Lecture 9: Censorship

I. Antecedents in Antiquity and Middle Ages
   • Condemnation of people and ideas rather than written objects; e.g. medieval inquisition ag. Cathars and other heretics
   • No particular medieval concern for Bible in vernacular

II. General patterns
   • Printing elicits regulation on a scale not aroused by mss production
   • Censorship sponsored by city councils, church, universities
   • Types of works censored (15-18th): Blasphemy, scandalous statements (even jokes) ag church or state, astrology; obscenity; in Italy: judaizing, books on duelling; vernacular access to Bible
   • Every early modern context includes censorship: Prot and Catholic
   • Punishments: fines, demolition of press, types; confiscation of books (often resold!); imprisonment; mutilation (no longer in 17th); execution

   Elizabethan decree (England, 1559): printers "for covetousness chiefly regard not what they print, so they may have gain, whereby ariseth great disorder by publication of unfruitful, vaine and infamous books."

III. Roman censorship—pre-publication and post-publication censorship
   • Late start: 1542 inquisition; no list before 1559 (Paul IV list very strict)
   • Permissions to read to the well-connected
   • Congregation of index formed 1571: rivalry; 1596 strictly enforced
   • Hard to reach decisions: sic et non, arbitrary decisions, decisions overturned, censors not paid, hard to find
   • 1607 index of expurgations: only one vol; censors paralyzed by fear of censorship of their work.

   Antonio Possevino, Bibliotheca selecta (1602) justification of censorship and how to do it; appropriation of Gesner’s Bibliotheca universalis (1545)

IV. Censorship and its impact on interpretation
   • Self-censorship
   • Motivations for printing forbidden books: material gain, ideology
   • Need to read in context
   • Censorship undermined by religious and national diversity, by market forces and reader demand