

development in such a society is that sex will not be part of an authentic and intimate relationship of mutual love and concern, of genuine caring, but that it becomes rather a vehicle for transient, even though mutual, satisfaction. The interpersonal relationships which characterize the James Bond movies are representative of such. In these films, which have been fantastically successful, the major characters are expert at exploiting one another via aggressive and sexual means. The relationships are full of guile, threat, and are consequently extremely guarded. One does not get involved with others except in a casual, episodic manner. Bond is heroic, not because of his virtue, but because he is so eminently successful in exploiting others.

As a psychologist I find it hard to refrain from taking such relationships as symptomatic of our contemporary way of life. I am deeply chagrined at the tawdry spectacle of social elements which "push" or portray sexual stimuli and activities for the purpose of making money. The prime criterion for production, publication, presentation, marketing, etc., is the profit criterion: Will it sell; will it achieve a mass audience? Is there not something wrong with a social system which sacrifices almost everything else before the god of money? Have the business values of American society so pervaded the Church that we have neither the inclination nor moral courage to speak out against the evils of a system which glorifies profit?

Men will struggle for that which they cherish and will battle those things they perceive to be their enemies. Some see pornography as an unvarnished evil to be eradicated at the cost of free expression. As I see it, the real obscenity is the prostitution of human relationships, as exemplified by our use of one another for transient gratification and for money-making. Human energy, talents, and passions are employed in the service of exploitation and alienation, goals which are antithetical to the development of positive involvement in relationships of loving concern. For me, the mission of the Church is to foster man's brotherhood, under the fatherhood of God, and to fight man's alienation from God and man. This mission must be performed in the presence of many conflicting influences. In a policy which emphasizes constructive alternatives rather than censorship, is found uncertainty, choice, virtue, error, and, possibly, godliness.

## TOWARD A POSITIVE CENSORSHIP

*Stephen L. Tanner*

The argument over censorship and pornography is necessarily a muddled one. The factors involved are matters of taste and principle which do not lend themselves to simple logical treatment. The matters of taste concern aesthetic taste, which is the most difficult to define, communicate, or reason about; and the matters of principle concern moral principles of the most knotty, perplexing sort. But for me, out of this muddle, two points emerge clearly. The first is that despite the difficulty of tracing and defining such effects, literature and drama do serve in a significant way to shape the attitudes, values, and actions of our society. The influence of literature may have been limited or perhaps negligible in times past, but in our literate, movie-and-television-watching culture, that influence is real and must be reckoned with. The second point is

that despite repeated efforts, no society has yet perfected a harmless method of eliminating the distribution of pornography. And in the case of the United States, no *effective* method has been perfected either.

It is true that determining in what manner and to what degree literature influences the way people think and act is extremely difficult. Human behavior is complex, and modern research has done nothing to solve that complexity; if anything, it has only served to point it out more dramatically. Therefore, one must be careful about assigning causal significance to one condition of experience when even the simplest human act is the product of many conditions. It is unreasonable, for example, to assume that a pornographic book found in the bedroom of a youth who has been arrested for criminally assaulting a young woman is the cause of that assault. But the fact that the effects of literature are difficult to define in no way makes those effects less real. To say so would be similar to claiming that since we cannot clearly identify, define, and explain all the forces which are shaping history at this moment such forces have no effects. While recognizing the complexity of human behavior, and not succumbing to naturalistic determinism, I still see significant truth in the simple-minded formula that actions, in general, are the products of thought, and thinking, in turn, is a product of experience; and a large portion of the experience of an American today consists of reading books and magazines and watching television and movies. Therefore, it is only reasonable to expect that the raw material of that experience will determine, in large measure, the quality of the resulting actions.

Gore Vidal, in an article on pornography in *The New York Review of Books*, March 31, 1966, writes: "By their nature, pornographies cannot be said to proselytize, since they are written for the already hooked. The worst that can be said of pornography is that it leads not to 'anti-social' sexual acts but to the reading of more pornography. As for corruption, the only immediate victim is English prose." I suppose this is the average "enlightened" view of pornography, but in terms of logic it leaves something to be desired. How does one get hooked in the first place, for example? And though English prose may be the only "immediate" victim, that is not to say the *only* victim. In interesting contrast to Mr. Vidal's statement is this one by Dr. Max Levin, Clinical Professor of Neurology, New York Medical College: "The argument that no girl is ever ruined by a book is like the contention that there is no need to control the spread of germs, since the only people who succumb to germs are those with a predisposition to disease." There are some convincing arguments against censorship, but the old adage, "Nobody was ever seduced by a book," is not one of them. Phyllis McGinley is much nearer the truth when she says, "Since the invention of writing, people have been seduced by the power of the word into all kinds of virtues, follies, conspiracies and gallantries. They have been converted to religions, incited to revolutions, inspired to patriotism, urged to sin and lured into salvation."

Books affect people in many ways, but the effects of pornographic or "questionable" books which I find most alarming do not result directly from obscenity or the description of erotic situations. Obscenity, while it may be temporarily fascinating to some, is generally revolting in itself and will finally provoke disgust. The description of erotic situations can produce sexual desire which could conceivably produce undesirable actions, but there is plenty of sexual desire present in human nature anyway which is bound to surface peri-

odically. The dangerous effects of “questionable” literature are more indirectly produced. It is the contingent moral consequences of obscenity and erotic description which are most important to consider.

As I interpret the influence of literature on our culture, so-called “hard-core” pornography is not nearly so dangerous from a moral standpoint as books, movies, and television drama which, in treating their subjects, imply or even explicitly portray pernicious moral or social values. The danger is not inherent in the subject matter because, as the history of literature shows, almost any subject matter can be utilized in an aesthetic and, for that matter, moral way. How the subject is treated determines its value. The dominant method for presenting a story in our century has been to “show” rather than “tell” it. This method has produced some great literature, but it is also responsible for some very questionable responses to certain literature. Wayne Booth, in perhaps the most significant book on the theory of narration in recent years, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, analyzes very carefully and thoroughly this impersonal (meaning tending to obscure the author’s personality or judgments) or objective method of narration. In his last chapter, which deals with the morality of this method of narration, he shows how the modern writer uses a variety of powerful techniques to win his reader’s interest and sympathy for his subject and characters. But since the writer tries at the same time to keep his art “pure,” that is, to make it “objective” and not intrude his own judgments, such judgments are often hidden and it is possible for the reader to be seduced (i.e., by immersion in the point of view of a character) to an incorrect (in terms of what is justified by the work itself) and sometimes morally dangerous point of view. Booth uses as an example of the “seductive point of view” Celine’s work, *Journey to the End of the Night*. This novel, narrated in the first person, takes a modern picaresque hero through a series of sordid adventures — a pattern used frequently in contemporary fiction. It is all, of course, completely “objective”: Celine never makes any explicit value judgments. Booth suggests that a puzzled reader who expresses bewilderment might receive this answer: “But you are insisting on value judgments where value judgments are inappropriate. The very point of the book is that man is lost and confused.” The trouble with this answer Booth continues, is that the book does, necessarily, insist on value judgment: “To argue that the work simply intends to present a ‘vivid picture’ is meaningless, when the vivid picture consists of acts and statements which cannot be seen for what they are except in a setting of values.” Booth does not say it, but I think he would agree that the decision of a novelist to portray vividly the sordid aspects of life without making value judgments is in itself a value judgment. We can see a similar “objective” method of presentation used with the same possible consequences on the movie and television screen. The unevaluated slice of life is a popular form of modern expression. Generally, these slices of life are very realistically done and generate considerable interest and often sympathy in the viewer, but since the writer and producer deliberately avoided making explicit judgments, in fact, even tried to avoid implied judgments, sometimes the moral content is obscured, distorted, and is then frequently misinterpreted.

In all of these comments I have given the author the benefit of the doubt regarding the intended purpose of his work. We also must realize, of course, that some writers set out deliberately to persuade their readers to points of view that are destructive to their sense of individual and social meaning, not

merely challenges to particular personal or social values. In an article titled "Against Pornography" in *Harpers* (March 8, 1965), George P. Elliot points out the dangers presented by writers who deliberately use pornography as "a weapon of nihilistic destruction." His main example is Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*. He grants that this work should not be censored for its pornography because, "as a work of art, it has considerable merit, and it could not achieve its ends without the use of intrinsically pornographic episodes and images." But its purpose is not just aesthetic, it is nihilistic as well. "The literary value of the book is enough to redeem its pornography but not enough to make one ignore its destructive intention." He feels society has a right to protect itself from such an attack on its very existence.

If my arguments about the effects of literature can be allowed, some kind of censorship is desirable, but what kind will provide effective controls over deleterious art and literature without at the same time destroying the individual freedom we cherish? It is not my purpose to grapple with the bewildering question concerning the limits of the authority of society over the individual. The point I wish to make is that the present condition of censorship in America is most unsatisfactory. We have censorship laws, of course, and there are convictions made under these laws, but even so, as the *Time* essay (April 16, 1965) on the "new pornography" points out, "just about anything is printable in the U. S. today." All the famous (or rather infamous) and hard-to-get old volumes are on the paperback racks of nearly any drugstore. At the store where I buy my groceries, I can also pick up copies of *Fanny Hill* or *Tropic of Cancer*. Whether this is right or wrong becomes almost an irrelevant question for all practical purposes, because those who believe it is wrong will be able to do very little about it in this era when civil libertarians are enjoying such unprecedented prestige and influence. As a general rule, and as painful as the realization is to many of us, the decisions of our Supreme Court reflect the prevailing attitudes and values of the American people; and a Supreme Court so concerned with individual rights as to rule against prayer in schools and for increased respect for the suspected criminal's right to counsel is not going to put more censorship power in the hands of government.

Pornography is usually defined as that which is calculated to arouse sexual excitement. The task of ruling on pornography is difficult and wearisome for the American judiciary because what stimulates A does not stimulate B. No two people are likely to respond in the same way to the same stimulus. For this reason, and as an historical survey of legal tests for pornography illustrates, the legal definition has become increasingly narrow and vague. The present legal system quite effectively bans "hard-core" pornography, but this consists mainly of egregiously dirty pictures, not much literature. But, in my opinion, the literature has much greater moral implications than the pictures. Pictures can always be recognized for what they are, but this is not true of books or drama. Pictures can arouse sexual desire, but they cannot do much to shape attitudes or moral posture.

Another difficulty concerning censorship is the decision as to who is to do the censoring. There are plenty of reactions in current books and magazines to the flood of disgusting literature being published, but even the people who condemn this alarming plethora most vigorously tread softly on the issue of specific censorship measures. We are all too fond of our individual rights to desire very rigid governmental controls. Writers who do outline some specific

measures usually suggest censorship boards composed of experts from various fields. Always included is an expert in literature. This may be a good solution. Certainly, such a board would be more desirable than one composed of the widows of policemen, as was the case in Chicago at one time. But from my knowledge of experts, particularly literary experts, there would still be great variation in taste and opinion, and they would end up not screening out any more than is screened out at present.

I do not mean to sound entirely pessimistic about the possibility of meaningful censorship, and as I have tried to indicate, because literature does, in part, mold the moral conditions of society, the government does have an obligation to exercise some controls. The Church, as an institution for teaching and preserving morality, also has an obligation to work through democratic processes to control the distribution of pornography (taken in a broad sense). But to be more practical and realistic in this age of civil libertarianism, we must recognize that censorship by compulsion, or negative censorship, has limited possibilities. I think we should be more interested in what I see as the unlimited possibilities of a positive censorship, a voluntary censorship.

What I mean by a positive censorship is primarily a system of education. The methods of presenting a story have become highly developed in our century, and some of these methods have moral significance. The device of impersonal narration, for example, has already been mentioned. Readers must be taught how to read a work of fiction not simply so they will be able to understand and appreciate it as art, but also so they can accurately understand and evaluate the moral concepts expressed or implied in it. The most detrimental effects of "questionable" literature arise from the fact that such literature is not recognized for what it is. When pornography is recognized as pornography and is not disguised as art, most people can cope with it in a satisfactory way. When people recognize what the moral concepts within a story or a drama are and that they are not those which they accept or value, there is less danger of their being seduced by them. For example, Wayne Booth says that many of Mickey Spillane's readers

would drop him immediately if he intruded to make explicit the vicious morality on which enjoyment of the books is based: "You may notice, reader, that when Mike Hammer beats up an Anglo-Saxon American he is less brutal than when he beats up a Jew, and that when he beats up a Negro he is most brutal of all. In this way our hero discriminates his punishment according to the racial worth of his victims." It is wise of Spillane to avoid making such things explicit.

Indeed, it is wise for Spillane to avoid being explicit, but it is very unwise for a reader not to make explicit for himself what Spillane only implies. One form of a positive censorship would be to teach readers (and viewers) to see implied values, even though the author is very careful to conceal them.

The rhetorical devices available to a writer today enable him to make nearly any type of character or point of view sympathetic to the reader. This is wonderful for the writer and is the reason for the successful creation of much notable and praiseworthy literature. But when these devices are used carelessly, or for immoral purposes, the inexperienced or immature reader will likely be victimized. A young reader, or any reader for that matter, should be taught to recognize various narrative techniques and realize the

moral consequences of sympathizing with a particular character or point of view. This would enable him to recognize characters, situations, ideas, and values for what they are. Only then could he meaningfully opt for them or not.

The situation with pornography and censorship right now is particularly unsatisfactory because on the one hand laws and courts ban only the hardest of hard-core pornography, and on the other hand the church-going public rejects nearly any book which contains an obscene word or explicit sexual description. Neither of these positions is desirable. The ideal condition would be one in which people were equipped to sift moral from immoral; sensationalism from meaningfully heightened experience; literary pandering from serious literary expression. In other words, the freedom of literary expression which exists in our society is not in itself as dangerous as many suppose. What is dangerous is that this freedom of literary expression is not balanced by a corresponding freedom of literary appreciation; for the careless, uncritical, or immature reader is not a free reader in the best sense of that term.

As a church and as a people, instead of only striving to combat and censor morally bad literature in a negative way, we might try, in addition, to set better standards of taste in a positive way through forms of education which could provide us with a greater awareness of what literature is and does and with more intelligent, critical habits of reading. And, of course, what can be said for reading also applies to viewing. Within our Church, for example, in MIA, Seminary, and Institute, literature courses could be given. Not the old-fashioned courses in literary appreciation, which have a certain value but are generally abused by teachers who spend all their time rhapsodizing about subjective appreciative responses; rather, courses in literary criticism in which the definition of literature might include television and movie scripts, and the students could be taught methods of evaluating literature more commensurate with the times. They could be taught to recognize the kind of moral schizophrenia which results when members of the Church talk and accept absolute moral values on Sunday and then, usually unconsciously, sympathize with the relative values expressed or implied in so much of the literature, movies, and television they encounter during the week. Perhaps they could be brought to ponder inconsistencies like the fact that the commandment on Sunday reads "Thou shalt not commit adultery," but during the week it becomes "Thou shalt not commit adultery *unless* thou meetest someone more attractive or interesting or understanding than thy present spouse." Even the Home Teaching and Family Home Evening programs could be utilized to help our members recognize and cope with pornography and morally questionable literature. To teach people to avoid deleterious literature is good, but at best can only produce a cloistered virtue. In our culture, where so much morally hazardous literature is unavoidable, people must also be taught to cope with what they cannot avoid.

Another method of positive censorship our Church could adopt would be to provide book reviews and reading lists of valuable books for our people, particularly the young people, so as to stimulate them in worthwhile reading. This would serve to broaden and improve their literary tastes and, at the same time, decrease the possibility of their finding bad literature either by chance or simply because nothing else presented itself. Young people are not only seduced by what they read, but by what they do not find in their reading. If

a young person reads only books which focus on sex and violence, what conclusions can we expect him to draw about what is important both in literature and life? The most common guide to books for people of all ages nowadays is the best-seller list. Unfortunately, this list is like a sacred canon for many people, even though common sense as well as literary history should tell them that popularity is an unreliable test for worthwhile literature. Christians, who are trying to be in the world but not of it, should be particularly wary of uncritically accepting a list which represents the world's taste in books. It is too easy for people who judge by sales and press coverage alone to assume that men like James Baldwin, Henry Miller, and Norman Mailer are some kind of literary demigods. The reviews which our Church might make available, in addition to calling attention to good books perhaps not on the best-seller list, could also serve to examine and evaluate the books which are on that list. Such reviews must not simply be attacks; they should be intelligent, objective attempts to discover the book for what it really is. After all, there are not simply good books and bad books, moral and immoral. Most books are mixtures. A highly moral book, for example, might contain some rather explicit sexual description which serves a truly aesthetic or even moral purpose. This use of such description should be distinguished from the use made by the writer who is simply trying to sell books by shocking or enticing, or from the use made by the writer who writes a generally worthwhile book but has thrown in some vivid sexual description as a sop to current fashion. Reviews making such distinctions could be extremely valuable to the bewildered Church member who is trying to find some kind of moral stance upon entering the exciting but often disconcerting world of contemporary literature.

These suggestions for a positive censorship will appear idealistic to many, and I confess that they are rather idealistic. But nothing really worthwhile was ever accomplished by aiming low. In the final analysis, I am convinced that such a project of education is in fact more realistic and feasible than any project nowadays which aims to solve the problem only by proscriptive censorship.