1 Introduction: Justifying Just Judgment

DEFINING CENSORSHIP

The main goal of this book is to explicate and comment on the views—both explicit and implicit—of some of our most prominent Canadian writers on censorship, but before I can begin this work I must clarify what I mean by that term. The Oxford English Dictionary defines a censor (the noun) in four ways. The first refers to the original use of the term to refer to the Roman magistrates who took the census of the citizens. The last is used in psychology to describe the mental faculty that represses certain elements of the unconscious. My definition, which does not deal particularly with classical history or Freudian psychology, derives primarily from the other two meanings. A censor, according to the first of these, is “one who exercises official or officious supervision over morals and conduct,” and this includes “an official in some countries whose duty it is to inspect all books, journals, dramatic pieces, etc., before publication, to secure that they shall contain nothing immoral, heretical, or offensive to the government” (1029). The OED’s other definition of a censor is “one who judges or criticizes,” especially “one who censures or blames” (1029). This definition, according to the dictionary, has become obsolete: before the twelfth century, “censurer” and “censor” had the same meaning, which included the non-pejorative sense of one who judges or evaluates; as this definition fell out of use, “censor” came to mean an official who suppresses, while “censurer” became one who finds fault, blames, or condemns (OED, 1029). I believe that the
loss of this early meaning of “censor” has deprived the word of its most salient characteristic, namely the quality of judgment – the word comes, after all, from the Latin censere, meaning to assess, estimate, judge – which in turn has led to confusion regarding what practices are and are not covered by the word.

Before I attempt to justify my belief that the element of judgment should be returned to the definition of censorship, I want to situate the two pertinent *OED* definitions in the context of intellectual history, a context that will provide a theoretical frame for my own definition. The first definition, that censorship is government suppression, is a product of the Enlightenment. For Enlightenment thinkers – from Bacon and Locke through Voltaire and Diderot to Franklin and Jefferson – society’s crucial problems could be solved and reliable norms established through the use of reason. Of course reason could only be freely exercised when people were liberated from the tyranny of authoritarian institutions such as the Church and the state, and this included being free of their agents of censorship, who regulated the expression of reason. John Milton’s *Areopagitica* is directed at the English Parliament, as is J.S. Mill’s treatise “On the Liberty of Thought and Discussion,” which is aimed at the “legislature or [its] executive” (78). The American First Amendment stipulates that “Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press.” Because the Enlightenment project was so concerned with the emancipation of reason through the liberation of the rights of the individual, the Enlightenment model of censorship came to be the institutional – primarily governmental – control of expression.

We are still living with the Enlightenment conception of censorship, and there are still those in the West who explicitly adhere to a definition of censorship as government suppression. John Leo, writing from a particularly conservative perspective, is one such adherent: “In normal English,” he argues, “‘censorship’ means control of utterance by government.” He dismisses the claims of censorship made by artists who are denied grants, and by those squeezed out of the marketplace by corporate interests, as “word games ... [that] are generating suspect statistics and polluting public discussion” (31). Explicit positions such as Leo’s are rare.3 More commonly the Enlightenment definition is simply assumed: it has become a traditional way of thinking about censorship and constitutes the semantic background out of which censorship debates emerge. It is the assumption, for example, behind the liberal assertion, formulated by Oliver Wendell Holmes (inspired by Mill and echoed by Ronald Dworkin), that “the best test of truth is the power of the thought to
get itself accepted in the competition of the market” (Abrams v. United States, 616). This argument, a central one in free-speech debates, holds that, as long as government suppression is absent from society, members of the society will be able to express and exchange ideas freely. It maintains that there is no censorship inherent in a marketplace of ideas.

There are a couple of problems with the Enlightenment definition of censorship and the arguments that proceed from it. First, this definition simply fails to describe accurately the relationship between power and the control of discourse in our society. In his influential book Questions of Censorship David Tribe challenges this definition of censorship as government suppression: “In this narrow sense, which some pedants, I believe wrongly, regard as its true meaning, censorship of printed material disappeared in Britain in 1695, and of plays in 1668. Only in totalitarian lands of the Right or the Left does it, by and large, remain in this form. Yet it would seem perverse to say there is no censorship in the liberal democracies” (17). As Tribe points out, the definition of censorship as suppression by government has led to the (mistaken) belief that, as the Enlightenment project was gradually realized in the West in the decline of the power of the Church and the replacement of authoritarian rulers with democratic practices, censorship has been eradicated. Censorship has not been eliminated in liberal democracies. The marketplace of ideas, left to function on its own without government censorship, has not resulted in the open and free expression of ideas among people. I will demonstrate in this book that there exist, in our society, a whole range of censors – from government to agents in the private sector to the writers themselves.

Another problem with the Enlightenment definition is the demonization of censorship. As a tool of government control of its citizens, censorship came to be known as the enemy of reason and therefore an enemy of freedom and democracy. As Sue Curry Jansen points out, in Enlightenment discourse “censorship is a devil term. It refers ‘back to’ a Dark Age in Western history. It refers ‘down to’ reactionary elements: un-Enlightened or foreign elements which threaten to reverse the tide of progress in Liberal societies” (4). As a result, censorship has come to acquire, in liberal democracies, especially in the United States, a reputation of being a practice that is always wrong. A related problem is the rhetorical effect this demonization of censorship has had on discussion of the issue. Whenever a proposal surfaces for the control of some discourse – be it pornography, hate literature, or offensive art – those making the proposal are labelled censors. This portrayal is not inaccurate, but the effect of calling
individuals censors is immediately to cast them as anti-democratic, intolerant, and immoral, even before any of their arguments or the discourse in question is examined. It is very difficult for would-be censors to have their reasons for advocating censorship heeded when they have already been written off for that advocacy in the first place. Deprived of moral efficacy, arguments for the control of particular discourses must give way to anti-censorship feeling that, having hardened into an absolute principle on the moral high ground, is applied procedurally, without care for context, with significant deleterious results.²

If the Enlightenment position is one camp on the conceptual field defining censorship, then the other is what I wish to call the constructivist position. The constructivist position defines censorship as a process embedded in the forces that shape society. It derives from the ideas of thinkers such as Michel Foucault, who challenge the Enlightenment notion that truth can be arrived at or that knowledge can be produced by an autonomous individual using “objective” reasoning. For these thinkers, knowledge is at least partially a product of forces outside the individual. For Foucault, those forces are ones of power: “We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (Discipline and Punish, 29).³ It is a logical step from the idea that all knowledge proceeds from the interaction of social forces to the related idea that the absence or exclusion of any knowledge is the result of the interplay of social forces as well. In this view government, which suppresses the free expression of reason, is not the only censor in society: any time a social force causes expression to be excluded, or “disempowers” expression, censorship is taking place.

This is the broader view held by critics such as Richard Burt, who revises the Enlightenment definition of censorship and dispenses with the public/private divide that sees censorship as something performed only by governments: “I will contend that censorship operates not only in repressive terms (as in the confiscation and destruction of art, say), but also as a complex network of productive discursive practices that legitimate and delegitimate the production and reception of the aesthetic in general and of the avant garde in particular” (“Degenerate ‘Art,’” 220). Burt relies on the constructivist idea that the existence (and therefore exclusion) of any discourse depends not on the intentions of any particular agent but on social
forces that shape the context of that discourse. Sue Curry Jansen relies on this kind of thinking as well in her reformulation of censorship, which is similar to Burt’s: “My definition of the term encompasses all socially structured proscriptions or prescriptions which inhibit or prohibit dissemination of ideas, information, images, and other messages through a society’s channels of communication whether these obstructions are secured by political, economic, religious, or other systems of authority. It includes both overt and covert proscriptions and prescriptions” (221n1). In constructing these broader definitions, both Burt and Jansen come to reject the view of censorship as a strictly repressive, negative, demonic process that must be eliminated; instead, they take the view that censorship occurs wherever social forces contend, making it “an enduring feature of all human communities” (Jansen, 4). While both critics’ intellectual projects echo my own in attempting to rehabilitate the concept of censorship by extending the traditional Enlightenment definition in several ways, their books limit the application of a revised definition: for Burt to the realm of aesthetics and for Jansen to the realm of economics (what she calls “material or market censorship” [222n1]).

While my redefinition of censorship will be applicable beyond the realms of aesthetics and economics, I believe there is a danger in taking this constructivist approach too far. Michael Holquist, building on the same constructivist terrain as Burt and Jansen, does not observe their limits but ends up with a redefinition of censorship that has little use. His approach is tied closely to the structuralist view of language, in which signs gain their identity only through relational contrast with other signs. Echoing Ferdinand de Saussure’s idea of linguistic difference, he writes: “Censorship is a necessary moment in all perception (to see a tree, I must cut out of my purview the rest of the forest). And it is an ineluctable feature of the grammatical aspect of language (to say “cat” in the noun slot of an English sentence is to exclude “dog,” “zebra,” “heffalump,” etc.). In some measure, then, all texts are censored. Imposed censorship occupies a small segment in the arc of prohibition ... At this overabstracted level, the concept begins to lose its usefulness but not, perhaps, before demonstrating that all experience is a reading between the lines” (23n2). As Holquist himself recognizes, this definition is overly broad, to the extent that it becomes synonymous with the generic capacity to distinguish one thing from among others (whether it be a tree in a forest, a word in a sentence, or one book from others). This definition provides no answers to questions regarding the parameters of censorship – whether it is public or private, intentional or unintentional, whether it occurs before or after publication, and for
what reasons – because it observes no such boundaries. Ultimately, under this definition, because everything is censorship, nothing is.

Holquist’s definition of censorship is interesting, however, because it comes so close to duplicating the definition of the word “judgment,” which is “the mental ability to perceive and distinguish relationships; discernment” (Nelson Canadian Dictionary, 735). What am I doing when I see Holquist’s tree if not perceiving and distinguishing the relationship between that individual tree and those that make up the surrounding forest, or, in other words, using my faculty of judgment to pick out and comprehend that individual tree? This brings me back to the point of departure of my discussion of definitions, which was the historical connotations of the word “censor” and, by extension, “censorship.” Quite some time ago, according to the OED definitions outlined above, censorship was simply the act of judging or criticizing. During the Enlightenment the word came to mean the governmental suppression of discourse. But this later meaning is in fact a much more specific version, a subset of the earlier one, for the government censorship of some work is a negative judgment of the work, backed up by the power to enforce that judgment. In recent times, however, it has become evident that governments are not the only authorities that exercise the judgment of censorship: Jansen argues that the economic market does so; Holquist that we all do. My point here is that, again, any discussion of censorship must acknowledge that judgment is at the base of this activity. Anti-censorship forces are loath to admit this because judgment is not a pejorative term; the words they do focus on, “suppression” and “control,” when placed beside “government” are much more effective in achieving the demonizing effect they are after.

It is appropriate, therefore, to see all definitions of censorship on a spectrum of judgment, with the very narrow Enlightenment definition (Leo’s, for example) at one end and a very diffuse constructivist one (Holquist’s, for example, which comprises the judgment of anything by anyone) at the other. Most other definitions of censorship will generally fall somewhere between these poles. The definition I use in this book does so as well. I would define censorship as the exclusion of some discourse as the result of a judgment by an authoritative agent based on some ideological predisposition. The definition borrows from but is certainly broader than the Enlightenment definition: the idea that censorship is practised by someone in power is maintained, for example, but the government official is changed to any authoritative agent. It is naturally narrower than the all-encompassing constructivist definition contemplated by Holquist: judgment is the prime activity of the censor; it is not just
any judgment, however, but judgment based on some ideological ground (so Holquist’s physiological example would not qualify).

Let me expand on some of the characteristics of this definition. First, who can be a censor? Is censorship a practice solely within the purview of the government (that which is public) or can it be a private practice as well? If censorship can be private as well as public, then another question arises: can a person censor him/herself? That is, is censorship performed only by a third party, or can it also take the form of self-suppression? As is evident from the definitions of censorship I have highlighted so far, constructivist definitions diverge from the traditional Enlightenment one mainly in asserting that governments are not the only censors in society. Gara LaMarche argues that “censorship functions at three levels: governmental, through legislatures and school boards and arts councils; nongovernmental, through decisions by editors and producers, publishers and studios, booksellers and theaters; and the personal” (58). Like Lamarche, I will contend that private censorship and self-censorship are not different in kind from governmental censorship and that all three are covered by my definition.

What is the difference between government and private censorship? Let us take an example to consider the justification of such a distinction. It is 1947 in Moscow. I write a letter to the editor spelling out the evils of Communism and hope to have it published in the newspaper. Under the regime of the day all letters appearing in the Communist Party newspaper (the only newspaper permitted) must be screened by government officials before being authorized for publication. My work is duly examined, fails the test, and is refused publication. I am sent a terse note directing me to stop writing capitalist propaganda, and my friends tell me I am lucky to be alive. Clearly this is censorship (it epitomizes the traditional Enlightenment definition). Now let us imagine that at the same time I have a cousin who lives in the United States and holds views on political economy diametrically opposed to mine. My cousin writes a letter on the benefits of Communism, and while the Soviet government is considering my letter, he sends his to an American newspaper editor who, after considering the content of his polemic, not surprisingly turns him down. How are these two scenarios different?

Noted First Amendment scholar Frederick Schauer takes up the issue of public versus private censorship and gives two main reasons for viewing them as different. One difference he identifies is that suppression of speech in the private realm “is almost always trivial. Speakers and listeners can move to different locations” (125). Schauer’s point is that private suppression is usually local, while
public suppression extends systematically throughout the domain of the government. Applied to my example, this argument would hold that, while government rejection of my letter barred it from every newspaper in the land, my cousin could turn to other newspaper publishers. But given the Cold War hysteria in the United States at the time of our example, is it not conceivable that my cousin would send his letter to newspaper after newspaper with no success at publication? Would an industry ban be any different from a government one? For South African novelist and social commentator J.M. Coetzee, writing in 1996, this is the answer to Schauer’s argument: “When censure is not only expressed but acted upon by bodies that hold an effective monopoly on particular media of expression (via, for instance, distribution or retail networks), freedom of expression may be stifled as effectively as under outright legal ban. This is a significant problem for anyone who tries to distinguish sharply between censorship and censure, or what Frederick Schauer calls public and private censorship” (235). Furthermore, while private suppression can be as effective as a public ban, sometimes it can be more effective. If the Soviet government for some reason decided my letter would be barred only from newspapers distributed in Moscow, and my cousin was refused by every newspaper in New York State, it could be argued that the private suppression was more robust than the public. Finally, just as the subject of private suppression can move to another location to speak his piece (or in my cousin’s case to another newspaper if he can find one), there is nothing inherently immobilizing in censorship wielded by government. It is true that the Soviet authorities would not have let me pass into West Germany to publish my letter, but that is not because they practised censorship but because they believed in restricting the movement of their citizens. Other countries that censor (like Canada, which has hate laws) are not concerned with such restriction of movement. So it is not necessarily true that private censorship is trivial or local compared to public censorship, and to distinguish between them based on this view would be a mistake.

The other distinction Schauer makes between public and private suppression of discourse is that private suppression may be an act of expression. The New York Times may decide to suppress my cousin’s letter, but if the state tells the newspaper it must be more tolerant and publish his letter, the Times is being censored. Forcing the newspaper to include something it would prefer not to include interferes with its freedom of expression. Schauer concludes that “the act of censoring by a private agent can in many instances be an act of speech by that agent, and ... remedying this act of censorship by
a private agent can be a governmental restriction on that act of speech ... This additional dimension of private suppression as an act of speech, or at least a corollary to it, distinguishes private from government censorship, and makes the notion of private censorship almost self-contradictory" (122–3). Schauer’s argument is faulty, however, because it does not consider that government suppression can be an act of expression as well. The City of New York could decide to ban any newspapers containing pro-Communist sentiment from its streets, but if the federal government tells the city it must be more tolerant and allow these newspapers, the city is being censored. It wishes to express its anti-Communist feeling, but its freedom to do so is being curtailed in a way similar to the curtailment of the Times by the government. Thus suppression can be an act of speech not only for private agents but for public ones as well. Schauer’s second distinction is no more justified than his first, and I would contend there is no good reason to observe a difference in kind between public and private censorship.

The continuity between public and private censorship lends support to my definition, in which censorship can be performed by any authoritative agent. But does this formulation include self-censorship? Can an artist (who has, after all, a certain authority over his or her own work) who ends up excluding his or her own discourse be considered to be a censor? Before I can answer this question I need to consider some of the characteristics of censorship that are implied by my definition. These include the question of when censorship can occur, whether it is intentional or unintentional, and the reasons for its occurrence.

When can censorship occur? The traditional definition holds that censorship is “prior restraint,” which consists either of a licensing system in which a work must be submitted to a government agent for inspection before publication or of a court injunction prohibiting the dissemination of some information. Within Western democracies the former kind of prior restraint has, for the most part, been done away with for written material like books, and is found only in pockets of other forms of cultural production (films, for example, are still reviewed before release in some Canadian provinces). The latter kind, court injunction, is used sparingly (sometimes judges impose a publication ban on the proceedings of a trial to ensure the accused gets a fair hearing). Though incidences of prior restraint are now rare, there is a constant stream of disputes, both inside and outside the courtroom, in which censorship is considered to be the issue of contention. This fact suggests that censorship does not consist only of occurrences of prior restraint. As Cass R. Sunstein points out, “There
is a major obstacle to free speech if someone who utters a criticism of the President is subject to a sentence of life imprisonment; but there is no prior restraint. Most censorship occurs through subsequent punishment" (xiii). Perhaps, however, we are using the wrong word when we call these cases censorship. These instances of post-publication suppression, as Sunstein says, consist of punishment. Prior restraint, by contrast, aims to prevent certain material from being published. If censorship is exclusion or suppression, then isn't prevention a much more comprehensive mode of exclusion than punishment?

The answer is no, for two reasons. First, punishment is prevention. The infliction of some penalty in retribution for someone's act is usually only one goal of punishment; the other is to prevent that person from committing the act again and to send a warning to others who would commit such an act. Deterrence makes post-publication suppression as effective a form of censorship as prior restraint. In fact, it may be more rigorous. For in a state that punishes after publication, to reduce their risk authors will tend not to produce material they fear will come close to what is considered punishable by the authorities (this is an example of self-censorship). In a system of prior restraint authors will feel more at ease producing this marginal material since the only risk they incur is having their work rejected. We see the deterrent capacity of post-publication suppression in the effect of libel law known as "libel chill," whereby authors fearing retribution refrain from making claims that, though perhaps controversial, would not be actionable under the law. Second, one may argue that post-publication suppression is not "true" censorship because individuals under this system have an autonomy unlike those subject to prior restraint. At least they are free to publish their work: if it is suppressed afterward, that is another matter. But this is only to say that these individuals are free to break the law. The same can be said of authors in a system of prior restraint, for they too are free to break the law by flouting government inspectors and publishing, while facing the consequences afterward.

Not only do I believe that censorship can occur both before and after a work's publication; I would go further to argue that censorship can occur even before the work is written. With this claim I am concerned not so much with the timing of the suppression but with its nature: is censorship always direct, overt, and intended? The traditional Enlightenment definition of censorship would answer this question in the affirmative: faced with an offensive work, the government intervenes without an intermediary, openly carrying out its purpose, which is to suppress the work. Some of the constructivist definitions I have discussed, however, present censorship as a more...
subtle, systemic discursive process that shapes the very boundaries of what can be said. Richard Burt calls this "structural censorship": “Censorship may be seen, then, not only in terms of repressed and free discourses but also in terms of the receivable and the unreceivable – what cannot be heard or spoken without risk of being delegitimized as beyond the pale of discourse” (“Introduction,” xvii). Judith Butler refers to a similar phenomenon when she writes of “implicit censorship” (she also calls it “foreclosure”) that “operate[s] on a level prior to speech, namely, as the constituting norm by which the speakable is differentiated from the unspeakable” (137–8). The “unreceivable,” the “unspeakable,” are not lacunae in discourse that are produced by the direct and overt intervention of an intentional agent. At the level of language, if I cannot express some idea because the requisite words do not exist in my lexicon, I am being constrained indirectly and covertly by the social forces (not an intentional agent) that have constructed my vocabulary. At the level of speech act, if I refrain from interrupting a play to roundly curse the actors for their bad performance, it is not because of any government prohibition but because of social mores that deem it unacceptable. In both examples I can break free of the restraints only by a radical act of social transgression (in the first case by creating the words I need and having them understood by others, in the second by defying social convention).

One might argue, however, that these are not cases of censorship precisely because they are not direct and overt, and no intentional agent is present. But surely these attributes are not required in all incidents in which we would consider censorship to be a factor. If a government decides to give grants only to artists who sing the praises of that government, it is not censoring directly and overtly: it is not openly preventing its critics from voicing their views through prior restraint or punishment. Yet while the awarding of a government grant is a reward, the withholding of it is a punishment, and again, to punish for the expression of some idea is often as effective as to prevent it. In this way the outcome of the government’s action will be to inhibit speech. This is censorship, albeit of an indirect and covert nature.\(^8\) Now does censorship need to be intentional. During an election campaign the media may agree to disseminate candidates’ views only if the candidates can afford to purchase expensive ads. The media’s intent, no doubt, is merely to make money, not to suppress particular political views. The effect, however, is to censor those who are financially disadvantaged. In Canada the government recognizes this threat of inadvertent censorship and counters it by obliging the public broadcaster to air political ads free of charge.
Taken together, the arguments I have been making about censorship lay the foundations for my claim that self-censorship is a form of censorship not unlike the others I have been discussing. Some of the examples I have used – when I refrain from saying something about someone because I am afraid of being sued for libel; when I suppress my urge to interrupt a play; or when I refrain from criticizing the government to win a grant – show self-censorship in action even as they illustrate these arguments. Self-censorship often occurs before a discourse is even articulated. It is often indirect: I may decide not to say something, but it may be because a third party has put pressure on me to keep silent. That third party may be the government, but it may also be a private interest. Self-censorship can be intentional (I may choose to keep my criticism of the government to myself because I know it is the only way of obtaining a grant), but it may also be unintentional: I may have so completely assimilated the values of society that my suppression of my opinion may be unthinking and automatic (in which case it becomes difficult to identify). Since, as we have seen, censorship can be private; since it can occur before a discourse is even articulated; and since it need not be direct, overt, or intentional, we can conclude that self-censorship is not different in kind from other forms of censorship.⁹

One problematic issue that arises when we consider self-censorship is its relation to artistic revision. What is the difference between self-censorship and editing? When a novelist reluctantly bows to pressure from a publisher to remove a scene that the publisher feels will be controversial, the novelist is clearly performing an act of self-censorship. When the novelist agrees to make certain stylistic changes demanded by the publisher, such as modification of grammar or punctuation, we call it editing. What determines the difference between these activities, and where is the line drawn between them? At first glance it would appear that the answer depends on the nature of the motivation of the revision. The motivation in the first case is political or ideological (I prefer the latter word as per my definition of censorship), while in the second it is aesthetic. But poststructuralist critics have suggested that there is no pure, objective, aesthetic realm, that aesthetic judgments do not exist independent of the ideological forces (economic, social, historical, etc.) that shape them. Ideological foundations can affect judgments of style no less than they do other kinds of aesthetic judgments (such as "quality"). Consider the Black Canadian writer who is told that her novel, written in Nation Language (a Black English dialect) will only be published if she "cleans up" the grammar to comply with standard English. The publisher's demand is ideological, and should the writer comply, she will be
censoring herself. Clearly the difference between self-censorship and editing is not the latter’s aesthetic motivation. Perhaps the difference relies on there being a disagreement between writer and publisher: when the writer endorses the changes it is editing; when she makes them against her wishes, when she bows to outside pressure, it is self-censorship. But if a writer goes along with changes merely because she has assimilated the ideological values that inform them, she is participating in the “implicit censorship” to which Butler refers. In this way, making “grammatical” corrections to get published is like keeping silent during an awful play to avoid incurring public displeasure.

While I think it is very difficult to formulate a difference between editing and self-censorship when artistic revision is instigated by a third party (including when a writer, of her own accord, makes changes to her work to align it with some externally set standard), I am reluctant to class editing choices made solely by the author for “personal” (non-ideological) reasons as self-censorship. This feeling rests on the assumption that individuals have a certain authoritative autonomy, that they can make some choices, including some aesthetic ones, independently of the social forces at work in the background. Determining the validity of the extreme constructivist position that proffers these social forces as fundamental to human endeavour, that decentres the subject and questions the subject’s authority, even posits the death of the author,10 is beyond my purview here. Thus, in trying to determine whether an author is performing self-censorship by altering a text based on what appear to be autonomous, personal reasons – as I do with Findley in chapter 2 – I rely on a case-by-case approach that takes in the context of the act (the nature of the changes, the author’s stated intent, etc.).

All the characteristics of censorship I have been discussing are implicit in my definition, in which censorship is the exclusion of some discourse as the result of a judgment made by an authoritative agent based on some ideological predisposition. By an authoritative agent I mean someone with the power to enforce the judgment, whether it be a public agent, a private agent, or the producer of the discourse herself. Rather than attach a clear subject to the act of exclusion I use the rather passive “as a result of” to allow for censorship that is indirect and covert and may not always be intentional. The definition also stipulates that there must be a certain driving factor behind the suppression for it to be censorship (even if it is indirect), namely a judgment driven by ideology. This rules out arbitrary and physiological acts of differentiation or selection. The most important word in the definition, however, is judgment. Censorship
Censorship and Canadian Writing

The definition of censorship I have been discussing informs the following chapters of this book. I use it both to identify the arguments about censorship that these Canadian writers make (either explicitly or implicitly) and to expose some of the contradictions in these arguments. In chapter 2, I show that Timothy Findley has taken up the traditional position, which sees censorship as a sinister force in society. He takes this position in part in response to a number of controversies involving the exclusion or alteration of his own writing, including the rejection of one of his novels by publishers and the decision not to publish another because of the threat of a libel suit. The Wars in particular shows signs of censorship (either attempted or accomplished) by Findley’s editors, the creators of the film version of the novel, and Findley himself. Much of the source material in this section of chapter 2 comes from unpublished writings by Findley, making this the first critical study to compare early versions of The Wars with the final, published one. My goal in examining these incidents of exclusion and alteration of Findley’s work is to show that they are examples of censorship and, as such, illustrate the point that censorship can take forms other than government suppression of expression. In fact these censoring activities – such as selection by publishers, for example – are widespread and inevitable in our society, so when we argue about censorship it is not the practice itself we should be evaluating but the reasons behind this practice. In this section I also explore some of Findley’s more wide-ranging philosophical attacks against censorship. He condemns the practice explicitly in some of his non-fiction work, where he advances several different anti-censorship arguments. I demonstrate that his arguments
are undermined by discrepancies within this non-fiction writing as well as by contradictory evidence provided by a thematic reading of *The Wars*.

The second half of the chapter on Findley is devoted to a close reading of *Headhunter* that emphasizes the novel’s implicit anticensorship position. The novel makes more sense, for example, when we see that the birds – supposed to carry disease – represent books and the D-squads represent censors, and that Findley based his malevolent artist, Julian Slade, on the real-life painter Attila Richard Lukacs. Observations of this sort, taken together, reveal that in *Headhunter* Findley proffers a traditional neutralist liberal attack characterized by two arguments, the non-consequentialist and consequentialist claims for free speech, aimed at discrediting censorship. I counter the first, non-consequentialist claim by asserting that it does not really exist, that in fact it is always a species of the second, consequentialist approach. The consequentialist position in turn relies on the “slippery-slope” argument, which rejects the possibility of drawing a line between acceptable and unacceptable speech. I challenge this argument by invoking my definition of censorship and maintaining that all exercises of judgment involve the drawing of lines, and that the judgment or censorship of discourse should not be, cannot be, any exception.

The second writer that I study, Margaret Atwood, also puts forward the slippery-slope argument in her fiction, but in the context of the pornography debate. Chapter 3 traces the development of Atwood’s attitudes towards the censorship of pornography. It begins with an analysis of *Bodily Harm*, the novel in which Atwood is interested in the relationships between censorship, pornography, and violence. This analysis reads the novel against three other texts that deal with pornography: *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*, *Autobiography of a Schizophrenic Girl*, and *Story of O*. Although they may seem unlikely books to compare with Atwood’s, the striking resemblances between these works and *Bodily Harm* provide a new explanation of the character Rennie’s attitude towards her own body and of the importance of hands in the novel. Certain elements of my definition of censorship come into play in this analysis as I show that one of the major obstacles to the growth of the protagonist is marketplace censorship, the suppression of certain kinds of discourse through economic pressure. This kind of censorship often transforms into self-censorship, as economic values are internalized by individuals, and this is what happens to Rennie. Another kind of censorship afflicting Rennie, remarkably, is pornography. The equation between censorship and pornography is Atwood’s, but it meshes with my definition
of censorship as the exclusion of some discourse as a result of ideological judgment (with pornography it is the exclusion of certain depictions of sexuality as a result of patriarchal judgments). Reflecting anti-pornography feminist theory of the time, Bodily Harm puts forward several arguments linking pornography with male violence, ultimately making the case for the censorship of pornography. It may sound contradictory to discuss the censorship of pornography when pornography is equated with censorship, but this equation fits with the controlling idea of the novel: Bodily Harm calls for the exclusion of an exclusionary practice.

Atwood’s change in thinking on the censorship of pornography is signalled by an article she wrote for Chatelaine magazine in which she attacks pornography, but which ends by sounding a note of warning about the oppressive potential of censorship. The article was published two years after Bodily Harm and two years before The Handmaid’s Tale; in the latter novel Atwood picks up that note of warning to structure a full-blown dystopia. The second half of my chapter on Atwood is a close reading of The Handmaid’s Tale. I argue, for example, contrary to most critics, who believe that the character Serena Joy (Commander Fred’s wife) is based on conservative Republican Phyllis Schlafly, that in fact she is modelled on television evangelist Tammy Faye Bakker. I also add fresh evidence to the established view that Gilead bears many similarities to Nazi Germany and, more importantly, explain why Atwood relies on this comparison. In addition, in my discussion of taboo, I show that the restrictions attached to sex in the novel have clear analogues in the suppression of discourse, or in censorship. More important than the novelty of these observations is their role as elements in an overall interpretation that sees Atwood making four (albeit implicit) arguments against censorship: first, that truth and meaning are subjective – what is profane and should be censored for one person is sacred for another; second, that censorship will result in a slippery slope that eventually engulfs “inoffensive” works; third, that pornography is harmless; and fourth, that suppressing some discourse only makes that discourse more attractive (I call this the “compression-explosion” model of censorship). I believe that the presence of these ideas in the novel suggests that, by the time she wrote The Handmaid’s Tale, Atwood had come to question the view that pornography is more dangerous than censorship. At the same time I maintain that objections to her four arguments are contained within the novel itself, challenging this anti-censorship position.

Chapter 4 also deals with the censorship of pornography, but my study of Margaret Laurence’s work shows that, though writing at
approximately the same time as Atwood, Laurence arrived at very different conclusions regarding the benefits of eliminating pornography. In this chapter I am less interested in implicit arguments about censorship to be found in Laurence’s fiction (a large part of my work with the other writers) than in an aspect of her explicit commentary on the subject that has remained, so far, unknown to her readers. The most important unpublished piece of writing by Laurence involving censorship is a draft manuscript of a novel now held at the William Ready Archives at McMaster University. Laurence began work on this draft shortly after an attack on her work *The Diviners* was mounted in 1976 in her own town of Lakefield, Ontario. Censorship is a more personal issue for Laurence than it is for the other writers I study because of this event (and a similar attack that took place in 1985), so any understanding of Laurence’s position on censorship must take into account the consequences of these biographical episodes. I begin my study by looking at the effects on the writer of the first attack, tracing the evolution of her response from the germination of the idea to write a novel about the attack, to her struggle to create characters with whom she could not sympathize, to her final abandonment of the project. I examine the draft material for this project that Laurence left behind, showing how it reflects the 1976 attack – in its characters, the attackers’ motivations, the material in question, and the protagonist’s reaction – and is a response to it.

Though this response remained incomplete and unpublished, Laurence did find other written forms through which to channel her feelings about censorship: her children’s book *The Christmas Birthday Story*, and her article “The Greater Evil,” which appeared in *Toronto Life* in 1984. The second half of my chapter on Laurence is a re-reading of this article – in which Laurence weighs the relative dangers of pornography and of censorship – in the light of its more lengthy and complex unpublished precursor, a speech Laurence gave to Ontario judges in 1983. In this light the powerful arguments she makes for banning pornography show up much more clearly, and as a result Laurence’s position on censorship is revealed to be much closer to the one that derives from my definition of censorship as judgement than to the liberal anti-censorship position that might otherwise be ascribed to her based on a reading of the article alone.

Of all the chapters in this book, chapter 5 illustrates most clearly the definition I have constructed of censorship. In it I look at types of censorship that occur as a result of the competition of social groups in the cultural sphere. “Socio-cultural censorship,” as I call it, is practised by four different groups of agents: educators, who censor through the exclusion of certain languages and histories from the
classroom; "cultural gatekeepers," such as publishers, critics, anthologists, and the distributors of awards, who mediate between cultural producers and the public, deciding what material will be disseminated; some cultural producers who appropriate the voice or subject of a social group that is not their own, thereby excluding members of that group from the cultural arena; and some cultural producers themselves who practice self-censorship.

This socio-cultural censorship derives from competition among social groups in society, so it is typically most often perpetrated by members of a dominant group over members of a disadvantaged one. In chapter 5 I look at the socio-cultural censorship of two marginalized groups in Canada: Native and Black writers. To illustrate the way this kind of censorship affects Native Canadian writers I focus on Beatrice Culleton, a Métis writer whose autobiographical novel, In Search of April Raintree, was either the subject of or implicitly portrays socio-cultural censorship at the hands of all four kinds of agents I mentioned above. In the second half of the chapter I turn to the Black Canadian writer Marlene Nourbese Philip, who writes about the censorship of Black language and the appropriation of Black culture in her book of poetry She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks; she discusses the agents I describe as cultural gatekeepers in non-fiction essays and letters; and she shows how self-censorship works within the Black community in her novel for young adults, Harriet’s Daughter. My goal in accumulating evidence that these two writers implicitly and, along with many scholars who write on marginalized cultures, explicitly view these exclusionary activities as censorship is to lend support to my definition of the term as a practice based on judgment. While I decry the racist ideology behind much of the socio-cultural censorship illustrated in this chapter, I maintain that, were racism to disappear, censorship would remain, for socio-cultural judgments by their very nature are based on ideological predispositions. This inevitability suggests that we should be looking at ways to make socio-cultural censorship more just rather than trying to rid our society of it along with other forms of censorship.

While there has been much written on censorship, from John Milton to Stanley Fish, almost none of it has focused on Canadian literature. I hope that, by exploring issues of censorship in English Canadian literature specifically, this study will shed new light on Canadian literary practice and, at the same time, will sharpen our ideas about how censorship works, its inevitability and value, and the importance that context plays in making judgments in all censorship disputes.