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The Novel and Censorship in Late-Victorian England

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Abstract and Keywords

The last two decades of the nineteenth century saw an expansion of print as well as a new freedom of the press; such expansion produced a corresponding movement to suppress such freedom and to censor print. This essay explores the efforts of Oscar Wilde, Thomas Hardy and Grant Allen to redefine the censorship debates in the prefaces to their novels. Often overlooked as a forum for the interrogation of censorship, prefaces manifest not only the complexities of the pressures on novelists to regulate what they wrote but also their efforts to resist those pressures. Legal censorship existed, of course, but Wilde, Hardy, and Allen did not target those forms of control. Instead, they registered the network of pressures arising out of the contexts in which their writing was produced, received, and marketed. Those pressures created varied forms of censorship that determined what could and could not be represented in the novel.

Keywords: Censorship, Law, Prefaces, Press, Reception, Oscar Wilde, Thomas Hardy, Grant Allen, Henry Vizetelly, Circulating Libraries, Publishers

In the Victorian period, the only print censorship trial targeting a novel occurred in the fall of 1888. The journalist-turned-publisher, Henry Vizetelly, was brought to trial for the publication of provocative English translations of Emile Zola's novels.[1] Shortly after the trial, the National Vigilance Association published a pamphlet, 'Pernicious Literature', documenting the parliamentary debate, the trial, and the press response. The House of Commons debate includes 'a very painful incident' related by Samuel Smith to illustrate the potential dangers of reading Zola. A boy comes across two open pages of a Zola novel in a store window and stops to read: '[t]he matter', Smith claims, 'was of such a leprous character that it would be impossible for any young man who had not learned the divine secret of self control to have read it without committing some form of outward sin within twenty-four hours after'.[2] While an extreme example, this short anecdote captures many of the fears and assumptions animating appeals for print censorship or regulation in the

Victorian period: it assumes a direct link between reading and social action; it highlights a category of vulnerable reader (here it is a boy but the most prominent vulnerable reader in the period was typically a young female reader); (p. 167) and it highlights the availability of the reading material (here it is a store window but cheap publications were equally problematic as were translations that made material available to broader publics.)

The history of the English novel and print censorship remains to be written. This history would be a very short account, however, if it were dedicated only to legal versions of censorship and an impossibly long account if it adopted the broadest possible definition of censorship (variations on 'culture is censorship'). The challenge, then, is to comprehend print censorship in a manner flexible enough to embrace the range of ways in which it worked in Victorian England but still specific enough to retain its ties to the law. In this chapter I want to focus on the English novel and print censorship in the last two decades of the 19th century; it is in this period that many writers and commentators confront and contest restrictions on novelistic representations, and they articulate, concisely and astutely, many factors that contribute to calls for censorship that are, nevertheless, not always aligned with legal censorship.

It is also in this period, as noted above, that censorship and the law come together explicitly in the one legal trial that targets novels—English translations of Zola's novels—in the 19th century. In both contexts—print commentaries and the legal trial—it was censorship for obscene libel (that is, representations of sex and sexuality) that commanded the attention of the censors in these latter decades as opposed to religion (blasphemy) and politics (sedition). I focus here on an overlooked forum for the scrutiny of censorship: Prefaces to novels.[3] Prefaces to novels afford a wonderful opportunity to study the relationship between print censorship and the novel, in general, and print censorship and *this* novel (the novel for which the Preface is written), in particular. They have the institutional authority of the novel itself as well as the marginal *frisson* following from their paratextual status. Many novel Prefaces, in short, engaged explicitly with the question of censorship and the novel and offer some of the most comprehensive, explosive, and incisive dimensions of print censorship in the period.

Print Censorship in Victorian England

Print censorship has long been overlooked as a resonant category in Victorian England in part because of the absence of prominent censorship trials. But it exercised a powerful force on writers, publishers, booksellers, and readers themselves and, I want to argue,

was vitally important to the definition and development of the novel. The print censorship debates, as the Prefaces I turn to below illustrate, understood censorship less in (p. 168) terms of the law (and a single repressive or restrictive force) and more in terms of censorship as a complicated network of relations, or what Ian Hunter and colleagues call a 'diversity of regulatory mechanisms'.[4] That is, targets of censorship in the late-Victorian censorship debates knew well the toll that censorship exerted on their production and publication, even in the absence of legal force and sensational trials.

In 19th-century England, then, print censorship was inseparable from the production and reception of printed matter and the markets in which such works circulated. The censorship and regulation of print culture, in other words, was not only, or even primarily, related to the legal restriction of printed matter (although such legal cases were important). Further, the controls on print did not typically manifest themselves as the repression of an author or, what Edward de Grazia calls, the 'assault on genius'. Rather, print censorship in 19th-century England is best understood, I want to suggest, in the interrelated contexts of the production of the book (its expense, its size, its prefatory material, its reprint status, its language, its expurgation where relevant, and so on), the reception of the work (the class, gender, age, nationality, and place of readers), and its markets (the periodical journals, the annuals, the newspapers, the circulating libraries, the railway stations, and so on). In this context we can identify the following forms of print regulation: self-censorship (exercised by both authors and readers); family-based censorship (typically exercised by the father and made powerful (p. 169) by the practice of reading out loud); extra-legal institutional censorship (exercised by circulating libraries, public libraries, publishers, and booksellers); as well as legal censorship.

In the context of legal censorship, the three most prominent trials of the period were the *Hicklin v. Regina* trial (for the publication of *The Confessional Unmasked*, a critique of Catholicism) (1868); the Bradlaugh-Besant trial (for the republication of Knowlton's *Fruits of Philosophy*, a birth control manual) (1877–78); and the Vizetelly trial (1888). These trials addressed religious, scientific, and literary writings respectively and articulated fundamental aspects of censorship that reflected all levels of print regulation in Victorian England (that is, they cannot be understood only in their legal context but rather, I would argue, have to be addressed in terms of the production, reception, and markets of the works in question).

The latter decades of the 19th century on which I am focusing here revive a view of the novel that had dominated in the latter decades of the eighteenth and early decades of the nineteenth centuries. In that period, an Evangelical zeal drove several censorship campaigns and also animated an aversion to the novel often articulated in periodical essays, for instance, that promoted the perception of the novel as, by definition and

almost without exception, immoral and potentially dangerous, even as—or, more likely, because—the readership for novels was on the rise. While the wholesale critique of the novel had softened in the 1880s and 1890s, fears related to the novel from this earlier period were inflamed again by what was perceived to be at once a broadening of the topics novels chose to address, in part imported from French novels as the references to Zola translations above illustrate, and a broadening of the audiences for whom the novel was available.[5]

This sensitivity to audience reflects a persistent feature of the censorship debates in the Victorian period. In the legal sphere, the Obscene Publications Act (1857) and the Hicklin Standard (1868) defined the approach to print censorship that obtained through the 20th century. In both of these approaches, audience was key to the evaluation of censorship. The Obscene Publications Act alerted the evaluator's attention to material that was distributed, as *The Times* put it in an editorial on 29 June 1857, in 'low thoroughfares' to 'the young, the ignorant, and the vicious', and the Hicklin Standard defined 'the test of obscenity' in terms of works that may 'deprave and (p. 170) corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences, and into whose hands a publication of this sort might fall'.[6] In the passage preceding this citation, literary quality is explicitly excluded from consideration and in a later section authorial intention is similarly discounted. The only factors worthy of attention when evaluating obscenity, then, are the content of the work in combination with its anticipated readership.

It was in this context that novelists had learned to calibrate carefully their representations so as to ensure the widest possible circulation for their works. But several things changed in the 1880s. The contrast between, as Henry James put it, 'that which they [people] see and that which they speak of, that which they feel to be a part of life and that which they allow to enter literature',[7] was becoming more starkly visible. This visibility, in part, was due to the liberty granted newspapers in their publications of, if not sexually explicit, then sexually suggestive material. It was in the 1880s that W.T. Stead, for example, launched his 'Maiden Tribute' inquiry into what he called 'the white slave trade' with detailed exposés of the purchase of young girls for sexual trafficking.[8] It was also in the 1880s that one saw a renewed fascination in the titillation afforded by the transcription in the press of detailed divorce cases which again dealt with sexual material. And it was in the 1880s that circulating libraries began to lose their grip on a public that had until this period been satisfied to let these libraries determine the appropriate range of novelistic representation.

In response to this expansion of print freedom in the press, vice societies (ironically led by W.T. Stead himself) sought to suppress an extension of print freedom in other venues (especially the novel);[9] and novelists, the most persistent of whom was George Moore,

sought to gain for themselves a similar freedom of expression in their own genre. Novelists began to take greater risks and also to thematize the restrictions they confronted, at the same time as vice societies exerted greater zeal and energy in their suppression. It was this combination, in part, that led to the Vizetelly trials of 1888 and 1889. Without the energy and dedication of George Moore to print freedom, cheap Zola translations might not have been published at this time; but also without the attention and scrutiny of vice societies, in this case the National Vigilance Association, they might not have been prosecuted.

(p. 171) In this chapter I want to highlight the efforts of three novelists in the early 1890s to redefine the censorship debates in a manner more congenial to their literary production in the wake of the revival of censorship agitation in the 1880s. Their efforts are bracketed by the Vizetelly trials and both the 1895 trial of Oscar Wilde for gross indecency and the 1898 trial of George Bedborough for selling Havelock Ellis's *Sexual Inversion.* These latter two trials do not address novel censorship directly and yet they contributed to ongoing revisions of the intersections between the English novel, print censorship, and the reading public. It is noteworthy that the two trials related to print culture—the Vizetelly and Bedborough trials—target the publisher and bookseller respectively and not the authors. The period I address here is also shaped by recent interventions in the censorship debates by Henry James and George Moore. James's 'The Art of Fiction' and 'The Future of the Novel', among other works, take issue with print restrictions imposed on the novelist.[10] Moore's series of novel prefaces, polemical works, and essays deal much more directly with print censorship and the perceived damage exacted by circulating libraries on the vitality and growth of the English novel.[11]

Novel Prefaces: Oscar Wilde, Thomas Hardy, and Grant Allen, 1890–95

Wilde's Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* Hardy's Prefaces to *Tess* and *Jude the Obscure,* and Allen's Preface to *The British Barbarians* respond to the print censorship debates in very different ways. These were not just debates between a censorship and anti-censorship position but also a debate *within* the anti-censorship position. Wilde advances an art-for-art's sake position that attempts to remove the novel from the debate by severing the connection between art and society and, despite other statements to the contrary, denying the moral force of literature. Hardy, by contrast, focuses on current modes of publication and the construction of the novel-reading audience. And Grant Allen explicitly launches a 'protest' against prevailing systems of print production,

interpretations of 'purity', and readership restrictions. Taken together, these Prefaces foreground the next century's struggle with perennial questions about art and its responsibilities to and freedom from its reading audience.

(p. 172) Useless Art

Wilde's entanglement with Victorian law, of course, is best known in the context of the 1895 libel and gross indecency trials.[12] But as Richard Ellman, Peter Keating, and Regenia Gagnier suggest in passing, Wilde's Preface to *Dorian Gray* can be read as a statement not only of his aesthetic position but also as a response to the political climate of print censorship; or rather, aestheticism is never entirely separable from the social and political context in which it arises. This Preface is a response to early reviews of Wilde's novel; in this respect, it speaks to that novel's reception history.[13] Unlike most Prefaces, however, it was first published independently, in *The Fortnightly Review* in March 1891, and it was republished a month later in the first edition of *Dorian Gray*.[14]

This Preface does not invoke censorship explicitly but it can be read as a strategic response to protect the novelist by insisting on severing the connection, prominent in social purity discourse and in the Zola example with which I open, between reading and action. Instead of arguing that novels had a positive social and moral function, Wilde refused the terms of the debate.[15] By writing his Preface as a series of aphorisms Wilde already challenged the standard format of an English Preface. Not surprisingly, his Preface is closer in style to antecedents of the art-for-art's sake movement. Théophile Gautier's Preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, for example, like Wilde's, was written in response to negative reviews of an article he wrote outlining his aesthetic position.

The Preface to Gautier's novel severs the connection not only between reading and action, but also between representation and the author. 'It is ridiculous to say that a man (p. 173) is a drunkard because he describes an orgy, a rake because he describes debauchery'.[16] He is especially scathing when he turns to what he terms the 'utilitarian critics'. Like other Prefaces, and the censorship debates as a whole, Gautier also compares the evaluation of his alleged immorality to classic writers who have preceded him. He mocks the question the utilitarian critic asks: 'What is the use of this book?', and he writes: 'No, you imbeciles, no, idiotic and goitrous creatures that you are, a book does not make jellied soup; a novel is not a pair of seamless boots.'[17] His comments on usefulness and beauty resonate with Wilde's own thinking on these issues:

> Nothing beautiful is indispensable to life…Nothing is really beautiful unless it is useless; everything useful is ugly, for it expresses a need, and the needs of man

> are ignoble and disgusting, like his poor weak nature. The most useful place in the house is the lavatory …pleasure seems to me the goal of life, and the only useful thing in the world.[18]

Consider the Preface to Wilde's novel in the context of these comments and the general climate of print censorship:

> The artist is the creator of beautiful things.
>
> To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim.
>
> The critic is he who can translate into another manner or a new material his impression of beautiful things.
>
> The highest as the lowest form of criticism is a mode of autobiography.
>
> Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming. This is a fault.
>
> Those who find beautiful meanings in beautiful things are cultivated. For these there is hope.
>
> They are the elect to whom beautiful things mean only beauty.
>
> There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all.[19]

If most critiques of censorship in the period put their focus on print production, circulation, markets, and reception, Wilde inflects the debate differently. He seeks to keep the focus on art and to mock the focus on the reader. In Wilde's terms, it is neither the artist nor the book itself that produces an immoral work, it is the reader figured as the critic. (p. 174) Criticism, then, is a form of autobiography in so far as it may betray the critic's immoral thoughts. Art in and of itself has no use-value—the famous last line of the Preface is 'All art is quite useless' (42)—and the question of a work's morality is accordingly, and often contradictorily, sidelined. The aesthetic argument—the value of art as art—anticipates the most successful response to print censorship that would develop in the modernist period. Instead of highlighting the need to protect the reader, the emphasis slowly shifted to the need to protect art (a category that had been eclipsed by the category of the reader in the earlier debates).

‘Household Reading’

Where Wilde refuses the moral terms of the censorship debates that position art in relation to its social function, Hardy, like George Moore, refuses the construction of a default reader who dictates the limits of acceptable representation. Unlike Wilde, then, he takes up the debate on its own terms and within the proscribed boundaries. Hardy is keenly attuned to the ways in which conditions of production impinge on what a writer can say. Hardy writes his first Preface to *Tess* in 1891. His views on print regulation, however, are fully elaborated in an 1890 symposium on ‘Candour in English Fiction’ that was published in the *New Review*.[20] When ‘observers and critics remark, as they often remark, that the great bulk of English fiction of the present day is characterized by its lack of sincerity, they usually omit to trace this serious defect to external, or even eccentric causes’. Instead of focusing on the imagination or insight of the author, Hardy suggests, one should consider ‘the conditions under which our popular fiction is produced’.[21] In ‘representations of the world, the passions ought to be proportioned as in the world itself’ (16). Encapsulating the main points in the censorship debates to date, he stresses the impact of ‘the magazine and the circulating library’ on shaping literary production tailored to ‘what is called household reading, which means, or is made to mean, the reading either of the majority in a household or of the household collectively’ (17).[22] The result is a form of implicit censorship:

> What this practically amounts to is that the patrons of literature—no longer Peers with a taste—acting under the censorship of prudery, rigorously exclude from the pages they regulate subjects that have been made, by general approval of the best **(p. 175)** judges, the cases of the finest imaginative compositions since literature rose to the dignity of an art. [18]

The author, Hardy argues, inevitably ends up submitting to ‘the Grundyist and subscriber’ (19). ‘It behooves us’, he continues, ‘to inquire how best to circumvent the present lording of nonage over maturity, and permit the explicit novel to be more generally written’ (21). Hardy proposes three possibilities: (1) books bought and not borrowed (classes of books rather than a ‘general audience’); (2) serials in newspapers ‘read mainly by adults’; and (3) develop magazines for adults. He does not, then, take issue with print regulation for young readers. Havelock Ellis cynically reflects on this point in his review of *Jude*. What might happen, he wonders, if the young were to read Hardy? ‘Consider how sad it would be if the young should come to suspect, before they are themselves married, that marriage after all may not always be a box of bonbons. Remember the Young Person.’[23]

The Prefaces to Hardy's *Tess* are written between 1891, when the novel was first published, and 1912. They take up the issues of literary production and reception already discussed in his essay on 'Candour'. Here is the Preface to the first edition in its entirety:

> The main portion of the following story appeared—with slight modifications—in the *Graphic* newspaper; other chapters, more especially addressed to adult readers, in the *Fortnightly Review* and the *National Observer*, as episodic sketches. My thanks are tendered to the editors and proprietors of those periodicals for enabling me now to piece the trunk and limbs of the novel together, and print it complete, as originally written two years ago.
>
> I will just add that the story is sent out in all sincerity of purpose, as an attempt to give artistic form to a true sequence of things; and in respect of the book's opinions and sentiments, I would ask any too genteel reader, who cannot endure to have said what everybody nowadays thinks and feels, to remember a well-worn sentence of St Jerome's: If an offence come out of the truth, better is it that the offence come than that the truth be concealed.[24]

Hardy first focuses here on the mode of publication: novels published in serial publications are inevitably shaped by the periodical's anticipated readership. The *Graphic* newspaper does not permit the range of representation that is possible in periodicals like the *Fortnightly Review* and *National Observer* addressed to 'adult readers'. Even though he does not refer directly to the young female reader, his reference to the 'too genteel reader' anticipates his focus on readers in later Prefaces.

The second paragraph focuses on the representation of truth: Hardy refers to his 'sincerity of purpose' and puts into play 'true' or 'truth' three times in this short passage. He (p. 176) clearly invokes possible objections to the book (in the form of the 'genteel reader'), and the implicit call to censorship that underwrites such objections ('who cannot endure to have said'). He closes with an appeal that interests of truth override petitions for concealment.[25] The differences between Hardy and Wilde in this context are also interesting: where Hardy privileges truth in terms of the value of exposé, Wilde privileges truth in terms of the value of art.

For the fifth edition, in 1892, Hardy rewrites the Preface entirely. In this Preface he traces the novel's reception history, noting that the majority of reviewers praised his novel. The Preface, however, focuses on the minority of readers who were unhappy with it; they are divided into three groups: reviewers who address 'subjects fit for art' (25); reviewers who feel that the novel reflects only life at the end of the 19th century and does not do more than that; and the 'genteel' reader to whom Hardy referred in his original Preface.

The first sentence of this Preface is noteworthy for the contortions it makes not to say what it is saying:

> This novel being one wherein the great campaign of the heroine begins after an event in her experience which has usually been treated as fatal to her part of protagonist, or at least the virtual ending of her enterprises and hopes, it was quite contrary to avowed conventions that the public should welcome the book, and agree with me in holding that there was something more to be said in fiction than had been said about the shaded side of a well-known catastrophe. [25]

The reference to sex with Alec as ‘an event’ or the description of the chapters following the ‘event’ as ‘the shaded side of a well-known catastrophe’ suggests that even in the Preface, Hardy understood that he could not say all. If Tess was an attempt to say something more in fiction about sex, then the Preface remained a site in which that something would not be said directly to the ‘public’ whose ‘avowed conventions’ made candour impossible. Where Wilde parodies the unsayable, Hardy circumlocutes. It is in the Preface to *Jude the Obscure*, however, written in 1895, that Hardy confronts the construction of the reader most directly.

Again Hardy draws his reader’s attention to the restrictions imposed by serial publication:

> The history of this novel (whose birth in its present shape has been much retarded by the necessities of periodical publication) is as follows. [He recounts the year he began writing the text, when he finished it, and its publication in *Harper’s*.] But, as in the case of *Tess of the D’Ubervilles*, the magazine version was for various reasons abridged and modified in some degree, the present edition being the first in which the whole appears as originally written. [38]

(p. 177) Where Hardy justified his account in *Tess* by reference to sincerity and truth, here he writes:

> For a novel addressed by a man to men and women of full age; which attempts to deal unaffectedly with the fret and fever, derision and disaster, that may press in the wake of the strongest passion known to humanity, and to point, without a mincing of words, the tragedy of unfulfilled aims, I am not aware that there is anything in the handling to which exception can be taken. [38]

If the 1912 Preface to *Tess*, with its account of the book-burning by the bishop, has garnered the most critical attention, one can see from these earlier Prefaces Hardy’s efforts to wrestle with print restrictions. For the most part he accepts the terms of the print regulation debate—the vulnerability of the young female reader and the focus on

morality—but attempts to refigure them in a manner more conducive to his own novelistic production. His novels are not written for young women, he claims, and they are moral. Where social purity movements were attempting to define 'moral' in one way, novel Preface writers during this period were giving the term a broader inflection, although, unlike Wilde, most did not reject the terms of the debate altogether.

A Hill-top Novel

In the same year as the Wilde trial and Hardy's *Jude*, Grant Allen published *The British Barbarians*[26] and wrote the most explicit protest against print regulation that I have found in a Preface written in English. Before turning to this Preface I want to consider an exchange on print regulation in which Allen was involved that predates it by four years. In June 1891, a year after Hardy's 'Candour in Fiction', Allen published an essay, 'Letters in Philistia', in the *Fortnightly Review*. He argues against restrictions placed on writers and notes that English fiction is not known abroad as French and Russian fiction is. 'The British public is, in one word, stodgy.'[27] He further notes that W.E. Henley once referred to him mockingly as 'the man who isn't allowed'. According to Allen, Henley missed his point. He explains: 'It isn't that *I* am not allowed: it is that *we* are not allowed…men can't write as they would…because the public and its distributing agents dictate to them so absolutely how and what they are to produce that they can't escape from it.' He continues:

> The definiteness of the demand, indeed, has become almost ludicrous. Rigid contracts are nowadays signed beforehand for the protection of such and such a piece of work, consisting, let us say, of three volumes, divided into twenty-six weekly parts; each part comprising two chapters, to average two thousand five hundred words **(p. 178)** apiece. Often enough, a clause is even inserted in the agreement that the work shall contain nothing that may not be read aloud in any family circle. Consider what, in the existing condition of English bourgeois opinion, that restriction means![28]

This family-based censorship—captured also in Hardy's phrase 'household reading'—was hotly debated in the period. The number of writers who raise this issue and either suggest that such regulation is over or that it persists more powerfully than ever testifies to its hold on the public imagination. Trollope, for example, argued in his *Autobiography* that unlike the restrictions placed on fiction fifty years ago, 'There is…no such embargo now [in 1876].'[29] Stead replied directly to Allen's article in a piece for the *Review of Reviews* in which he rejected the claim that English novelists were forced to negotiate serious print restrictions:

> It is sheer nonsense to pretend that in England a man cannot say what he will…I have never hesitated to discuss in the frankest and freest manner possible all questions which Mrs Grundy taboos, discussing them in the hearing of the whole people, regardless of the shrieks of the prude…It is not plain speech and free speech that the English public dislikes, it is unclean speech, speech that is used to corrupt the mind and deprave the imagination that the British Philistia, if it be Philistia, protests against—and rightly protests—and will go on protesting.[30]

As the driving force behind the Maiden Tribute exposé Stead felt that he knew what he was talking about. He suggests that there is ample 'liberty' for the British novelist; what is missing is 'genius'. And he distinguishes here between 'free speech' (which is applauded) and 'unclean speech' (which corrupts). He continues on to note that free speech related to 'social problems' is merited but draws the line when it leads to what he calls 'depravity' (in his example, 'depravity' is equated with not fully acknowledging the seriousness of adultery).[31]

Undeterred by these responses, Allen took up the issue of print regulation again in his 1895 preface to *The British Barbarians.* Both *The British Barbarians* (written in 1889) and *The Women Who Did* (written in early 1893 and published a few months before *The British Barbarians publication in 1895*) represent adulterous relationships, as did 'Ivan Greet's Masterpiece', the title story of the collection published in 1893. In the Preface to this collection, Allen writes: 'I sent [the title story to the *Graphic*], I confess, in fear and trembling, and was agreeably surprised when the editor had the boldness to print it unaltered.'[32] He then notes that two other stories that dealt with (p. 179) adultery were rejected by every journal he sent them to, 'declined by the whole press of London'.[33] This previous experience likely animates his attitude to censorship in the Preface to *The British Barbarians*. His novel, which he calls a 'hill-top novel' (written freely from his hill top), 'raises a protest in favour of purity'. Allen reverses the terms of the purity movement so important to many of his contemporaries; he claims that his novel is 'pure' in a period when the field is otherwise 'flooded with stories of evil tendencies'. Purity, for Allen, refers to the author who writes what he or she thinks and does not try to moderate his or her subject matter and views in light of an anticipated readership.

The reason other novelists have not raised similar protests, he argues, is due to their reliance on a mode of publication—serialization in magazines and newspapers—that limits what the novelist can say. He groups together 'Catholic readers', 'Wesleyan Methodist subscribers', 'the young person', and the 'British matron' as the readers responsible for the novel's 'ridiculous timidity' and argues that the representation of 'truth' (which Allen upholds) should not in any way curtail a novel's 'circulation'. The excessive caution exercised by editors as they take into consideration the anticipated

response of their potential readers results in a situation in which 'it is almost impossible to get a novel printed in an English journal unless it is warranted to contain nothing at all to which anybody, however narrow, could possibly object, on any grounds whatever, religious, political, social, moral, or aesthetic'. Literature, Allen claims, following Thomas Hardy, is 'the expression of souls in revolt'.[34] The mode of publication, he argues, accordingly prevents the production of literature.

Further, Allen reverses the terms of the relationship between censorship and the reader. He states explicitly that he wants to write for girls and women but does not want to limit the range of his representation in this context. Wise men are wise already; it is the boys and girls and women who most need 'suggestion and instruction'. Instead of using the reader's innocence as a gauge that disqualifies her from reading the novel, it is her very innocence and need for instruction that makes the reading of the novel so important.[35]

Allen admittedly expresses his radical positions with respect to print freedom in the context of a conservative framework: he celebrates the genius of the individual author; and while he reverses the terms of the purity movement he maintains the pure/impure opposition. He is nevertheless clearly suggesting that writers should not be limited by unnecessarily restrictive publication conditions and readers should not be unnecessarily (p. 180) protected.[36] In this Preface, then, Allen at once demonstrates the force of social purity discourse in the literary culture but attempts to redefine the terms of this discourse to counter its print regulation arguments.[37]

In conclusion, these Prefaces, and others written in the 1880s and 1890s, exhibit an acute awareness of print restrictions. Each of these novelists tried to recast the terms of the censorship debate in different ways. Wilde situated his response in the context of aestheticism and a rejection of the utilitarian approach to literature; Hardy wrote against modes of publication and claimed that his novels were not written for young readers; and Allen similarly protested against modes of publication but claimed that the novel should be for the young. These foci on the reader and modes of publication remind us that print regulation was never simply about legal repression of an author. At the same time, one can see in Hardy, Allen, and Wilde a shift to a focus on art. For Hardy this shift is translated in terms of 'sincere' art and for Allen it is translated in terms of 'pure' art; it is only in Wilde, however, that this focus on art disrupts the terms of the debate as it renders qualities of sincerity and purity irrelevant to the 'uselessness' of art.

If Wilde retorts by privileging the aesthetic, Hardy by privileging the adult reader, and Allen by privileging the purity of art and all readers, I want to close with two reversals of censorship attitudes that speak to the complexity of the censorship field in the period. The first involves a moment in the Vizetelly trial and its aftermath. The prosecution collects twenty-one offending passages from Zola's *La Terre* and reads them aloud to the

jury members for their evaluation. After hearing only a few of these passages, the jury, presumably repulsed, requests not to have to listen to them all, Vizetelly abruptly pleads guilty, and the trial comes to a rapid close. Only five years later, in 1893, the British government and press, representatives of the same population that could not bear in 1888 this tiny sampling of Zola's work, welcome Zola to England with an 'enthusiastic reception' and 'sounds of ringing cheers'.[38]

My second example occurs in a novel, Mary Cholmondeley's *Red Pottage*, published in 1899. In this novel, Cholmondeley's central character, Hester, is a novelist. She writes a novel that her brother, a reverend, reads. Deeply disturbed by the novel's content, even as he is impressed by the force of its style, the reverend feels it is his duty to burn the **(p. 181)** novel. This is one of the more flagrant descriptions of censorship in the 19th-century English novel and an ironic commentary on the outward crime that may be committed within twenty-four hours of reading. But it is also a brilliant dénouement both to Cholmondeley's novel and to the story of English print censorship. Cholmondeley enacts a representation of censorship and the dictates of the vulnerable reader, by way of the vulnerable male reader, and a powerful critique and undoing of such censorship: for if Hester's brother burns her book, we read this account in *Red Pottage*, a novel that itself closely resembles that burned novel of the narrative. Hester's novel, then, is simultaneously burned and revived. Both of these reversals no doubt owe a debt to the ongoing explorations of censorship enacted in a range of cultural forums. In short, a consideration of late-Victorian novel Prefaces illustrates the ways in which authors and publishers negotiated the new climate of print censorship in the context of the rise and influence of social purity movements, changing understandings of the social role of the novel, new novel forms, and new and contested conditions of literary production and publication.

Suggested Reading

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Walkowitz Judith. *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Weeks Jeffrey. *Sex, Politics, and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800*. London: Longman, 1981.

Wilde Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Edited by Norman Page. Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 1998.

Notes:

(1) These editions were provocative because they were inexpensive and translated (thus making them accessible to a broader audience than usual), their titles were known for their sensational appeal (*Madame Bovary*, for example, was one of the novels published by Vizetelly in translation), and they included front matter and Prefaces deliberately highlighting the editions' unexpurgated character, boldness, and 'realism'.

(2) National Vigilance Association, 'Pernicious Literature', in *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, ed. George J. Becker (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 335.

(3) For an extended analysis of Prefaces in Vizetelly novel editions and a treatment of the Vizetelly trials see Barbara Leckie, '"A Preface is Written to the Public": Print Censorship, Novel Prefaces, and the Construction of a New Reading Public in Late-Victorian England', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 37 (2009): 447–62.

(4) Ian Hunter, David Saunders, and Dugald Williamson, *On Pornography* (London: Macmillan, 1992), 71. Theoretical approaches to censorship fall into two broads camps. Pre-1985 criticism tends to follow a freedom versus the law model; post-1985 criticism, often influenced by Foucault, tends to focus on networks and a constellation of different factors. In this context, Walter Kendrick, *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture* (New York: Viking, 1987) and Ian Hunter et al., *On Pornography* offer the most nuanced accounts of censorship in Victorian print culture, but important gaps and omissions remain as new questions are also raised. The pre-1985 criticism tends to privilege the author's right to free speech; it assumes that the government or state restricts expression and that the goal should be, instead, freedom of expression. The post-1985 group can be further divided into critics who consider the relationship between censorship and language. Most of these theorists take issue with 'free speech' not because they are opposed to freedom of speech but rather because they question the

capacity of speech ever to be free. Pierre Bourdieu, for example, refers to a political field which 'produces an effect of censorship by limiting the universe of political discourse, and thereby the universe of what is politically thinkable' (Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 172). And Judith Butler defines implicit censorship as the 'implicit operations of power that rule out in unspoken ways what will remain unspeakable' (Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 130). Interestingly, their comments closely echo late-Victorian commentary on censorship. For a range of approaches to print censorship in the Victorian period see: Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality, 1885–1914* (London: Penguin Books, 1991); Edward DeGrazia, *Girls Lean Back Everywhere: The Law of Obscenity and the Assault on Genius* (New York: Random House, 1992); Alan Hunt, *Governing Morals: A Social History of Moral Regulation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Paul Hyland and Neil Sammells, eds., *Writing and Censorship in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1992); Peter Keating, *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel, 1875–1914* (London: Secker, 1989); Robin Myers and Michael Harris, eds., *Censorship and the Control of Print in England and France, 1600–1910* (Winchester: St Paul's, 1992); Lisa A. Sigel, *Governing Pleasures: Pornography and Social Change, 1815–1914* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 2002); and Alan Travis, *Bound and Gagged: A Secret History of Obscenity in England* (London: Profile, 2000).

(5) The impact of the French novel on defining appropriate boundaries for the English novel was enormous. Long associated with everything corrupt, the licence in range of representation practised by French novelists provoked considerable anxiety in English novelists, readers, and publishers. As I illustrate in this chapter, in the latter decades of the century many novelists began to contest what they perceived to be the narrowness of English literary licence, but it is important to acknowledge that many more novelists participated in the implicit print restrictions than contested them. The rising influence of French authors (Baudelaire, Huysmans, Zola, the Goncourt brothers, etc.) intrigued English novelists who wished to be valued not only for the story they told but also for the art they created. The growth of new and alternative publishing houses in the latter decades of the century (Vizetelly, Bodley Head, John Lane) is also part of this story. On the Victorian novel in France, see Marie-Françoise Cachin's chapter in this volume.

(6) *Law Reports*, '*Regina* v. *Hicklin*', Queen's Bench Cases, vol. 3. (London: William Clowes, 1867–68): 360–79, 371.

(7) Henry James, 'The Art of Fiction', in *Essays on Literature: American Writers, English Writers*, ed. Leon Edel and Mark Wilson (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 670.

(8) See Judith Walkowitz's *City of Dreadful Delight* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) for a good analysis of the Maiden Tribute case, in particular, and 1880s London, in general.

(9) There are also several studies of social purity movements of the period that address questions of censorship: Lucy Bland's *Banishing the Beast*, Alan Hunt's *Governing Morals*, and Stefan Petrow's *Policing Morals: The Metropolitan Police and the Home Office, 1870–1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994). Finally, Jeffrey Weeks's important *Sex, Politics, and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (London: Longman, 1981) treats pornography, social purity movements, and many other issues related to sexuality.

(10) See Barbara Leckie, *Culture and Adultery: The Novel, the Newspaper, and the Law, 1857–1914* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999) for a discussion of Henry James and George Moore in the context of print censorship.

(11) Moore is best known for his 1885 *Literature at Nurse, or Circulating Morals: A Polemic on Victorian Censorship*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Hassocks: Harvester, 1976), but he also discusses censorship at length in novel prefaces, letters to the editor, and other print forums.

(12) In *Modernism and the Theater of Censorship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), Adam Parkes notes that these trials can also be read as 'obscenity trials' (11).

(13) Wilde's novel was first published in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* in the year following the second Vizetelly trial. When Wilde published the novel in book form he significantly revised a great deal of the text, arguably censoring his own work in response to the many negative reviews the first version of the novel received. During the Wilde trials, the prosecuting attorney notably always cited from the *Lippincott's* version, claiming that the later novel had been 'purged'. See H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* (New York: Dover, 1962), 111. The controversy in response to the first version of the novel took place primarily in the pages of the *Scots Observer* (to which Wilde also contributed) and is discussed in some detail by Regenia Gagnier in her *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986) and others. The relationship between Wilde's novel and Vizetelly's trials is discussed briefly by Lawrence Danson, 'Wilde as Critic and Theorist', in *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*, ed. Peter Raby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 80–95, 86–8, and Anne Margaret Daniel, 'Wilde the Writer', in *Palgrave Advances in Oscar Wilde Studies*, ed. Frederick S. Roden (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 36–71, 46–7.

(14) See Laurel Brake, ‘The Discourses of Journalism: “Arnold and Pater” Again—and Wilde’, in *Pater in the 1990s*, ed. Laurel Brake and Ian Small (Greensboro: ELT Press, 1991), 43–61 for a good discussion of the climate of censorship in the 1880s and 1890s and for a treatment of Wilde’s Preface in this context.

(15) As Peter Keating notes in *The Haunted Study*, when Wilde wrote in his Preface, ‘“There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written or badly written. That is all”, he was not only proclaiming aesthetic doctrine, he was also openly mocking the law’ (243). Wilde’s art-for-art’s sake defence, Keating notes, would not be acceptable in a British court for another sixty years.

(16) Théophile Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, trans. Joanna Richardson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), 34. This point is also made in ‘The Soul of Man Under Socialism’. The Wilde trials, in many ways, point to the failure of novelists to dictate the terms of the debate when it came to the law. To write about a drunkard was to name one’s self a drunkard, so to speak.

(17) Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, 36.

(18) Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, 39.

(19) Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. Norman Page (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 1998), 41. Subsequent citations appear in the text.

(20) The other participants were Walter Besant and Eliza Lynn Linton. Both writers, like Hardy, discussed audience and public opinion and both deplored ‘the barriers set up by Mrs. Grundy’, E. Lynn Linton, ‘Candour in English Fiction’, *New Review* 2 (January 1890): 11–14, 11.

(21) Thomas Hardy, ‘Candour in English Fiction’, *New Review* 2 (January 1890): 15–21, 15. Subsequent citations appear in the text.

(22) This comment echoes the persistent lament through George Moore’s writings on censorship: the novel is severely diminished, he argues, by the dominion of the young female reader as the default reader in the context of whom print restrictions are dictated.

(23) Havelock Ellis, ‘Concerning *Jude the Obscure*’, *Savoy Magazine* 6 (October 1896): 35–49, 45.

(24) Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, ed. John Paul Riquelme (Boston: Bedford, 1998), 24–25. Subsequent citations appear in the text.

(25) Several critics, of course, did not agree with Hardy. See, for example, Caine's 'New Watchwords', *Contemporary Review* (1890): 471–72.

(26) Grant Allen, *The British Barbarians: A Hill-Top Novel* (London: Lane, 1895).

(27) Grant Allen, 'Letters in Philistia', *Fortnightly Review* (June 1891): 947–62, 950.

(28) Allen, 'Philistia', 953. These debates, moreover, are exacerbated by the differing views on press censorship and theatre censorship; different rules and attitudes obtain in the categories of press, theatre, and the novel.

(29) Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1883), 125.

(30) W.T. Stead, 'Philistia and Mr. Grant Allen', *Review of Reviews* 3 (June 1891): 585.

(31) Stead, 'Philistia', 585.

(32) Grant Allen, *Ivan Greet's Masterpiece etc*. (London: Chatto, 1893), n.p.

(33) Allen, *Ivan*, n.p.

(34) Ever vulnerable to critique, *The British Barbarians* was parodied by H.D. Traill in a work entitled *The Barbarous Britishers, A Tip-Top Novel* (London: Lane, 1896), which includes a Preface that mocks the terms of Allen's Preface to his novel: 'Do not imagine for a moment that I have said anything which I don't think. Absurd as some of my opinions may seem, I really hold them. What I have complained of is, that I have all along entertained more absurd opinion still, which, owing to the cowardly clinging of Editors to common-sense, I have had to suppress' (2).

(35) This was an argument that had also been made in response to print censorship in the 1860s.

(36) In 1926 *The Woman Who Did* (Boston: Little Brown, 1926) was explicitly advertised in terms of its positioning with respect to the censorship debates. The novel was not itself censored but its engagement with censorship issues is announced on the cover of the text. It reads: 'The present seemingly endless discussion as to what is or what is not fit to print makes timely this new edition of a famous novel which set the literary world by the ears when it was first published in 1895.'

(37) Allen's novel was not well received (although interestingly, most reviewers devoted half their reviews to commentary on the preface). *The New York Times* reviewer wrote: 'Mr. Grant Allen repeats over and over again how utterly fearless he is, and declares that

he is disseminating the highest truth…From the mock stiltedness of the preface, you know what Mr. Grant Allen was after' (18 December 1895, 10).

(38) Henry Vizetelly, *Glances Back over Seventy Years: Reminiscences* (London: Vizetelly, 1893), 432.

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