

CENSORSHIP AND BOWDLERIZATION:

Censorship is the attempt to either stop a particular work from being printed, an attempt to stop a work from being taught in schools, or an attempt to make it illegal or buy or sell copies of that work. In medieval and early Renaissance times, for instance, the Inquisition had a list known as the "Index of Banned Works," and any titles on this list were supposed to be destroyed or confiscated by the church. In Hitler's Germany, as an example, any work by a Jewish author or any work that criticized the Nazi party was to be publicly burned.

Bowdlerization is the attempt to change or chop out passages or sections in a larger work while still letting the work be published--a sort of mini-censorship. A text altered in this way is "bowdlerized." This term comes from the name of Reverend Thomas Bowdler (1754-1825), the man who edited *The Family Shakespeare* (1815-18). In his edition, Bowdler removed whatever he considered "unfit to be read by a gentleman in the company of ladies."

The questions of censorship and bowdlerization have continued through many centuries. In some centuries, politically unpopular ideas have been censored. In others, various religious works have been censored. In others, literature and essays dealing with sex or violence have been censored. Here is a partial list of some of the famous items that have been banned, bowdlerized, or censored in recent centuries:

- *Grimm's Fairy Tales* banned because Little Red Riding Hood brings a gift of wine to her grandmother.
- Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* banned in Brooklyn Public library (among other places) because of racial language such as "nigger." Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has been banned for the same reason.
- Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, and Boccaccio's *Decameron* banned by the Comstock law of 1873 (The U. S. Federal Anti-Obsecenity Act). Other books banned for sexual content include Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*.
- U. S. Postal services at one point refused to ship copies of James Joyce's novel *Ulysses* because of scatology.
- Voltaire's *Candide*, Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, and Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* banned for criticizing current war efforts.
- Walt Whitman's collected poetry, Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* censored by publishers.
- Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Ray Bradbury's science fiction short stories censored or bowdlerized by various high school text publishers.
- Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* and J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series banned in various schools. Cartoons such as *The Smurfs*, *Scoobie Doo*, and *Bugs Bunny* (challenged for references to the occult or for animated violence).
- Senator Joseph McCarthy proposed a ban of Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience* for "promoting dangerous activities and encouraging people to question unrightfully the government." Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* have been challenged for criticizing capitalism, economic policy, and consumer-culture.
- *The Bible* and *The Koran* banned in the Soviet Union between the 1920s until the 1990s. Vernacular translations of the Bible were illegal in all of medieval Western Europe--only Latin versions were acceptable.

Even Shakespeare is often bowdlerized in college textbooks and high school textbooks. For instance, these sections are often removed:

- Mercutio's jokes with the Nurse about masturbation in *Romeo and Juliet* (Act II, scene iv, 112-119); Sampson and Gregory's talk about raping virgins in *Romeo and Juliet* (Act I, scene i, 16-27).
- Petruchio's joke with Kate about oral sex ("my tongue in your tail") in *The Taming of the Shrew* (II, i, 215-17).
- Iago's claim that Othello and Desdemona are, in modern slang, "having doggy-style sex" ("making the beast with two backs") in *Othello* (I, scene i, 112-113).

Many modern editions of Greek mythology and many college anthologies of the *Iliad* quietly gloss over the homosexual nature of Achilles' relationship with Patroclus and the lesbian aspects of Sappho's poetry (circa 7th century BCE). Other literary works frequently bowdlerized include Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), where later editors often remove the sections discussing how the protagonist saves the Lilliputian village by urinating on a fire and those discussing how the protagonist ends up hanging from the oversized nipples of a naked Brobdingnagian giantess. The *1001 Arabian Nights* and the works of Sir Richard Burton are often bowdlerized to remove discussion of polygamous Arabic customs, sexuality, or violence. Even the Bible itself has not escaped attempts at bowdlerization. In the nineteenth century, "decorous" versions of the Bible were printed in which "improper" verses were removed from the text and placed in a separately published appendix. To give some idea of the extent of the bowdlerization, these editors removed references to nudity in the Adam and Eve narrative (Gen 2:24-25), to Noah's drunkenness (Gen.9:20-25), genitalia (Deut.23:11-12), circumcision (Gen. 17: 12-14, Joshua 5:1-3, 1 Sam. 18:24-27), rape (Judges 19:22-26), homosexuality (Gen. 19-14), descriptions of incest (Gen. 19:30-36), masturbation (Gen. 38:8-10), Judah's sexual intercourse with his daughter-in-law (Gen. 38:15 *et passim*), and David's adultery with Bathsheba after seeing her bathing in the nude (2 Sam. 11:2 *et passim*). The list of expurgations goes on much further than this, but these few examples illustrate the over-zealous tendencies of censors. It seems that, for some editors, even God is guilty of puerile titillations. The assumption is that any reference to such things simply must be wicked regardless of context or intent.