

ON THE INDEX!

**PERSPECTIVES ON LITERARY
CENSORSHIP IN QUÉBEC**

/// BIBLIOTHÈQUE

ASSEMBLÉE NATIONALE
DU QUÉBEC

censure

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"O Jesus, who said 'Blessed are the pure of heart,' deliver me from unhealthy and frivolous literature, from this epidemic of indecent illustrated works: journals, magazines, novels and serials that take pleasure in preaching crime and immorality . . . Through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, give me the generosity, self-confidence and courage to fight obscene literature and to demand respect for your rights, O You, my Divine Master. To the best of my ability, through prayer and sacrifice, I want to repair the harm caused by immodest printed works; by disseminating good books, I want to help You to present a more beautiful humanity to our Father in Heaven."¹

In June 1958, *La semaine religieuse de Montréal*, published this prayer for the "purification of literature." Readers today would certainly find it surprising. However, there has always been literary censorship in Québec, and the history of its literature is full of attempts to protect the public from "dangerous reading." Many different types of documents have been targeted and censorship has affected all kinds of printed materials. It has taken different forms depending on the societal context, which has both given rise to it and, at the same time, been subject to it.²

The work of historian Pierre Hébert has largely contributed to the establishment of a narrative framework of the history of literary censorship in the province. Consequently, the brochure of this exhibition takes up the chronology established by Hébert, and the selection of documents presented is based on the content of the two volumes of his book *Censure et littérature au Québec*.

What is meant by literary censorship has changed over the years, and has referred to different things at different times.³ In the 17th century, it had to do more with criticism and reviewing texts to correct errors,⁴ but by the 18th century in Québec, it referred more to condemnation, and then took on even more repressive connotations towards the mid-19th century. Today, censorship is defined as a power to restrict literature, and its impact is considered illegitimate or abusive by those who are censored.⁵ It has mainly taken three forms:

- Punitive censorship, as the name suggests, punishes the publication of a work by imposing various penalties, such as book burning, being placed on the Index, banning by order or public condemnation.⁶ This is the most concrete and obvious form of literary censorship.
- Prescriptive censorship is more covert. Instead of banning certain works, it identifies other works and prescribes that they be read. It orients what must be written in order to impose restrictive standards on literary production.⁷
- Self-censorship refers to actions taken by authors against their own work, generally because of fear of negative consequences or reprisals.⁸

These forms of censorship have overlapped across three periods in the history of literary censorship in Québec: ad hoc censorship (1625–1840), clerical censorship (1840–1960) and legal censorship (1960–2000).⁹

AD HOC CENSORSHIP: CASE-BY-CASE PROHIBITION

(1625–1840)

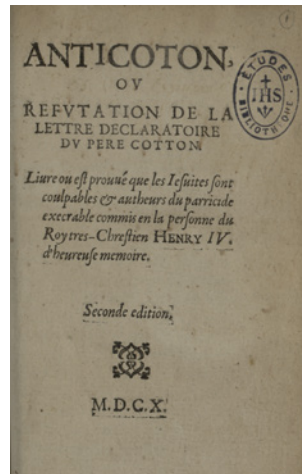
Censorship in Québec was intermittent during the first centuries. It was carried out by civil and religious authorities on a case-by-case basis, in response to events and the socio-political context.¹⁰ Censorship was not yet at the heart of an institutional structure or applied systematically throughout the territory, as it would be after 1840.

The first recorded case of censorship in New France dates from 1625. It targeted the document known as the *Anti-Coton*. The pamphlet's author was anonymous, but it has since been attributed to César de Plaix, who would have written it to refute the ideas that Pierre Coton had defended several months earlier in his *Lettre déclaratoire de la doctrine des Jésuites* (Letter declaratory of the doctrine of the Jesuits), published in July 1610. Coton was defending his religious order from criticism following the assassination of Henri IV, but Plaix accused the Jesuits of being directly involved. Having sparked much controversy, the *Anti-Coton* was listed on the Roman Index in 1617.¹¹ In New France, the executioner burned the pamphlet in Québec City's public square in 1625.

With the exception of this case, there was no strict control of printed materials in New France, in particular because there was no local printing industry – the first printing shop opened in 1764.¹² Furthermore, the population was poorly educated and the literacy rate was low, so books were not widely accessible.

NEWSPAPERS TREATED HARSHLY

Although censorship during this period was not structured or formally organized, newspapers were still prime targets, whether the censorship was political or religious.



César de Plaix. *Anticoton, ou Refutation de Lettre declaratoire du Pere Coton*. (Anti-Coton, or, A refutation of Coton's letter declaratory). 1610. Bibliothèque des livres rares et collections spéciales, Université de Montréal.

This was the case for *the Quebec Gazette*, the first print publication in the province. It was founded on June 21, 1764, and was born out of a partnership between William Brown and Thomas Gilmore, who, with the support of Governor James Murray, had decided to start a newspaper in Québec City. In 1765, the British government's passage of the *Stamp Act* introduced a high tax on many types of public printed materials, including newspapers.¹³ *The Quebec Gazette* was not able to pay this tax and announced that it would shut down. The Act was finally abolished the following year and publishing resumed.



La Gazette de Québec (The Quebec Gazette), March 25, 1779. National Assembly Library collection

The Quebec Gazette was affected by economic events, but most newspapers in the 18th and 19th centuries were penalized for the ideas they conveyed. Take, for example, the *Gazette littéraire de Montréal*, the second newspaper to be established in the Province of Québec. It was founded in June 1778 by two men of letters, Fleury Mesplet and Valentin Jautard, who wanted to disseminate Enlightenment ideas in the province. They criticized the civil, judicial and religious powers, and they supported the cause of American independence, which did not please the British authorities.¹⁴ After their arrest, which was ordered by Governor Haldimand, both authors were imprisoned for more than three years.

This trend continued during the first half of the 19th century, when there were many newspapers, often founded by political parties. Furthermore, following the Constitutional Act of 1791 and the beginnings of parliamentarianism, conditions were favourable for informing Canadians about political matters.¹⁵ In this context, the *Le Canadien* newspaper was founded by Pierre-Stanislas Bédard, Member of the Legislative Assembly and leader of the Parti canadien, as a means of promoting the Parti canadien's platform and defending the interests of French Canadians.

The newspaper advocated a government accountable to the elected assembly, and denounced the British authorities. This angered Governor James Craig, who ordered the writing staff's arrest and imprisonment in 1810. The newspaper's printing presses were confiscated and the offices ransacked. Governor Craig's objective was also to deprive the Parti canadien of its main means of communication before the elections that year.¹⁶ The newspaper was revived several times over the course of the 19th century, notably in 1817, under the direction of Laurent Bédard, nephew of Pierre-Stanislas Bédard, and in 1831, under the direction of Étienne Parent.



Le Canadien (Le Canadien newspaper), November 11, 1809. National Assembly Library collection



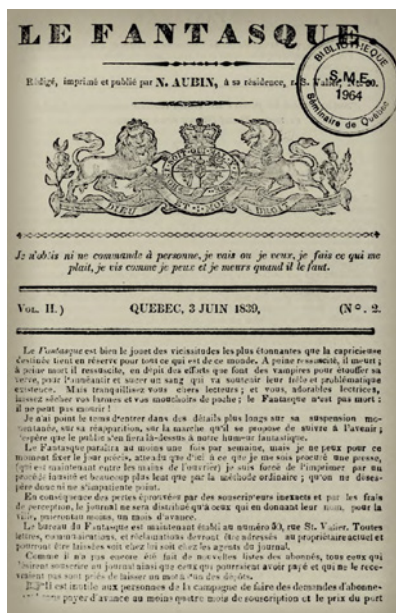
Bust of Pierre-Stanislas Bédard. 2010. National Assembly Library collection

At the time, British legislation and Common Law gave the governors the power to ban publications, and they prohibited the dissemination of information that could lead to conflict between the King and his subjects.¹⁷ This was the case of the *La Minerve* newspaper, which Ludwig Duvernay began publishing in 1827. *La Minerve* frequently criticized the colonial administration and advocated that the elected members of the House of Assembly of Lower Canada should control tax collection and government spending. On January 9, 1832, Duvernay published an article criticizing the Legislative Council. The Council accused Duvernay of defamatory libel, and he was sentenced to prison for the entire parliamentary session. The newspaper was also banned in 1837 during the Lower Canada Rebellion.

It was on Duvernay's initiative that the controversial work *Les paroles d'un croyant* (*Words of a Believer*) by Félicité Robert de Lamennais was made available to readers in Lower Canada. Duvernay knew the book had been condemned by the Church, so to distribute it to the general public while avoiding reprisals, he printed copies with Paris given as the place of publication.¹⁸ More than 3,000 copies were sold and circulated, in particular among the reformers of Lower Canada. In 1834, the Church banned Lamennais' work from educational institutions.



Félicité Robert de Lamennais. *Les paroles d'un croyant* (*Words of a Believer*). 1834. Chauveau Collection, National Assembly Library



Heading of the *Le Fantasque* newspaper, June 3, 1839. National Assembly Library collection

In the context of the Patriote uprisings (1837–1840), other newspapers met the same fate as *Le Canadien* and *La Minerve*. Founded by Napoléon Aubin in 1837, *Le Fantasque* was seized after it published an article in December 1838 in support of the rebels and political prisoners. Aubin and his printer were arrested in January 1839. Founded in 1837, *Le Libéral* (The Liberal), Québec City's Patriote newspaper, also saw one of its owners, Robert-Shore-Milnes Bouchette, arrested and exiled to Bermuda because of the political involvement of the Francophone founders, editors and shareholders in the Patriote rebellions.

Prison and exile were quite common ways to censor people and publications at the time. Freedom of the press was restricted by an Imperial government that did not tolerate dissidence. Furthermore, given their limited number of readers, newspapers often found themselves economically dependent on the authorities in power.¹⁹ This made their survival all the more tenuous.

THE CHABOILLEZ AFFAIR

Although the Church did not have as much influence on censorship in the 18th century as it would in the next, it did publish several pastoral letters in which it reiterated the importance of “banning suspicious books,”²⁰ listed the vices associated with reading “the most dangerous books”²¹ and even urged the faithful to burn “immoral reading.”²² The Church was already imposing itself as a guardian of morality with respect to good literature.

However, until 1840, the clergy had difficulty controlling what was published, and printed works proliferated, with many newspapers being published and the gradual development of a local printing industry after 1764.²³ The Church was also not able to limit conflicts and exchanges of ideas within its own ranks, as evidenced by the Chaboillez affair in the 1820s, which shows that there was a risk of schism within the Church before structured clerical censorship was put in place.²⁴ In 1823, Father Augustin Chaboillez, an adherent of Gallicanism, authored a pamphlet entitled *Questions sur le gouvernement ecclésiastique du district de Montréal* (Questions on the ecclesiastical government of the District of Montréal) in which he stated his opposition to the appointment of Jean-Jacques Lartigue as Auxiliary Bishop of Montréal. He called the appointment into question on Canon and Civil Law grounds, and challenged the idea that the District of Montréal could be considered as an episcopal district. This publication gave rise to much controversy among the clergy. In October 1823, Bishop Lartigue replied to Father Chaboillez in a pamphlet entitled *Lettre à Mr. Chaboillez, curé de Longueuil, relativement à ses questions sur le gouvernement ecclésiastique du district de Montréal* (Letter to Mr. Chaboillez, curate of the parish of Longueuil, concerning his questions on the ecclesiastical government of the District of Montréal), signed by Pierre-Hospice Bédard, son of Pierre-Stanislas Bédard. Louis-Marie Cadieux, parish priest of Trois-Rivières, also reproached Father Chaboillez for his liberal statements and support for Gallicanism in a pamphlet entitled *Observations sur un écrit intitulé Questions sur le gouvernement ecclésiastique du district de Montréal* (Observations on a work entitled Questions on the ecclesiastical government of the District of Montréal). The polemics continued in the newspapers, where arguments between members of the clergy raged.

In February 1824, Father Chaboillez replied to his critics in another pamphlet, *Réponse de messire Chaboillez, curé de Longueuil, à la lettre de P.H. Bédard; suivie de quelques remarques sur les observations imprimées aux Trois-Rivières* (Response by Mr. Chaboillez, curate of the parish of Longueuil, to the letter by P. H. Bédard; followed by several remarks on the observations printed at Trois-Rivières). In it, he reiterated his adherence to Gallicanism and his support of the State's right to intervene in religious matters.

The polemics ended in April 1824, when Lartigue was appointed Auxiliary Bishop of the District of Montréal with the support of 54 of the district's 93 priests. For Bishop Lartigue, this affair showed how important it was for the clergy to have a newspaper and even a press in order to control the messages disseminated among its rank.²⁵ These events taught the clergy a powerful lesson. It realized how crucial it was to have organized censorship, which would be established in the 1840s.

CLERICAL CENSORSHIP: THE GOLDEN AGE OF BANNING LITERATURE (1840–1960)

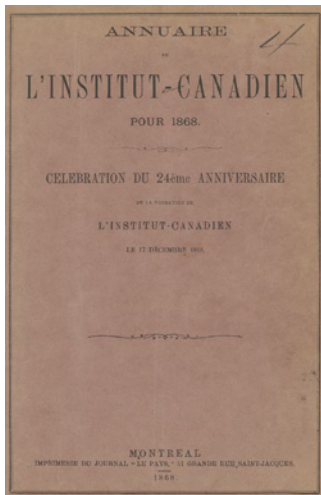
In the mid-19th century, more and more people were learning to read, and books and other publications were becoming more accessible to the general public.²⁶ The literacy rate rose from 29.1% in the 1850s to 74.45% in the 1890s.²⁷ As a result, it became more important for the Church to carefully control what the population could read. In addition, with the appointment of Ignace Bourget as Bishop of Montréal in 1840 and the founding of *Mélanges religieux*, an ultramontane newspaper, the conditions were ideal for establishing efficient, organized clerical censorship that was independent of civil power. The Church would have a great impact on the literary world for more than a century.²⁸



Bishop Ignace Bourget. Circa 1850.
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du Québec, J. E. Livernois Ltée holdings

LIBERALS VS. ULTRAMONTANISTS

Clerical censorship was part of a global conflict between liberalism and ultramontanism that marked the second half of the 19th century. Bishop Bourget was at the heart of this conflict, and the battle he waged against the Institut canadien de Montréal was particularly fierce. The libraries and literary institutes of the time were subject to oversight by the clergy, who checked the content of their collections and the activities they held to ensure they met moral standards.²⁹ In a circular published on May 31, 1858, Bishop Bourget stipulated that all libraries must have a copy of the Index.³⁰ The Institute refused to comply and kept, in its collections, books that the Church considered immoral, thereby defending freedom of conscience and freedom of opinion.³¹ In addition, the Institute held conferences on modern and liberal subjects, which greatly displeased the Church.³²



Annuaire de l'Institut-canadien pour 1868
(Annual of the Institut canadien for 1868).
Chauveau Collection, National Assembly Library

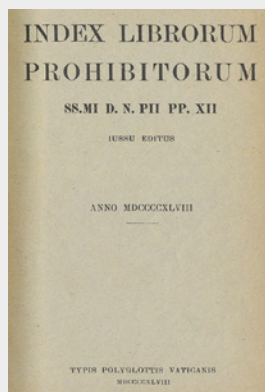
During his tenure, Bishop Bourget stepped up attacks on the Institut canadien de Montréal. In 1858, he published three pastoral letters denouncing literary institutes for having “dangerous” books in their possession. He criticized the Institute for not respecting bishops’ right to approve the books within its walls, and he denounced the *Le Pays* newspaper for taking the Institute’s defence. In 1869, he struck again, sending a brief to the Sacred Congregation of the Inquisition, the office that was responsible for updating the Roman Index. In the brief, he asked the Congregation to add to the Index the *Annuaire de l’Institut-canadien pour 1868* (Annual of the Institut canadien for 1868), which was a pamphlet reproducing a talk that Louis-Antoine Dessaulles had given at

the Institute. The talk conveyed liberal ideas advocated by the Institute, in particular tolerance, freedom of conscience and freedom of religion. As a result of Bishop Bourget’s action, the *Annuaire de l’Institut-canadien pour 1868* became the first French-Canadian publication to be officially placed on the Index by Rome.

The process for a document to be put on the Index by Rome

The expression “put on the Index” is often wrongly used to refer to practically any book that was banned by the clergy. However, for a book to be actually placed on the list of prohibited documents in the Index librorum prohibitorum, it had to be submitted to the Sacred Congregation of the Index, which was under the Pope’s authority. The Congregation investigated denunciations and suggestions for additions to the Index, and decided which documents were placed on it. Because the process was lengthy, only three French-Canadian works were ever officially included: the *Annales de l’Institut-canadien* (Annual of the

Institut canadien) for the years 1868 and 1869, banned in 1869 and 1870; the essay entitled *Le clergé canadien, sa mission, son œuvre* (The Canadian clergy, its mission, its work) by Laurent-Olivier David, banned in 1896, and *The Christ-Founded Order of the Secular Priesthood or a Suppressed Page of Theology Restored to Light*, a book by Father Telesphor Smyth-Vaudry, added in 1909.³³ Nevertheless, the clergy's influence in the province was so strong that the vast majority of its literary condemnations did not have to go all the way to Rome for their effects to be felt.



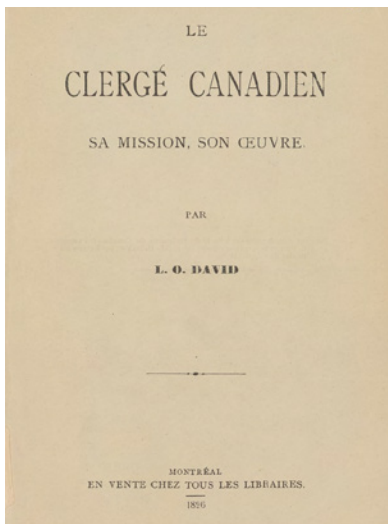
Index librorum prohibitorum.
1948 edition. National Assembly
Library collection

Bishop Bourget's attacks on the Institut canadien de Montréal culminated in the Guibord affair, which arose upon the death of Institute member Joseph Guibord in November 1869. Bourget refused to permit Guibord's burial in the Catholic cemetery on Côte-des-Neiges, especially since the Institute's members had been automatically excommunicated since 1858. Supported by the Institute, Henriette Brown, Guibord's widow, brought a lawsuit against the Bishop that dragged on until 1875. The judge finally ruled in Brown's favour, and Guibord was buried in the Côte-des-Neiges cemetery on November 16, 1875. Bourget may have lost that battle, but he won the war, for after the burial he deconsecrated Guibord's plot.

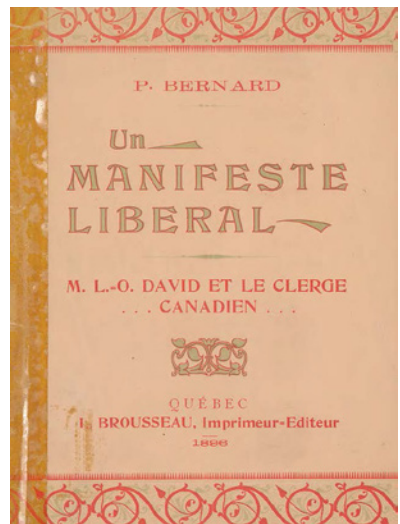
The end of Bishop Bourget's career was marked by a university conflict between Québec City and Montréal in the 1870s. From the beginning of his mandate, Bishop Bourget had wanted to establish a university in Montréal to oppose the Institut canadien's liberalism and counter the influence of the Protestant, Anglophone McGill University. He also wanted the Montréal university in question to serve the ultramontane cause, given that Université Laval, founded in 1852 in Québec City, was more liberal leaning. Bourget submitted the request to Rome, which refused twice before allowing Université Laval to establish a branch in Montréal. Outraged by this decision, Bourget resigned in 1876.

In 1878, Université Laval de Montréal was founded. Of course, Bishop Bourget's followers, committed to the idea of an independent university in Montréal, were displeased. Two of them, Abbé Alexis Pelletier and Dr. Elzéar Paquin, published several pamphlets attacking Université Laval for its liberalism and criticizing Bishop Taschereau of Québec City and Bishop Fabre of Montréal for their support of the university. In March 1882, Taschereau issued an order prohibiting anyone from reading *La conscience catholique outragée et les droits de l'intelligence violés* (Catholic conscience outraged and the rights of intelligence violated) by Paquin. In 1884, Taschereau also prohibited anyone from reading or distributing *La source du mal de l'époque au Canada* (The source of the evil of the times in Canada), a pamphlet by Pelletier, and Bishop Fabre recommended that the work be burned.³⁴

Bishop Bourget's successor, Bishop Fabre, followed in his predecessor's footsteps, and banned all works critical of the Church. In this regard, one of the most notable bans was of an 1896 pamphlet by Laurent-Olivier David, who had served as a Liberal Member for Montreal East from 1886 to 1890. *Le clergé catholique: sa mission, son œuvre* (The Canadian clergy: its mission, its work) was an essay on the clergy's interference in the province's political matters, criticizing in particular the clergy's interference in the 1896 federal election and the Church's stance on the issue of francophone schools in Manitoba.



L.-O. David. *Le clergé canadien : sa mission, son œuvre* (The Canadian clergy: its mission, its work). 1896. Canadian Pamphlet Collection, National Assembly Library



Dominique-Ceslas Gonthier. *Un manifeste libéral : L.-O. David et le clergé canadien* (A liberal manifesto: L.-O. David, and the Canadian clergy). 1896. Canadian Pamphlet Collection, National Assembly Library

After fifty copies of his pamphlet were distributed in Rome, David became the subject of virulent attacks by the clergy and several newspapers.³⁵ Father Dominique-Ceslas Gonthier denounced David's work in a two-volume pamphlet, entitled *Un manifeste libéral: L.-O. David et le clergé canadien* (A liberal manifesto: L.-O. David and the Canadian clergy). On December 18, 1896, David's pamphlet was officially placed on the Index by the Sacred Congregation in Rome. David then removed it from the places where it was sold. On December 22, the Québec bishops unilaterally condemned the *L'Électeur*, the newspaper that had published David's text, but six days later, on December 28, *L'Électeur* was reborn under a new name: *Le Soleil*.³⁶

NATIONALIZATION OF FRENCH-CANADIAN LITERATURE

In the early 20th century, the clerical approach to censorship shifted from punitive to prescriptive. It became less a matter of explicit prohibitions and more about recommendations to guide writers.³⁷ The Church launched a campaign to nationalize French-Canadian literature, with the land and Catholicism at its heart, and with Abbés Camille Roy and Lionel Groulx playing key roles.³⁸ The clergy's objective was to promote literature that increased national and Canadian sentiment, upheld morality and virtue and promoted a Catholic vision of the world. Any writer who wanted to be published had to accept this view of literature. The clergy wanted to "define, plan and guide"³⁹ French-Canadian literary production. That is why many "romans du terroir" (novels celebrating rural life and moral conservatism) were published during the first third of the 20th century.⁴⁰

Cote Morale des Nouvelles en Librairie

Bon usage d'éditeurs, de libraires, et même de bibliothécaires n'a pu en même les instruments nécessaires pour se rendre compte, sans exception, de la valeur morale des ouvrages qui viennent de paraître sur le marché. Avant d'acquiescer pour leur rendre service en publiant, chaque mois, une liste des plus récents ouvrages avec leur cote morale, l'Église a été obligée après consultation, attentive de divers revues catalogues de bibliographie-critique, telles que *Le Livre et l'Écriture*, les *Notes bibliographiques*, le *Revue des Cahiers d'Étude d'Angers*, etc. Il se peut cependant que quelques-uns de ces cotes soient, au jour ou l'autre, sujettes à rectification, si, après une étude des ouvrages en question, nous nous rendons compte que la cote donnée par les revues mentionnées n'est pas adéquate au milieu canadien. Quoi qu'il en soit, nous croyons que les cotes données ci-dessous sont suffisamment sûres pour nos lecteurs, nos bénéficiaires d'ouvrages.

ARNOTTEY (C.), <i>Pique-nique en Solage</i> ... M	HERLIN (H.), <i>Envois Unis, v. pâtes de diable</i> ... B?
ARNOUX (A.), <i>Zabala l'indélicat</i> ... D	KNON (C.M.), <i>Complot contre la Terre</i> ... B
BERTHOUD (W.), <i>Concili de guerre</i> ... B	LABORDE (J.), <i>Les cœurs vides</i> ... M
DANNON (P.), <i>Un certain M. Blot</i> ... B	LANGEZ DEL VASTO, <i>Les quatre filices</i> ... B-S
DIDELOT (F.), <i>Chronique de N. l'Érudite</i> ... M	DARTEGUY (J.), <i>Les confessions</i> ... D
DOMMANGET (M.), <i>Blasphème et Espérance</i> ... D	MAFFIOLY (J.), <i>Bonne chance, marié!</i> ... D
DOMMANGET (M.), <i>Blasphème et Espérance</i> ... D	MANFREDI (D.), <i>Le renouveau</i> ... B
DORN (D.), <i>Le parfum de la peur</i> ... B?	MARI (L.), <i>L'Éclair dans la selle</i> ... D
DUTLIEUTHAUSER (M.), <i>Il lui sera bien coup pardonné</i> ... B	MARTIN (C.), <i>Deux-vingt</i> ... M
EXBRAYAT (C.), <i>Amour et spandop</i> ... TB	MIKES (G.), <i>Docteur d'Asie</i> ... B
GAGNON (M.), <i>Entre les mains</i> ... B?	MORTON (A.), <i>L'Épiqueur lebel Cadix</i> ... B
GERARD (P.), <i>Deuil en rouge</i> ... D	ROUX (D. de), <i>Méditerranée Antic</i> ... D
GILL (J.), <i>Coup de tonnerre</i> ... TB	SOLAUGHTER (F.G.), <i>Pas à pas avec Hrus</i> ... D
GONNET (H.), <i>Après ou l'école Inconnue</i> ... M	TURB (E.C.), <i>Objet Polka</i> ... B

Signification des cotes

M -- main text	B -- pour adultes
D -- dangereux	TB -- pour teens
B? -- appelle des réserves	TB-S -- pour tous mais spécialisés

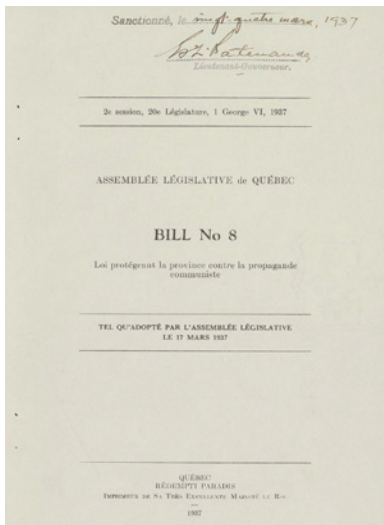
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Lectures, November 1960. National Assembly Library collection

In this context, many priests became literary critics and gave advice and reading recommendations in various Church publications. One of the most important platforms was *Lectures* magazine, which assigned morality ratings: “for all,” “for adults,” “discouraged,” “dangerous,” “immoral” and “Index.” Published monthly from 1946 to 1966 by Les Éditions Fides, the magazine wanted to “give all who are aware of the exceptional dangers that we are facing today a practical means of guiding themselves and others through the whirlwind of current publications.”⁴¹

WORLD WAR II AND ANTI-COMMUNISM

In the lead-up to World War II, censorship power temporarily shifted to the civil authorities, in particular with Maurice Duplessis’ government’s passage of the *Act to Protect the Province Against Communist Propaganda* in 1937. Commonly known as the “Padlock Act,” this Act stipulated that “it shall be unlawful to print, to publish in any manner whatsoever or to distribute in the Province any newspaper, periodical, pamphlet, circular, document or writing whatsoever propagating or tending to propagate communism or bolshevism.”⁴² One of the first casualties of the Padlock Act was the communist newspaper *Clarté*: its offices were searched on November 16, 1937, and padlocked for one year.⁴³ The police also raided the home of the newspaper’s editor, Jean Péron, as well as the paper’s press. Despite this, *Clarté* continued its operations clandestinely.



Bill 8 – Loi protégeant la province contre la propagande communiste. 1937. Fonds Assemblée nationale du Québec



Clarté, 20 novembre 1937. Collection de la Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée nationale du Québec

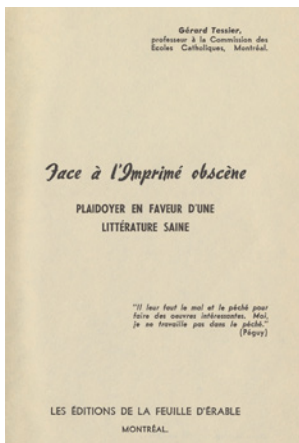
At the federal level, the *War Measures Act* was invoked in 1939,⁴⁴ and censorship of printed matter was regulated following the adoption of the *Defence of Canada Regulations* in September 1939.⁴⁵ The regulations mainly targeted newspapers. The objective was to keep information from being disseminated to prevent enemy powers from obtaining intelligence that could compromise the country's security. They stipulated that, as of October 1939, all Canadian publishers had to send a copy of each of their publications to Ottawa so that government censors could verify the content of newspapers and reprimand offenders. In practice, however, the directives issued by the censorship board in Ottawa were often difficult to apply because of their large number and complexity. Between September 1939 and March 1940, nearly 70 directives were sent to publishers, making it confusing and arduous to carry out censorship.⁴⁶

A GRADUAL TRANSITION TO MODERNITY

In the post-war context, several events began to undermine Church censorship. The emergence of a consumer society and the gradual opening up to the world upended old ways of thinking.⁴⁷ The publication of *Refus global* (Total Refusal) in 1948 and a large influx of French literary works into the province shook up the established order. "Obscene literature" featuring crime and sexuality, in particular popular novels and comic books from the United States, flooded into the Québec literary market.⁴⁸ These events led the clergy to consider that the province was being stalked by real "debauchery in the publishing world."⁴⁹

The Church tried desperately to maintain its hold, but its campaigns appeared increasingly absurd to the general public. The Balzac affair is an example. On February 11, 1950, the Société des écrivains canadiens announced in the *Le Canada* newspaper that it would hold an exhibition to mark the 100th anniversary of the death of French author Honoré de Balzac. Four days later, Bishop Valois, diocesan director of the Catholic Action movement in Montréal, objected to this initiative because Balzac's works were on the Index.⁵⁰ The Société argued in favour of the French writer, but in the end, it was forced to abandon its plan.

To compensate for its loss of power, the Church also put more pressure on the State to use its legislative power to ban obscene literature.⁵¹ The clergy frequently campaigned against the two main literary scourges of the decade: comic books, which depicted criminality, and yellow newspapers,⁵² which were sensationalist publications with highly sexualized content.⁵³ The Church considered both dangerous to youth and held them responsible for the nation's degeneration. In 1955, in response to comic books' popularity, Abbé Gérard Tessier published *Face à l'imprimé obscène: plaidoyer en faveur d'une littérature saine* (Confronted with obscenity in print: Advocating healthy literature) to denounce works likely to corrupt young minds. In it, he provided a list of good works to be read for educational purposes.



Gérard Tessier. *Face à l'imprimé obscène. Plaidoyer en faveur d'une littérature saine* (Confronted with obscenity in print: Advocating healthy literature). 1955. National Assembly Library collection

In this context, the Québec Parliament passed the *Act respecting publications and public morals* in 1950. It prohibited "any illustration . . . which evokes real or fictitious scenes of crime or of the habitual life of criminals, or morbid or obscene situations or attitudes, tending to corrupt youth and pervert morals."⁵⁴ The Act targeted yellow newspapers in particular because it applied specifically to periodicals. It was enforced by the Quebec Board of Cinema Censors, which received an expanded mandate to cover print publications. However, in practice, the Act had little effect because it targeted only illustrations and only the Attorney General could submit publications to the Board of Censors, which did not consider print publications its priority and did not provide publishers with clear criteria.⁵⁵

Statistics show that, in the 1960s, the authorities relied more on federal law than on provincial law to censor literature.⁵⁶ In June 1959, after pressuring the government, public morality groups and the clergy obtained an amendment to the Criminal Code that clarified the meaning of the term "obscene" in order to make it easier to enforce the law. The clergy won a bittersweet victory with this amendment, as their control over censorship was gradually eroding and the power was being placed in the hands of the State.⁵⁷

LEGAL CENSORSHIP: THE ASCENDANCY OF THE RULE OF LAW AND THE COURTS (1960–2000)

The shift in censorship power from Church to State, which had begun in the 1940s and 1950s, intensified in the 1960s and 1970s. Civil Law now prevailed over the law of the Index, so fines and imprisonment replaced the moral sanctions, which no longer had much impact on Québec society.⁵⁸ In 1966, following the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), the Church abolished the Index, an event that reflected the collapse of clerical control.⁵⁹

MAJOR LITERARY TRIALS

One of the main manifestations of this transfer of the exercise of censorship from the clerical to the judiciary is the holding of several trials against literary works by virtue of the amendments made to the Criminal Code in 1959.⁶⁰ Five copies of the novel *L'amant de Lady Chatterley*, published in 1928 and written by the British writer DH Lawrence, were thus seized in November 1959 in different bookstores in Montreal, since the novel was accused of being obscene under the new law.⁶¹ The trial spanned a few years, before the Supreme Court exempted the book from any sanction in March 1962.

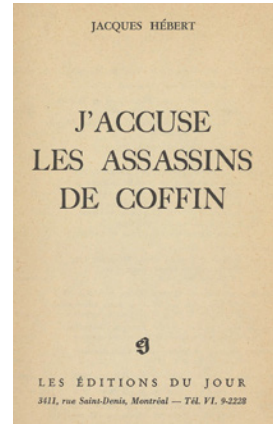
The case of *L'amant de Lady Chatterley* was used a few years later as a precedent in the trial of the novel *Histoire d'O* by Pauline Réage, published in Paris by Pauvert publishing in 1954.⁶² If this novel was a worldwide success and translated in many languages, it wasn't without having caused a certain scandal during its publication, several being struck by the deviant sexuality staged in its pages. In the Quebec province, the Montreal police morality squad seized all copies of the book in two bookstores in 1967.⁶³ Legal proceedings against the novel extended until 1973, when confiscation of the book was lifted.⁶⁴

During the same years, the writings of Jacques Hébert regarding the Coffin affair were also in conflict with the law, their author being accused of contempt of court following their publication. Throughout his literary career, Jacques Hébert defended Wilbert Coffin, a Gaspé warden who was, according to Hébert, falsely accused of having murdered three American tourists in 1953. Coffin



Pauline Réage. *Histoire d'O* (Story of O). 1967. Literature Collection, National Assembly Library

was executed by hanging. The chances being slim of finding a publisher interested in his pamphleteering essay denouncing injustice, Hébert founded Les Éditions de l'Homme and published *Coffin était innocent* in 1958. In 1963 he published *J'accuse les assassins de Coffin* at the Le Jour publisher. Following the book's publication, a commission of inquiry was set up in 1964 (the Brossard Commission), charged with the mandate of shedding light on the Coffin affair.⁶⁵ In the end, the commission considered that the author had lacked rigor in his essays. As a result, Hébert was the victim of legal sanctions such as a short imprisonment and a fine. After the controversy resulting from the publication of his two books on the Coffin affair, Jacques Hébert published in 1970 the essay *Obscénité et liberté*, a plea against book censorship.



Jacques Hébert. *J'accuse les assassins de Coffin* (I accuse Coffin's murderers). 1963. National Assembly Library collection

Finally, a literary trial worthy of mention is the one resulting from the publication of the essay *Julie Papineau, un cas d'éducation et de mélancolie janséniste*, written by historian Fernand Ouellet. In this book, Ouellet makes contentious statements about Julie Papineau, wife of political leader Louis-Joseph Papineau. Ouellet claims that Julie Papineau was an anxious woman who would have taken advantage of her mental and physical disabilities to play those around her. Ouellet also maintains that the children of the Papineau family were mentally unstable, and that the family was abnormal.⁶⁶ Shortly before the publication of the book, Anne Bourassa, granddaughter of Azélie Papineau and daughter of Henri Bourassa, asked Fernand Ouellet to remove some passages that seemed offensive and intimate. The author refused, which caused Anne Bourassa and her sister to sue him. During this ten-year trial, the Bourassa sisters declared that the work of Fernand Ouellet was defamatory and damaged the reputation of their family. Ouellet, supported by the Canadian Historical Society, believed that any historian had the right to interpret the past based on available sources. At the end of the trial, Ouellet was forced to pay the Bourassa sisters \$400. The judge did not issue an injunction against the publication of the book. However, few publishers and bookstores were eager to distribute the book after its history with the law.

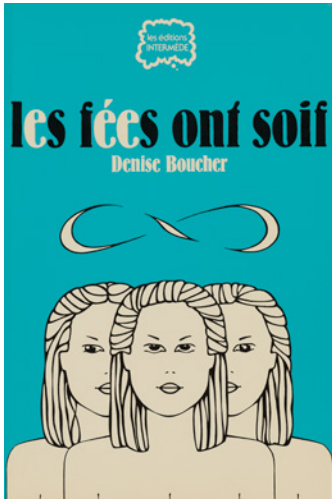
THE LAST GASPS OF CLERICAL CENSORSHIP

Although the Church had lost power to the State, its influence was still felt in the 1960s and 1970s. Two events in particular show that the clergy was still trying to censor works it considered unacceptable: the publication of the essay *Les insolences du frère Untel* (The Impertinences of Brother Anonymous) and the play *Les fées ont soif* (The fairies are thirsty).⁶⁷

Before being published as a collection in 1960, *Les insolences du Frère Untel* was published as letters in the *Le Devoir* newspaper in 1959. The author, under the cover of anonymity, criticized the mediocrity of the education system, a legacy of the Grande Noirceur (the “Great Darkness”), as well as the oppressive religious hierarchy, which, according to him, “restricted French Canadians’ freedom of thought.” Far from going unnoticed, *Les Insolences* was an immediate success in bookstores, and 100,000 copies were sold in only a few months. The identity of the author, Jean-Paul Desbiens, a young Marist brother who was working as a philosophy teacher, was revealed shortly before the book launch. The Church authorities were shocked, and they took action to prevent the book from being released, but without success. Desbiens was swiftly reprimanded and exiled abroad, where he was closely watched by his superiors.⁶⁸



Jean-Paul Desbiens. *Les insolences du Frère Untel* (The Impertinences of Brother Anonymous). 1988. National Assembly Library collection



Denise Boucher. *Les fées ont soif* (The fairies are thirsty). 1979. Special Collection, National Assembly Library

Les fées ont soif is by Denise Boucher, who wrote it in the fall of 1977. It is a feminist play presenting female archetypes of the virgin, the mother and the whore who are seeking to free themselves from the dictates of the patriarchy. It caused an uproar. In June 1978, the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde was deprived of a \$15,000 grant when its director, Jean-Louis Roux, would not agree to the Conseil des arts de Montréal's requests to alter the text. Then, when the play opened in the fall of 1978, members of Les jeunes Canadiens pour une civilisation chrétienne (Young Canadians for a Christian Civilization) demonstrated in front of the theatre, reciting prayers, as they believed the play was inspired by the devil.⁶⁹ The print edition of the play, *Les fées ont soif*, published by Les Éditions Intermède, was

the subject of an injunction prohibiting its distribution. In January 1979, the injunction was finally lifted since the presiding judge found that the plaintiffs had not successfully proven that *Les fées ont soif* had caused them any injury.

DEMOCRATIZATION OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In the last decades of the 20th century, freedom of expression came to be protected and valued, and censorship has increasingly grown out of place. The most recent cases of censorship have often taken the form of literary debates between intellectuals, as reflected in the case of *L'arpenteur et le navigateur* (The surveyor and the navigator), published by Monique LaRue in 1996. The book was accused of anti-Semitism in 1997 by Ghila Sroka, editor of *La Tribune juive*. She claimed to detect xenophobia and elements of fascism in it.⁷⁰ Reactions were not long in coming: the literary world split into two camps, one in defense of LaRue, and the other in favour of Sroka. For more than ten months, Québec intellectuals and writers battled each other in numerous articles published in various newspapers, especially in *Le Devoir*.

Censorship seems all the more incongruous when it is intended to regulate artistic expression in literature. The creative writing magazine *Steak haché* (Hamburger), founded in June 1998 by Denis Vanier, a Québec counterculture icon, was a notable casualty of such censorship. This avant-garde magazine was produced by contributors on a small scale and offered for free at a Montréal bookstore, outside the usual distribution network. Some of the texts dealt with provocative themes, such as pornography and eroticism. Because of the content of a text published in the fall of 1998 of *Steak haché* (No. 5), which was deemed obscene, a reader filed a complaint and the Montréal police's morality squad was called in to investigate. Although no formal charges were laid against Vanier, he was warned not to distribute the issue, and subsequent issues of the magazine were reviewed by the morality squad.⁷¹



:Collectif. *La vérité se passe un doigt: Steak haché anthologique*. (The truth lies: Steak haché anthology) 2000. National Assembly Library collection

CENSORED AND BANNED AT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY LIBRARY

With increased literacy rates and greater access to books in the mid-19th century, libraries came to be seen by the clergy as important institutions for disseminating ideology and therefore they came under the control of the Church.⁷² Like public libraries, the National Assembly Library has experienced the consequences of literary censorship during its history and that of the Parliament.

In the Parliament's history, the Blanche Garneau affair is certainly a well-documented case of press censorship. Following Garneau's murder on July 22, 1920, John H. Roberts, journalist and owner of *The Axe* newspaper, criticized Premier Louis-Alexandre Taschereau (who was also the Attorney General and head of the provincial police force) for his inability to find the culprits.⁷³ In the fall of 1922, the newspaper reported rumours that two Members of the Legislative Assembly were involved in the affair. On November 7, 1922, the Assembly found Roberts guilty of violating parliamentary privilege, and a bill was introduced to have him imprisoned. He remained in jail for 115 days and was finally released on April 12, 1923.

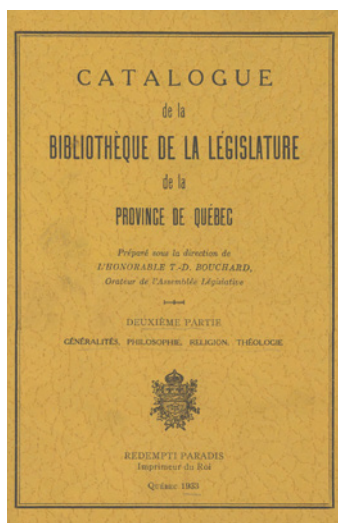


The Axe, November 17, 1922. National Assembly Library collection



Bas-relief of L. A. Taschereau. 1936. Alain Gariépy Collection, National Assembly of Québec

Soon after, the Library was drawn into the aftermath of a major event in the history of literary censorship following the publication of the novel *Les demi-civilisés* (The half-civilized) by Jean-Charles Harvey in 1934. Denouncing the conservative values promoted by Church authorities at the time, *Les demi-civilisés* caused a stir with its liberal positions.⁷⁴ Three weeks after the novel's publication, Cardinal Villeneuve banned it and threatened to excommunicate anyone who disobeyed his order. Jean-Charles Harvey, then editor-in-chief of the *Le Soleil* newspaper, was dismissed. Sympathetic to the writer's cause, Premier Taschereau offered him the position of Director of the Legislative Assembly Library, a move which the Cardinal immediately opposed.⁷⁵ In the end, it was Georges-Émile Marquis who was appointed to the position, relegating Harvey to serve as Director of the Bureau de la statistique. In 1937, after being dismissed from that position by Premier Maurice Duplessis, Harvey moved to Montréal and founded the *Le Jour* newspaper.⁷⁶ In 1942, the newspaper was denounced in the *Semaine religieuse de Québec* for having shared in its pages an article from *Life* magazine that criticized the Québec clergy.



Catalogue of the Library of the Legislature of the Province of Québec, 1932–1933. Special Collection, National Assembly Library

At the time, the clergy's influence on libraries could also be seen in sections called "Hell," where banned books were kept, either because they were considered immoral or dangerous to readers or because they were on the Index.⁷⁷ To consult those books, readers had to obtain permission from the library director. In the 1930s, the National Assembly Library had its own "Hell" section; its 1932–1933 catalogue reflects this with a category entitled "Prohibited works. The Library's Hell."

To allow users to consult books on the Index, library directors often requested written authorization from a clergy member confirming that the user could safely consult the prohibited books.⁷⁸ The National Assembly Library was no exception to this rule; during his time in

office, Georges-Émile Marquis, Director from 1934 to 1952, received many such written authorizations. He made sure to remind citizens who wanted

to borrow works on the Index that they had to first obtain written permission from an ordained member of the Church.

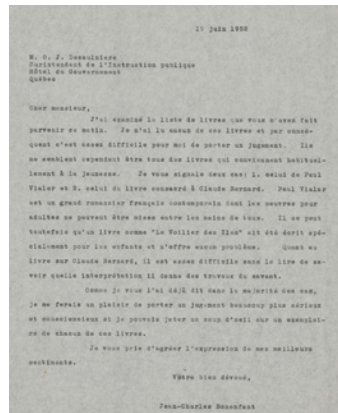
Marquis's successor, Jean-Charles Bonenfant, Director of the Library from 1952 to 1969, was frequently consulted about the moral quality of literary works. For example, at the request of Théophile Genest, Director of the Palais Montcalm theatre, Bonenfant reviewed the text of the play *Moumou* by Jean de Létraz and concluded that it should not be presented "because of the risqué situations the characters are put in."⁷⁹ Clergy members also wrote to Bonenfant. For example, in 1952, Sister Sainte-Emma at the Ursuline Monastery, wanted to know the moral value of the novel *Eugénie Grandet* by Honoré de Balzac, and on several occasions in 1952 and 1953, the Superintendent of Public Education, Omer-Jules Desaulniers, asked Bonenfant for his opinion on the moral value of works intended for the province's schools and school libraries.



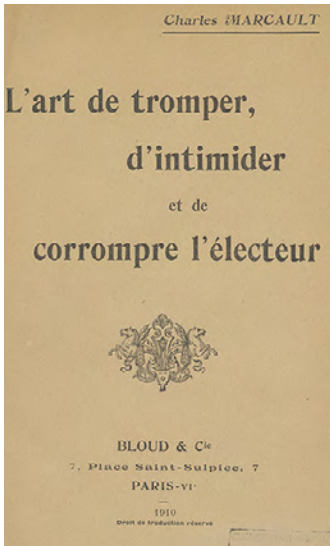
Georges-Émile Marquis. 1950. Québec National Assembly holdings



Jean-Charles Bonenfant. 1950. Québec National Assembly holdings



:Correspondence between Jean-Charles Bonenfant and Omer-Jules Desaulniers. 1952–1953. Jean-Charles Bonenfant holdings, National Assembly of Québec



Charles Marcault. *L'art de tromper, d'intimider et de corrompre l'électeur*. (The art of misleading, intimidating and corrupting the elector.) 1910. Special Collection, National Assembly Library

In the 1960s, the Library also found itself in the middle of a House debate concerning one of its books, which had been taken out but never returned. On May 12, 1961, Jean-Claude Plourde, Liberal Member for Roberval, asked a question in the House about *L'art de tromper, d'intimider et de corrompre l'électeur* (The art of misleading, intimidating and corrupting the elector). The House then learned that Maurice Duplessis had borrowed this rather controversial book in 1947 but had never returned it, possibly to keep it from being read by other Members.⁸⁰ The question was intended to embarrass Union nationale leader Daniel Johnson with regard to the former premier and party leader's pro-censor behaviour.

Although the Library has not experienced any other noteworthy events since the 1960s, censorship nonetheless always

remains topical in a context where freedom of expression and freedom to read are becoming more important in libraries' mandates. The last decades of the 20th century saw the emergence of new ethical issues related to access to information, such as control over access to hate speech. For example, Jacques Prémont, Director of the Library from 1969 to 1993, published an analysis on this subject in 1990, in which he reflected on the practices that a parliamentary library should adopt with regard to hate publications.

CONCLUSION

Ever-present throughout the history of Québec print publications, censorship has changed over the years, constantly being redefined in response to the context. Censorship went from being an ad-hoc measure to an effective weapon of control in the hands of the clergy. It has now shifted to the realm of law. Public opinion and the State are in a dialogue to establish standards of tolerance and for the social acceptability of literary works.⁸¹ Still today, censorship causes much ink to flow, as the limits of freedom of expression and the need for constraints are constantly reinterpreted.⁸²

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