



Censoriousness in film and theatre

by Simon Belt

In the wake of allegations of sexual assault and cover-up by Harvey Weinstein, the floodgates seem to be opening and those caught in the crossfire will suffer badly. To pre-empt any damage to reputations in this heightened atmosphere, allegations of sexually predatory behaviour by Kevin Spacey led to Netflix cancelling their contract with him.

Kevin Spacey was accused of making a sexual advance toward actor Anthony Rapp when both of them were working on Broadway in 1986. Rapp was 14 at the time and Spacey was 26. Spacey allegedly approached Rapp in a bedroom at a house party and "picked [him] up like a groom picks up the bride" and put him on the bed, falling on top of him.

Spacey said he could not remember whether the alleged encounter happened, but apologized if it did. After the allegation became public, Netflix announced the next season of the ***House of Cards*** show he stars in, Season 6, would be its final one. Though the announcement was based on a decision pre-dating Rapp's revelations, Netflix and Media Rights Capital, which produces the series, later announced production on the final season would be halted as well.

Spacey has not been convicted of any crime, nor even faces charges, yet a popular series with Spacey starring is being stopped. Maybe Netflix were planning on stopping the ***House of Cards*** show anyway, and are using the circumstances surrounding adverse publicity to do so. Regardless of any opportunism, there is something very censorious about this announcement.

That there is something more serious and censorious going on is highlighted by post production work on the Gore Vidal movie Spacey starred in is being completely scrapped even after all the filming has happened and shortly before release. The only rationale for this is that Netflix think the audience would be too easily offended seeing a continuum somehow between Spacey appearing in a film and the audience being encouraged to be sex fiends, even though Spacey has not been found guilty or even charged of any crime.

The 1978 punk film Jubilee, directed by Derek Jarman, has been adapted as a play for the

Royal Exchange theatre. Toyah Willcox, who was in the film and is now in the play, said the lines were "beyond disrespectful" in the city where Hindley and Ian Brady operated. In the film a character named Amyl Nitrate used her opening speech to say Hindley "instantly became my hero" when she was 15. The new play has cut lines about Moors Murderer Myra Hindley being "a true artist" and a "hero" for fear of offending the audience.

Now there's a matter of good taste, which I appreciate, but the matter of this being an iconic punk film, made into a play should have the line left in as it really is about shocking the audience. Director Chris Goode, who adapted the script for its stage premiere, said the lines were in the original film and understood that punks deliberately wanted to shock society and smash taboos.

Goode initially resisted requests to take out the reference to Hindley but was convinced to do so by a member of the "senior artistic leadership of the Royal Exchange" on Saturday. Goode thought that "It seemed to me that if Derek [Jarman] could do that in 1977 that we must be able to do it 40 years on," and that he "hadn't fully understood the way in which Myra Hindley as an icon and an idea has sort of become hotter over the intervening 40 years. That surprised me a little bit."

The change in the period is not about the importance of the line for now, in terms of Hindley's importance, but more about how cultural bodies seem to think we are all more easily offended today.