

press for the subject.

But they don't read it, of course. They only read it in bits, to find a passage to read aloud to their friends and be horrified over. People will find what they want to find in any book. *The Owl and the Pussycat* has been censored for cohabitation. Yes. Truly. Remember, they got married AFTER they sailed away in the beautiful pea-green boat? *The once and future king* had magic (another apparent no-no to some religious folks.) *The wind in the willows* had the animals appealing to a non-Christian god, and being blessed by him. Look in any great piece of literature, and you will find something that will offend somebody. It is usually only the pablum that doesn't have any potential for censorship. Is that what we want in our society, a library full of pablum that has nothing to say about the real problems of real readers who turn to literature for comfort or example or just plain enlivenment?



I find the whole issue of censorship quite unbearable. It saps me of the energy I need to write, and drains the strength and courage I need to tackle difficult issues. I try to think about the problem as little as possible so as not to let it have any influence on my writing.

Welwyn Wilton Katz, for seven years a secondary school math teacher in her native London, Ontario, is the author of seven adolescent novels and adult short fiction. She has won awards for *Falseface* (Ebel Award; International Fiction Contest; runner-up, Governor-General's Award for Children); *The third magic* (Governor-General's Award for Children; runner up, Ruth Schwartz Award); *Whalesinger* (nominee, Governor-General's Award). Her latest novel, *Come like shadows*, is set in Stratford, Ontario, during a production of *Macbeth*.

From Claire Mackay

I have no easy answers to the problem of censorship. All I can do is to raise some questions, based on three experiences.

Experience 1: An otherwise sensible parent recently said to me, with a straight, even solemn, face, that censorship should begin at home. He went on to describe (or prescribe) a set of rules that sounded to me like a kind of intellectual and



aesthetic straitjacketing right out of Orwell. After I regained my composure, I silently thanked my own parents, who made a home in which any kind of censorship was anathema. My mother and father allowed—encouraged!—me to read anything I pleased. I happily devoured *The girl of the Limberlost*, *Confessions of an opium-eater*, every issue of *Captain Marvel*, *Superman*, and *Wonder Woman*, the *Basic writings of Sigmund Freud*, three or four hundred *Star* weekly novels (does anyone remember them?) which I used as a kind of speed-reading course, *Das Kapital*, *The Decameron*, and a book written by a clergyman entitled *Woman: Her sex and love life* (subtitled *Light on dark subjects*), in which

I was abjured, lest I risk my immortal soul, not to wear black underwear and to be careful riding a bicycle. This last was the only book that confused me. None of them led me astray, although I have always been wary of bicycles. And I grew up okay. I am a nice person. I have never been in jail. I have been married to the same fellow for forty years. My children talk to me at regular intervals. Dogs like me. My mother approves of me most of the time, except when I forget to stand up straight.

Questions: Assuming we believe in the freedom to read, should not this mean freedom to read anything? Is such a freedom partial, or divisible? And shouldn't that freedom be extended to all, including those tens of thousands of children who go to bed hungry because there is no food in the house (if they have a house) and unread to because there are no books in the house?

Experience 2: My first book was an innocuous (or so I thought, oh foolish I!) little adventure story entitled *Mini-bike hero*. It concerned a boy who, after a number of spine-tingling interludes, is called upon to save a two-year-old from a raging flood. In my original, the two-year-old was a Métis child. In the course of describing where this child lived, I drew upon my own certain knowledge as a medical social worker whose clientele was largely native, and whose sympathies were definitely so. I used the words "settlement," "shack," and "abandoned wreck of a car." I thought I was being precise. But a reviewer in this journal thought I was only racist, and wrote: "How can the scales fall from our children's eyes if they haven't fallen from the eyes of our authors and editors? Hopefully [sic!], in another printing of the story, this section will be removed" (CCL 7:36-38).

It was. In fact, all mention of natives was removed. The settlement became a Sunday school camp, and the Métis baby a blatant Caucasian. The publisher and I just didn't want to mess with the thought police, and I confess I felt a little like Galileo. I had succumbed to an early form of what we now call "political correctness," and in so doing, I had betrayed my writer's duty to set down what is true.

Question: Is political correctness just a new, insidious and very dangerous kind of censorship?

Experience 3: One night a few years ago I was babysitting my grandson Ryder, then three years old. I had brought him a new book—*The three billy goats gruff*, with vivid illustrations by Paul Galdone. Ryder sat at the kitchen table, serious, intent, turning the pages—until he reached the full-colour double-spread of the troll. He stopped. His eyes grew wide. He shut the book with great care, then turned to me and said, "Nana, please take this book to your house and bring it back when I'm a bigger boy." Ryder wasn't ready, at three, for the book. And he knew it. I trusted him to know when that time would come, as I believe all children should be trusted. (And the time did come: I gave him the book when he was five, and a real cool dude. He looked at the terrifying troll, grinned, and said, "Hey, Nana, this excellent!") To quote Katherine Paterson: "Books cannot shock us or change us or move us without our permission."

Questions: Shouldn't we trust our children? Should those who would remove books from library shelves, those who would burn books, those who don't trust children be entrusted with the care and education of children?

These are big questions. Perhaps they aren't even the right questions to ask. But I'm hoping they might help all of us, just a little, in the search for some answers.

Claire Mackay, whose most recent book is *The Toronto story* (Annick 1990), began writing for young people when her third son nagged her into it. She has so far produced six novels and two nonfiction works, none of which, to her regret, has been banned.