

treating these diseases and that this has implications for policy regarding AIDS, both in Scotland and in Britain as a whole.

Davidson's conclusions include a now well-known argument that finds attitudes toward and treatment of VD to be based as much on the "moral assumptions and social anxieties surrounding sexuality as by the medical dimensions of the issue" (327). While he does present some aspects of this view as having a uniquely Scottish character, his book is most valuable not because Scotland offers a particularly revealing example of the history of VD but because the sources with which Davidson has constructed and presented his detailed case study are so rich.

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Politics, Prudery and Perversions: The Censoring of the English Stage, 1901–1968. By NICHOLAS DE JONGH. London: Methuen, 2000. Pp. xvi + 272. £16.99; \$21.95.

Governing Morals: A Social History of Moral Regulation. By ALAN HUNT. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Pp. x + 273. £42.50; \$65.00.

Bound and Gagged: A Secret History of Obscenity in Britain. By ALAN TRAVIS. London: Profile Books, 2000. Pp. viii + 344. £16.99; \$21.95.

There is a long, inglorious, and still continuing history of censorship in Britain in which long-standing themes of national sexual prudery and ruling-class secrecy have been intricately intertwined. There is also a fairly long tradition of writing books about it.

The books by Alan Travis and Nicholas de Jongh form part of a lengthy polemical tradition that details the absurdities and biased assumptions under which the censorship of books, plays, pictures, and so on deemed obscene has taken place in Britain with an intention to improve the situation. Both works are designed for a general audience but are nonetheless of considerable interest to historians of sexuality, although they must be used with some caution.

Both authors, particularly Travis, cover ground already well trodden by others: Alec Craig in *The Banned Books of England* (1937, reprinted in 1962), C. H. Rolph in *Books in the Dock* (1969) and *The Trial of Lady Chatterley: Regina v. Penguin Books Ltd.* (1961), and John Sutherland in *Offensive Literature* (1982). However, Travis was able to gain access to previously closed files in the Public Record Office, though he concentrates mainly on well-known cases of prosecutions, such as Radclyffe Hall's *The*

Well of Loneliness, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and the works of D. H. Lawrence. In the Lawrence case he does elucidate the author's long struggle with the authorities well before the posthumous courtroom triumph of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (and demonstrates that this case was to all intents lost by the Crown even before the notorious "wives and servants" speech by prosecuting counsel). He has a useful chapter on the routine policing of obscene literature and the secret Home Office Blue Book of titles of books subject to destruction orders by magistrates throughout the country.

Travis's use of the relevant files illuminates the contradictions and tensions between different individuals and departments. Oxbridge-educated civil servants in Whitehall were routinely embarrassed by local police forces confiscating classics of European literature (Boccaccio's *The Decameron* was a regular victim) and succeeding in getting them condemned by provincial magistrates. An issue Travis does not address here is that of context: while it was not infrequently claimed that the works that had been confiscated and destroyed as pernicious literature were freely available in the local public library, one can envisage that when these books were found in the company of soft-core pulp fiction and nudist magazines in the recesses of the shops of dubious booksellers, there was a certain element of guilt by association.

Following from claims that the books that were the subject of police action could be found in local libraries (a subject that has never to my knowledge been addressed by historians) is a question about the public library and "dangerous literature" in Britain. Were librarians acting as the custodians of the public's right to know and to have access to at least classic or serious works dealing with sexual topics? Up to a point perhaps they were, though probably only the in-depth study of local library committee records and details of purchasing policies would confirm this. Anecdotal evidence, however, suggests that when libraries did hold, for example, Havelock Ellis's *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, it was seldom on the open shelves and more often in the librarian's office. This was probably less an issue of clear-cut censorship than of security, books of this kind being far more prone to vanishing silently from the shelves than being checked out.

The coverage in Travis's book is spotty and not entirely consistent. Most chapters focus on the censorship of printed material (and sometimes visual images), but the later chapters provide a brief account of the end of theatrical censorship in Britain (discussed in far more detail by de Jongh) and consider issues involving videos and the Internet. While it may be argued that anxieties have shifted to these readily available, consumable, and hard to control means of purveying "obscene" images, there is little or no discussion of the contextually relevant subjects of film, radio, and television censorship except for the very recent period. The reason for this may well be the different conditions under which censorship of these media took

place and thus the different degree of accessibility to relevant archives. Whereas the actions of government departments (such as the Home Office, the director of Public Prosecutions, and the Metropolitan Police) can be traced through files that have survived in the Public Record Office (though only recently released for research), the British Board of Film Censors was set up by the nascent industry to provide standards of certification acceptable to the local authorities who actually licensed cinemas. The inner workings of the British Broadcasting Corporation and decisions about what could and could not be broadcast have not been thoroughly explored, although Lord Reith's puritanism and its effects during his influential period as director-general are well known.

A number of questions arise about who was, or might be, offended by what and how this was nuanced by social class. There were clearly differences of opinion between Whitehall civil servants and provincial police forces and magistrates over the salaciousness of Rabelais and *The Arabian Nights*. Presumably, there were also those who regarded Donald McGill's bawdy seaside postcards as harmless fun but might have been shocked at the Beardsley prints on display in the Victoria and Albert Museum or the Jim Dine paintings in the Tate Gallery that were the objects of police action in the 1960s. Not explored is the extent to which censorship generated a resistant culture with the kind of innuendo and double entendre featured in McGill's work and other popular manifestations (e.g., the *Carry On* films, in which apparently innocuous dialogue gains an entirely different slant when spoken by Sid James leering into Barbara Windsor's cleavage or in Kenneth Williams's tones of camp outrage). But de Jongh does mention the attempts of theatrical censors to prevent any introduction of stage "business" that might be considered suggestive.

The question of audience and acceptability is suggested (though not really addressed) in de Jongh's study of English stage censorship in the twentieth century. The ongoing low-level moral panic about stage representations manifested by the lord chamberlain's office and the examiners of plays seems eccentric in its concerns. Surely, one thinks, it would only be the relatively comfortable classes that could afford to go to the theater in the first place. A point that never becomes explicit or is given as much weight as it might bear in de Jongh's study is that commercial theater managers were on the side of the censor, since precensoring of plays was a more-or-less solid guarantee that they would not be prosecuted. Nor is the power of commercial criteria to influence what gets produced and the constraints that this places on playwrights adequately discussed. (These days, musicals seem to play the part in London's West End that drawing-room comedies did between the wars and well into the 1950s.) This was surely a major factor in what de Jongh claims were the "limits of freedom" following the 1968 Theatres Act. While Mrs. Whitehouse's private prosecution of the producer of *The Romans in Britain* (1980–82) for putting

a simulated act of male rape on stage was doubtless discouraging to dramatists and producers, this play was presented in the subsidized National Theatre: one may well imagine that West End theater owners were actuated less by fears of the legal consequences of staging “scenes of gay intimacy” (246) than by a feeling that these would not bring in the punters.

The story de Jongh is primarily interested in telling, however, is the unedifying tale of control by the lord chamberlain’s office over what appeared on the English stage until 1968. The lord chamberlain was not an elected official or a government appointee; he was an officer of the royal household. The day-to-day task of censoring plays was undertaken by examiners of plays personally appointed by him on grounds that are far from clear since their qualifications for the task tended to be somewhat hazy. De Jongh characterizes the twentieth-century examiners as a group as largely “upper middle-class, retired senior officers from the armed forces . . . intelligent and diplomatic” but “philistine, with little knowledge of serious drama and its traditions . . . little awareness or appreciation of the modern movement. . . . They relied on gut feelings,” which were antiradical and often tainted with the commonplace anti-Semitic and antihomosexual feelings of their day (xi). Furthermore, the process was a secret one. Communications between the lord chamberlain’s office and producers or managers were confidential, and there was no process of appeal. However, it was possible to achieve “compromises and concessions” by negotiations “conducted quietly behind the scenes,” especially for theater managers, whose own concerns tended to mesh with the preconceptions and assumptions of the examiners (x).

Throughout the century, the situation caused serious playwrights major distress and anguish. While the expedient of a “club” performance existed for unlicensed plays, by their nature (attendance required becoming a member of a club as well as simply purchasing a ticket) these performances were unable to command anything like the audience for the commercial sector. In addition, for dramatists making a polemical point, such performances largely meant “preaching to the converted” (28–29).

Besides political themes, transgressions of gender and class were the focus of the examiners’ blue-penciling activities. It is rather a pity that de Jongh does not seem to know Marie Stopes’s cogent feminist “Essay on the Censorship,” which makes quite explicit the gendered assumptions of the theatrical censors. It was printed as a preface to her own (unperformed) play, *Vectia*, based on her first, unconsummated marriage. Proponents of serious theater were constantly irritated that light farces regularly got through the censorship net. A purity campaigner giving evidence to the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene Council’s post–First World War investigation into the state and sexual morality contrasted the struggle of social hygiene activists in trying to get Brieux’s famous play on venereal disease, *Damaged Goods*, produced, with the license afforded to productions such as *A Little*

Bit of Fluff. A figure who regrettably does not feature in de Jongh's account is the playwright, pacifist, and male suffragist Laurence Housman, whose own plays transgressed at least two of the major taboos by representing religious figures and royalty. He was the author of the series of playlets on the life of Queen Victoria, produced together as *Victoria Regina*, and published thoughtful attacks on the censorship.

De Jongh's book, like Travis's, is marred by careless proofreading. There are a number of errors of fact, the most egregious of which is the statement that the lord chamberlain's records for the twentieth century are held in the Public Record Office. The detailed records of theatrical censorship are actually in the Department of Manuscripts at the British Library.

Both Travis and de Jongh take a top-down approach in their accounts, representing censorship as a process imposed upon the populace from above by the powers of the state (even when differing elements among these powers had conflicting agendas). This was certainly an important element, and the secrecy with which censoring policies were implemented fits well with the arguments of David Vincent in *The Culture of Secrecy* (1998) concerning the pervasive lack of openness in British governmental activities. From this angle active censorship could appear as just one more facet of the state's intention to keep people in the dark.

However, this is not the whole story. Both accounts touch only fleetingly on the role of moral reform organizations and do not discuss their relationship to censorship in any depth. De Jongh, indeed, implies that they were very much part of the establishment themselves, claiming that the "views of these moral purity organizations were treated with respect by the Lord Chamberlain, since their ruling boards were thick with bishops and aristocrats" (73). This seems to misunderstand how voluntary bodies in the U.K. actually work. While their letter headings may glisten with well-known or socially elite names, the people doing the actual day-to-day work and providing the bulk of supporting membership tend to originate from rather humbler social echelons. For example, the aristocratic personages who were patrons of birth control clinics were not likely to have been fitting caps or making out case cards themselves or writing letters to medical officers of health, nor did the eminent luminaries who lent their names to the Pioneer Health Centre, Peckham, assist in the famous health overhaul process or participate in its democratic (even anarchistic) program of social activities.

Travis and de Jongh, therefore, neglect a very important aspect of the history of British censorship: not merely the acquiescence of the populace in the government's activities but the active demand, among certain sectors, for cleaning up society. This demand has, particularly since the 1960s, gone hand in hand with a belief that the government is not doing enough (or even going in the wrong direction). One can, of course, exaggerate

this morally reforming tendency within British society. There is a recurrent, if not exactly continuous, history of juries in obscenity cases who have taken into account questions of intention and applied that element of the “commonsense of the man in the street” that the jury system is supposed to bring to the judicial process. From the 1877 Besant/Bradlaugh trial for publishing a birth control tract, through the 1942 trial of Dr. Eustace Chesser’s *Love without Fear*, to the 1960 case, *Regina v. Penguin Books*, which involved *Lady Chatterley*, and beyond, juries have acquitted works that “the establishment” wished to condemn. This was certainly recognized by those in power: a note on the Home Office file relating to the prosecution of the barrister Henry Young in 1892 for disseminating Malthusian tracts indicates relief that he opted for trial by magistrate (leading to conviction) rather than by jury (which would almost certainly have led to acquittal). Nonetheless, organized bodies demanding moral reform played a significant part and had a political clout perhaps disproportionate to the quotient of the population they actually represented, and their role in the institutionalization of censorship cannot be overlooked.

Alan Hunt’s *Reforming Morals* explores a number of questions about the organizations established to regulate moral conduct, although it does not specifically address their involvement in the processes of censorship. The book is an austere, analytical, and scholarly work of historical sociology that examines the “theory and politics of moral regulation” in Britain and the United States. It focuses on the groups within society that have demanded stricter moral standards. While concentrating predominantly on the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Hunt’s book does consider earlier movements for moral reformation and includes a final chapter on “Making Sense of Contemporary Moral Politics.” The book lacks the vivid anecdotes of the other two volumes under review and eschews their chatty and accessible, indeed journalistic, style. Nor does it explore the copious archives of the organizations established during the fervor of the social purity movement of the late nineteenth century and enduring well into the mid-twentieth.¹ Instead, because it discusses a relatively long period of time and has a much wider geographical scope, Hunt’s book relies predominantly on secondary literature and on the published materials of individual moral reformers or organizations. Nonetheless, Hunt provides an illuminating study that addresses both the continuing tradition of moral reform and the changing ways in which this has been expressed.

Hunt argues against simplistic models of “social control” and “moral panic” when discussing moral regulation and also against any reductionist assignment of “projects of moral regulation” to particular political

¹A detailed analysis of the differences, as well as the alliances, between the various social purity/social hygiene organizations would be a valuable contribution. Indeed, some bodies, such as the National Council for Combatting Venereal Diseases (later the British Social Hygiene Council), were metaorganizations representing a plethora of interests.

tendencies. He makes the by now relatively accepted case that the impetus behind these campaigns tended (and still tends) to emanate from the middle classes rather than from those in institutional power. However, this does not prevent him from concurring with Nicola Beisel's conclusions in *Imperilled Innocents* (1997) concerning the appeal of Comstock's antiobscenity crusades to the beleaguered social elites of certain (but not all) East Coast cities in the United States in the later nineteenth century. A recurrent theme is the power of moral reform projects to bring together apparently opposed individuals and groups in a common cause and the distinctive "intermingling of disparate ideological elements." In fact, such projects, he argues, can only be successful "when [my emphasis] some specific social problem is articulated in such a way as serves to mobilize an array or umbrella of different social forces." Consequently, "effective moral politics tends to involve a mix of conservative and traditional ideologies along with radical and libertarian elements" (102). Thus he finds, as so many other historians have, that late-nineteenth-century purity movements "form a fascinating tapestry of contradictory elements. Practices and discourses drawn from religious revivalism, a conservative commitment to a traditional view of the sexual division of labour . . . and, at the same time, a radical critique of at least some components of the traditional gender order" (103) were combined in rather different ways in distinct national contexts.

Also thought-provoking is Hunt's suggestion of the thrills that moral reform could offer to the campaigner: "Projects of moral regulation involve participants who actively seek to chart and engage with social problems perceived and experienced as problematic or dangerous. Moral reformers are social explorers" (197). One thinks of the impeccably upper-middle-class Sybil Neville-Rolfe and her crusade against VD in the early twentieth century that led to the foundation of the National Council for Combatting Venereal Diseases. At one point in her long career she deemed it necessary to "go undercover" among prostitutes herself.

While this book is extremely stimulating, I have a number of quibbles concerning some elements in Hunt's arguments, mainly questions of nuance and interpretation of specific instances he cites. Did the term "abolitionism" used by the forces opposed to the regulation of prostitution refer, as he contends (102), to a goal of ridding the world of prostitution, or did it, in fact, refer to the goal of abolishing the regulations that both recognized prostitution and oppressed prostitute women? Certainly, there was a hope that once this apparatus had been removed prostitution would be reduced, but the abolitionist movement, on the whole, wanted to dissociate itself (as indeed he comments) from earlier movements that simply aimed at "suppressing" it. I personally would not place the transition from social purity to social hygiene as early as he does: I do not consider that

this had already taken place *by* the 1900s but believe it occurred at least a decade later.

Hunt's claim that "a full-blown regulationism was back in place" by the end of the First World War is an extremely curious reading of the "British system"—free, confidential, and expert treatment for all, in principle (if not in practice) eschewing old models of stigmatization and "guilt" and "innocence"—implemented as a result of the final report of the Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases. However, it is true, as far as one can ascertain, that the policing practices actually applied to street prostitutes remained standard over a much longer period; in some areas, many decades after the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act, the prostitutes themselves continued to believe that there was a "register."

Hunt's account of the royal commission (183) is simply wrong: far from being set up in 1914 due to concern over military personnel, it was established a year earlier as the result of concerns over the general inroads of venereal disease on the public health of the nation; several decades of pressure to set up an official investigation reached critical mass at the same time that "Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet" (Salvarsan) promised actual curability of syphilis. To the best of our knowledge, the royal commission had nothing to do with the (controversial and much protested) introduction of "Regulation 40D" as a wartime expedient under the Defence of the Realm Act, making it an offense for a woman with VD to have or even solicit sex with a member of the armed forces. This traditionalist response to the urgent problem of sexually transmitted diseases in the forces ran utterly counter to the agenda of destigmatization and antiregulationism promoted in the final report of the royal commission and the ideology of the recently established Ministry of Health regarding the best methods of preventive medicine. Hunt's aerial photographic method fails to register the nuances of the different positions of different government departments involved and, indeed, the role of various voluntary bodies.

The works that Hunt cites on the debates about the influence of "neo-Malthusianism" and the causes of the population decline in Britain from 1870 are not the most recent analyses of the topic. Stefan Petrow's *Policing Morals* (1994), an extremely useful study of the relationship between purity campaigners and the Metropolitan Police in the later nineteenth century, is not mentioned. Hunt also seems to think that the Indecent Advertisements Act of 1889 targeted birth control, which was not specifically mentioned in it: the 1892 prosecution of Henry Young for disseminating Malthusian tracts was, in fact, undertaken under the Post Office Act. The drive for social purity was not as exclusively Protestant as Hunt argues: certainly in the British context there were Catholic bodies with similar interests. On the influence of purity rhetoric and its capacity to have "compounded feelings of sexual trepidation" (177), the correspondence received by Marie Stopes,

author of the epoch-making marriage manual *Married Love*, from its first publication in 1918, is illuminating. Thousands of men from a wide social range and of all ages wrote to her expressing fears and concerns about sex that had clearly been exacerbated (in some cases quite explicitly) by social purity teachings.²

Nonetheless, Hunt makes important points even if it would be nice to have these deployed in a closer reading of the activities of particular moral reform bodies and their intersection with the institutions of state power, both central and local. He strongly emphasizes the extent to which Victorian purity campaigns were directed toward the middle and upper classes and toward men. This did not exclude the possibility of policing the lower orders and disorderly women—as he also comments, disciplines of self-formation that manifested as an “exhibition of self-control” could provide “moral authorization for attempts to impose external controls over others” (98).

None of the books reviewed here gives us the full complexity of censorship, silencing, and speaking out. There are no references to the Home Office’s decision that the public interest would be best served by not prosecuting Edward Carpenter’s *The Intermediate Sex*, in spite of some pressure from below to do so, for fear of drawing it to the attention of a wider audience than what seemed to the civil servants to be its natural constituency. There is barely any recognition that moral reformers were themselves censored when they spoke out on matters deemed best left in silence: local authorities, for example, refused licensing to propaganda films on VD disseminated by the British Social Hygiene Council; the problems with producing Brioux’s *Damaged Goods* have already been mentioned. Nor do we get any sense of the way in which censoring “obscene” literature, like the policing of various other elements falling within the purlieu of “morality” in Britain, was merely a way of ensuring that it was only available to those “in the know” or with access to sources of supply (whether private theater clubs in London or bookstores in Paris, where one might purchase *Ulysses*), which often meant those who already had some form of social privilege. One thinks of abortion before the 1967 Act and the “Law for the Rich” that meant that anyone with £100 and certain doctors’ names or telephone numbers could readily obtain this “illegal” operation, and of the relative impunity of the “everyone knows” but never-outed establishment homosexuals, and those with the entrée to private clubs who did not have to resort to “cottaging” with its attendant risks.

All three works discussed above make some contribution to our understanding of issues of censorship and movements for moral reform in Britain. However, none of them manages to bring together all the elements necessary for a really satisfactory study of the subject: detailed

²See Lesley A. Hall, *Hidden Anxieties* (Cambridge, 1991).

archival research on both a national and a local level, in official records and those of voluntary bodies and campaigning individuals, with the kind of theoretical analysis Hunt gives us. We are left with rather more questions than answers.

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Wellcome Library for the History and Understanding of Medicine
London



Willa Cather and Others. By JONATHAN GOLDBERG. Series Q. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001. Pp. 240. \$54.95.

Best known as a scholar of gender and sexuality in early modern British literature, Jonathan Goldberg, author of *Queering the Renaissance*, turns his attention to early-twentieth-century American literature and its cultural context in his newest monograph, *Willa Cather and Others*. Primarily aimed at literary scholars, this book locates Cather's better-known novels—*O Pioneers!*, *My Ántonia*, *The Song of the Lark*, and *The Professor's House*—in a rich cultural cartography that includes not only her lesser-known fiction and journalism but a broad range of cultural phenomena: diva worship among early-twentieth-century lesbian opera buffs, homoeroticism and homophobia in the cultural constructions of World War I shell shock, early-twentieth-century travel writing, and documentary photography of Native Americans in the 1930s.

Taking as his starting point Cather's own seemingly oxymoronic aesthetic principle that the quest of an author is not representation but the evocation of what she calls "the thing not named," Goldberg unpacks this term and extends it to explicate multiple texts and contexts. Critic Sharon O'Brien first linked "the thing not named," with its echoes of "the love that dare not speak its name," to Cather's homosexuality, but Goldberg takes Cather's principle further. He links Cather's expressed desire to point to, to evoke, to dream "the thing not named" inextricably to her sexuality but refuses a one-to-one equation that would simply substitute "lesbian desire" for "the thing not named" as the coded secret of all Cather's texts. Instead, he steers his reader on a much less direct route from textual surface to textual depth and from life to art, illustrating, for example, how Cather used seemingly heteronormative plot lines to represent deeply homoerotic desires, or how she engaged almost obsessively in various novels with male-male homoerotic dynamics as a mode of "not naming" (but certainly queering) such "things" as authorial identification and readerly desire.