

# Censorship row as Kirk's publishers drop student book

## Call for stories to be changed rejected

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IT is a literary argument featuring, infidelity, colourful language and thwarted hopes.

Some students on one of the country's leading creative writing courses have accused the publishing wing of the Church of Scotland of attempted censorship after its publishing offshoot, the St Andrew Press, said it would not print their stories unless robust language was toned down or removed.

In recent years, students of the creative writing course at the University of Glasgow – whose alumni include award-winning writers such as Louise Welsh, Rachel Seiffert and Zoe Strachan – have published a collection of their short stories.

Compilations were published in 2006 and 2007 and this year the students hoped to do something similar and

approached St Andrew Press, which, after a meeting last December, appeared keen to publish – it designed a cover and page layout.

The compilation was to be called *Let's Pretend: 37 Stories About (In)Fidelity*, and infidelity was the subject matter agreed with St Andrew Press.

Ian Rankin, the creator of the Inspector Rebus books, has written an introduction.

However, the students organising and editing the compilation, Fiona Rintoul and Susan Kemp, say the publisher dropped out in May. St Andrew Press suggested changes, mainly toning down or removing swearing, which the students refused.

Ann Crawford, head of publishing at St Andrew Press, suggested to Ms Kemp at the beginning of May that the stories should be changed, specifically the use of God and Christ as "expletives" in three stories, and "stronger swear-

ing" in eight others.

She said one story, *Devout Observer* by CJ Begg, might not be accepted at all because it was "offensive to religions".

It was suggested that members of the Church of Scotland might "react very negatively to offensive swearing" especially the use of the "f" and "c" words.

St Andrew Press decided not to publish the book and the students are applying for Scottish Arts Council funds, so that Freight Design can publish the work.

The Kirk says agreement to publish was on condition that the stories were not "overly or gratuitously offensive" and did not ridicule other faiths or denominations.

The students say that no such guidelines were issued, and if they had been, they would have looked for another publisher.

Ms Kemp said: "I did say there may be problems with

some of the language and they said it was fine as long as it wasn't gratuitous. In May, though, there was a long list of changes and I thought: 'Oh my God, this is censorship'."

John MacGill, convener of the Church of Scotland's publishing committee, said: "Unfortunately, when the student representatives submitted the finalised stories to the publishing committee, it became apparent that some of the authors did not appear to have been told that there were any guidelines."

He said this had left St Andrew Press in an "awkward position".





**SUSAN KEMP: 'There was a long list of changes.'**

Ref: 16039372

