Censorship—the Knot that Binds Intimacy and Women's Writing

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The connection between the private—often considered as the realm of the intimate—and women's writing has long preoccupied feminist criticism. Recent feminist criticism has revealed the social impact of the connection between intimacy and women's writing. This also raises the question of how women have negotiated these nuances and positions. Were there any strategies, any coping mechanisms with regard to employing intimacy in their writing? In this review article, we provide a brief overview of how censorship, gender and intimacy have been intertwined throughout history. Building on Sue Curry Jansen's view which regards censorship as "the knot that binds knowledge and power" we further claim that we could regard censorship as the knot that binds intimacy and women's writing. We also corroborate our assertions with examples from prominent studies focusing mainly on Western European literatures and add further examples of encounters with various forms of censorship, as experienced by Zofka Kveder, a writer who actively participated in Slovenian, German, Czech, and Croatian literary systems.

Keywords: feminist literary criticism / women's writing / intimacy, censorship / self-censorship / Kveder, Zofka

Introduction

The connection between the private—often considered as the realm of the intimate—and women's writing has long preoccupied feminist criticism.¹ In the reader edited by Susan Ostrov and entitled *Women*

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and Romance the studies selected by the editor enable us to trace this preoccupation ever since the first wave feminism. Within the triad private space, romantic love and writing, intimacy seems to have played a crucial role in forging a new feminine identity, at odds with the patriarchal blueprint of traditional societies. Women's writing circulated these ideas, established invisible-but nonetheless powerful-connections and inscribed women's perspectives on all matters intimate onto their reader's mentality. More recent studies within feminist criticism have revealed the social impact of the connection between intimacy (now regarded as a cultural category) and women's writing. At Home in the World: Women Writers and Public Life, from Austen to the Present (DiBatista), or Writing Intimacy into Feminist Geography (Moss and Donovan) articulate detailed exposés on women's role as cultural transmitters. Such studies reveal the role women had in history, when dealing with matters of the intimate, domestic life, love and escapism. In effect, these issues had been thoroughly explored outside the scope of the gendered perspective by Anthony Giddens in his referential study The Transformation of Intimacy. In contrast to much of the dominant discourses on the role of intimacy in modern culture, Giddens takes a Habermasian² stance in arguing that women's writing played a major role in in the radical blurring between the private and the public spheres, thus triggering a paradigm shift in the way emergent modern societies were *doing intimacy* (Jackson and Sik Ying Ho). However, feminists have since then critiqued this position-starting from drawing attention to the particular nuances of a post-bourgeois conception of a public sphere (Fraser) and ending with the latest study in the field: Women Writing Intimate Spaces. The Long Nineteenth Century at the Fringes of Europe (Lindh Estelle, Dutu, and Parente-Čapková). The particular concern of the editors of the latter volume was the issue of intimacy bound up with spatiality. As the title suggests, the contributors focused on a neglected geographical area-the fringes (or, arguably, peripheries) of Europe in relation to intimacy, or better yet, to the different intimacies identifiable in the emerging modern societies in these parts of Europe, at the turn of the twentieth century.

It is thus clear that the feminist scrutiny has raised awareness and has called for further nuancing the discussion related to the intimacy paradigm shift. There are, in fact, a variety of viewpoints on intimacy in regard to women's writing from the eighteenth century onward,

² We are referring here to the concept of public sphere as developed by Jurgen Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society.*

ranging from attachment to the culture of adultery, from eros to antiintimacy. This also raises the question of how women have negotiated these nuances and positions. Were there any strategies, any coping mechanisms with regard to employing intimacy in their writing?

In her research on German romantic female authors, Barbara Becker-Cantarino tackles this issue by coining the concept of "gender censorship." She notes that in the canon of German romanticism the discourse on sexual difference and writing functions "as a discourse of censorship" (Becker-Cantarino 81). In the wake of classicist and romantic aesthetics, the German philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte is extremely resolute when addressing the issue of regulating women's writing within the scope of utilitarianism: he deems women writers' "products" as not being worthy of the Republic of Art, namely the realm of philosophy or science, traditionally regarded as male only areas, not to be trespassed by women. This would be, Fichte contended, against "natural law." Even if this Fichtean social philosophy had been challenged, women were still subordinated to men at the period of the intellectual movements, according to subsequent Becker-Cantarino's argument (82). Moreover, even after several generations, when certain women writers did manage to establish themselves as authors, the status of a woman writer was still regarded as beyond the realm of respectability of their gender norms. In actual fact, when applied onto the emerging women's literary production, all the overt or covert control exercised by men around them did not differ fundamentally from the formula of censorship practices (84).

Historically, various forms of censorship have markedly shaped the creative process of writers. Not only state censorship but also interventions by editors, publishers and translators may be regarded as censorship practices. They could be understood as an implicit form of censorship, which comprises "an area that is not strictly codified legally, wherein no one can ever be sure whether the boundaries have been trespassed or not, or predict what kinds of penalties they might face" (Dović 169). Particularly subjects pertaining to a broad range of morality, gender, and intimacy (love, sexuality, family connections, friendship) have been severely scrutinized by censors who determined what was (in)appropriate in the field of artistic expression. It didn't take long for censors to realize that the moral standards imposed on women could be questioned, and in the worst case, even rejected, by the influence that popular women's works had on other women.

In this review article, we provide a brief overview of how censorship, gender and intimacy have been intertwined throughout history. Using

Sue Curry Jansen's perspective as a foundation, which sees censorship as "the knot that ties knowledge and power," we further assert that we could see censorship as the knot tying intimacy and women's writing together. We further add additional examples of encounters with various forms of censorship, as experienced by writer Zofka Kveder, who actively participated in Slovenian, German, Czech, and Croatian literary systems, to support our claims with examples from renowned studies focusing primarily on Western European literatures.

Censorship conducted by religious and secular authorities

Probably the first influential female voice that was violently silenced belonged to Hypatia (born c. 350–370 AD; died 415 AD), a Neoplatonic philosopher, astronomer, and mathematician. The aggressive mob murdered her to stop her influence on Alexandrian politics.

Gender censorship was applied by critics also after the death of the female author. This can be traced in the early reception of Sappho's work in the Attic comedy. The latter attributed to Sappho many lovers who lived before or after her, so that even the Roman philosopher Seneca seriously wondered whether Sappho was a public whore and Byzantine grammarians even speculated that there were two women of that name: one was said to have been a famous poetess, the other a notorious courtesan and heroine of comedies. In the second century, the Roman Catholic writer Tatian painted an even more negative picture of her when he wrote about her promiscuous sexual life, which was supposedly described shamelessly in her poems (Gantar 60). Such portrayals did not affect Sappho's creativity, since they occurred only after her death, but for many women writers after her, equating their literature or heroines with themselves and their intimate lives had far more negative consequences.

However, for the very origins of the word censorship, we need to shift to Rome, where the word censor was used from the fifth century BC. Censor was the officer who conducted the census, regulated the morals of the citizens, counted and classified them (see Swithinbank). Even with such an early definition of the censor's duties, it is clear how paramount morality was. In the history of censorship, next to statements regarded as hostile to the state and the religious establishment, morality is the most frequent reason for authorities' interventions in texts. In the Middle Ages, the most infamous attempt to silence women was undoubtedly the burning of the book *The Mirror of Simple Souls* and its author, the beguine Marguerite Porete (?–1310) at the stake in 1310. Not just the content of Porete's book but also her status of beguine (i.e., the Christian lay-order without taking religious vows) were problematic for the Catholic Church. One of the taboos Porete had violated was writing the book in Old French rather than in Latin. She was ordered not to circulate her ideas or the book again. In spite of this, she continued to do so (Piron).

Book burning can be described as an extreme, repressive censorship, which occurs when the work is already in the public—it may circulate as a manuscript as in Porete's case or be printed or performed. However, the religious authorities also tried to act in advance and prevent any attempt to spread ideas considered dangerous, and in this way exercised preventive censorship.

The Catholic Index Librorum Prohibitorum is one of the forms of this particular type of censorship. It was first issued in 1559. The first woman to be placed on the list was Magdalena Haymairus (1535–1586) in 1569, who was listed for one of her children's books. Other women include Anne Askew (1521-1546), Olympia Fulvia Morata (1526-1555), Ursula of Munsterberg (1491,1495, or 1499-1534), Veronica Franco (1546-1591), and Paola Antonia Negri (1508-1555) in the sixteenth century. In the nineteenth century we find Madame de Staël (1766-1817) with her novel Corinne ou l'Italie on the list and George Sand (1804–1876). Even if the Index has not been so important since the nineteenth century, the following authors and their works can be found on it in the twentieth century: Simone de Beauvoir's (1908-1986) The Second Sex (1949) and The Mandarins (1954) and Maria Valtorta's (1897–1961) work about the life of Jesus Christ entitled The Poem of the Man-God (1959). From the year 1966 the Index does not have the force of ecclesiastical law with the associated censures but it keeps its moral force.

Book censorship was exercised not only by the Catholic Church, but also by secular authorities. For instance, in Austria, the strict regulation of state censorship coincides with the Age of Enlightenment. In 1751, Maria Theresa established a censorship commission. Book censorship lasted until the March Revolution, while theater pre-censorship lasted until the end of the monarchy. There is no doubt that the primary task of censorship was to protect the authorities (secular and ecclesiastical), but the area of morality was also very important for censors. In the spirit of the Enlightenment, censorship was supposed to push back ignorance and superstition, furthermore one of the tasks of censorship was to change old customs and practices that appeared coarse and uncouth in the eyes of the enlightened people. In addition, censorship was to contribute to the development of modern, stricter morals and the refinement of manners (Bachleitner 50).

As for women writers, at the time of Maria Theresa (1751–1791) we find the works of Marianne-Agnès Falques (1720–1780), the author of romance novels, on the list of banned books. Later, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the following names appear: Marie-Adélaide Barthélemy-Hadot (1763–1821), Sophie von Brentano (1766–1800), Anna Eliza Bray (1790–1883), and George Sand, the latter with 17 titles (Bachleitner 111, 328, 336, 347).

Why were Sand's novels so problematic for Austrian censors? Bachleitner examines *Consuelo* (1842–1843), a historical novel that refers unkindly to Austria and is set about half in Vienna. In *Consuelo*, Sand bluntly attacks the monarchy and its representatives. Her main charge is that absolute power corrupts character. The proximity to the Gothic novel provided an additional argument for the censors to put *Consuelo* on the list, since everything linked to superstitions was problematic for the Austrian censorship (Bachleitner 348–350).

George Sand's historical drama *Les Mississipiens* (1840) was also placed on the list of banned works. This play varies the theme that George Sand dealt with in numerous novels: failure of love and materialistic thinking against the background of financial speculation. Anti-Semitic tones are also struck in the text: Samuel Bourset is the despised "modern Shylock" who provides the upper classes with money or shares, but often ruins them financially. Such an image of the Jew was not appropriate, since Austrian society was also dependent on Jewish capital and the audience could find parallels with Salomon Rotschild, an important Austrian financier. The moral issues were problematic in this work as well. In *Missisipiens*, as in most of her texts, Sand presents marriage as a field of speculation in which young, unmarried girls are treated like stocks on the market (Bachleitner 378–380).

Further east, in Russia, which—next to Austria—historically had the strictest censorship in Europe, Evdokia Rostopchina (1811–1858) and her ballad "Nasil'nyi brak" ("The Forced marriage," 1845) were sharply criticized by censors. L. Schlosberg discusses the case of the 'Rostopchina ballad' which became a platform for social gossip about the marital hardships of the countess and her husband Andrei Fedorovich, allegedly addressed in the poem. Thus, the critic points out that the censorship initially targeted the subject matter: it was taboo due to public pressure exercised onto women writers who were expected to exclude personal matters from the act of writing. Moreover, Rostopchina fell

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even further into disgrace and was banished from court when tsar Nicholas I apparently misinterpreted her poem as a political allusion to the forced 'marriage' of Poland with the Tsarist empire. Consequently, "around this time, the countess abandoned poetry in favor of writing prose, blank verse dramas, and stories" (Schlosberg 2064–2065).

The use of pseudonyms can also be seen as a form of dealing with censorship. Most often, women writers chose pseudonyms because they assumed that their writings would be more successful it they had a male name on the cover. Sometimes, as in the case of Zofka Kveder, the decision was not voluntary. At the time of her first publications, Zofka Kveder was employed in the office of Ivan Šušteršič, a lawyer who was also a politician advocating Catholic values and views on women's role. He found unacceptable that his female employee would write literature and therefore he required her to write under a pseudonym.

Censorship interventions by family members, friends, and editors

It was fairly typical for women writers' relatives or acquaintances to act as censors by burning their correspondence. We recall here the granddaughter of Madame de Sévigné who ordered her son-in-law to burn her grandmother's letters after her death. Fortunately, he had the letters copied (Fleré 5-6). But even where letters were not burned, they were often manipulated, edited. Peter Sabor writes that in the first collected edition of Jane Austen's letters, published in 1884, some passages or even whole pages were removed from the manuscripts. Occasionally, Victorian defenders of morality would completely remove from printed books the fragments dealing with anything connected to bodily humors or explicit language, as revealed in one of Jane Austen's correspondence letters with her sister Casandra, one of the manuscripts that have reached us to-date. Visiting the premises of a school, she finds a study room "full of all the modern Elegancies—& if it had not been for some naked Cupids over the Mantelpiece, which must be a fine study for Girls, one should never have smelt Instruction" (Sabor 129-130).

Obviously, her publisher Richard Bentley³ also had to think of the financial aspect of releasing Austen's letters. For the same reason, the

³ After Austen's works had been out of print for 14 years, in 1832 Henry and Cassandra Austen and T. Egerton sold the publishing rights of all six of Austen's novels to publisher Richard Bentley.

editors of the French newspaper Le Matin censored Colette's texts. According to Jeanne A. Ojala, there has always been a conflict between the moral and economical components of the censorship process, which is how the economy-related censorship issue in Colette's case is explained. However sensitive they might have been to the bourgeois' public moral demands, excessive censorship was bound to trigger financial cutbacks. Consequently, the authors of potentially censored published material would never be prosecuted on moral grounds. These economic realities explain how *The Ripening Seed* (Le Bli en herbe, 1922) featuring a theme violating social norms of the time (an older woman seducing a teenager) was published by Le Matin in a series, at least to a point, long after some members of the public reacted to the theme. The economical factor could also explain another Colette series (in 1931), this time overtly hinting at homosexuality (of both genders). As Colette notes, the editor "cut my text in the middle of a sentence, and sent me a letter informing me that he was calling a halt to Ces Plaisirs ... because it was not to the taste of his mass readership" (Ojala 541-542).

Similarly, Radclyffe Hall's (1880–1943) lesbian novel *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) was banned. It all began with a note from James Douglas, editor of the *Sunday Express*: "I would rather give a healthy boy or a healthy girl a phial of prussic acid than this novel." (Douglas 38) The ensuing obscenity trial ended with the banning of a novel. Judge Biron concluded his judgement with the following words: "[...] I have no hesitation whatever in saying that it is an obscene libel, that it would tend to corrupt those into whose hands it should fall, and that the publication of this book is an offence against public decency, an obscene libel, and I shall order it to be destroyed." (Biron 49)

Any allusion to sexuality was problematic both in printed texts and in theater. Slovenian censor Fran Milčinski referred to women as he rejected a popular French comedy *Florette and Patapon* (1906) by Maurice Hennequin and Pierre Veber on the following grounds: "The play is not suitable for our moral audience, for the wives and daughters of our officials, and for our always very numerous student visitors. The actions and expressions of the play are too obscene!" (Milčinski)

This analysis highlights a crucial fact about moral instruction that is present in nineteenth-century Austrian censorship. As a result of the fact that its regulatory or disciplinary procedures are founded on gender relations and the patriarchal structure of society, bourgeois ideology's key objective of censoring women's sexual desire also collides with the censorship of the theater at this point. While the Enlightenment believed that it was important to educate the general populace and that this aim included the study of sexuality, the focus of attention in the nineteenth and early twentieth century was on the bourgeoisie, particularly women. The (male) students were presumably not the target audience that the censor truly had in mind, given that the majority of them had already had sexual contact with domestic servants or in brothels during this time; instead, the wives and daughters of officials were to be given greater weight.

Another example of censorship of explicit sexual desire is Zofka Kveder's novella Eve (Eva, 1904). The story depicts sexual intercourse between a woman from a wealthy and respected Croatian peasant family and her servant. At some point, Eve gives in to her passion and becomes pregnant. She is overwhelmed with shame and sees the only way out in suicide; thus the novella ends with Eva stabbing herself to death. Kveder sent the novella to Ljubljanski zvon (a renowned Slovenian periodical). Her correspondence with the editor, Fran Zbašnik, reveals the editor's desire to have her alter or omit some passages from the original manuscript. Judging by her response, Kveder must have given in under financial pressure. She requested the manuscript from the editor so that she may publish it in German because her text was too daring for the Slovenian audience: "I know Ljubljana, unfortunately you are right.—For me a character like Eva is something grandiose. Her suicide is based on a true incident down in Croatia.-But I know-in Ljubljana people would sniffle." (Kveder)

Self-censorship practices and strategies

In order to avoid censorship, women writers tried to find alternative ways to publish their works. By exploring these strategies, we move from the traditional definition of censorship to the realm of the so-called new censorship, which "stresses the multiplicity of forms of censorship and the generative effect of censorship, an activity hitherto seen as purely repressive" (Bunn 25). New censorship theory offers a more complex understanding of the entire censorship phenomenon, and, consequently, is more open to different perspectives, such as feminist literary criticism.⁴ In Annette Kuhn's view, censorship is "not reducible to a circumscribed and predefined set of institutions and institutional activities, but is produced within an array of constantly shifting dis-

⁴ On new censorship theory, see Gilbert; Curry Jansen; Freshwater; and the articles in this thematic issue by Annell, Kārkla, and Eglāja-Kristsone.

courses, practices and apparatuses. It cannot, therefore, be regarded as either fixed or monolithic" (Kuhn 127).

The most common method of avoiding censorship was probably to use a pseudonym, particularly a male identity. As Becker-Cantarino points out, this wasn't typically the case prior to the romantic era. She argues that writers of the older generation "such as Sophie La Roche (1730–1807) or Anna Louisa Karsch (1722–1791), consciously presented themselves as professional authors after a first work received critical acclaim—though they remained well aware of their status as exceptions, if not anomalies, in literary culture" (Becker-Cantarino 89–90).

On the other hand, after 1800 women often published anonymously or under a masculine pen-name and had their work revised or even signed by men. Becker-Cantarino gives the example of Caroline Schlegel-Schelling, who published nothing under her own name, but reported about her writing in her letters. In one of them she writes: "On Thursday Schelling submitted an article that I ... [had] composed; I would not have wanted it under my name in any case ... Schelling did away with the epistolary form I had initially given it and incidentally teased me a lot because of my great affection for the play and everything connected with it that had been so obvious; I had to laugh myself realizing what a feminine appearance it had. With much joking we removed the traces of gentle hands one by one." (Becker-Cantarino 87) As Becker-Cantarino argues, "[g]ender censorship' led to repressions, omissions, concessions, and modifications in literary texts, especially in novels, which contemporaries read as representations of real life" (91).

To illustrate how 'gender censorship' worked via textual interventions, Becker-Cantarino brings forth the example of *The Seldorf Family* (*Die Familie Seldorf*, 1796–1797), a family saga by Therese Forster-Huber which was well received due to its apparent endorsement of patriarchal order. The topic of the wayward daughter who refuses marriage is no doubt masqueraded—yet another method of eluding censorship (Becker-Cantarino 91).

In a similar vein, according to Mulvey-Roberts, both family sagas and the Gothic novel "allowed women to overcome the censorship that barred female literature from tackling taboos such as incest and rape" (Mulvey-Roberts 2638). Yet not only novels were subject to gender censorship. Drama is equally productive in this sense, fostering the fragmentation of characters and dramatic. This fragmentation is at work in Caroline von Günderrode's dramas with open ends, for instance in *Magie und Schicksal* and *Hildgund*, which is a re-writing of Atilla's legend. In *Hildgund*, the woman playwright leaves an open ending: "Where a male hero would be able to stab away, this drama breaks off, because the desire of the heroine, formulated in a monologue, appears immoderate." (Hoff 106–108)

Virginia Woolf is a good demonstration of a writer who used selfcensorship in the early twentieth century in the context of marketing tactics. As Vara Neverow notes, Woolf was aware that she was widely read by different audiences: "a mixed-gender public readership, a primarily female readership, and an intimate readership consisting mainly of family and friends." (Neverow 57) Consequenty, for "the general readership Woolf avoided or downplayed topics likely to provoke disapproval—for example, Mrs. Dalloway is very covert with regard to Sapphic and male homoerotic desire. Directed mainly to a female audience, *A Room of One's Own* might be a bit more explicit about sexuality and gender hostilities" (58).

Woolf's counterpart in Central Europe, Zofka Kveder, also practiced self-censorship; however, she did not downplay topics, but a genre. In 1900, she published a collection of short stories (sketches) *Mystery of a Woman (Misterij* žene), which was rather praised by many progressive critics and readers. However, conservative critics were soon to react negatively. In 1902, Oton Župančič, one of the most prominent Slovenian poets of that time—and the occasional literary critic published a survey of Slovenian short stories and wrote about Kveder's book in very harsh terms: "The mystery of a woman' by Zofka Kveder is not really literature, but cultural and social history. Those sketches are of bad literary taste, the visionary images are exaggerated, the symbolism is superficial. 'The mystery of a woman' belongs to the so-called veristic literature, with tendencies that smell too much of demagogy and have nothing to do with literature." (Župančič 25)

While Župančič wasn't the only one to have offered unfavorable criticism, other critics' points of emphasis were different. They had written about content, while Župančič addressed structural issues (the genre employed by Kveder in her writing, for instance). As a young feminist, Kveder was determined to write about women's subordination and domestic violence, and she continued to do so after publishing her *Mistery of a Woman*. However, following Župančič's criticism, she never published another collection of sketches as a self-censorship strategy.

Conclusion

From the point of view of gender, intimacy and morality, censorship proves to have always been a project that not only protects the political immutability of monarchical boundaries, the organization of the state apparatus, and the inviolability of the Church, but has intervened in the private sphere of individuals, especially women. In this review article, we aimed to structure a brief exploration of the historical entanglements between censorship, intimacy and women's writing. Having established the paramount importance of the cultural contract of intimacy at the societal level, we have pointed out how the establishment has become very sensitive to the reworkings of intimacy in women's writing, due to its high social modelling potential (Bandura). Soon, policing scenarios of intimacy become scenarios of censorship.

In this respect, we have argued that because the bourgeois society has created different codes of conduct for women and men, the reception of their works was also differently perceived—it became gendered. We have seen that women's works, usually describing the private lives of their female protagonists and dealing with themes of intimacy, love, friendship, and other relationships, are even more exposed to the critical interventions of editors. As a result, on the one hand we have provided examples of how the criteria for censoring or rejecting an author's work were tied together with the impact the work would have on the audience. On the other hand, in accordance with the "new censorship theory," we have provided several examples of how the gender restrictions have also been ingrained in the act of literary creation itself.

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Cenzura – vozlišče, ki povezuje intimnost in žensko literarno avtorstvo

Ključne besede: feministična literarna veda / literarno ustvarjanje / ženske / intimnost / cenzura / samocenzura / Kveder, Zofka

Povezava med zasebnim, ki pogosto velja za področje intimnega, in ženskim pisanjem že dolgo zaposluje feministično kritiko. Novejše študije v feministični kritiki so razkrile družbeni vpliv povezave med intimnostjo, ženskim literarnim avtorstvom in cenzuro oziroma samocenzuro. Ob tem se postavlja vprašanje, kako so literarne ustvarjalke ubesedovale tematike, povezane z intimnostjo, ki so bile neprimerne, da jih obravnava avtorica. Ali so obstajale kakšne strategije, kakšni mehanizmi spoprijemanja s tem? V preglednem znanstvenem članku najprej podajava kratek pregled, kako so se cenzura, spol in intimnost prepletali skozi zgodovino. Izhajajoč iz študije Sue Curry Jansen, ki cenzuro obravnava kot »vozlišče, ki povezuje znanje in moč«, trdiva, da bi lahko cenzuro obravnavali kot vozlišče, ki povezuje intimnost in žensko literarno avtorstvo. Svoje trditve podkrepiva s primeri iz odmevnih študij, ki se osredotočajo predvsem na zahodnoevropske književnosti, in dodajava primere srečanj z različnimi oblikami cenzure, kot jih je izkusila Zofka Kveder, pisateljica, ki je aktivno sodelovala v slovenskem, nemškem, češkem in hrvaškem literarnem sistemu.

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