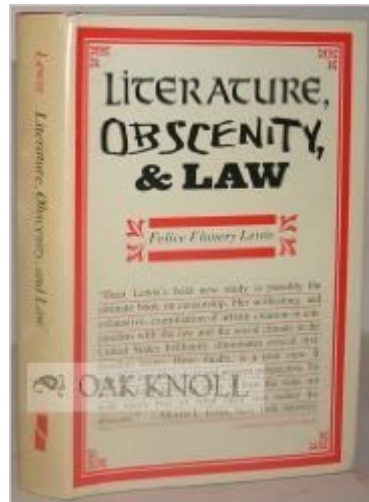


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Literature, Obscenity, & Law



Synopsis

This timely new study provides a systematic, comparative, and comprehensive view of literature's involvement in the obscenity question. The year 1890 roughly marks the beginning of a sexual revolution in the fiction published in the United States. Today, the gains realized generally are regarded as beneficial, and the right of writers to express themselves and, perhaps more importantly, the right of people to read, usually are taken for granted, though they are not without peril, as recent Court cases have shown. The year 1890 marks also the beginning of a sustained effort through legal action to censor literature considered obscene. The tensions thus produced are with us still. A crisis once again seems brewing as a result of the Burger Court's 1973 *Miller v. California* decision. At least 2 of the 50 states have already passed new antiobscenity legislation based on *Miller*, and more than 250 such bills are pending in other state legislatures. The trauma to our national psyche caused by the obscenity issue is the subject of this new, thorough, and dispassionate study. Dean Lewis's investigations include all works of imaginative literature—novels, short stories, poetry, and plays—known to have been the subject of obscenity litigation in the United States, for which court records exist, up to and including the *Carnal Knowledge* (*Jenkins v. Georgia*) case in 1974, and encompass more than fifty major works of imaginative literature charged with being obscene. General readers concerned with civil rights, constitutional scholars, lawyers, judges, booksellers, publishers, writers, and librarians will find here much to ponder about the state and status of our literature—almost the most prodigious asset of a country, and perhaps its most precious possession, as Mark Twain once wrote.

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