

SUBJECT INDEX:

BANNED FILMS ~ CENSORSHIP



Nothing – not blasphemy, not disrespect for the monarchy or national institutions, not racial bigotry – excercises the state-appointed censors of western cinema more than the conjunctoin of children and adult sexual libertinism.

Both “NATTLEK” (above) and “SATYRICON” (left) created a firestorm of controversy with their suggestion (by means of cross-cutting) that young boys were witnesses to adult sexual activity. Neither film showed or suggested children engaged in sexual acts themselves, but the witnessing was corruption enough.

*This is the central premise of censorship. That we, the uneducated (and **all** children are uneducated in matters of sex) will tend to be corrupted by what we see. Corrupted politically, corrupted in faith, corrupted in morality. The premise is as old as Plato. It is unproven – it cannot be proven – but it continues to determine what we are allowed to see, hesr and read.*

Until television supplanted it in the 1950s, cinema was judged to be the prime opinion former, especially of the uneducated masses, and as such it was policed even more rigorously than the printed word. Today, when many would complain that anything and everything is permitted on the screen, material is in fact censored *fivefold*: firstly at the scripting and pre-production phase, secondly in the editing to final print, thirdly by official state institutions such as the British Board of Film Censors prior to general release, fourthly for certification to domestic video release, and fifthly by the (self-appointed) guardians of public taste in television networks, who commission and then *re-censor* films prior to broadcast – something which they please to call “editing for content”. The images we are permitted to see have been very thoroughly sieved.

It is important to recognise that censorship is not exclusively an external imposition on the film-making process, but occurs subliminally at the casting, script revision and storyboarding phases of every commercial production, as well as in the marketing and pre-marketing of the film. The selection of, or avoidance of, particular camera angles, particular shots, particular names; the selection of race, nationality and gender in the casting of unsympathetic roles, all these entail a significant auto-censorship process. As with the rigorously crafted “photo opportunities” politicians and celebrities use to present themselves in a given light, film-makers too select their images always with one eye on an internal weathervane of what, in any given decade, must or must not be said and shown. The greatest censor of any film is always its director.

The first British film to receive a censor’s certificate was “**MARY OF BRIARWOOD DELL**” (1913 – of no relevance to this archive). Initially there were no age restrictions on exhibitors, and as late as the 1930s parents could take their small children to see the latest terror offering – “**DRACULA**” or “**FRANKENSTEIN**”. In the 1950s (so I’m told) children could still view most films, provided they were accompanied by an adult, and it was a common sight to find kids hanging around the doors of a cinema asking adult patrons to escort them in. The introduction of the “X” certificate in 1952 created for the first time a category of films children were forbidden to see under any circumstances, and absurdly enough the first film to receive an “X” certificate starred 13-year old Andrew Ray – “**THE YELLOW BALLOON**”. Since that date children have starred in many “X”-rated features, and tabloid writers have had predictable fun recycling the story of the young star – Linda Blair in “**THE EXORCIST**”, Mischa Barton in “**LAWN DOGS**” – denied admission to the films in which they played the central role. Censorship, so far from withering on the vine in more “open”, “tolerant” societies toward the end of the century, proliferated into new media and a fistful of new, stricter, age classifications, as though blindfolding children were the primary objective of the exercise.

In reality, blindfolding *adults* is the primary objective. The pre-eminent terror of all censors is and always has been human sexual appetite. Why this should be so, and remains so long after “the permissive generation” have settled into flabby middle age, is a subject for a doctoral thesis unto itself. Suffice to say that sex is anti-civilisation, anti-social order, anti-family. Sex is nature’s own terrorist faction. This archive’s primary focus is on childhood, and many of the titles below have attracted controversy because a child appears present as a witness to adult sexual performances – “**NATTLEK**”, “**SATYRICON**” – are themselves the object of adult sexual interest – “**LOLITA**” – or are seen to be actively eliciting that interest – “**LEON**”. Many films (a surprising number) have treated with the theme of adult/child sexual relationships in a non-judgmental, even sympathetic, fashion without attracting either controversy or censorship difficulties, so it would be mistaken to suppose that the topic itself has been considered “out of bounds”, even in American cinema (where it travels under the guise of “sex initiation” comedies). Sex, however, is not the only focus of the disapproving eye.

Child nudity was for a very long time considered to be emblematic of “innocence” itself – which is to say, a notional pre-sexual state of grace, more fondly imagined than real. The post 1980s “sex abuse” frenzy – which has been actively exported from the US to the entire developed world – has so stigmatised child nudity that it is now far more problematic to film-makers than adult nudity, an inversion which would have seemed flatly ludicrous in the 1930s or 50s. The California Penal Code now makes it a criminal offence for a film company even to *suggest* a scene, however innocuous, that would entail child nudity, and an offence for

any parent or guardian to give consent to it. The Disney Corporation has responded to these concerns by unilaterally scouring its own back catalogue and deleting or “fogging out” any harmless glimpses of naked children there.

Some American films have attracted controversy on these grounds, though happily continental cinema appears to continue to regard nudity *per se* as unproblematic. The American neurosis, however, is so profound and total that it can be discerned in films without nudity of any description. Children are filmed now predominantly in medium shot – from the waist up – as though their lower halves are a positive magnet to illicit lust, whether clothed or not. Watching contemporary US films for children, this Maginot line for camera angles is almost universally observable – another instance of auto-censorship. The fig leaves appended to nude statues by the Victorians seems quite moderate by comparison.

Elsewhere in the world other concerns – primarily political or religious – figured large in the banning of films, and the archive includes some titles which made themselves unwelcome on grounds unconnected with the presence of children in them.

City After Dark
A Clockwork Orange
Cronica de un Niño Solo

Argentina 1964 : “Chronicle of a Boy Alone”. Banned by the Argentine authorities for a year, this “searing indictment of a fascist regime running roughshod over its most vulnerable citizens” is a grim portrait of a boy ([Diego Puente](#)) committed to a state-run orphanage.

Dawandeh

Iran 1984 : “The Runner”. Street boy ([Majid Nirumand](#) +/-13) lives in a derelict hulk on the beach and ekes out a subsistence as a shoeshine or selling ice water. Banned by the Iranian authorities (along with director Naderi’s subsequent “AAB, BAAD, KHAK”) for bringing disrepute on the Islamic revolution.

The Exorcist
The Genesis Children

US 1972 : Hippie underground film – naked boys, 8-15, philosophise and free associate on a Mediterranean beach. The film’s “..uninhibited naturist sentiments and anti-establishment climax incurred the wrath of critics and censors nationwide”. With [Peter Glawson](#) et al.

Leon
Lolita
Lolita
Mais Nous ne Delivrez pas du Mal
Nattlek
No Greater Glory
Satyricon
Storm Center
Wildwechsel
Zero de Conduite

Non-fiction

~ 16 titles ~

THE HAYS CODE

"These guidelines, written by trade publisher Martin Quigley and the Jesuit priest Daniel A. Lord, formed a new Motion Picture Production Code, which replaced earlier, less detailed advice offered to producers in the silent era. The Code was put before the industry by Will Hays in February [1930] and officially adopted by the Association of Motion Picture Producers, which represented the major studios, from 31 March. It had the immediate effect of making MGM drop its plans to film *A Farewell to Arms* and *Oliver Twist*, but before long many of its provisions were honoured more in the breach, until the Legion of Decency forced strict adherence from 1934. The rules applied only to domestic release, and studios often made alternative versions with nudity and bedroom scenes for foreign release. The Hays Code read as follows:"

General Principles

No picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience should never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil or sin.

Correct standards of life, subject only to the requirements of drama and entertainment, shall be presented.

Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation.

Particular Applications

Crimes against the law:

These shall never be presented in such a way as to throw sympathy with the crime as against law and justice or to inspire others with a desire for imitation.

Murder:

The technique of murder must be presented in a way that will not inspire imitation. Brutal killings are not to be presented in detail. Revenge in modern times shall not be justified.

Methods of crime should not be explicitly presented:

Theft, robbery, safecracking, and dynamiting of trains, mines, buildings, etc., should not be detailed in method. Arson must be subject to the same safeguards.

Use of firearms should be restricted to essentials. Methods of smuggling should not be presented. Illegal drug traffic must never be presented.

The use of liquor in American life, when not required by the plot or for proper characterisation, will not be shown.

Sex:

The sanctity of the institution of marriage and the home shall be upheld. Pictures shall not infer that low forms of sex relationship are the accepted or common thing.

Adultery, sometimes necessary plot material, must not be explicitly treated, or justified, or presented attractively.

Scenes of passion:

They should not be introduced when not essential to the plot. Excessive and lustful kissing, lustful embraces, suggestive postures and gestures are not to be shown.

In general passion should so be treated that these scenes do not stimulate the lower and baser element.

Seduction or rape:

They should never be more than suggested, and only when essential for the plot, and even then never shown by explicit method. They are never the proper subject for comedy.

Sex perversion or any inference to it is forbidden. White slavery shall not be treated. Miscegenation is forbidden. Sex hygiene and venereal diseases are not subjects for motion pictures. Scenes of actual child birth, in fact or in silhouette, are never to be presented. Children's organs are never to be exposed.

Vulgarity:

The treatment of low, disgusting, unpleasant, though not necessarily evil, subjects should be subject always to the dictate of good taste and a regard for the sensibilities of the audience.

Obscenity:

Obscenity in word, gesture, reference, song, joke, or by suggestion (even when likely to be understood only by a part of the audience) is forbidden.

Profanity:

Pointed profanity and other profane or vulgar expression, however used, is forbidden.

Costume:

Complete nudity is never permitted. This includes nudity in fact or in silhouette, or any lecherous or licentious notice thereof by other characters in the picture.

Undressing scenes should be avoided, and never used save where essential to the plot. Indecent or undue exposure is forbidden. Dancing costumes intended to permit undue exposure or indecent movements in the dance are forbidden.

Dances:

Dances suggesting or representing sexual actions or indecent passion are forbidden. Dances which emphasise indecent movements are to be regarded as obscene.

Religion:

No film or episode may throw ridicule on any religious faith. Ministers of religion in their character as ministers of religion should not be used as comic characters or as villains. Ceremonies of any definite religion should be carefully and respectfully handled.

Locations:

The treatment of bedrooms must be governed by good taste and delicacy.

National feelings:

The use of the flag shall be consistently respectful. The history, institutions, prominent people and citizenry of other nations shall be represented fairly.

Titles:

Salacious, indecent or obscene titles shall not be used.

Repellent subjects:

The following subjects must be treated within the careful limits of good taste:

- actual hangings or electrocutions as legal punishments for crime
- third degree methods
- brutality and possible gruesomeness
- branding or people or animals
- apparent cruelty to children or animals
- the sale of women, or a woman selling her virtue
- surgical operations

(source: *"That was Hollywood – the 1930s"* by Allen Eyles)