

CHAPTER Conference 2022 | 'Books in the Closet' (9 June 2022)

Please note that all times are BST.

10.00 – 10.30 **Welcome & Introductory Presentation**

George Cooper, University College London

Locating the boundaries of censorship and suppression: An introduction to CHAPTER Conference 2022: *Books in the Closet*

Books in the Closet will open with some reflections on the state of 'censorship-studies' as a distinct field of academic study. This talk will attempt to locate the boundaries of 'censorship' and 'suppression' in their normative and descriptive guises. From studies of civic accountability in the Roman Empire, through to postmodern theories of censorship as a function of discourse in the work of Sue Curry Jansen, Michael Holquist, Judith Butler, and others; this talk will explore the implications of expansive, non-normative notions of censorship – as 'all forms of suppression or prohibition' – common to theoretical scholarship of the 1990s and 2000s. Claims of 'censorship' underscore contemporary critiques of surveillance capitalism, social media regulation and ownership, and of so-called 'cancel culture'. This talk will attempt to re-frame 'censorship-studies' in recognition of censorship's normative function beyond academia: as a field of study having outgrown its theoretical canon, grounded in late-20th century social and literary theory.

10.30 — 12.00 **Panel 1 | *The Queer Closet: Publishers, Readers & the Marketplace***

Charley Matthews, University of Edinburgh

Queer paperchases: the search for gendered knowledge by nineteenth-century readers

Women's reading in the nineteenth century was often chastised using an essentialized dichotomy; women either read novels too immersively and forgot about their marital duties, or they read information too erratically and superficially to benefit from it. Although women scholars of the period refuted these claims, and subsequent work has been done to rehabilitate women's "serious" reading, there has been less critical attention to the role of queer reading in this nexus of readerly behaviours. Given that reading "resistantly" and "against the grain" are a staple of modern queer theory, we may ask whether nineteenth-century queer readers deployed similar tools. Anne Lister and Geraldine Jewsbury are two queer women/gender-nonconforming people whose reading was vitally important to their financial and social statuses. This paper will argue

that Lister and Jewsbury both queered the immersive/extensive reading binary in order to map alternative narratives of gendered and sexual knowledge.

Christopher Adams, Institute of English Studies, SAS

‘Conditioned somewhat by what we can sell’: Marketing the Homosexual Novel in Mid-Twentieth Century Britain

In the 1950s, the rise of what Martin Dines terms the ‘homosexual novel’ coincided with the rise of queer male urban consumerist culture, as advertisers and producers began to reconceive a discrete market for goods and services aimed at queer men. This paper examines how a traditional British publishing house — Putnam — discovered a queer market for its books. It traces how Putnam’s publication of two landmark homosexual novels — Martyn Goff’s *The Plastic Fabric* (1957) and *The Youngest Director* (1961) — created tension within the company while also enabling it to reimagine potential markets for other works on its list. In doing so it forged highly profitable transatlantic relationships with the robust network of queer book clubs in the United States absent in the United Kingdom, thereby expanding the definition of the ‘homosexual novel’ into a broader publishing category of the ‘queer book’.

Upasana Banerjee, Independent Scholar

Publishers as Activists: Trace the Metamorphic Evolution of the Queer Literature Market in India

This paper examines the position of queer literature and its market in India corresponding to the conservative Indian social structure. Though the Ancient Indian Literary texts have portrayed the normativity of homosexuality (Kamasutra), the 200 year long colonial oppression and Christian conversion dismantled the gender fluid social practices. After the much controversial debate of 377, there developed a market of queer literature in India with growing readers having an appetite for queer literature. In this specific context, the paper examines how publishers are corresponding to this need through engaging with queer authors and how their initiative is creating healthy and gender fluid reader space. The paper will analyze how publishers serve as activists by circulating queer experiences with specific focus to queerness as a part of mainstream Identity with special reference to pandemic queer crises.

12.00 — 13.00 **Lunch Break**

13.00 — 14.00 **Panel 2 | Closets and Censorship from the 18th Century to the Victorian Era**

JP Ascher, University of Virginia

The Other Licenses for Printing after the Restoration

The Licensing Act of 1662 established pre-publication censorship, eventually enforced by Roger L'Estrange for all books 'except those on law, state affairs, heraldry, divinity, physic, philosophy, and arts and sciences'. While the copyright ramifications of that Act have been widely studied, the exceptions have not been. The Royal Society, for example, held their own license to publish books that they employed for single-author monographs and their newsletter, the *Philosophical Transactions*. The latter contradicts the received history that the *London Gazette* was the only source of news at the time. It was, in fact, the only source of one type of news. This paper will outline the Royal Society's licensing of John Evelyn's *Sylvae* and their *Philosophical Transactions* as a way to begin to understand how these other licenses worked. Using those as case studies, it will describe the sorts of evidence for other licenses after the Restoration.

Rachel Calder, University College London

Joseph Whitaker: 'mechanic' to the Victorian book trade

In this paper I argue that Joseph Whitaker was one of the most important but neglected figures in the Victorian book trade. At the time of his death in 1895 he was widely known as the originator of *Whitaker's Almanack*, but his book trade peers knew him as the editor of two innovative trade publications. *The Bookseller* was the trade journal that immediately inspired dozens of similar titles for other branches of the retail trades and *The Reference Catalogue of Current Literature*, the most comprehensive collection of bibliographic information then available. Together, these publications provided subscribers with an unrivalled information and communication service that offered extensive advertising and sales data, specialist journalism and high-quality commercial information, and a forum for exchanging literary gossip and debating trade concerns. Both publications remain central to today's publishing industry and stand as testaments to Whitaker's legacy.

14.00 — 14.15 **Break**

14.15 — 15.15 Panel 3 | 20th Century Considerations

Thomas Cryer, University College London

‘This Textbook Fad’: Black Power, the Paperback Revolution, and the 1960s Reinvention of John Hope Franklin’s *From Slavery to Freedom*

Utilising a sociology of texts methodology, this paper explores the 1960s struggle over the publication, distribution, and pedagogical purpose of John Hope Franklin’s *From Slavery to Freedom*, perhaps the most consequential post-war African American history textbook. Originally published in 1947, *FSTF* was continually updated to trace African Americans’ history from their “ancient African beginnings” to the “Black Revolution’s latest stirrings.” Yet during the 1960s the work’s rights passed from Random House to McGraw-Hill; it was launched in paperback; and demand surged following the Black Power and Studies movements, with sales rising fifty-fold from 1967 to 1969. Facing McGraw-Hill’s commissioned readers reports complaining of *FSTF*’s complexity and use of the term “Negro”; of its inattention to women, cultural history, and transcontinental visions of “Blackness”, Franklin’s struggle to maintain his work’s scholarly reputation provides a unique insight on debates that have defined Black History from this pivotal decade to our present day.

Simone Sannio, Freie Universität Berlin

The Novel as a Coherent Hole: Philip Roth’s *Operation Shylock* and the Art of Self-Censorship

In the epilogue to his pseudoautobiographical novel *Operation Shylock*, Roth describes his decision, following significant political pressures, to call the book “a work of fiction” and to suppress its final chapter, which would have disclosed a secret mission undertaken on behalf of the Israeli secret service. While this ending has often baffled critics, some of whom regarded it as an emblem of the novel’s many plot holes, a proof of Roth’s allegiance to the Jewish state, or a parody thereof, I argue that this work is constructed in such way precisely to provoke contradicting interpretations and to disregard expectations for a “well-made novel”. By the end of the 20th century, the use of textual lacunae as an invitation to the reader could seem like a trite intellectual game or postmodernist trope. Roth, however, builds this centuries-old device into a larger system that keeps making it provocative: the political sphere. My paper intends to look at Roth’s metafictional acts of self-erasure not only as a powerful aesthetic choice, but as a political one. Why does the author pretend to sacrifice a chapter of his book, performing a sort of self-mutilation? Various perspectives will have to be considered: the issue of minority writers’ artistic freedom vs. their moral responsibility towards the community, the different expectations of transnational audiences like the Jewish one, and the connection to the Shakespearean play from which the “operation” the book is supposed to describe draws its title.

15.15 — 15.30 **Break**

15.30 — 17.00 Panel 4 | *The Closet in Contemporary & YA Publishing*

Sonali Misra, University of Stirling

‘Cartelisation of English-language Trade Book Publishing’

Territorial rights such as Commonwealth Rights grant British publishers publication and distribution rights to former British colonies. However, a book published in India – whether by an independent publisher or the subsidiary of a multinational – is often not chosen for publication in the UK. Therefore, Indian writing in English is unable to access a global readership. These practices are furthering postcolonial structures within global publishing and culture, in which India is considered a market territory and not a source of ‘good literature’.

I will utilise secondary literature and the primary research I have conducted in the form of interviews with elite participants in the British and Indian publishing industries (CEOs/MDs and Sales Directors) to discuss cartelisation of the global English-language trade book market due to territorial rights and the multinationalisation of the industry, and how that is disadvantageous to writers of former British colonies, with a special focus on India.

Amirah Mohiddin, University of Leicester

‘In demand by fools and lowly ignoramuses’: Arabic epics and Young Adult fiction.

‘It is nothing but lies, falsehood, stupid writings, complete ignorance and shameless prattle which is only in demand by fools and lowly ignoramuses’. This is how theologian, Ibn al-Kathir, condemned Arabic epic literature, commonly known as sira. Siras, loosely related to the western heroic romance, popular romance or saga, were often told in dialect as opposed to classical Arabic, and thus became known as a lower class form of entertainment associated with beggars and vagabonds. This is a stigma that remains until today.

My paper explores how this corpus of Arabic literature can be reconstructed into the “saturated” Young Adult market, another mode of literature that is considered to have little scholarly value. I will explore how this assignation of value is limiting as it dismisses potential opportunities and spaces for marginalised voices and stories to develop by reflecting on academic and social discourse, as well as examples from my own writing.

Katharine Smales, University College London

The Cats and Pyjamas: Using digital ethnographic methods and semi-structured interviews to surface the voices of young children on their shared digital reading practices at home.

An exploration of how digital ethnographic methods and semi-structured interviews were used to surface four- to eight-year-old children’s voices, in relation to their shared digital reading practices in their own homes during 2020-21. Using video data and semi-structured interviews to foreground children’s voices, over those of their parents and focusing on their homes, as

supposed to educational settings, insights were gleaned into who and what was present and how digital technology was used to facilitate shared reading. Highlighting the affordances and challenges of these methods, as well as what they revealed in terms of the visual and the embodied, this talk will provide insights into these methods as a way of accessing voices which have not been traditionally heard in the Publishing field.