

Lady Chatterley's Lover.

by

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D H Lawrence's controversial novel, **Lady Chatterley's Lover**, was first published privately in 1928 before it was legally published in 1959 in USA and 1960 in UK. After the debacle in UK the publishers targeted Australia in 1960. The furore it created was a turning point in Australia's censorship laws.

The book was still on the Australian Customs 'banned books' list after thirty years.

In 1960 Senator Denham Henty, Minister for Customs and Excise, had the powers to refer contentious publications, in particular any book *which in the opinion of the Minister unduly emphasises matters of sex, horror, violence or crime, or is likely to encourage depravity, by obscene language or perversity* to the Literature Censorship Board for advice.

The Censorship Board recommended the release of the novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, but the Minister of Customs Senator Henty rode roughshod over the advice, and the matter was brought up in Federal Cabinet. So began the furore of *Lady Chatterley* and her lusty lover. Senator Brown asked in Parliament on 14 March 1961 if the decision was made by the whole cabinet or Senator Henty after consulting Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, and a few of his colleagues? The answer to retain the ban was partly personal by the Prime Minister and political because of a pending Federal Election.

On the other side was the weight of booksellers, publishers, civil libertarians, writers and academics all lobbying for its release in Australia. The decision could be appealed, but the prospect of taking the Federal Government as well as the individual states to court was far too costly and ridiculous.

A solution might not be too far off or was it.

Penguin Books in UK had published an account of the proceedings under the title of **The Trial of Lady Chatterley**. This book was banned in Australia under the Customs Act: Item 22. Though *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was placed

in a category reserved for books of possible literary merit, the Trial was downgraded to a section (Item 22) that dealt mainly with 'penny dreadfuls' and the like.

This really got the anti-censorship lobby's back up.

A W Sheppard - bookseller, and self confessed "literary intelligence agent"- dissected a copy of The Trial of Lady Chatterley and mailed the parts in thirty-four airmail letters to friends and associates in Australia. After collecting the parts he reconstructed the book, printed and published it in Australia thereby circumventing the regulations of Her Majesty's Customs.

The Customs Department tried to stop the locally printed Trial of Lady Chatterley from going on sale, but to no avail.

Customs staff usually vetted all literary material on arrival before it left for distribution. This was one of the very few jobs one could put one's feet up all day reviewing books of dubious content and being paid as well.

With the installation of the new Minister for Customs and Excise, Senator Anderson, on 27 July 1965 **Lady Chatterley's Lover** was finally released from the clutches of Customs.

During 1972 the Customs Department at last relinquished its role as censor.