

Censorship, discretion and their circumstances Censura, arbitrio y sus circunstancias

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Abstract

This article proposes a reflection on the role played by censorship in general and regarding written texts in particular, by analyzing in detail its influence in children's and young people's literature in different Latin American countries and in Brazil more specifically. Censorship, which is seen as an act of repression and violence, has affected many people's lives in different countries, where dictatorships have tried to set the citizens' pace by imposing the discretion of power and cowardice of the stronger against the weaker. If we take a glance at childhood, we can see that the prohibition of reading certain books necessarily leads to live with censorship and learning lessons that shall subsequently put into practice both in university teaching and in the exercise of journalism, as well as when it comes to write texts, where one's impulse to express through mastery of symbolic language arises. In Brazil, children's literature, which was despised by censors, created subtle, dense and challenging texts for smart, engaged readers. But in addition to prior censorship, there is also self-censorship. As far as children's literature is concerned, adults -as mediators- play an important role because they should facilitate children's access to good books instead of hindering it. Censorship, which is always subjective and arbitrary, cannot be accepted in any way.

Resumen

En este artículo se plantea una reflexión sobre el papel de la censura en general y en los textos escritos en particular, haciendo un análisis más detallado de la influencia de la censura en la literatura infantil y juvenil en distintos países de Latinoamérica y, en particular, en Brasil. La censura, vista como un acto de represión y de violencia, ha recorrido buena parte de la vida de muchas personas en distintos países, donde las dictaduras han tratado de marcar el paso de los ciudadanos imponiendo el arbitrio de la fuerza y la cobardía del más fuerte contra el más débil. En un recorrido por la infancia en la que las prohibiciones de leer determinados libros llevan, necesariamente, a la necesidad de convivir con la censura y aprender lecciones, estas luego se pondrán en práctica tanto en la docencia universitaria, como en el ejercicio del periodismo y en la tarea de escritora, donde se expresa el impulso de manifestarse desde el dominio del lenguaje simbólico. La literatura infantil, despreciada por los censores, permitió en Brasil crear textos sutiles, densos y desafiantes para lectores inteligentes y cómplices. Pero, además de la censura previa, está la autocensura y al hablar de la relación entre la literatura infantil y la censura tienen un importante papel los adultos mediadores, que deben facilitar y no cercear el acceso de los niños a los buenos libros. La censura, siempre subjetiva y arbitraria, no debe aceptarse de ningún modo.

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When we talk about censorship and expression, we should determine the field we refer to. In first place, I will speak about my personal experience with censorship and what I learnt from it. Some insights or critical reflections and analyses on this matter arise from my experience, from life itself, not from any external theories. I do not know about censorship only because I have read about it or because I have seen films that deal with it. I experienced censorship as a reader when I was a child and as an adult too. I also faced censorship as an author. I also was a teacher of literature at university and I worked as a journalist for many years. I found different examples of censorship in all these activities and I was able to appreciate some constant, recurrent mechanisms of how this phenomenon is exerted. I suffered its consequences first-hand, and still keep them in my heart or in my mind. I speak about censorship from some vital part of myself.

My first contact with censorship did not take place as a creator, but I did before I was even as a reader. That was during the first dictatorship under which I lived, where Getulio Vargas ruled Brazil between 1930 and 1945. In other words, I was not even twelve when he left power. Outside my family environment, at the kindergarten I attended, I already knew I should not say I loved Monteiro Lobato's stories, which my parents used to read for me at home. Not to mention the adventures of those wonderful characters that filled my life with dreams, along with the lives of my children and grandchildren years later. In those days, I knew it was our secret but I could not imagine the reasons behind it. I did not know that Lobato, our greatest author of children's literature, a fantastic trail blazer, had been arrested by the dictator's police. I did not know that his books suffered different levels of repression. The situation was similar to that described by the Chilean's writer Antonio Skármeta in his children's book *La composición*: children may not know the details of what is going on, but they are aware of the political environment they live in. Warnings not to talk

about Lobato's stories were very clear. I witness them myself.

I do not know to what extent those warnings became clearer due to the fact I was arrested by Vargas' government because of censorship. Actually, it was my father who was arrested when I was three. He was a journalist and an editor-in-chief of a newspaper. He wrote an article that was not approved by the government's censor. Nevertheless, my father was able to mislead him and published the text. The newspaper was seized and the police broke into the newsroom. They looked for the article's author in his home and in the streets until he was found. He arrested inside a bus and thrown into jail. I was with him, on my way to the park where I used to play, and the authorities "allowed" me to stay with him for a few hours until an uncle of mine came to pick me up after they phoned him. It was a *very special* permission indeed.

We moved to Buenos Aires a few years later, where I enrolled in school. It was General Juan Domingo Perón's time. One day, the teacher told me to draw a picture titled "This is my flag". I am a Brazilian, so I drew my flag. She told me I had to draw the Argentinean flag. I drew it but I entitled it: "This is your flag". It was not possible; it had to be the same as the others. I drew a new picture, this time with two flags but the Brazilian flag was bigger. I was expelled from the classroom and taken to the headmaster's office. They phoned my parents. They were informed that they would expel me because I was stubborn and a rebel who was disrespectful of patriotic symbols, a very bad example for the rest of the classroom. I was only six. This happened in the last but one month of class, when I could not enrol in any other school to complete that term and continue my education. My father, who was also stubborn and a rebel, went to see the Brazilian ambassador, who intervened personally. Thanks to that and given the possibility of a diplomatic incident, the headmaster "allowed" me to complete the school year. A *very special* permission once again.

I gradually became aware that prohibitions and repression acts are usually accompanied by *special permissions*, a sign of the “magnanimity” of those in power who perpetrate violence. It is not only an act of power and cowardice of the stronger against the weaker, which is another essential aspect characterising them is discretion precisely, but the inequality before the law was present too. It is that kind of certainty of being powerful any simple officer may experience when he/she is not held accountable for his/her actions to nobody. It is that same arrogant authoritarianism we all feel every time we travel in the immigration officers who, on entering his/her country, checks and leafs through the passport, stares in the traveller’s face and searches through his/her clothes and affixes or not a seal on a piece of paper giving his/her consent to stay in that territory during a specific timeframe. There are no clear, preset criteria. There is no possible defence or questioning. It is just unfettered authority limiting the rights of others.

Back to Brazil, when I was seven, once that first Brazilian dictatorship came to an end, I enrolled in a religious school. One day, in the playground, a bonfire was made using books of Monteiro Lobato. They would request us to bring them from our homes. Not all of them. But I remember seeing two that I had already read: *Viagem ao céu / Journey to Heaven* and *História do mundo para crianças / World history for children*. They were my books because my mother did not allow me to take anything to school. She told me once again not to speak about what we had or read at home. I asked the teacher why we were making that little bonfire, just with a few books. She was very kind and patient to me. She explained that reading those books was a sin and that Lobato was a communist (which I did not know what it was and which I found out afterwards). She told me that, in one of his books, he spoke about world history by talking rubbish about religion. In other book, he did not respect the church because the characters therein went to heaven without meeting God, instead they could only see planets, comets and

stars. They even played with angels and Saint George in a very disrespectful way. I finally left that school before the end of the school year (but my parents got the papers to get me transferred to another school). I do not know why exactly.

Afterwards, upon reflecting on those facts, I learnt one more thing. There is not only censorship under openly dictatorial or quasi dictatorial regimes. Censorship is very frequently -according to world history, we were not supposed to read but we were taught about the Inquisition, the list of prohibited books, the witch-hunt- associated to religious or political fundamentalisms that are followed to the letter and that try to impose one monolithic interpretation to others’ views. These regimes also try to oblige to read one book only, following one only interpretation; these books are paraded everywhere during long marches and demonstrations as if they were weapons. That way, they are really weapons that can take away the freedom or the life of those who do not agree with that only reading.

Other encounters with censorship offered me different angles.

In 1969, for instance, I worked as a university lecturer. Brazil was once again a dictatorship, the military government dictatorship that rules the country between 1964 and 1985. As a reader, I was used to find censored newspapers where journalists tried to convey the best they could what they intended and was prohibited. That way, readers learnt to “read” between the lines censored pieces of information but we had no idea of what had been censored. Arbitrary arrests, lack of respect for human rights and torture spread throughout the country five years ago. However, Brazilian society only realised that when the American ambassador was kidnapped by an urban guerrilla in September 1969 and the people claimed against censorship for the first time. A manifesto was read by the kidnappers explaining their action and condemning what was going on in the country before their action was published in the newspapers. As a reader, from a family of

journalists and well informed ones, I know something, but most of the population could not even suspect what was going on in reality.

I was arrested at that time. When I was interrogated, I had a big surprise. Some questions were based on quotes of mine, on sentences I pronounced in class, but totally out of context. I remember I taught a course on contemporary Brazilian novel in rural areas at the Faculty of Arts. One of the books studied was the story of a band of bullies that operated in the wastelands fleeing from the police. At the height of structuralist criticism, I analysed the text with my students by applying the critical thinking models implemented by Greimas and Bremond, using the logic of narrative possibilities. By using this model, we analysed who were the main characters and their nemesis, the allies and their opponents, along with how were sequences leading to traps and clashes built. Those sentences were taken out of their context and transformed into theoretical training of “guerrilla lessons in the forest”. Likewise, I found that there was one police informer between my students at least, in a time in which small recording devices did not exist. And I also learnt that censoring the context and keeping it from being known was another way of lying and undermine texts. In other words, I am talking about manipulating the truth by isolating it from its circumstances. I indeed spoke those words, but the context was so different that they could never have that meaning. Censoring the context is a very efficient way of repression, because the truth cannot be denied but is transformed into the opposite thing. One time, a Brazilian writer initiated judicial proceedings -and won- against an editor because he included part of a children’s tale of hers entitled *Romeo y Julieta* in a collection. It was a tale against racism set in a garden full of blue and yellow butterflies that were fighting all the time. But the children of the two families become friends because they disobeyed their parents, who avoided any contact whatsoever. I am not telling you the whole story. But it should be added that, when selecting a text to include it in an anthology,

the editor separated it from the rest and ended it with the following sentence, said by the butterfly mom who forbade the two baby butterflies from being friends: “Never play with anyone of a colour from yours”. That way, it seemed to be both a conclusion and a piece of advice. The tale’s objective was just the opposite. The judge immediately realised that and ordered the editor to compensate the author.

In parallel with my activity as a teacher, at that time I started to write children’s stories to be published in a magazine that was created recently in São Paulo, in 1969. Only some authors, who had never published anything related to this genre, were invited to participate in said magazine in order to avoid the old didactic models and the bad habits of a condescending language that is full of diminutives and has a certain air of superiority. Since I went into exile in January 1970, I sent my stories for three years therefrom; this fact marked the beginning of my career as an author of children’s stories. I found that I enjoyed writing them a lot, as well as exploring colloquial language and having orality free of academic models. I enjoyed taking advantage of puns and using humour, playing with lyrical resources or diving into fantasy when dealing with very serious, real issues. The fantastic acceptance of readers amazed me. I wanted to tell stories that could be of interest and entertain my youngest son, who was 3 at that time, or his friends. But I became increasingly aware that I was talking about our own situation by extolling freedom and rebellion, by valuing popular wisdom, stimulating irreverence, protesting against injustices, trusting the ability of every little, helpless character to think and act by himself/herself, without always obeying. Our readers accepted us so well for that reason too. And I am speaking in the plural because the same happened to other authors, whether collaborators of the same magazine -just as Ruth Rocha or Joel Rufino- or not -such as João Carlos Marinho or Ziraldo, who, at that time, in addition to publishing his first children’s book, also founded

humorous newspaper of opponents that was very successful-

Different critics, such as Machens (2009), have already stated that our works, emerging as what became known as the boom of children's literature in Brazil, maintain, for different reasons, a close relationship with that picture of press censorship and arts censorship in general.

The first reason was that we were intellectuals from different areas, without any personal bond with children's universe, without working directly with children, without any pretence of giving anybody lessons. None of us had ever thought about writing for young people. We probably would have never embarked on this project if we had not feel bothered in our respective fields of activity. But we felt the pressure of dictatorship, the burden of censorship and an inextinguishable impulse to express ourselves. We had enough mastery of language to use it as a compliant instrument in our hands by means of humour, poetry resources and elements from popular wisdom. We wrote ambiguous texts with multiple meanings, full of cultural references, walking on the thin ice of semantics and accustoming readers to go the extra mile in the puns we used.

Another reason which is generally highlighted is the genre's ability to incorporate to symbolic language. Just as poetry and lyrics (two more genres that experienced a boom in Brazil at that time), children's literature usually explores the different meanings and the plurality of the different readings seen by some readers at a specific age, while other readers figure out other ones with certain references. Given the fact that folk songs are associated to mass culture, it immediately became the flagship of the opponents' thoughts and protests and drew a lot of attention. For that reason, it became one of the main targets of censorship.

But children's literature sailed in more still waters. It was aimed at women and children, generals did not read it or listened to it everywhere just as folk music. Therefore, it was

unnoticed if Ruth Rocha wrote about a bossy king or about a king who suffered from a strange illness, which consequences were him not being able to see small people. Or if I wrote about a girl who travelled in search of a country where she would not be subjugated and who became increasingly aware that the only law that applies fairly is that stemming from everybody, since it is written by everybody and applied to everybody. Or if I published a book entitled *Érase una vez un tirano...* (*Once upon a time, there was a tyrant*) In other words, no matter how paradoxical it seems, censorship obliged us to be subtle and dense, but did not prevent us from creating or exercised any power over us, at an official level at least. Certain schools would always prohibit students to read our books. Some editors declined to publish them due to fear of reprisal –one of my books was rejected by six editors. When the seventh editor decided to publish it, it won all prizes that year. Nothing else happened. Nothing compared to the difficulties faced by the press, by folk music, by the cinema, by the theatre or by adult literature in Brazil. On the contrary, censorship showed us how to write more densely and our public learnt to read more intelligently with complicity. Argentina experienced a very similar phenomenon in terms of censorship and political repression. They also had pioneering authors such as María Elena Walsh. Likewise, according to Rosell (2001, p. 35): "In both (...) cases there are catalysers such as the lack of popularity of military dictatorships, the saturation of nationalism and the need to beat censorship". In those circumstances, free of the heavy burden of didacticism and pedagogy thank to the activity of pioneering authors. In Argentina, some authors who did not have any direct link with teaching appeared as well, and had a very sophisticated education, such as Laura Devetach, Gustavo Roldán, Graciela Montes, Graciela Cabal or Ema Wolf.

According to Rosell, in Cuba, another country with a very important prior pioneer -José Martí- the same thing happened subsequently due to the initial long-standing public support to the

authoritarian regime, and progress was only influenced by the Argentinean and Brazilian children's literature. Nevertheless, this critic states, in reference to those countries in the 70s:

Creative activity, so far dominated by a certain immediacy, hypertrophy in poetry, tales and their different didactical hybrids, opens up to more fantasy genres, which were progressively enriched by resources such as the combination of realism and fantasy, humour, irony, parable, carnivalisation, metalanguage, etc. At the same time, topics and issues increased by means of a rapprochement to their own folklore and nature, by prospecting human and social circumstances of a new nature (Rosell, 2001, p. 45).

One paradoxical point is that the strengthening and consolidation of this phenomenon are related to a movement to face censorship, whilst in other countries in the region, that lived under equally arbitrary dictatorships, the minimum conditions were not in place to try -at least- leak the voice stifled by violent repression. In other words, in some countries, children's literature emerged despite of censorship. But this situation did not imply that censorship made it easier, so that was not the case in most of the countries in the continent. Each case is different and I would like to continue my story explaining my relationship with censorship.

Back to Brazil, when my lawyers believed I could return, I was punished by the political regime by losing my job at university. I then started working as a journalist. Between 1973 and 1980, in charge of Radio journalism in *Jornal do Brasil*, and I had a very different contact with censorship. At the beginning, there was prior censorship, with explicit prohibitions on news dealing with certain issues. It was subsequently suspended in magazines and newspapers, but it kept on being exercised on radio and TV all the time, since these services were government concessions and the granting thereof was subject to summary challenge if prohibitions were not observed.

Instructions came by phone. The telephone could ring at any time with a new prohibition. I tried to institutionalise some minimum safety proceedings, such as asking the officer his/her

name or the telephone number he/she called from. We only considered the order was duly received after calling back and verifying it was not a joke. We also wrote down the name of the person who received the instructions and the time. The prohibition was then written down, displayed on a notice board and a copy thereof was filed. It was a primitive attempt to ascribe some kind of responsibility to each prohibition, but it offered no guarantees whatsoever. The authorities said we were phoned to prohibit but sometimes we did not receive any call. It was their word against ours. But we could at least establish some rules and the officers agreed on that. To some extent, it was some kind of guarantee in front of their superiors. That way, I learnt censorship is more powerful in the anonymity just like any other form of cowardice. Those proceedings were enough to decrease the number of prohibitions we received but they were still received on a daily, plural basis. Prohibitions covered any issue and not only those related to politics or the police. There is no point in breaking them down in this text, because it does not aim at focusing on press censorship¹.

I had never worked that way. On one hand, I was angry at that pressure that turned my profession into the opposite of what it is intended, by forbidding us to inform the public, to inform about the facts and to express ourselves. On the other hand, I was determined not to make censorship enforcement easy and not to budge one inch more than necessary to that sort of violence. I always made my position very clear to the more than 30 journalists who were under my charge. They got my point and that way we managed to keep an admirable, brave team spirit. We were living under prior censorship, which prevented us from publishing our texts. We would never allow it to become self-censorship, which would make impossible to find news or writing them ourselves.

It was a painful decision but it enabled us to live those years with courage and dignity and with our heads held high. It implied working double, uselessly. In some cases, between 70% and 80% of what we organised could not be

used, so we always had some reserve material to replace what could not be on air. In other words, those news that were very important were all set (or we kept longer versions of those news that were especially relevant), and could then be used just in case to fill the minutes that could be removed from the news at the eleventh hour. We knew much of our work would be binned. It was so frustrating. Nevertheless, one good thing was that we felt proud that we were not collaborating with the dictatorship. The agenda was set at the beginning of the day as if censorship did not exist. Reporters went to the street as if they were totally free and found what they saw or heard. They came back to the newsroom and wrote what they investigated. They gave the resulting text to the editors, who evaluated to what extent it could be disseminated together with the editors on call. We sometimes took greater risks than advisable: thirty minutes before news were on air, we left all phones in the newsroom off-hook so censors could not reach us. That way, many times some news were disseminated in certain issues before prohibitions were received. At other times, although it appeared that they would be prohibited, they somehow went unnoticed and we did not receive any ban and were on air against all expectations, because we found and write it. Nobody else had. Listeners realised that immediately and our news programmes had the largest viewership share and became the most prestigious in Brazil.

In addition, since prior censorship of our printed newspaper had been suspended -its newsroom was located in the same building and floor- I personally gave on a daily basis to our colleagues of the printed newspaper what we found; in spite of the fact that we could not disseminate it on the radio. I left it to the person in charge of a very prestigious column: *Informe JB*. During that period, four different journalists took care of that column and only one of them embraced prior censorship, to the extent that he would never use that material. The other three were grateful and disseminated in the knowledge it would be the boom that day

because censorship forbid its dissemination on the radio. In other words, we were somehow canalising what we found to disseminate it. On other occasions, we learnt from Brazilian football: a bit of little skill, body shaking and dribbling to score a goal. For example, on the occasion of the elections to the governing board of Flamengo -a football club- we interviewed the candidates and they all referred to the benefits of voting as one may please, defended the right to opposition and the superiority of those regimes allowing to celebrate elections. Censor did not consider to forbid that, which pretended to be some sports news. When the order arrived, it was too late and a newspaper on free elections was on the streets.

I learnt a fundamental difference from that experience: the difference between prior censorship and self-censorship. Prior censorship means that the authorities -whether political or religious- prohibit the publication of something. Self-censorship means that the writer embraces those mechanisms and does not allow himself/herself to create or his/her follow free will, which is where his/her need to express himself/herself comes from. The first is imposed by force and cannot be enforced all the time, it has some breaches. The latter is based on a self-persuasion process that entails the writer's cooperation. Fear is thus stoked up. It finally changes direction to please power, capitulating to it, foreseeing its desires, even those that had not been expressed yet. Creation is liquidated; it is far more efficient and marks forever. For that reason, prior censorship needs to be accompanied by violent repression to effectively intimidate and work. Self-censorship is only therefore implemented, once prior censorship paves the smooth, easy way to the worst discretion.

There is obviously other kind of censorship, which intends to suppress anything freely written or published. It has been used by totalitarian regimes and fundamentalisms to complement prior censorship, in a series of actions ranging from Lists of Prohibited Books to imposing death penalty to Salman Rushdie by anybody who catches him, and from Nazism

to the Cultural Revolution in China. It is a kind of subsequent, violent, furious censorship. It is frequently accompanied by imprisoning, inflicting corporal punishment or putting those individuals who disobey to death. But it may really be the first of them. By trying to avoid it, the other types of censorship I said -prior censorship and self-censorship- are implemented to a certain extent. They emerge from fear and caution, justified or not.

This overall picture should be taken into account because the most specific issue dealing with the relationship between censorship and children's literature falls within it. It is a complex situation that usually raises doubts.

In first place, there has traditionally been a bond between children's literature and an educational system that intends to ignore that literature is art and aims at using it for pedagogical purposes. This aspect *per se* would be enough to confuse the circumstances materially, by mixing criteria alien to the selection ones. This is what it is about when children's access to books is mediated by adults: choice, selection, desire for guidance. All these proceedings constrain the supply of books. It should not be confused with prohibitions or encroachment upon freedom. It is perfectly understandable that schools -with limited school days yearly and limited class hours daily- concentrate their efforts on those aspects that seem to be more useful for the didactical objective of teaching. Therefore, the selection of books for school libraries, for example, or for the adoption of extracurricular readings, should necessarily include a smaller quantity and a narrower range of books that those offered by children's public libraries, by bookstores or even by families, which can choose among all existing books in a specific language for their children and not only those books that teach something.

In second place, if we take the attention paid by those adults in charge of childhood education into account, it would be understandable and advisable that they take care of what children

read. It is also understandable and advisable that they pay attention to what they hear everywhere (even from parents and teachers), to what they read on the covers of newspapers and magazines, to what they watch on TV or on videos, to the videogames or computer games they play, to their conversations with their friends, or to the information they find on those websites usually visited by them. For example, I run a children's bookstore for 18 years and, among other things, I took care of the selection of those books in stock. I remember that, during that period, I decided not to sell two books because I considered they were full of prejudices and racist connotations, without any literary qualities. Some books would never pass the most demanding ideological screening, such as *Pippi Longstocking*, because of its *eurocentrism* and its unfailing certainty of the superiority of one culture -or ethnicity- above others. But I never believed children should not have any kind of contact with the delightful book by Astrid Lindgren for that reason alone, or with Kipling, for instance. On the contrary, I thought it is essential that children get used since early childhood to criticising what they read, to distrusting what they read -although it may seem attracting- or to identifying others prejudices or prejudices occurred in different periods of time, which are hidden in books. They will only attain that objective by reading very many different high-quality books whose authors would differ.

There is a difference between caring about these contents and going mental on a specific word, issue or picture from a book among so many of them. This excess trend in the field of children's literature can be found in some countries, as stated by H. Hoertel in his book, *Banned in the USA: A reference guide to book censorship in schools and public libraries* (Westport, Greenwood Press, 2002, Givens, 2009), for example. There are so many titles that a book can be written just by listing them. To get some idea of the problem, the books of a worldwide known author, one North-American classic, Mark Twain, are no longer read at schools

and have been rejected from many libraries in the United States because he used the word *nigger*, which is abusive and offensive to African-Americans nowadays, regardless of the fact that his characters were rebel, liberty-loving, fighters for justice and that one of them even faced the very moral of the society of that time to help a slave run away from his master. Instead of praising that boy who thinks for himself and faces the values of adult world, disobeying slave laws; those fussy people who only care about semantics prefer to go mental on a specific word, forbidding North-American children to get to know Huckleberry Finn or Tom Sawyer.

Education historian Diane Ravitch (2003) coined the term *language police*, which is the title of her book. The author alleges that “the censorship regime spread among educational editors in response to both right-wing and left-wing lobbies” and clearly states that today there is a “protocol of charitable censorship in place that is well established, which is likewise easily endorsed and widely implemented by editors of didactic books, text agencies, professional associations, the states and the federal government”. She thus concludes that what students learn is constrained, preventing them from getting to know different visions. This is also applicable to non didactic books, children’s literature books, caught in the net of those lobbies that influence schools and the media in general. They progressively prevent readers from having contact with a wide range of points of view, which should characterise all democratic societies.

When commenting on that kind of publications and a report drafted in 2002 by the *Office for Intellectual Freedom* (OIF) of the *American Library Association* (ALA), Canadian author Cherie L. Givens (2009) identifies some examples of how those censorship guidelines also operate in her country. She tells the story of a contemporary illustrator of a story taking place in 1850 in the South of the United States, who had to draw a child with Asian features among the black and white characters at the editor’s request, because he had

to show the “ethnic diversity”. Nevertheless there was not any Asian character in the book or in the region at that time. In another case, the book of a renowned author who has published almost thirty books was about the story of a very forgetful old woman. The editor firstly asked him not to call her “old” in order not to cause any offence, replacing the old woman with a young woman. At last, he believed it would be better if the story was not about a woman, so that feminists would not be offended.

The word evolution cannot be used in some books not to cause any offence of a religious nature to the creationists. One of my books has been rejected by a North-American Publishing house because there is a scene where a little girl caresses her newborn baby brother while her mother is breastfeeding him. They asked me to remove that scene because some readers may find it disgusting. Another book written by me, *Menina bonita do laço de fita*, which has been very successful in many countries, caused damage to my Danish editor because a reader who was responsible for deciding whether it was suitable for its inclusion in the network of public libraries rejected it. Such reader would state that the story presents half-breed characters naturally as if that kind of coexistence was harmonic or advisable, which may contribute to mobilisations by afro-descendant communities fighting for the affirmation rights of their ethnicity. One only opinion, one only vision was enough to reject a book in a country where children’s literature is essentially disseminated through its network of libraries. What an irony! In Denmark precisely, where the difficulty in finding an illustrator for a children’s book by Käre Bluitgen about Mohammed’s life made a local newspaper propose twelve different pictures and triggered a crisis whereby Danish embassies have suffered assaults, Danish flags have been burnt and more than 180 people were killed in Muslim countries.

We are closing the circle as far as libraries are concerned. We go back once again to the essential aspect of censorship I identified at the beginning hereof: the discretion of personal

decisions made from a tyrannical power against helpless victims. As stated by Heins (2006), censorship “is the inevitable result of decision-making procedures that are highly subjective and arbitrary that reflect the ideological and personal preferences of censors”, which is another reason for our staunch rejection.

The institutional control that characterises censorship can be verified at any stage of the production or distribution of a book. It sometimes happens very subtly in the juries of competitions. An appealing member with strong personality, having the gift of the gab and power of conviction is enough. We all know dozens of examples of that mechanism.

The case of the book *Magnifico*, by the Canadian author Vitoria Miles, described in the aforesaid *Bookbird* issue on censorship is noteworthy. According to the rules, if the jury of the *British Columbia Book Prize* did not vote for the book it would be excluded, which indeed occurred. One of the juries did not like the end involving the visit of the British Royal Family to Canada in 1939. The fact that the book did not win the prize resulted in the lack of advertising so that it could be read by a greater number of readers, even grown-ups. Later, in Ontario, the same book was a finalist of another prize but it was rejected because the father of one of the characters, who was an immigrant, said a few words in Italian that were considered as offensive language, in spite of the fact that their translation was “hog” and “dog”. When one goes through the story of the destiny of a book, you got the feeling that you are reading a new version of the fable of *The wolf and the lamb*. New reasons to disqualify the book emerged constantly: the happy end does not work, Italians may be offended, offensive language is not advisable, etc. As the book did not win those prizes, it was not included in the libraries’ lists, and all the foregoing suggests that the memories of the colonial past referred to have to do with it, because episodes referring to the monarchy or the metropolis were not considered to deserve being treated with any kind of respect for history, in the name of democracy

probably. As if parliamentary monarchies that are more democratic than certain so-called people’s republics could not exist.

Many experts in this field believe that fear and prudence are excessively coming to the forefront more and more, probably only due to the concern merely not to cause any exaggerated offence entailing any kind of risks that may put their sales and profit at stake under the pretext of protecting children, which makes editors hesitate to publish anything that may eventually seem disgusting to somebody. The result thereof can be a great production of dull, unfunny books, manufactured in series and very similar to each other, as if aseptic, sterile urns were a cultural model. From an educational point of view, surely with a broader perspective, it is not the best way to assist the development of reading habits or to collaborate with children in the construction of their knowledge of the world or their capacity to tolerate those who are different.

Understanding and accepting others make us being exposed to different judgements, without victimisation or resentment. Being in contact with art is essential in human development. But art can only be seen as the expression of free spirits, although we disagree with them in many cases. If we want art to raise us, we have to fly with the wings of freedom.

Notes

1 When I resigned from my job on the radio, in May 1980, I left full copies of the files of all the censorship notes received in three institutions during that period: the Associação Brasileira de Imprensa / Brazilian Press Association, the Sindicato de Jornalistas do Rio de Janeiro / Journalists’ Union of Rio de Janeiro and the Departamento de Pesquisa do *Jornal do Brasil* / Research Department of *Jornal do Brasil*.

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