding, they discovered the couple's two-year-old child dead and the other children bleeding but alive. Garner was put on trial and convicted—not for killing her child but for destruction of property. She was sent back into slavery, along with her husband.

Out of these grotesque facts, Morrison created a ghost story that summons up the nightmare side of America's history. She does so in images and language that are unforgettable. Morrison, who died in 2019, is now a writer enshrined in the American—indeed, the international—canon. However, as with Walker, there persists a strong resistance to her writing.

CHALLENGES TO *BELOVED*

Morrison's novels have been challenged around the country for reasons similar to those offered against Walker's texts. In 2007, at the behest of two parents, the superintendent of schools withdrew *Beloved* from a Louisville high school's AP course when students had only 30 pages remaining in the text to read. In 2012, at Plymouth-Canton Community Schools in Michigan, two parents tried to ban *Beloved*. At a public hearing, one parent argued that *Beloved* was given a Lexile rating that equates to a fifth-grade reading level. Brian Read, a literature teacher at the school, told a reporter that, in this case, this was a meaningless metric: Lexile indicates a text's usefulness for teaching people to read. The teacher explained: "Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* has a low Lexile score, and no one would challenge the literary value of that."

The protesting parents weren't bothered by Lexile's measure of *Beloved* either. The real reason behind their challenge was that the novel was deemed an inappropriately "fictitious" account of the real-life issue of slavery. With this backdrop in mind, they argued that the language, violence, and sex acts

provide no historical context for the reader—never mind that these aspects are far from out of context in slavery. Plymouth-Canton's school board voted to keep *Beloved* in the curriculum.

Virginia has seen a long-running controversy about the use of *Beloved* in AP courses. This controversy began in 2013 and spilled into the state's 2021 gubernatorial race. The story begins with Laura Murphy, a parent in Virginia's Fairfax County, who protested the assignment of the novel in her son's AP English class. Rebuffed by the county's Board of Education, Murphy eventually brought the matter to the attention of State Senator Richard H. Black. In 2016, Black introduced a bill that would have required teachers to give parents advance notice of assigned books with sexually explicit content. Parents could then choose for their children to opt out of reading the assigned book and instead read an alternative text. Senator Black counted up the use of words he found particularly offensive and immoral in *Beloved*. In a document his office prepared, he noted all references to bestiality, breasts, and reproductive organs.

As the bill worked its way through the state legislature, a teacher from Black's district named Jessica Berg wrote to Black objecting to the bill. Berg was dismayed to learn that some of Black's colleagues had taken passages from *Beloved* out of context and read them on the floor of the state senate. She insisted that professional educators retain the authority to assign texts as they see fit. She praised her students and accused Black of coddling them. Senator Black responded in kind, calling *Beloved* "vile," "profoundly filthy," and "moral sewage." He added:

> Slavery was a terrible stain on this nation but to teach it does not mean you have to expose children to smut. The idea that you would oppose allowing parents the opportunity to be better informed about what their child is reading is appalling and arrogant. You do not know better than the parents.

Although the bill passed the Virginia legislature, the governor of Virginia, Terry McAuliffe at the time, vetoed it. He asserted that decisions about curriculum are better left to local school boards than to legislators and that the bill "lacks flexibility and would require the label of 'sexually explicit' to apply to an artistic work based on a single scene, without further context." Five years later, the controversy returned to the headlines. McAuliffe was running for governor again. In the last week of the campaign, an advertisement run by his opponent, Glenn Youngkin, featured Laura Murphy, the parent who had originally contacted Senator Black. Without explicitly mentioning *Beloved*, Murphy, looking into the camera, said: "When my son showed me his reading material, my heart sunk. It was some of the most explicit reading material you can imagine." Murphy went on to criticize McAuliffe for vetoing the bill, claiming that McAuliffe "doesn't want parents to have a say." The ad was seen more than 1 million times and was widely discussed in the media. Youngkin went on to win the race for governor of Virginia.

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21

THE TEXTBOOK WARS

A consistent category of challenges and book bans within school systems involves textbooks, especially history textbooks. This lecture considers the larger issues at stake in these controversies. As the great Czech novelist Milan Kundera famously wrote: “The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.” However, it is up for grabs what people put forward as memories and what they choose to forget. Textbooks—particularly history textbooks—are at the center of that struggle.

DIFFERING HISTORICAL NARRATIVES

One of the most disturbing aspects of the ongoing national war over textbooks is that individual states are no longer on the same page about the crucial stories that compose the nation's history. A 2020 *New York Times* article by Dana Goldstein explores the crucial differences between the same textbooks published from 2016 on for 8th- and 11th-grade history classes in California and Texas. For example, in an annotated section on the Bill of Rights, the California edition of a history textbook explains that rulings on the Second Amendment allow for some gun regulations. The same section of the Texas edition contains only a blank space. Another example concerns a section of a textbook that discusses the Harlem Renaissance and debates about the movement's impact on African American life. The Texas edition of the textbook, unlike the California edition, contains a cautionary note that "some critics dismissed the quality of the literature [the Harlem Renaissance] produced."

Historical writing is the shaping of the shards of the past into a coherent and compelling mosaic. The arguments about the past and its meaning are themselves historical documents, describing fierce disagreements not only about ascertainable facts but also about the contested meaning and weight of those facts. Even the best historical writing is subject to revision by subsequent historical writing. The topics of research are themselves subject to change. For example, there have obviously been women since the beginning of humankind. However, the field of women's history did not exist until about 50 years ago.

Arguments about the interpretations of the American past are arguments about how to read the American experiment. Textbooks encapsulate a narrative ideal of the country as well as the effort of schools to instruct young people in practicing engaged citizenry within a democracy. There is an inherent tension between developing a basic narrative of the nation that permits active, thoughtful public engagement and the method of skeptical inquiry necessary to sift through arguments about the meaning of America.

MODERN TEXTBOOK CULTURE WARS

Recall that the modern culture war over textbooks began in Kanawha County, West Virginia, in 1974. During the crisis, two men were shot, an elementary school was firebombed, explosives were planted, and the school superintendent was sprayed with mace and received death threats. Many commentators see this incident as a defining moment in the birth of what's called the New Right.

In 1974, the county adopted new textbooks to comply with a recent state mandate that "school books should portray the contributions of minorities to American culture." School board member Alice Moore was outraged. She declared that the new books were "anti-American," promoting, among other things, moral relativism, atheism, and communism. Moore contacted a Texas group called Educational Research Analysts (ERA) and got guidance on how to confront her fellow school board members and reach out to local media to generate publicity. Despite managing to assemble a petition signed by 12,000 Kanawha County residents, Moore's side lost a school board vote during the summer of 1974. However, on the first day of classes in September, 9,000 children were kept home. After months of struggle, the protests were eventually quelled and the textbooks adopted.

The state of Texas has been the site of many controversies in recent decades over history and science textbooks. Texas buys close to 50 million textbooks every year for roughly 5 million public school students. As a result, the disputes in Texas over textbook content have affected the textbook market for the entire country. The contemporary conflicts in Texas have rough origins in the political and social struggles of the 1960s. This refers specifically to

challenges to hierarchies of gender and racial classification as well as to the national self-image of the United States as a bestower of democracy to more benighted lands. There is no consensus over certain fundamental questions about American politics, economics, and culture. Thus, there are intense disagreements about how these subjects should be treated in educational materials designed for children and adolescents.

Textbook controversies in Texas are centered around the State Board of Education, an elected body with members representing 15 education districts around the state. For decades, that board was repeatedly challenged and confronted by Mel and Norma Gabler. The Gablers started going to hearings of the board's Textbook Committee in 1962, after their 11th-grade son noticed that the text of the Gettysburg Address found in his American history textbook did not match a photograph of the actual document in their home encyclopedia. The phrase "under God" was missing. The offending textbook had been published in 1954. The Gablers compared it to textbooks published in 1921 and 1885, respectively, and saw discrepancies between these texts, too. They wondered how it was possible to determine the truth.

RISE OF THE GABLERS

Norma Gabler began attending meetings of the Textbook Committee in the state capital of Austin. Over time, the Gablers became sophisticated political infighters. They created and sustained remarkable institutional power within Texas to influence the content of textbooks. They also founded ERA. This was a low-overhead, nonprofit organization, funded via contributions. Until their deaths—Mel in 2004 and Norma in 2007—the Gablers supervised a small but determined staff that combed textbooks for alleged factual inaccuracies, progressive bias, and anti-conservative and anti-Christian animus. The Gablers also made some notable discoveries of assertions that were flat-out wrong. Early on, Norma red-circled the claim in a history textbook that the United States had exploded an atomic bomb during the Korean War.

The regular presentations of ERA before the Textbook Committee became more elaborate: They filled books with claims of factual inaccuracy and ideological bias. They met with groups all over the state and beyond and were featured on various media outlets. By the 1980s, the Gablers were a fixture

within the highest echelons of the New Right. Reverend Jerry Falwell, the head of the Moral Majority, and Phyllis Schlafly, an anti-ERA activist and organizer, were enthusiastic supporters of the Gablers.

One key theme for the Gablers was Christianity versus secularism. The Gablers viewed Christianity as unique when compared to all other religions. They rejected a universal theism. For example, they objected to textbooks that asked students to note the many secular myths that roughly parallel Judeo-Christian narratives. In another emblematic example of their worldview, the Gablers objected to one textbook linking Martin Luther and Martin Luther King Jr. as "reformers." In general, the Gablers objected to social change movements that challenged the conventional hierarchies of class, race, and gender roles. Challenges to gender normativity were a particular sore spot. Any material that seemed to suggest that women's primary responsibility was not, as they put it, "as mothers molding young lives" was dangerous.

In the 1990s, the textbook evaluation process in Texas saw significant changes. The Gablers and their organization continued their work. However, new forces saw that politically contesting and then controlling the board itself was the way to exert the most power over its decisions. James Leininger, a San Antonio physician and medical equipment executive, began to contribute large sums of money to candidates for political office and particularly to the Texas State Board of Education. He flooded formerly sleepy races for the board with so much money that he was able to shift its composition to the right. Leininger also founded an organization called Texans for Governmental Integrity. In 1994, it sent a mailer to the voters in the district of an incumbent board member, depicting a Black man kissing a white man while making the point that the incumbent supported a discussion of homosexuality in state textbooks.

THE TEXAS TEXTBOOK WARS

Such controversies kept exploding into the state and national media. Thus, in 1995, the state legislature enacted a law that revised protocols around selecting textbooks: The State Board of Education would be permitted only to address whether the books contained "factual inaccuracy" and whether they met manufacturing standards. This new restriction didn't quite quell the arguments. The right to address factual inaccuracy turned into a giant loophole through which critics could generally attack the alleged ideological biases of the books

and their authors. Even the requirement for meeting manufacturing standards could be invoked in a pinch. In 1996, board member David Bradley objected to a reference to women's suffrage in an algebra textbook. Standing before a public hearing, he ripped the cover off the text and declared, "Ladies and gentlemen, worthless binding. I reject this book."

In 2002, *The New York Times* reported that a US history textbook, whose primary writer was the eminent historian John Mack Faragher of Yale, had made the point that prostitution was common in the cattle towns of the American West during the late 19th century. The best estimate was there might have been as many as 50,000 prostitutes throughout the West. This statistic tells readers something interesting about frontier economies, social conditions, and the relations between men and women as the nation expanded westward. However, the chairwoman of the Texas State Board of Education, Grace Shor, and her allies on the board objected to the inclusion of this information. In short, despite the law limiting objections to factual matters, the State Board of Education also opposed the inclusion of information it deemed unimportant or offensive. Prentice Hall, the publisher, subsequently withdrew the book from the Texas market and substituted another one.

In 2010, the State Board of Education approved new standards for the social science component of the state's curriculum standards, collectively known as Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills. The social science standards contained no input from historians or other scholars. They listed slavery as only a secondary cause of the Civil War. They also included no guidance, let alone emphasis, about the 90-year-long racial segregation of the South known as Jim Crow. The 2010 curriculum standards were subsequently applied to a comprehensive textbook review in 2014. Then came a raucous several days of public hearings, in which it became clear that no one had fully reviewed the countless recommended changes. The board voted, along straight party lines with Republicans in the majority, to recommend 89 textbooks in history and social science for the next 10 years. Houghton Mifflin, a major textbook publisher, withdrew a high school government textbook rather than make the required changes.

Because of a legislative change enacted in 2011, local boards of education in Texas can choose books from outside the approved list. However, picking books on the list is still the easiest default choice to make because they're

certain to conform to the curriculum standards. Nevertheless, school districts do engage in the added labor of making their own choices. This option to choose has made publishers bolder in defending their publications. Additionally, some students in Texas have challenged the textbook protocols of the State Board of Education. In 2020, about 11,000 students in the Houston area petitioned the board to move up the scheduled revision of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills curriculum from 2023 to 2021 and to ensure that the revision included a full accounting of American racism.

The textbook wars in Texas reflect broader social debates about America's identity as a nation—especially as Americans grapple with the enduring consequences of slavery and racial injustice. If you look beyond history and social science curricula, you can discover other ways that textbook controversies reflect deep divisions in America over intellectual and cultural trends that have gained momentum since the 1960s.

THE FLORIDA TEXTBOOK WARS

Florida is immersed in a controversy about critical race theory and the appropriate discussion of gender dynamics in schools. In recent years, the issues around textbooks in Florida have also centered on social-emotional learning (SEL). Proponents say SEL develops healthy interpersonal skills that have long-term benefits for both individuals and communities. Critics, however, contend that SEL is essentially a form of manipulating students—an approach to education that allegedly prepares students to accept critical race theory and radical ideas that reject gender normativity.

According to its leading advocacy organization, a group called the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, SEL is

> a process through which children develop in their ability to integrate thinking, feeling, and behaving to succeed at important developmental tasks. The process includes ... recognizing and managing emotions, caring about others, making good decisions, behaving ethically and responsibly, developing positive relationships, and avoiding negative behaviors.

Some critics, however, believe there is psychological manipulation in SEL that will lead to political indoctrination. To quote a 2021 article from the conservative publication *The Federalist*, SEL encourages "the cultivation, not of knowledge, but of the 'correct' attitudes, beliefs, opinions, and behaviors."

In 2022, the Florida Department of Education initially scrubbed the list of submitted mathematics textbooks by 41%. The department claimed that in addition to inappropriate references to critical race theory, there was "the unsolicited addition of Social Emotional Learning in mathematics." This was particularly deemed to be the case in kindergarten through fifth grade. This initial announcement did not specify what these unsolicited additions were. Several weeks later, the state reinstated some of the textbooks, eventually releasing some of their evaluations. Subsequently, *The Washington Post* obtained 5,895 pages of the state's review of the submitted texts. Sometimes it was not clear what motivated the Department of Education to reject a text, but several examples were flagged that specifically involved SEL.

To many, it seems obvious that "math texts should be about math—about finding the right answer." However, proponents of SEL might counter that in addition to teaching math basics, elements such as "Math Musicals" help to reduce the anxiety many students feel about the subject and encourage them to stay engaged. Interestingly, this methodological disagreement could open the door to the objection that SEL is a form of manipulation and indoctrination.

In the circumstances of the prevailing culture wars, conservatives seem to be more active in policing the textbooks that children and adolescents read in school. No doubt, many of their criticisms come from a sincere desire to give their children the best education possible. However, as Americans try to present to their children an honest and nuanced picture of their national past, they shouldn't try to scrub that picture of defects and flaws. People need to be especially careful that legitimate scrutiny of textbook content doesn't veer into the promotion of a lopsided agenda—on one side or the other.

Arguments between what historians term the "new America" and the "normative America" are refracted through schools. There are empirical truths that can be asserted and defended against confused or irresponsible falsehoods. For example, in 2010, the Texas State Board of Education tossed from a third-grade reading list the books of Bill Martin Jr., author of *Baby Bear, Baby Bear, What Do You See?* They had confused him with another Bill

Martin who had written a book about Marxism. That embarrassing falsehood could quickly be corrected. However, the deeper questions contained in these arguments over textbooks concern the stories Americans want their children to read to understand both the kind of country that has been and the kind of country that they want to be. Such arguments are about national identity. You could suggest they're also about the intellectual freedom to question and even to revise the historical and cultural orthodoxies you may have grown up with.

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22

THE BACKLASH AGAINST HARRY POTTER

Has there ever been a series that's inspired as much anticipatory glee among children and young adults (not to mention many adults as well) as the Harry Potter series? It has been anointed as the best-selling fiction series in all of human history, selling more than 500 million copies worldwide. Rowling is the first, and so far the only, author who's become a billionaire from her books. There have been eight films based on the books, a Broadway play, and two Harry Potter theme parks in the United States. However, as this lecture demonstrates, no book series—or author—is immune to criticism.

ADVENT OF THE HARRY POTTER SERIES

J. K. Rowling published her first Harry Potter novel in Great Britain in 1997. Its title, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, was subsequently changed to *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* for the American market. Rowling followed up with six more novels about Harry and his Hogwarts friends and foes. Rowling has often said to interviewers that she got the idea for the character of Harry in 1990 while she was delayed on a train traveling from Manchester to London's King's Cross station. For more than five years, Rowling planned out all seven books in the series. In 1993, she relocated to Edinburgh with her baby daughter and three chapters of the first Harry Potter novel in her suitcase. Twelve publishers subsequently rejected the completed manuscript until, at last, Bloomsbury accepted it.

J. K. ROWLING

Today, many fans would say that there's literary value to the series: The books' plotlines and character development are intricate, and their reading of life is nuanced; bad things happen to good people in the world of Harry Potter, as they do in real life. Characters experience disappointment, bullying, loneliness, grief, fear, loss. Some important characters even die in the course of the series. However, as always, there's disagreement among critics about the value of the Harry Potter books.

One of the most withering takedowns was by prominent literary scholar Harold Bloom. Bloom, who died in 2019, was renowned for his spirited and substantive defense of the traditional Western canon. He wrote an op-ed for *The Boston Globe* in 2003 where he said he saw the Harry Potter books as a major indicator of a trend of, as he put it, "Dumbing Down American Readers." Bloom took issue with Rowling's writing style, saying he "suffered

a great deal in the process" of reading *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. He even brushed aside the argument that Rowling's books would lead young readers to other, more classic authors.

Arguments over the literary value of a book or series are one thing. Bloom wasn't arguing against the existence of the Harry Potter books or saying that reading them corrupted a child's psyche or immortal soul. However, there are plenty of people who have made that argument. In fact, attacks on the moral value of the Potter series began to be launched fairly early on in the series' evolution.

CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING HARRY POTTER

In 1999, the American Library Association announced that the three Harry Potter books then in print, all of them bestsellers, were the most complained-about books in America. Assorted parents, school district administrators, and librarians accused the books of being excessively violent, glamorizing witchcraft and the occult, and being dismissive of traditional family values. For instance, a grassroots group called Family Friendly Libraries—composed of citizens, librarians, and library trustees—declared that the books shouldn't be read aloud by teachers in classrooms. The group's founder and director, Karen Jo Gounaud, alleged that the series "celebrate[s] witchcraft through entertainment [and] as a result the books can prove to be a powerful advertisement for the occult religions." She also stated that she would rather children read books that highlight "good moral values." Potter

series characters such as a ghost called Nearly Headless Nick drew the organization's ire as a particular example of what the members saw as the offensive goriness of the series.

The 10 formal challenges to the Potter books in 1999—out of a total of 472 book challenges that year—may not sound like too many. However, the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom cautions that for every one formal challenge—which means adults come to a library or school to complain and then put their complaint in writing—there are at least four or five that aren't reported. In 1999, for example, parents in an Ontario, Canada, school district were upset by the level of violence in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. In that story, a mass murderer is thought to be heading toward Hogwarts. Some of the parents also objected to drug references and a perceived antiauthoritarian attitude in the novel.

By the following year, the first four Harry Potter novels had topped the American Library Association's Most Challenged Books list for the second year in a row. By May 2001, the books had received 52 formal challenges. The efforts to ban the Potter books from public school classrooms in the United States were spread over 27 states. Some groups didn't stop at simply challenging or even banning. For example, a religious group outside of Pittsburgh staged a general book and record burning that included the Potter books because of their focus on sorcery. Other public burnings of the series took place in 2001 in Pennsylvania and New Mexico, the latter at a church where Rowling's books were denounced as "masterpiece[s] of satanic deception."

In response to an attempted banning of the Potter books in Zeeland, Michigan, a teacher and a reading tutor cofounded a grassroots group that called itself Muggles for Harry Potter. (In the series, a "muggle" is anyone who doesn't possess magical powers.) The group was composed of students, parents, teachers, and other community residents who opposed the ban. Within nine months, 18,000 people nationwide had joined the campaign. Because of these efforts, the Michigan school district eventually lifted all restrictions on the books, except for classroom readings for kindergarten through fifth grade.

The first three Harry Potter volumes were among the most challenged books of the decade that began in 1990. By the following decade, the series was at the top of the American Library Association's list of challenged and banned

books. The Potter books utterly transformed the nature of challenges to books for children and young adults. Before 1999, most challenges for such books had to do with sex, the human body, or so-called inappropriate language. The targeted books were almost always in the category labeled realistic fiction. Rowling's series, however, shifted the censor's attention to fantasy: The challenges commonly claimed that the Harry Potter series exalted magic, the occult, even the demonic. Critics charged that the books lured children into attempting to emulate the spells and curses they were reading about. Granted, there were some traditional objections to violence and to the darkening tone of the series as it wrapped up—and parental anxieties were stirred up in some school districts once Rowling shared that she'd always envisioned Dumbledore as gay. However, most of the censorship attempts aimed at the series were for religious reasons.

The conclusion of the series in 2007 did not put any of these challenges to rest. In fact, the enormous publicity for the seventh Potter book drew increased pushback by those determined to challenge, ban, and even burn Rowling's books. In 2019, for instance, a Catholic priest in Nashville, Tennessee, ordered the removal of all Harry Potter books from the parish school's library. When the community of the St. Edward School requested an explanation, Reverend Dan Reehil responded by email, claiming that he had "consulted several exorcists, both in the United States and in Rome" and had been assured that "the curses and spells used in the books are actual curses and spells; which, when read by a human being, risk conjuring evil spirits into the presence of the person reading the text."

CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING J. K. ROWLING

For years, the challenges to Harry Potter focused chiefly on the series' alleged power to endanger young readers by stoking a fascination with the occult. Then came the moment when the challenges pivoted, targeting author J. K. Rowling. When those denunciations and cancelations of Rowling began to occur, they were leveled by many of those former child readers who had adored the books but were now of an age to find themselves hurt by Rowling's views on gender. In 2018, Rowling came under fire for "liking" a tweet that referred to trans women as "men in dresses." Rowling explained that she was

trying to take a screenshot of a tweet for research and mistakenly pressed "like" instead. However, no such excuse was plausible for the tweet Rowling herself initiated on December 19, 2019:

> Dress however you please. Call yourself whatever you like. Sleep with any consenting adult who'll have you. Live your best life in peace and security. But force women out of their jobs for stating that sex is real? #IStandWithMaya.

This "Maya" was Maya Forstater, a 45-year-old tax expert who worked as a visiting fellow at the Centre for Global Development. That organization had not renewed Forstater's contract because of negative tweets she posted on the topic of transgender identity. The reaction of the "Twitterverse" to Rowling's support of Forstater was swift and condemning, with calls to "cancel" Rowling and her books. Many of the actors in the Harry Potter films criticized Rowling and distanced themselves from her views. Rowling herself was denounced as a TERF, an acronym for transgender exclusionary radical feminist. As Rowling recalled:

> I spoke up about the importance of sex and have been paying the price ever since. I was transphobic, I was a … TERF, I deserved canceling, punching and death. *You are Voldemort* said one person, clearly feeling this was the only language I'd understand.

In June 2020, Rowling posted a long and considered response on her author's website directly addressing her detractors and explaining the reasons for her views on gender identity. It's titled: "J.K. Rowling Writes about Her Reasons for Speaking Out on Sex and Gender Issues." Rowling says she decided to speak out because "as a much-banned author, I'm interested in freedom of speech and have publicly defended it, even unto Donald Trump."

In the fall of 2020, *Newsweek* reported "a new TikTok trend" emerging as former Harry Potter fans protested Rowling's views on trans people by burning copies of her Harry Potter books. Images of the series being consumed by flames were posted on TikTok. One video came with a voiceover that declared, "It is impossible to completely divorce a work from its creator," and also denounced Rowling for what was termed the "fatphobia, racism, and valorization of supremacists and child abusers" in her Harry Potter books. Of course, many Twitter users expressed distaste for the idea of burning books. Comments on the *Newsweek* piece pointed out the irony of the Potter books being targeted first by conservative Christians and now by what could be termed members of the radical cultural left.

The controversy over Rowling's views rises up again every so often and continues to damage her literary reputation. For example, in the spring of 2021, Rowling became locked in a Twitter battle with fellow literary titan Stephen King, who had tweeted his belief that "trans women are women." According to King, Rowling, in response, blocked him. Thankfully, the book burnings have subsided. However, there is a relatively new way that those who are unhappy with the politics or sexual or religious content of a prominent book or series can not only assert their views but also change the work itself and how it's read: fan fiction.

In fan fiction, fans—most of them nonprofessional writers—take characters and stories invented by published writers and carry them off into fresh and strange plotlines of their own devising. You might make a case that fan fiction has been in existence as early as Shakespeare, who certainly lifted plots and characters from other writers. However, fan fiction as it exists today is usually traced to the rabid popularity of Star Trek in the mid-1960s and the so-called fanzines that were mimeographed and sold at science fiction conventions.

With the rise of the internet, it became instantly possible for Potter fans to self-publish and circulate Harry Potter spinoff stories. Some fans who grew up loving the series declare that they'll never read J. K. Rowling now because of Rowling's alleged transphobia and her other biases. Rowling herself has said she's flattered by all the Potter fan fiction and that she doesn't find it an infringement on her own creations or, presumably, her copyright. However, this could raise discussion about perhaps a less benign aspect of the fan fiction phenomenon: namely, this idea that readers edit out or revise elements of

an author's story that they find politically, racially, culturally, or religiously objectionable. Like high school teachers and college professors quietly dropping controversial texts such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* or *Lolita*, fan fiction could be used as a way to sidestep the difficult issues raised by the original works.

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23

FUN HOME: AN ALL-TOO-GRAPHIC MEMOIR

Graphic novels came into their own in the 1970s. The growth of the genre coincided with—and explicitly mirrored—the social transformations of that era in regard to race, gender, politics, and sexual identity. Given their often socially pointed plotlines, their appeal to YA audiences, and their regular appearances on middle and high school syllabi, graphic novels quickly became mainstays on the American Library Association's Top 10 Most Challenged Books list. This lecture focuses on the graphic novel *Fun Home*, Alison Bechdel's groundbreaking memoir, which is a concentration of almost everything people find offensive about graphic novels.

WHY GRAPHIC NOVELS ARE TARGETED

In a 2017 *Washington Post* piece on the uptick in graphic novel challenges, Charles Brownstein, executive director of the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, explained: "Graphic novels are more popular and widely read than ever [because] their authors are speaking directly to the real concerns of their audiences in an accessible way." Brownstein also suggested that the illustrated form itself is partly responsible for why graphic novels attract more challenges and bannings than traditional books: "Graphic novels are frequently reduced to a single image or sequence of images that can be removed from the larger context of the work and used to justify censorship."

Readers and defenders of the graphic novel also point out that there's a clear correlation between the "increase in … works that tackle sexual orientation and gender identity" and the uptick in challenges and bannings of such

books. Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* boasts a lengthy history of bannings. Moreover, it's one of the few graphic novels that has been successfully transferred to the stage, making its influence wider and thus generating still more controversy. Its plot is a veritable cornucopia of most of the elements that make censors' antennae quiver: same-sex relationships, masturbation, promiscuity, sexual and emotional abuse, nudity, violence, the undermining of the traditional family, and suicide. Moreover, it exudes a largely comic sensibility, particularly about death—there are scenes, for instance, where children play in empty coffins in a funeral home.

ALISON BECHDEL

Alison Bechdel started out her career as a comic book artist. After graduating with a degree in art in 1981 from Oberlin College, Bechdel moved to New York. There, she was rejected for admission to graduate programs at several art schools. While working at low-level day jobs in the publishing industry, Bechdel began drawing images that would turn into her celebrated comic strip about a group of lesbians called *Dykes to Watch Out For*.

Although the strip itself was not particularly famous, there is a famous concept that originated in it: the Bechdel test. Although Bechdel herself didn't invent the test—a friend did—the test was named after her, as she was the person who made it famous. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as

> an informal method of evaluating whether or not a film or other fictional work portrays women in a way that marginalizes them or which exhibits sexism or gender stereotyping. For a work to pass the Bechdel test, three criteria must be satisfied: (1) there must be at least two (named) women; (2) the women must talk to each other; and (3) they must talk about something other than a man.

Bechdel began to move away from *Dykes to Watch Out For* in the early 2000s and began working on an autobiographical graphic novel called *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*. The "fun" in *Fun Home* is short for "funeral" since Bechdel's father, Bruce, owned and operated the funeral home in the small town of Beech Creek, Pennsylvania. As the graphic novel dramatizes, Bechdel and her two brothers grew up playing at the "Fun Home" amidst the smell of formaldehyde and in the showroom coffins.

It was while she was an undergraduate at Oberlin that Bechdel sent a letter to her parents in which she came out as a lesbian. In response, her mother, Helen, disclosed that Alison's father, Bruce, was also gay. Bechdel learned that her father had had affairs with numerous men, including the family's babysitter and even young boys. In July 1980, two weeks after his wife asked for a divorce and four months after Bechdel came out, Bruce was hit and killed by a Sunbeam bread truck. Bechdel has said in numerous interviews that she believes his death was a suicide.

FUN HOME

Fun Home took Bechdel seven years to compose. One of the elements that made the book's creation especially laborious is the fact that Bechdel photographed herself in poses for each of the characters. She then used each photograph as a model that she hand-drew for inclusion as a panel in the graphic novel. *Fun Home* came out in 2006 and was a popular and critical success: It ascended to the *New York Times* bestseller list and was nominated for the National Book Critics Circle Award among others.

Fun Home is a post-modern memoir in the sense that it keeps questioning Bechdel's own memory of events and retells scenes as new information and interpretations emerge. It also mashes together fact, fiction, fantasy, dream, and desire. Bechdel has said that it is structured as a labyrinth, "going over the

same material, but starting from the outside and spiraling in to the center of the story." At the center of that labyrinth sits the enigmatic character of Bruce, Bechdel's father. Bruce was both a funeral director and an English teacher during the time Bechdel and her siblings were growing up. The memoir is saturated with literary references to, among other works, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Odyssey*, and the works of James Joyce and Marcel Proust.

In 2013, an off-Broadway musical adaption of *Fun Home* premiered at New York's Public Theater. The show transferred in 2015 to Circle in the Square, where it was nominated for 12 Tony Awards, of which it won 5, including Best Musical. With the book by Lisa Kron and a score by Kron and Jeanine Tesori, it was the first production with a female team to garner a Tony in those categories.

BANNINGS OF *FUN HOME*

One of the earliest bannings of *Fun Home* came four months after its initial publication in June 2006. Louise Mills of Marshall, Missouri, requested that *Fun Home*, along with Craig Thompson's graphic novel *Blankets*, be removed from her local library because she felt that they were inappropriate. (*Blankets* is a 2003 coming-of-age memoir about growing up in an evangelical Christian family and leaving that faith.) To settle the matter as to whether *Fun Home* and *Blankets* should be banned, Marshall Public Library held a town hall meeting. Louise Mills explained that her issue was with the fact that the graphic novels had illustrations that she believed were pornographic. She then declared that having them in the Marshall Public Library was "contributing to the delinquency of minors." Mills's husband chimed in, saying: "We are asking that these comic book–style books … that portray in pictures … graphic sexual acts, should not be purchased by our tax dollars." Another library patron, Sarah Aulgur, expressed fears of "seedy people coming into the library and moving into our community" in search of titles like *Fun Home*.

Not everyone who showed up to the town hall meeting was opposed to including the so-called controversial materials. For example, one woman named Jeani Wilson stated that although she found *Fun Home* and *Blankets* "repugnant," she believed that libraries exist "to provide a broad sweep of information." Another library patron named Claudia Milstead expressed the wish that some middle ground could be reached. The library's board ultimately decided that it wasn't

worth the effort to make a decision on only *Fun Home* and *Blankets*. However, they did feel it necessary to create a materials selection policy for the sake of transparency and to have a plan in place for future challenges.

The general criteria for selection that were adopted by the Marshall Library to make the acquisition process transparent include such elements as the social significance, critical acclaim, and/or popular demand of the books under consideration; the significance of a book's author; and the timeliness and/or permanence of a book's subject matter. As a result of the adoption of the library's materials selection policy in March 2007, *Fun Home* and *Blankets* were immediately returned to circulation.

In 2008, a student enrolled in an English class at the University of Utah objected to Bechdel's drawings depicting sex. As a result of a lawsuit in 2004, the University of Utah has a policy in place to allow for religious accommodations. The policy states that students who object to an assigned reading can either "get an alternate assignment or leave the course without penalty." Although the offended student agreed to read another book in place of *Fun Home*, he proceeded to contact an advocacy group called No More Pornography. That group started an online petition to get *Fun Home* removed from the curriculum at the University of Utah because it "depicts accounts of women having oral sex with other women, graphic nudity, and the open account of a young woman masturbating." The English department chair at the time, Professor Vincent Pecora, responded to the petition by stating, "If we try to choose only the novels that have a moral point of view that we agree with, we might not have a whole lot of literature to teach."

In South Carolina, at the College of Charleston, the controversy surrounding *Fun Home* turned out to have sweeping implications far greater than that of the Utah case. Every summer, the college offers an optional program called The College Reads! It encourages returning and incoming students, faculty, and staff to read a book "to promote the idea that liberally educated people read broadly and discuss with one another ideas arising from the books they share." Incoming students receive copies of the chosen book, and copies are made available for other students and faculty who wish to read it. The book's author is also invited to campus to speak about their work.

Fun Home was selected as the assigned book for the summer of 2013. In short order, a right-wing lobbying group called the Palmetto Family Council—whose stated mission is to "persuasively present biblical principles in the centers of influence on issues affecting the family"—made its displeasure known. In an interview with a local news station, the council's director, Oran Smith, said the book was "not a wise choice for 18-year-olds at a taxpayer-supported college." Despite the group's efforts to pressure the college into abandoning *Fun Home*, the college held firm. A spokesperson for the college noted that not a single parent of any incoming student had contacted the school complaining about *Fun Home*. Bechdel herself subsequently visited the college in October 2013 to discuss her graphic novel with students. While Bechdel's guest lecture took place without any major incident, behind the scenes, the South Carolina state legislature was looking at retaliating against the College of Charleston.

REPRESENTATIVE GARRY SMITH'S BILL

Republican representative Garry Smith presented and passed legislation in the South Carolina House of Representatives that cut $52,000—out of the approximate total allotment of $20 million—in state funding for the College of Charleston. This happened to be the exact amount the college had spent on purchasing copies of *Fun Home* and on Bechdel's speaker fee. The bill also cut $17,000 from the University of South Carolina Upstate for teaching a collection of stories called *Out Loud: The Best of Rainbow Radio*. In an interview, Representative Smith declared that the College of Charleston was "promoting the gay and lesbian lifestyle" by teaching *Fun Home*. He stated that even if a student didn't want to view the "graphic [depictions of] lesbian acts," the College of Charleston was going to "shove it down [students'] throat[s] anyway." As a reminder, The College Reads! program is an optional one for students.

The bill passed in the South Carolina House Ways and Means Committee. The executive director of the ACLU of South Carolina stated that "the First Amendment was intended to protect all speech—even speech we don't agree with—and politicians shouldn't be in the business of dictating what we think." In March 2014, the ACLU of South Carolina was joined by the National Coalition Against Censorship, the American Association of University Professors, and several other organizations, which collectively

denounced the punitive budget cuts via an open letter to the South Carolina Senate Finance Committee. Moreover, the off-Broadway cast of *Fun Home*, along with Alison Bechdel, Jeanne Tesori, Lisa Kron, and the show's musical director, Chris Fenwick, volunteered to travel to the College of Charleston and perform songs from the musical.

When the budget cuts proposed by Representative Smith moved to the South Carolina General Assembly in May 2014, Democratic senator Brad Hutto led an almost-four-hour filibuster in an effort to block the bill's passage. However, in came Republican senator Larry Grooms with a "compromise." The funding for both the College of Charleston and the University of South Carolina Upstate would be restored in full, but the money could be used only for programming

> related to instruction in the provisions and principles of the United States Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and the Federalist Papers, including the study of and devotion to American institutions and ideals.

A second provision was similar to the accommodations policy at the University of Utah. For classroom assignments, offended students had to be offered an alternative text so long as their objections to the assigned text were "based on a sincerely held religious, moral, or cultural belief." In June 2014, then-governor Nikki Haley signed the alleged compromise into law.

BRIAN GRASSO

At Duke University, the equivalent of The College Reads! program is called the Duke Common Experience. Duke selected *Fun Home* as the book for students entering in fall 2015. One student was so offended by the selection that he wrote an op-ed about the situation for *The Washington Post*. Brian Grasso, a Christian, explained that his rationale for not reading *Fun Home* derived from his belief that "Jesus forbids his followers from exposing themselves to anything pornographic." Grasso quoted Matthew 5:28–29, in which Jesus says, "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away."

Grasso elaborated on this familiar biblical passage by asserting that "there is an important distinction between images and written words." He said that he would have read *Fun Home* if it were only text. It's the "graphic" part of Bechdel's graphic memoir that he objected to because "viewing pictures of sexual acts, regardless of the genders of the people involved, conflict[s] with the inherent sacredness of sex." Grasso also chose to post about his decision to not read *Fun Home* on Duke's "Class of 2019" Facebook page. Grasso recalls that one young woman—a fellow student who identifies as both bisexual and Buddhist—struck up a chat with him in which she asked him about his beliefs and he asked her about the Buddhist perspective on sexuality. Grasso said: "We each shared our perspective, and walked away from the conversation with a deeper understanding and compassion for each other. *That* is what college is about."

Of course, the point of offering controversial texts, particularly to college students, is that they're intended to spark conversations. As Bechdel herself has said in response to the numerous denunciations of *Fun Home* and, specifically, the budget cuts proposed in South Carolina: "There is something particularly obscene and perverse about their act of censorship given that *Fun Home* is about the human cost of sexual shame and secrecy."

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24

CONTESTING THE GREAT AMERICAN NOVEL

This lecture discusses some of the formal objections to several novels commonly nominated as the Great American Novel, including *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville, *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison, *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck, and *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald. These are some of the nation's most precious imaginative documents that express the promise of a meritocratic democracy. Given how much the United States has been torn apart by discord at different times in history, it's little wonder that these Great American Novels would also be contested.

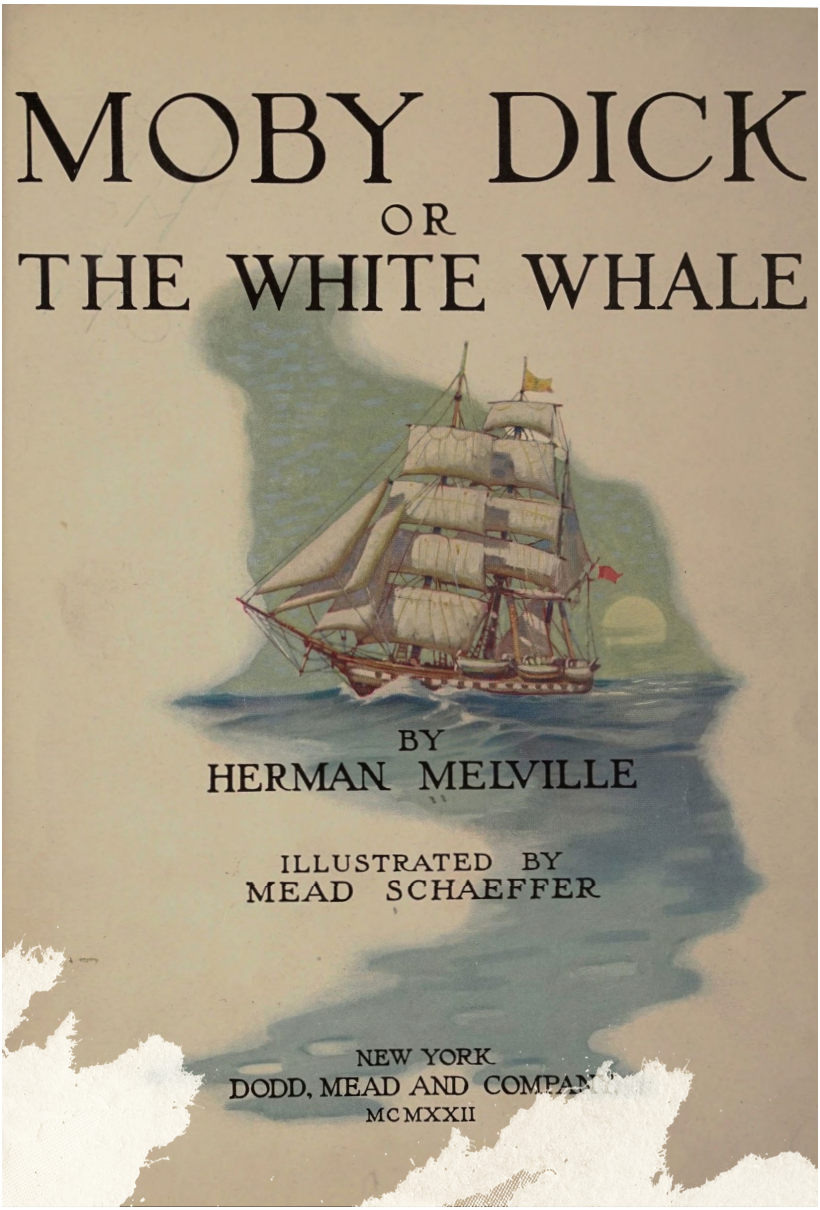
MOBY DICK

Moby Dick was published in 1851, first in London and then New York. Melville wrote what many readers consider to be the greatest of the Great American Novels in 18 months. He drew on, among other sources, his own early experiences on a whaling ship as well as the sinking of the whale ship *Essex* by a sperm whale off the coast of South America in 1820. *Moby Dick* was published to mixed—and, in the United States, mostly negative—reviews. It fell into obscurity until critics in the early decades of the 20th century resurrected it.


HERMAN MELVILLE

Since then, there have been many critical studies of *Moby Dick*. Several critical interpretations have to do with the subject of race in the novel. Melville, after all, was writing the novel on the eve of the Civil War, when America's "ship of state," like the *Pequod*, was in danger of breaking apart. As Toni Morrison and other critics have pointed out, every white character is paired with a character of color. For instance, the white captains of the whaleboats, that is, Ahab and Starbuck, are paired with the harpooners Fedallah and Queequeg, who are Indian and Polynesian, respectively. Perhaps Melville is saying something here about the necessary interdependency of all nations and colors.

Moby Dick is not usually tackled in high school for obvious reasons: It's long and complex, packed with allusions to the Bible, Shakespeare, American history, whaling terminology, and so on. Bannings of the novel that have occurred usually have to do with its sexual content. However, the interracial relationships on board the *Pequod* may also be an unspoken fear. A 1996 banning of the novel by the Lindale, Texas, Independent School District Board is typical: The board voted unanimously to ban 32 books on an AP reading list because they allegedly conflicted with community values. *Moby*


MOBY DICK
OR
THE WHITE WHALE
BY
HERMAN MELVILLE
ILLUSTRATED BY
MEAD SCHAEFFER
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Dick, along with other Great American Novels, such as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Huckleberry Finn*, and *The Scarlet Letter*, were banned because of "profanity" and concerns over "explicit sex acts" in the texts.

In college classes, certainly, homoerotic readings of *Moby Dick* are now the norm. This makes sense given that the *Pequod* is all-male territory. One can imagine, for instance, that the Lindale board would have been offended by chapters such as "A Bosom Friend," in which Ishmael reflects on his intimate friendship with his bunkmate, Queequeg:

> There is no place like a bed for confidential disclosures between friends. Man and wife, they say, there open the very bottom of their souls to each other. ... Thus, then, in our hearts' honeymoon, lay I and Queequeg—a cozy loving pair.

INVISIBLE MAN

Ralph Ellison's prologue to his 1952 novel *Invisible Man* explicitly pays tribute to *Moby Dick*. The unnamed narrator of *Invisible Man* recalls a church service in which the preacher declares, "Brothers and sisters, my text this morning is the 'Blackness of Blackness.'" Ellison's biographer, Arnold Rampersad, points out that that scene invokes "a moment in the second chapter of *Moby Dick* where Ishmael … momentarily joins a congregation [in] 'a negro church; and the preacher's text was about the blackness of darkness.'" Rampersad says it was Melville who "empowered Ellison to insist on a place in the American literary tradition" by his example in *Moby Dick* of "representing the complexity of race and racism."


RALPH ELLISON

Invisible Man—the chronicle of a Black man from the South struggling to get an education and then making his way up to New York City in the 1930s—questions the legitimacy

of the American dream for people of color. It won the National Book Award in 1953 and, like *Moby Dick*, is more often assigned in college than high school. One well-publicized high school banning case, however, occurred in 2013. The novel was banned from North Carolina's Randolph County Public School libraries and classrooms on the grounds of not being "suitable for young teenagers." A parent of a junior in Randleman High School complained about the vulgar language in the novel, its depictions of rape and incest, and one character's "loss of innocence." To support her case, she cited the isolated offending passages from the novel.

According to the North Carolina *Courier-Tribune*, board members were provided copies of the book before their initial meeting. The American Library Association**,** PEN America, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the Kids' Right to Read Project immediately campaigned for the school board to reverse its ban. The novel's publisher, Vintage, agreed to make 100 copies available for free to interested students. Only nine days later, the board voted to reverse its ban. Two district teachers stood up for Ellison's book, reminding board members that 21st-century students can still relate to the sense of invisibility the novel's narrator experiences as a Black man in the segregated 1930s. One board member publicly stated that he'd changed his mind after reflecting on his son's military service and the freedoms he was protecting.

THE GRAPES OF WRATH

John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* won the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize in 1940, the year after it was published. Because many students read the novel their senior year of high school, it's long been a target of challenges and bannings. Right from the start, it received a fiery reception in 1939 from some of the people it depicted.

The novel tells the story of Oklahoma Dust Bowl migrants—"Okies"—emigrating to California and meeting with hostility and hardship there. Within months of its publication, Kern County, California, a major destination for such migrant farm workers, banned the book from its public libraries and schools. The bans were driven by groups that opposed federal efforts to build camps and provide other relief for migrant workers—including the Associated Farmers of California and the State Chamber of Commerce.

The Kern County librarian at the time, Gretchen Knief, ordered some 60 copies of *The Grapes of Wrath* for the library's branches because she anticipated local demand for the novel. With no advance notice given to Knief, the Kern County Board of Supervisors voted to ban the novel at its August 1939 meeting, claiming that Steinbeck had misrepresented citizens of the county as "inhumane vigilantes, breathing class hatred and divested of … human decency." The board also objected to obscene language in the novel. *The Grapes of Wrath* was pulled from library shelves despite the fact that more than 600 local residents were on waiting lists to read it. Local boards around California were fired up to consider similar bans on the book.


JOHN STEINBECK

However, the Kern County board found it had a fight on its hands at its next meeting. Not only had Knief, along with union groups and the ACLU, begun mobilizing to fight the ban but also clergy, county health workers, and even migrants showed up at the meeting to protest it. California libraries reported a surge in requests. Less than six months later, the Kern County board reversed its decision. It claimed, bizarrely, that it had banned the book only to help stir up interest and enable Steinbeck to share his message. According to the American Library Association, the attempted censorship of *The Grapes of Wrath* was key to creating the Library Bill of Rights. In part, the bill asserts that

> libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.

THE GREAT GATSBY

The Great Gatsby, by F. Scott Fitzgerald, has a history of setting off alarms for the lax morality of some of its characters. Almost everyone wants to talk about *Gatsby* as a love story—understandable given that Gatsby's great yearning for Daisy Buchanan drives his rise to wealth and power. However, Fitzgerald himself said *Gatsby* was about "aspiration," the all-American yearning for something more. The final seven and a half pages of the novel make clear that Gatsby never found "something commensurate to his capacity for wonder." Not even Daisy could satisfy his yearning. All Gatsby's strivings to be worthy of Daisy, to transcend his humble origins and outrun his past, end in his death. "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

Fitzgerald's plot may suggest that the American dream is a mirage, but his beautiful language makes that dream irresistible. This may be the Great American Novel not only because of its language, its structural complexity, and its compression (it's only 185 pages long) but also because of its nuanced reading of class and meritocratic possibility in America.

The groundwork was laid for modern-day challenges by the reviews *Gatsby* received upon its publication in 1925, which viewed it as a crime novel. Granted, it does contain three violent deaths, a main character who's a bootlegger, extramarital affairs, and out-of-control drinking and partying. So scandalous did early readers find *Gatsby* that *Liberty* magazine, which was considering the novel for prepublication serialization, turned it down in December 1924.

In 1987, *Gatsby* was challenged at what was then called the Baptist College in Charleston for its "language and sexual references." That was a mild pushback compared to the controversy that erupted that same year in the Bay County School District in Panama City, Florida. Under the leadership of Superintendent

Leonard Hall, the district attempted to ban some 64 books, including *Gatsby*. The movement had started a year earlier with a novel called *I Am the Cheese* by Robert Cormier, which had been a staple at Mowat Junior High in Panama City. A parent of a seventh grader complained about the book, which was subsequently thought by school officials to contain "vulgar and obscene language." As a result, the school board adopted a policy requiring all instructional materials to be approved by the superintendent prior to use in the classroom.

By the following year, Superintendent Hall created new criteria for teachers to use in submitting rationales for their syllabi. These criteria recognized one category consisting of works considered to contain no vulgarity or explicit sex. A second category included books with a "sprinkling" of vulgarity. The 64 books that were placed in the third group were deemed to have "vulgarity" as well as the curse "goddamn." These books were placed off-limits to classroom discussion.

Soon after those new criteria were announced, a class-action lawsuit was filed in Federal District Court in Pensacola arguing that the ban violated students' and teachers' constitutional rights. People for the American Way, a civil liberties group, aided the plaintiffs. According to the suit, Superintendent Hall embraced the idea that he was elected to his post to "restore Christian values" to Bay County schools. According to John Buchanan, the result of Hall's personal mission had been disastrous. In December 1987, the Bay County School Board proposed tearing up the list of 64 books that Hall wanted banned from high school classes. This decision came after an eight-hour public meeting attended by hundreds of parents, teachers, local residents, and students wearing black armbands. The meeting was also broadcast on local radio. By 1988, *Gatsby* and the other 63 books were available for classroom discussion again in Panama City.

THE MAT-SU VALLEY BOOK BAN

As the Bay County case dramatizes, *Gatsby* has often been folded in with other canonical titles in these banning attempts. Alaska's Matanuska-Susitna or Mat-Su Borough School District provides another case in point. In April 2020, the Mat-Su board voted to remove five classics from its curriculum: Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, *Invisible Man*, *Catch-22* by Joseph Heller, *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien, and *Gatsby*. The charge against these books was that they contained mentions of rape, incest,

racial slurs, profanity, and graphic language. In particular, Angelou's memoir was cited for sexually explicit material and "anti-white messaging." *Gatsby* raised concerns because of its language and sexual references.

Sarah Welton, a teacher and the clerk of the Mat-Su board, dissented from the decision. She said: "To me, the need for controversial subjects is part of education. … Protecting students by hiding the issues or ignoring the issues does not help or prepare students for the world they inherit." Another board member, Jeff Taylor, who voted to remove the books, said he did so to give parents more "freedom, control, and involvement" in what their children read.

The Mat-Su Borough School District, which is the second largest in Alaska, soon became the focus of national attention. The American Library Association sent a letter urging the district to "rely on the professional judgment of its teachers and educators … to best determine what books meet the educational mission of the school district and the needs of the students." Soon, the community and far-flung supporters trained their attention on restoring the embattled books to the curriculum. A local lawyer and parent issued the Mat-Su Valley Banned Book Challenge, offering $100 to students who could read all five of the books by mid-August 2020. Fireside Books, a local bookstore, reported that all five of the titles had sold out and that the store had received orders for hundreds more copies.

The grassroots activism rippled out: A digital book club was set up for readers to discuss the banned titles. A local food truck promised a free mac and cheese to any student who could present a one-page report on any of the books. A councilwoman in Palmer, Alaska—a city within the school district—slammed the timing of the meeting, which was live streamed because of the coronavirus pandemic, saying the board had tried to slip it "under the radar." The band Portugal. The Man also got involved, decrying the board's "unpatriotic" banning on their Facebook page and saying any kid or parent who wanted copies of the books should email them and they'd be sent the books for free.

In May 2020, the thick of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, the board rescinded its vote to remove the five books from its high school curriculum. Nearly 600 people tuned into the live-streamed school board meeting, and some 80 cars showed up outside of the district's building to protest. Local councilwoman Sabrena Combs, however, cautioned that the

fight continues. The battle against book banning—especially concerning works that engage sexual and racial identity—has escalated in recent years. For good and ill, social media is greatly responsible for transforming book banning from an isolated school or community issue. When complaints about a book go viral, that leads to more complaints in schools and libraries across the country. However, as in the Alaska case, social media can also galvanize the opposition to book banning.

Observers say that elected officials in America are turning book banning into a wedge issue in the current culture wars. In response to the jump in book bannings, the Congressional Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties held a hearing on April 7, 2022. Representative Jamie Raskin, who opened the meeting, provided statistics to demonstrate that "basic intellectual freedoms are under attack in the US." He cited a 2021 American Library Association report that found the highest number of challenges to books in the 20 years the organization has tracked such data: 729 efforts to censor almost 1,600 books. "Many books are being targeted for censorship these days," said Raskin, "simply because they address racism or white supremacy, or address human sexuality or LGBTQ+ issues."

The summer following this congressional hearing, the largest school district in Utah, the Alpine School District, banned 52 books. Approximately 42% of the banned titles feature LGBTQ+ characters and/or themes. In response, PEN America has called for the district to reverse its decision. Jonathan Friedman, director of free expression and education programs at PEN America, said: "Sweeping removals of books are not supposed to be a routine thing in school libraries. Students have a right to learn about the variety of human experiences and perspectives that these books provide."

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