

[These extended remarks on free speech were excised because Hass had already made his point. This extended rant detracted from the overall work. - Robert Von Stricker Beresford]

Book banning.

Has it ever worked? Seriously? Aside from the fact that it is wrong, has it ever saved the children from moral decay and corruption? Or has it ever accomplished its goals, whatever they may be? Has it ever done anything aside from indicate the utter stupidity of the banners? We, as a society, need to get outraged by all the mothers (and fathers sometimes) and politicians who try to ban books. We need to yell at them and call them names until they retreat into their little holes in disgrace. I don't know that talking to them ever works. Though talking is, of course, the right course of action. It just makes me so mad. How can someone sit there and claim that a prize-winning work of fiction is corrupting the children, and that they have no part in the corruption, and the internet doesn't, and TV doesn't, and society doesn't and the other parents don't? Listen, we can't keep our children from the world. Better they have the opportunity to be exposed to quality and crap (regardless of whether we think it's filth) than just crap. How does one get in that mindset? I can't even conceive of it. You're damned if you do and you're damned if you don't. If we lock our kids in vaults, the cops will come arrest us. If we don't lock them in a vault they will be corrupted by the world, and especially *Snow Falling on Cedars*, that horrendously corrupting "book" (if you could even call it that) which no one can handle in all its immoral baseness. There are few things in this world more damaging to children than that "book."¹

Banning a book is like burning it. Are you a nazi? Would you burn a book? Because that's pretty much what we're doing when we ban one: the only difference is that banning doesn't (normally) physically remove the book from the world, just from the school library. No, we are not actually lighting it on fire, but the motivation behind both actions is the same.

Because of the large involuntary element in writing, works of literature can't be treated as embodiments of conscious will or intention, like people, and so no laws can be framed to control their behaviour which assume a tendency to do this or an intention of doing that. Works of literature get into legal trouble because they offend some powerful

1 I should know. Like any good crusading parent, I have never read it.

religious or political interest, and this interest in its turn usually acquires or exploits the kind of social hysteria² that's always revolving around sex (Frye 1963, 55).

After that quote, he attacks D.H. Lawrence for being boring. I sympathize. *St. Mawr* is not worth your time. “Novels can only be good or bad in their own categories. There's no such thing as a morally bad novel: its moral effect depends entirely on the moral quality of its reader, and nobody can predict what that will be. And if literature isn't morally bad it isn't morally good either” (Frye 1963, 56). I don't think this can be applied to other things, necessarily, as a perfectly serious essay on why it is good to kill your neighbour, or commit genocide, can be regarded as bad. This notion, though it helps us defend the novel, the poem, the building, the movie, can't really defend things that are less artful and more explicit. But where do we draw the line? Well, with free speech, we don't draw it. We try to allow education and society and, ultimately, people to determine whether or not it is bad. I would like to think that most of us can recognize, through our socialization, that the essay advocating killing your neighbour for its moral benefit (to you) is something we shouldn't agree with.

Hate Speech

'Hate speech' shouldn't exist but because it exists it creates the potential to be “over-used” (a ridiculous phrase); actually exploited. Such laws are vague to begin with and interpretations of what constitutes 'hate' or whatever you want to call it, will change from time to time. And somebody at some point will try to use it for their own benefit. Because this is what people in power do. And it's the abuse of power that liberalism is opposed to. So such rules are antithetical to liberalism. I'm sure some of you have seen that old Frank Zappa interview from *Crossfire* on YouTube. That's what I'm talking about. Words. Just words. This applies to swearing as much as anything else. Yet people are always coming up with reasons for why we shouldn't be able to say Kike. Spic. Wop. Zipper head. Cunt. Bitch. Fudge packer. Pufter. Faggot. Dyke. Sand Nigger. Towel head. Cracker. Round eyes. Deigo. Kraut. Schiester. Mecromb. Oh yeah, and fuck, shit. Swearing. I don't get it. What's the problem? Why are we still stuck in the Victorian era? What's with that?

2 “Oh Sam!”

There is a difference, for the victims of racial slurs, between swearing and racial slurs. I am a white male, whether I like it or not (though I guess I could change my sex but I don't know about my skin colour...unless...?). I cannot know what kind of feelings a black woman, for example, experiences when someone (especially someone different from her) calls her a nigger. I don't even have an equivalent for my own position. That is to say, at this point in history in Canada, there exists no word that can be said to me to make me feel the same way she does when some stranger labels her a nigger. I cannot know that feeling. The only way I can come close to approximating some kind of empathy is via artistic expression, whether through a story or a movie or photography or music or what have you. That's the only way I know of even coming close to empathy. I mean, I cannot know what it feels like. I can only guess. Maybe I kind of know for a moment, due to some very good art. Maybe. The point is that, like many things, we have to take the good with the bad. Even if we (or government) could control language (and we can't, or if we can it is only possible to do so via the means of Big Brother), we need freedom of expression to combat "hate speech." That's the only way I can figure to overcome it, that and everyday human experience with supposedly different "others" (and busing didn't work), also involving human expression. "Hate speech" is no doubt cruel, as far as I can figure, but the response to it, the way to get rid of the cruelty, is not through wiping out the supposedly cruel words (the words themselves are not cruel, only the people using them) as people will always come up with new words. One thing for sure, human beings are creative when they want to hate. The way to combat it is through art and through discussion and these things require few to no restrictions on expression.

In *South Park* episode 401, "Cartman's Silly Hate Crime 2000," they make a valid point about "hate crimes." This phrase is meaningless. Though the intention of the crime might not be one involving hate (i.e., when you are robbed, the burglar doesn't hate you necessarily), the intention is not the issue. It is the crime that is being punished, and the intention is only used to establish motive for proving guilt; - it is not actually part of the crime. But, as often is the case, there are those who think we need special types of crimes for racism, or for other *specific* intentions. There are others who think

racism is okay, or merely think that prejudice doesn't really hurt anyone.

Quebec

The near absolute enforcement of freedom of speech obviously applies, just as to anything else, to advertising. Why should store signs be restricted when other forms of speech are allowed? What makes signage special or more dangerous? And the reason for any restrictions are superfluous. There is only one kind of speech that should be banned, and that is speech that directly, publicly incites individuals to commit violent crimes against other individuals (“Fire!” in a crowded theatre, etc). This applies equally to advertising. Any laws forcing business owners to make their advertisements contain certain words should be unconstitutional. There is no justification for such regulations. Saving the French language is no such justification. That is a ridiculous crock of shit that amounts to the lame flailing of separatists losing their battles. Putting aside the facts that there is no way to prove, one way or the other, the effectiveness of such measures, and the absurdity³ of the measures in themselves, a language is not something that can be publicly defended by infringing on individual rights. Why? There *are* people in the world, there are not languages unless there are individual people. The 'rights' of concepts are even more vague and far more ridiculous than the rights of groups, which in themselves are intangible. How can a language have rights? That's absurd in and of itself. A language is not one concrete, tangible thing that can be protected by a law here or a law there. That's one thing. And it's sufficient.

But wait, there's more. That there is a supposed 'decline' of the English language through the perpetuation of fuck / shit / cunt / mecromb / lol is no reason to suppress fuck, shit, quiesenart, cunt, puddle-pumper, or what have you. One person's decline is another person's progress, folks. And the decline of a language is “A sorry spectacle, and one we can do almost nothing about” (Kolakowski 1991, 23). More importantly, go to Quebec. If you think the 'French' language of Quebec, aka Quebecois, is some kind of pure and beautiful dialect that is the bastion of 'French' in the world, listen

3 Editor's Note: “The world rests on absurdity” - Dostoevsky

to the Quebecers. Even though the stop signs may say 'arret,' there is more English in that language than there is in Ebonics. Hence, the Franglais nickname. I don't think making French bigger than English on signs will save Quebecois from being anglicized, as it already is. And languages mutate and die. This is part of life. Imagine if we were all still speaking Olde English? Wouldn't that be fun? That's what they want, isn't it? As Benevolent Dictator, I will pass a law saying that all signs in this country must have text in Chaucer's English that is at least 15 per cent bigger than text in any other language or any other form of English.

Say I am an English merchant living in the former town of Lennoxville, Quebec (now amalgamated into Sherbrooke, which is a whole 'nother story of the 'French' doing their best to keep the Englishman down).⁴ Lennoxville is pretty English. Yes, there are French people there, though the ones I've met are all bilingual. Say, I'm running some store. Who cares what kind of store. For whatever reason, I haven't bothered to learn French (or I haven't had time, or whatever). But my business is fine due to the presence of the English university, the English private school, the English CEGEP, the English high school, the English elementary school, and the English old folks home, all in the town. Yes, that's all true. I didn't make it up. This is a real place. Now because of some idiots in Quebec, I have a big French sign on my store, with some smaller English print underneath. And all the signs inside are in both languages. The English know it's a store to use because I speak English. Some French don't shop at my store because they don't like the fact that I am English and can't speak their language. Others don't care and use my store. The language used inside the store is English. People buy things in English. I sell things in English. We talk about whatever in English. And the big French words outside the store are saving the French language. Obviously.

And it gets worse. Since I wrote this I have learned that now these laws are being applied to signs *indoors*. So, suddenly everyone at an *Irish pub* is going to start speaking French because the bar

4 As a remedy for this I propose an englishploitation sub-genre of films which will demonstrate the lone Englishman's and Englishwoman's fight against the French Man, with plenty of shitty funk music on the soundtrack. I propose film titles such as *Rod* (male) and *Tee* (female). Fuck, I'm clever to come up with those all by myself.

signs and paraphernalia have been translated? I'm sure that's exactly what will happen. It's an *Irish pub!* What the hell is wrong with people? Sorry, dear readers. I apologize. I get heated up about speech. We cannot control language. There is no point in ever trying to. And it is wrong to try to. Language evolves. That's it.

While I lived in Quebec, I knew a separatist who apparently had never been outside of Quebec, but clearly knew all there was to know about Canada. His justification for the language laws was that if he went somewhere else in Canada and put up a French sign, he would be forced to replace it with an English one. I told him to visit Chinatown in Vancouver or Toronto. He didn't understand. But then, why should he? Why bother leaving Quebec ever? It's perfect, and must be kept that way by making French bigger on signs.

And there's the schooling. Though I understand that any community would want to educate its children in the language of that community, Quebec isn't in isolation. It is part of Canada. It has not left Canada. Telling someone they have to learn English seems reasonable in the rest of the country. Telling someone they have to learn French in Alberta doesn't make a whole lot of sense. So what? It should be that you have to learn French *or* English in Quebec, and in any other part of this country as long as we insist on having two official languages. Forcing people to learn the minority language of a country instead of the majority language of a country to 'save' that minority language is ridiculous. That's not to say people shouldn't teach French, but it should be voluntary. We'll all be speaking Esperanto in a few generations anyway.⁵

Swearing that isn't supposedly hateful

I will now debunk the reasons why we supposedly cannot swear.

The 'won't somebody please think of the children' reason: Apparently the words can be harmful. Not harmful in the sense of nigger or some other racist/sexist/degrading term. But harmful in the way

⁵ Pardon my bad joke, but it's true. We are all moving towards a common language at some point in the future. It may take centuries, but there will be a time when most people on this planet speak some kind of international language, whether it be one of the forms of Cantonese, Hindi, Swahili, Esperanto, or English...or some unholy language of the web. It is not the government's job to prevent this from happening, to French or to English for that matter.

of impeding someone's development by exposing them to immoral language. What kind of bullshit is that? If I say fuck in front of a kid, he will be scarred for life. If he watches someone get shot on TV, everything's peachy. Let's take lessons from the said children we're supposedly protecting against the wrath of shit, “sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” Damn straight, kids. But beyond that, kids swear anyway.

When you're a kid there's a limited number of places you can swear. When you're an adult, the number of places you can swear grows exponentially, to the point where the only place you can't swear is around kids. It's the weird trick act, where we're pretending like they don't know and we don't know and newspapers don't want to print it 'cause they don't want kids to read it. To which I say, 'Show me the eight-year-old that reads the paper.' If the kid's reading the paper, he probably heard the word 'fuck' (Martin Gero, cited in *Exclaim!* November, 2007, 22).

Amen.

Speaking of Amen, we have the religious reason: Swearing is against god or not appropriate for god-fearing people or some shit like that. But saying frig or some other substitute is totally okay. Even though the intent is the same, if we magically replace some letters, every thing's cool and we're no longer going to hell. Because we're smarter than *god*. But we knew that.

My friends' reason / The *South Park* reason: Swearing is special. Seriously, these words should only be used for special circumstances when we're really fucking mad at some fucker. Are you kidding me? Is this a joke? Is this why we shouldn't swear in front of children or we can't have swear words in 'family' newspapers or on network television? Because it's special. People who advance this point of view must really be up trees or something. John the fucking baptist.

The whole business of swearing...is mysterious. Of its very nature swearing is as irrational as magic – indeed, it is a species of magic. But there is also a paradox about it, namely this: Our intention in swearing to shock and wound, which we do by mentioning something that should be kept secret...But the strange thing is that when a word is well established as a swear word, it seems to lose its original meaning; that is, it loses the thing that made it into a swear word...The rule seems to be that words accepted as swear words have some magical character, which sets them apart and makes them useless for ordinary conversation. (Orwell 1967, 128-129)

I gotta say that I was disappointed with *South Park's* “It Hits the Fan.” Though I generally agree with the point of that episode, overusing certain words does not take the fun out of English. Mis-using them, as “HBC” does in that episode may indeed do it. But against that I would say, look at *Deadwood*, where the use of cocksucker in no way harms what is perhaps the most eloquently written

TV show, ever. That's right, I said ever. If we're saying shit just to say shit, that's childish, but it's no reason for a restriction of the word shit (regardless of whether it is self-imposed or not).

The social control reason: Swearing is impolite. Ha, maybe in the nineteenth century. 'Politeness' is a form of social control, so this is silly. But more importantly, how many people are really offended by someone saying fuck any more? I say it in front of people all the time. I hear it far more than I say it. It's everywhere. Well, except for in 'family' papers, and at Ti-Cats games (thank you Damien Cox!⁶). The point being that politeness is no reason at all. Politeness for one person is rudeness to someone else. I may not say certain words around people I know don't like them, but that in no way gives the government any right to restrict when I do use those words, or when anyone else does. Really, when it comes down to this, all these moral fuckers out there are just trying to control us. Restricting language sets limits on our imagination, which sets limits on how we can respond to moral zealots trying to take over our country.

My mom's reason: Swearing is destroying the English language. You know what is really destroying the English language? The internet. More specifically, instant messengers, texting, lol, lmao,⁷ and so on. How is one not acceptable and the other acceptable? Languages are not things that stay the same or can even be considered separate entities. Languages change constantly. All the time. How do we regulate that? How do we determine whether the change is good or bad? Well, we don't. Not until the owl of Minerva flies at midnight. And then it's too late. "Words do not constitute an overt act; they remain only an idea. When considered by themselves, they have generally no determinate signification" (Montesquieu 2002, 193). The interpretation and evolution of language totally depends on circumstance; it is out of our control. I have spoken.

⁶ Editor's Note: coxbloc.com

⁷ That sounds like a Chinese Communist Sesame Street character. If I could do voices I'd say "Where do correct ideas come from? Do they drop from the skies? No. Are they innate in the mind? No. They come from social practice and from it alone. They come from three kinds of social practice: the struggle for production, the class struggle and scientific experiment" in Elmo's voice. And then I'd have to release this in audio-book format.