

Censorship. A World Encyclopedia
Edited By Derek Jones

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Beginning with a foreword signed by Doris Lessing, a well-known writer and also a fearsome opponent of the apartheid regimes in South African countries, the massive work *Censorship. A World Encyclopedia*, published in four volumes in 2001, is the result of a project coordinated on an international level, aiming at the analysis and research of censorship based on the technical principles of editing an encyclopedic work. Debated from various points of view, the subject of censorship presents itself in a kaleidoscopic aspect that proposes to cover an area as wide as possible of the different manifestations in time against the individual's free expression and thinking.

Starting from the definition of the censor in the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* as an official whose job is to verify, before publication, any material that might contain anything “immoral, heretical, offensive or injurious to the state”¹, the editor Derek Jones orientatively sketches the directions that the act of censorship took in the course of time. It may be inferred thus that the intention of censoring should be revealed in areas with a possible danger of offending moral, religious, or political common sense. “Common sense” refers here to a majority's policy of orientation and consolidation as it manifests itself towards an opposition, usually of a minority, which is offensive, and contests or questions the majority's legitimacy.

Besides the official monopoly that any power holds, be it ecclesiastical, social, or political, towards the free expression of a viewpoint in opposition, the editor of the encyclopedia is aware of the diversity of the subject and he refers to a variety of *processes* that are revealed in the act of censorship: “...the encyclopedia is built upon the assumption that a variety of processes are involved, formal and informal, overt and covert, conscious and unconscious, by which restrictions are imposed on the collection, display, dissemination, and exchange of information, opinions, ideas, and imaginative expression.”² This opening

¹ Derek Jones, Editor's Note, in *Censorship. A World Encyclopedia*, edited by Derek Jones, London-Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2001, p. xi.

² *Censorship*...op. cit., vol. I., p. xii

perspective on the act of censorship, in search for the “anthropological roots” of the subject, suggests the existence of a “prehistory”¹ of censoring authorities, well before the invention of printing.

Wondering about the timeliness of such a work, besides the fact that censorship is an “interesting” subject, the editor Derek Jones points out the *always-timely* character of the topic even in a time when, according to Francis Fukuyama’s political predictions, liberal democracy seems to gather ground and impose itself as a political system in more and more regions of the world. Therefore, although the role of censorship in most political or social systems is practically to control and purge in the name and by the principles of official ideologies, the act of censorship gains different forms from one region to the other, making use of different practices and strategies in order to impose itself. An appropriate example in this respect is the diversity of forms in which political censorship manifested itself in the former communist states of Eastern Europe. Thus, without a comparative study of these (as the aim of an encyclopedia does not entail such an analysis), the nature of censorship is being treated in separate articles for each country; furthermore, in cases when certain contesting attitudes that attracted the vigilance of censorship aroused an international echo, separate articles have also been dedicated exclusively to these.

One may observe, for instance, besides the articles referring exclusively to countries from all geographical areas, a broadening interest in the act of censorship in articles commenting on certain reactions coming from different spheres of society. A thematic index of these can be browsed at the beginning of each volume. Its range includes fields as book editing, radio-TV and the Internet, video and films, legislation and human rights, literature, the arts of performance, ideologies and politics, press, religion, education, sexuality and violence, theory and practice of censorship, visual arts.

As the aspects connected to the act of censorship as such come from such a diversified range, and the official measures taken to configure its frame of reference are so extremely complex, and present a series of variations from one region to the other, the task to review such a far-reaching work is twice as difficult. Firstly, because the diversity of the material and the amount of information contained make it impossible to analyze systematically and treat exhaustively the articles in their thematic order. Secondly, the kaleidoscopic structure of the work permanently reveals a new face of the forms and strategies whereby censorship

¹ *ibid.*, xii.

developed in time; the information contained in the specific articles with a precise destination often completes thematic or geographical articles dedicated to each country separately.

Each topic, defined by a generic term, contains a series of sub-categories, varied and diversified as to their field of reference. Under the heading *Books* we will find, for instance, three other sub-categories, *Book Burning*; *Booksellers, Printers, and Publishers*; *Libraries and Reference Books*, which in their turn cover a very wide thematic field. Under *Book Burning*, one finds articles about authors whose books were burnt in the course of time from the exemplary case of the Bible to the more recent case of Salman Rushdie. The article, signed by Judith C. Kohl, does not overlook the famous cases of book burning during the Middle Ages of various works considered blasphemous by the official Church, like the theological works of Abelard, ordered by Pope Innocent III in 1140, or the Talmud copies, ordered by Pope Gregory IX, in 1248. The reforms of the Dominican friar Savonarola in Florence brought not only books of witchcraft and divination, but also the works of Dante, Ovid, Propertius, and Boccaccio to the stake. The phenomenon of book burning lasted until well into the 20th century, when the Nazis purged the works of the Judaic world, or authors of Jewish origin, such as Albert Einstein or Sigmund Freud, and also of those who opposed or protested against the Nazi regime: Thomas and Heinrich Mann, Arnold and Stephan Zweig, Jack London, Upton Sinclair, and Émile Zola. The 20th century ends with Salman Rushdie's well-known case, whose text, *The Satanic Verses*, was burnt on 2 December 1988 by the members of a Muslim community in a city in England, Bolton. The action against Rushdie was repeated a month later, on 14 January 1989, also in England, as a typical case of self-censorship on group-level, in this case Muslim fundamentalism, which sanctions any manifestation of one of their members who at a certain moment detaches him/herself from the group and contests it.

The diversity of the area of censorship makes almost impossible any attempt to systematically settle the occurrences of censorship in the course of time along certain thematic fields; yet, the attempt to follow one leading direction, be it temporal or geographic-spatial, would not yield more results either. For instance, in order to get an overview of the ways censorship functioned in the case of the film, both morally and politically, in completion of the article dedicated entirely to the eighth art a series of other articles should be noted, coming from the same thematic field, but referring to specific films, or even to specific artists whose films were censored. Then one should not omit the articles that refer to

the officially controlled film industry of certain countries. In Great Britain, for instance, a censoring committee has been functioning since 1913, *The British Board of Film Censors*, which had the task of allowing the broadcast only of movies beyond any “suspicion”: “No film subject will be passed that is not clean and wholesome and absolutely above suspicion.”¹ A film that passed for broadcasting was classified with either the letter “U” (for universal exhibition), or “A” (for public exhibition). One movie that was not permitted to be broadcast in England was the production of Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, *Un chien andalou* (1929, *An Andalusian Dog*), an expression of surrealism in the art of film, considered to be a violation of bourgeois artistic senses. This organ of control functions even today, certainly adapted to present needs; since 1985 it has become the *British Board of Film Classification*, also taking control over film production on video support.

The difficulty of following up one certain thematic track, especially with an exponentially growing amount of information, does not make censorship an easy choice for the tasks of a review. Naturally, for a contemporary reader, it would seem much more interesting to analyze the current subjects of censorship, which are also numerous, thus making it again difficult to choose the ones to comment on. Of extreme relevance would be, for instance, the choice of the article connected to modern war reports, even more so as the majority of the conflicts of war in the second half of the last century were also carried out in the media. Also an act of censorship is the interdiction for the accredited journalists in Iraq, during the first Gulf War in 1991, to refer to certain types of information, usually included in the category of military secrets, like the number of troops, their placement, or the type of armament used by the fighting troops.² A revised edition of the encyclopedia would probably reveal that censorship is relevant even today, by pointing to the forms that it took during the second Gulf War, mentioning, for instance, the advice given to those who got on the stage of the Academy Awards in 2003, not to make any comment about America’s involvement in the war.

Besides these forms of explicit censorship, an implicit, tacit form of censorship also attracts attention, without being considered the result of official interdiction. It is the case, for example, of the silent option not to broadcast the works of Wagner on radio and TV channels in Israel, though it has not been explicitly forbidden. The attempts to introduce Wagner to the Jewish public failed several times, until 2001,

¹ *Censorship...*, op. cit. vol. 1., 333.

² *Censorship...*, op. cit. vol. 4., 2609.

when conductor Daniel Barenboim succeeded, on a music festival in Jerusalem, after 30 minutes of debate with the audience, to convince them to listen to the composer's famous anti-Semitic musical essay from 1850, *Das Judentum in der Musik*, the *Prelude* of the opera *Tristan and Isolde*.

It has also been shown how, in the course of time, an act of repression, of censorship, had a contrary effect, and has even contributed to a better knowledge of the censored product, by attracting the attention of the public to it. This feature of censorship can be traced down especially to the cultural area of the countries of the former communist bloc, where the reputation of certain authors, both in their country and abroad, was consolidated by the very fact of their having been censored by the oppressive communist system. One such author is the Czech writer Milan Kundera, treated in the Encyclopedia in a separate article; the censoring of his novel *The Joke*, as well as his implication in the events of 1968, were to strengthen abroad his image of a militant anti-communist, arousing the interest of foreign publishers for his work. Of the Romanian writers whose work suffered because of political censorship, separate articles are dedicated to Paul Goma and Norman Manea. One cannot but agree with Ștefan Borbély, who deplores the omission from the Encyclopedia of two well-known opponents of the communist regime in Romania, Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca, whose roles played at the Radio Free Europe have not been mentioned.¹

Censorship in Romania is the subject of a study by Adrian Marino. Choosing Marino is of course not accidental, from at least two viewpoints: first, because his intellectual activity suffered due to the change of the political regime in Romania, both in his years of detention, and later on as an opponent. Secondly, because he shows today the most coherent interest in the investigation of the idea of freedom, already materialized in a work that sketches the future history of censorship in Romania. This *introduction* to the larger project of a study on freedom and censorship in Romania outlines two of the major objectives of the research into the idea of freedom of thought and expression: first, the completion of a work of reference in the field, absent from Romanian culture, and second, the proof of a historical tradition of the idea of freedom of thought in Romania.²

¹ Ștefan Borbély, "Enciclopedia mondială a cenzurii. Schiță pentru delicii parțiale" (The World Encyclopedia of Censorship: A Sketch for Partial Delights), in *Observator cultural* 151 (2003): 12.

² Adrian Marino, *Cenzura în România. Schiță istorică introductivă* (Censorship in Romania: An Introductory Historical Outline), Craiova: Aius, 2000, 13.

In his article on Romania, Adrian Marino outlines in a historical perspective, up to 1920, the forms in which censorship manifested itself, subordinated to the interdependent lay or ecclesiastical authorities, separate for the case of Transylvania, and of the other two provinces with a similar way of administration, Moldavia and Valachia. A script of Voivod Șuțu of Valachia, from 1784, subordinated the publication of religious books to the control of civil power; the script was regulated by his successor, Alexandru Moruzi, who restricted the act of censorship only to periodicals and books about the Ottoman Empire. A real Committee of Censorship was created only after the Russian-Turkish war (1828-29), which was meant to supervise all publications printed on the territory of the two Romanian principalities.¹

In Transylvania censorship had the same form as in the other two provinces, except that the coordinating institutions functioned under an administration that followed the political principles of the Empire and of the Catholic Church, especially of the newly established Greek Catholic Church. Thus, starting with 1777, the instructions given by a special censoring committee, *Commissio Regio Librorum Censoria*, applied to Transylvania as well, the first list of prohibited books, published in 1781, *Catalogus librorum prohibitorum*, contained 38 titles. The representatives of the *Școala Ardeleană* (Transylvanian School, cultural movement of the Romanians in Transylvania in the 18th century) had a fairly tense relationship with the authorities, both lay and ecclesiastical, due to the promotion of the ideas of the Enlightenment. All throughout the 19th century censorship in Transylvania developed its official and legal frame of work, focusing especially on the hidden political activity behind cultural, literary, or religious manifestations.

Following the Great Union in 1918, the Constitution from 1923 guaranteed the right to free opinion and voicing of convictions. In the period between the two World Wars, censorship received a predominantly political accent in Romania, just as in other European countries, directed either against leftists (putting the Communist Party into illegality in 1924), or against the extreme right wing (trying to diminish the influence of the Iron Guard), serving current political interests.

After the Second World War, during the communist regime, official control over all cultural, political, or even religious manifestations was part of state policy, taking an important place in the interests of the Communist Party's leading minority. Due to the lack of space, Marino's

¹ *Censorship...*, op. cit., vol. 3., 2043.

article obviously tries to limit itself to a few aspects of censorship in a totalitarian regime, underlining the most visible ones, and those that gained national and international notoriety. Marino's observation regarding the duplicity of communist censorship stands out as especially interesting, as one that imposed itself to such an extent that it succeeded to instruct and promote a spirit of self-censorship, on occasions even more efficient than official censorship, which theoretically was abolished at the end of the 70's.

Two other shorter articles complete the information on Romania, one about religion by Janice Broun, and one about Hungarian literature from Romania by György Gömöri, competently reviewed by Ștefan Borbély in his article on the encyclopedia. As Ștefan Borbély points out, the lack of an article about censorship in the German cultural space gives an incomplete overview on censorship in Romania.

Certainly, there are other omissions in the encyclopedia of censorship, and criticism has already signaled and will signal them in the future. Yet, one has to bear in mind that it is the product of numerous collaborations, which presumes, with all the editors' endeavors, a certain inequality in valor in treating the topics. On the other hand, as it is a work that covers such a varied, yet duplicitous thematic field, it is almost impossible to exhaustively grasp the phenomenon of censorship in all its manifestations in the course of time. Future revised editions will probably have the task to add new information that was left out from this first edition, or to make rigorous corrections to the ones already published.

Over and above these observations, the *Encyclopedia of Censorship* still remains an outstanding cultural phenomenon, even if as an intention it came after the events that provoked it. In addition, regardless from what perspective issues are viewed, to write about censorship means, as István Király argues, to be condemned to an "eternal phase difference"¹ from the moment that provoked the repressive reaction.

¹ István Király, "Cenzura și timpul fisurat" (Censorship and the Fissured Time), in *Tribuna* 33-36 (2000); also in the present volume, pp. 239-246.