

Banned Books: Censorship, Ethics and Twentieth-Century Literature

Instructor: Andrew Koenig

Course description: In this junior tutorial, we will study in depth four twentieth-century novels, and one poem, that have undergone censorship, provoked controversy, and sparked landmark court cases. By attending to the legal history of censorship, as well as the various grounds for censorship (e.g., obscenity, libel, sedition, blasphemy), we will restage longstanding debates over appropriateness, language and limits on freedom of expression. Our first case study will be James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922); in addition to reading 6 of the novel's 18 episodes, we will read an account of the publication and trial of *Ulysses* as well as the landmark legal decision that allowed for its importation into the US. Our next case study will be *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1932) by D. H. Lawrence, another modernist novel that faced legal challenges on grounds of obscenity. We will read excerpts from the Chatterley trial, an unofficial account of the trial, Lawrence's own reflections on pornography and obscenity, and theoretical reflections on the subject of depicting sex in literature. Our third case study will be *The Master and Margarita*, a Soviet-era novel that was heavily censored. We will explore how censorship in the Soviet context, where censorship is primarily *political* rather than moralistic in motivation, differs from the Anglo-American context. Our fourth case study will be Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*, which was censored for its antiestablishment content, its candid depiction of homosexuality, and its liberal use of profanity. Our final case study will be *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov, a book that was never censored, but which was widely decried and published abroad because it could not find an American publisher. We will ask questions about the ethics of writing about pedophilia and track reactions to Nabokov's work among his peers. Our course will be punctuated by weeks where we focus primarily on legal history and theories and histories of censorship, from Plato to Freud to Leo Strauss. We will also pay a visit to Houghton Library, which will offer an opportunity to see and handle primary sources. This tutorial will introduce you to a diverse cross-section of twentieth-century literature, from the modernist era to the present, as well as scholarship that attends to the legal status and ethical claims of these texts. Through a library session at Houghton and individual meetings, we will see how to use legal history, narrative ethics and other critical methodologies, as well as primary sources, to make fresh arguments about these polarizing texts.

Program objectives:

- 1) Craft a prospectus, annotated bibliography and research paper on a topic of your choosing
- 2) Engage with and respond to the arguments of other scholars in your own writing
- 3) Learn how to craft and organize an extended academic argument

Course-specific objectives:

- 1) Study the history of several landmark obscenity trials & arguments for/against censorship
- 2) Relate the rise of 20th-century literature to the history of censorship, from modernism on
- 3) Learn how to use legal history and literary criticism as scholarly tools

Required texts: available at the Coop and on reserve at Lamont. I will provide pdfs of shorter texts. Please let me know if you're unable to purchase, rent or borrow the required texts.

James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Gabler ed.)
D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*
Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master & Margarita*

Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*
Allen Ginsberg, *Howl and Other Poems*
[Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home*]

Assignments:

Course participation (25%): Students are expected to attend seminar every week. More than one unexcused absence will result in a 1/3 grade drop.

Written work (75%): This tutorial will prepare you to write a 20pp research paper on a topic of your choosing. Ultimately, you will make a scholarly intervention by addressing a research question developed in consultation with me.

- 1) Keyword assignment (1pg): For this assignment, you are to write a 500-word keyword-style entry on one of the following words: *sedition; libel; obscenity; censorship; blasphemy*. You should consult the *OED*, as well as *three other sources* in the course of researching your keyword. Your entry should offer a broad definition of your term, offer some historical background, as well as distinguishing characteristics that set it apart from its neighbors. (10%)
- 2) Bibliographic entry (1pg): For this assignment, you are to write a one-page bibliographic-style entry on one of the items related to censorship, book bans and samizdat that we have seen during our visit to Houghton Library. *This would also be a good opportunity to speak with Houghton's curator and identify any primary sources you might wish to incorporate into your final paper.* (10%)
- 3) Annotated bibliography of ≥ 10 sources you plan to consult in your research and a prospectus of your final paper. You should describe each source in a few short sentences and explain how you expect it will shape the writing of your paper. The prospectus should outline the tentative thesis for your final paper, your plan of action for conducting research, and your plan for integrating secondary sources. (10%)
- 4) A graded draft or partial draft of your final research paper, on a topic of your choosing, approved in advance. (10%)
- 5) Research paper (20pp): An original work of research that meaningfully engages with the work of other scholars on the topic you have chosen. (35%)

Academic integrity: All material you submit is expected to be your own work. Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and subject to discipline from the University Honor Council. Please speak with me if you are unclear on Harvard's expectations and standards. *NB:* Use of ChatGPT or any other AI software in the writing of papers is strictly prohibited.

Accommodations for students with disabilities: If you require academic accommodations because of a documented disability, please present a Faculty Letter from the Accessible Education Office and speak with me. I'm committed to making this course accessible for all students.

Course policies:

- *Undivided attention:* I prefer to keep use of electronics to a minimum. Please let me know if this restriction poses a problem.
- *Extensions* will be granted on a case-by-case basis but must, except in case of emergency, be requested in advance (~5 days before due date).

Course content: Much of the material we will encounter in this class is salacious, offensive, or disturbing. You should only take this course if you are willing to encounter this content.

Case #1: *Ulysses*

Week 1 (Introduction): The History of Censorship in England

Primary text: John Milton, *Areopagitica* (try and read it twice through)

Secondary texts: Annabel Patterson, Introduction to *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England*; Thomas Keymer, Introduction to *Poetics of the Pillory*

Week 2: *Ulysses*

Primary text: Joyce, Episode 4 (“Calypso”); Episode 5 (“Lotus Eaters”); Episode 8 (“Lestrygonians”)

Secondary texts: *United States v. One Book Called Ulysses*; Kevin Birmingham, *The Most Dangerous Book: The Fight for James Joyce’s Ulysses* (part 1)

Optional: Hugh Kenner, *Ulysses* (chapter-by-chapter guide to *Ulysses*)

Week 3: *Ulysses* cont’d

Primary text: Joyce, Episode 12 (“Cyclops”) and Episode 17 (“Ithaca”)

Birmingham, *The Most Dangerous Book: The Fight for James Joyce’s Ulysses* (part 2)

Optional: Hugh Kenner, *Ulysses* (chapter-by-chapter guide to *Ulysses*)

Week 4: *Ulysses* cont’d

Primary text: Joyce, Episode 13 (“Nausicaa”) and Episode 18 (“Penelope”)

Secondary text: Maud Ellmann, “*Ulysses*: The Epic of the Human Body”

Birmingham, *The Most Dangerous Book: The Fight for James Joyce’s Ulysses* (part 3).

Optional: Hugh Kenner, *Ulysses* (chapter-by-chapter guide to *Ulysses*)

Case #2: *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*

Week 5: Sex, Pornography, and the Obscene

- D. H. Lawrence, “Pornography and Obscenity”
- Susan Stewart, *Crimes of Writing*, Ch 8, “The Marquis de Meese”
- Raymond Williams, “Sex,” from *Keywords*
- *Jacobellis v. Ohio*

First library visit – meet with Odile Harter to explore how to conduct research

Week 6: *Lady Chatterley's Lover*

Primary text: DHL, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (Chapters 1–10)

Please read the Opening Address for the Prosecution and Defence, and the Verdict in *Regina vs. Penguin Books Ltd.*

Mini-assignment due (keyword: *sedition, libel, obscenity, censorship, or blasphemy*)

Week 7: *Lady Chatterley's Lover* cont'd

Primary text: DHL, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (Chapters 11–19); “A Propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*”

Please read Sybille Bedford, “The Trial of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*,” an unofficial record of the trial, and Damian Grant, “D. H. Lawrence: a suitable case for censorship.”

Case #3: *The Master and Margarita*

Week 8: *The Master and Margarita*

Primary text: Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita* (part 1)

Secondary text: Cristina Vatulescu, “*The Master and Margarita*: The Devil’s Secret Police File” from *Police Aesthetics*; Ann Komaromi, “The Material Existence of Soviet Samizdat”

Week 9: Houghton Library Visit

Please read these three essays on censorship in advance of our library visit:

- Matthew Bunn, “Reimagining Repression: New Censorship Theory and After”
- Michael Holquist, “Corrupt Originals: The Paradox of Censorship”
- Helen Freshwater, “Towards a Redefinition of Censorship”

We will be meeting with Christine Jacobson at Houghton Library to look at an array of materials related to censorship in the Anglo-American as well as Soviet contexts.

Week 10: *The Master and Margarita* Cont'd

Primary text: Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita* (part 2)

Secondary text: Peter Scotto, “Censorship, Reading, and Interpretation: A Case Study from the Soviet Union”

Second mini-assignment due (bibliographic entry on item from library visit)

Case #4: *Howl*

Week 10: Theories of Censorship

- Plato, *Republic* III and X, “The Banishment of the Poets”
- Sigmund Freud, “The Censorship of Dreams” (1915)
- Leo Strauss, “Persecution and the Art of Writing”

Prospectus & annotated bibliography due

Week 11: *Howl*

Primary text: Allen Ginsberg, *Howl*

Secondary Text: Bill Morgan and Nancy Peters, eds., *Howl on Trial*

Case #5: *Lolita*

Week 12: *Lolita*

Primary text: Nabokov, *Lolita* Part 1 (incl. “Introduction” and “On a Book Entitled *Lolita*”)

For this week we will read contemporary reviews from the time of *Lolita*’s publication: Kingsley Amis, “She Was a Child and I was a Child”; Howard Nemerov, “The Morality of Art”; and Lionel Trilling, “The Last Lover”

Graded draft of junior paper due

Week 13: *Lolita*

Primary text: Nabokov, *Lolita* Part 2

Secondary texts: Luke Sayers, “‘A brief history of the nymphet’s tribulations’: The Interpretation of Obscenity in the Early Reception of Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*”; James Phelan, “Estranging unreliability, bonding unreliability, and the ethics of *Lolita*”

Junior Essay due after reading week

OPTIONAL FINAL SESSION

Case #6: *Fun Home*

Primary text: Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home*

Legal text: Andrew Koppelman, “Does Obscenity Cause Moral Harm?”

Secondary Text: Ann Cvetkovich, “Drawing the Archive in Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home*”; Price, “Navigating a Doctrinal Grey Area: Free Speech, the Right to Read, and Schools”; Ariela Freedman, “Drawing on Modernism in Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home*”