

## Book Review

Lynch, James J., and Evans, Bertrand. *High School English Textbooks: A Critical Examination*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1963.

The school curriculum in the United States has undergone almost a decade of searching criticism and reform. Substantial changes in the modern foreign language, mathematics, biology, physics, and chemistry curricula have been accomplished in many schools and states. As yet, history, English, and the social science programs have not completed or, in some instances, really begun the cycle of reform which is intended to bring teaching in the lower schools into accord with the conditions of modern knowledge. In English, the cycle has begun. The book reviewed here is one part of the early stages.

Have high school students read "Macbeth" when in their version 9 characters and 10 scenes have been omitted, when lines from the missing scenes have been inserted in other places in the text, and when 300 lines have been omitted from the scenes which have been kept? Have these students really studied Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" when 1360 lines have been removed? What remains of Whitman's "Pioneers, O Pioneers!" when it is presented as a 12-line excerpt made up of the third, sixth, and seventh of the original 26 stanzas, and printed without mention that the poem is incomplete and the stanzas not consecutive? Can students comprehend Whittier's "Snow-bound" when its 759 lines have been reduced to 13? or the Prologue to "The Canterbury Tales," some 858 lines, when published in 59? Should Shakespeare's "O Mistress Mine" be classified in a literature unit entitled "The Social Swing," and Dicken's "A Christmas Carol" as a story of "Home Life"? Is

there unintentional irony in placing Shirley Jackson's short story, "The Lottery," within a topical unit, "America is Neighborliness"? How helpful are assignments accompanying the reading of literature which suggest that students form a "fan club" or an "adventure club," or which advise students to do "research" on the "development of modern psychology, or the effects of modern wars"? Such questions as these are raised by the late James J. Lynch and his colleague Bertrand Evans in their critical examination of American high school English textbooks.

Lynch and Evans, professors of English at the University of California at Berkeley, reviewed 72 literature anthologies, and 54 grammar and compositions texts used in high schools in 1960-61. Their report, 526 pages, 7 appendices, 44 pages of tables, contains 4 major recommendations to publishers: (1) anthologies of literature should be drastically reduced in size; (2) every work admitted into the anthologies should be of high literary distinction; (3) the grammar-composition textbook series should be abandoned; and (4) activities in listening, speaking, and writing should be incorporated into the literature anthologies. Buried in the approximately 400 pages of their editorial comment lie other messages. Literature must be taught as an end in itself rather than as the servant of the social and natural sciences. Abridgements of literary works should be avoided, but, if done, then clearly and honestly. Thematic unit organization of literature is superior to the more frequently encountered topical unit. Intensive study of a few major works each year always surpasses superficial coverage of a 3- to 5-pound anthology. Literature should be the source of much student composition. Anthologies overmatch contemporary literature, the editorial apparatus, editorial license in adaptation and abridgement, and address students in a patronizing tone. Grammar and composition textbooks are flawed with needless

repetition, irrelevant topics, artificial assignments, neglect of literary works as a source and center of language activities, apologies to students for asking them to do anything not presently modish among adolescents, and obsessive fear of difficulty. The authors assert that grammatical study is a means not an end, and recommend that a single grammar handbook of approximately 200 pages be provided for student use.

Recently, the journals of teachers of English have carried many articles which support the Evans and Lynch criticism of anthologies and their opinions on the teaching of literature, and have corroborated many of the specific criticisms of high school grammar and composition books. For more than a decade in these same journals, however, there has been controversy over the nature of language study, with what appears to be a steady movement away from the views of Lynch and Evans to those that argue for the value of the study of language as an interesting and important end in itself. In this newer sense language study includes not only studies of the structure of language, but also those of phonology, linguistic geography and dialects, usage, diction, lexicography, and comparative linguistics. Furthermore, doubts have been expressed regarding the wisdom of using anthologies at all, when inexpensive paperbacked editions of literary works and collections are available in great quantity, and when the existence of *any* measure of difficulty of reading material much less accurate grade placement of literary works is unknown. Notwithstanding these differences and criticisms of the authors' opinions and style, their report provokes thought, even a sense of guilt or shame.

Why do English textbooks for high schools contain so many selections which fall short of what might be termed, loosely, an American literary canon? How could such gross distortions and

shoddy editing exist over the years? How could the *belles lettres* tradition of literature be reduced to extracts from popular digests and other forms of "miscellaneous non-fiction" without enormous opposition? Why is there such a gap between linguistic scholarship and the contents of high school textbooks on grammar and composition? We might argue that such questions are unimportant; good teachers need not rely on textbooks! Unfortunately, studies such as *English and the National Interest* by the National Council of Teachers of English show that one-half of all high school English teachers have inadequate preparation in English. (Furthermore, that while 40% to 60% of elementary school instructional time is spent on the English language, elementary teachers have only 8% of their preparation time in studies in English, including education courses in reading and language arts.) Such information supports the validity of the questions as does the pedagogical maxim that next to quality of the individual teacher we must rank books and materials of instruction chosen to support some theory of curriculum.

While school boards, parents, schoolmen, and teacher educators share in the responsibility for the condition, we may legitimately claim, that unless scholars in the field of English accept the responsibility to work with teachers in the schools, to write elementary and high school English textbooks, and to reward those who do write with the same approbation and advancement that is given to authors of critical articles in literary journals, the criticisms of Lynch and Evans, and, indeed, a host of others, cannot be overcome. If schooling is to have intellectual relevance to the branches of knowledge, there is work to be done.

Fortunately, during the last 5 or 6 years we have seen a change in this direction. The National Council of Teachers of English, the Modern Language Association, and the College English Association have cooperated in a study of the basic issues in

the English curriculum. With their aid and encouragement, the U. S. Office of Education has sponsored Project English Curriculum Centers in several major universities across the United States. Furthermore, in 1962 a continuing organization of major college and university English department chairmen was formed and in its first resolutions accepted the challenge of improving teacher preparation in English, acknowledged its responsibility to the English curriculum in the lower schools, and urged that scholars write and review textbooks and materials for the lower schools.

In comparison to the involvement of the world of scholarship in mathematics, science, and foreign language teaching, however, the effort has been modest. As yet we have not spent \$ 12 million developing an 11-12 year English program as we have for a one-year course in physics! The time will come when scholars in English may believe what Jerrold Zacharias of M. I. T., leader of the high school physics curriculum revision, says, "... the task of curriculum revision is one of the most difficult of all tasks upon which the scholar can embark. Before he can hope to make a matter clear to the student, he must make it clear to himself, and where the subject matter goes back to the fundamentals, this can be enormously difficult.... it requires not only scholarship and skill, but the highest degree of scholarship and skill."

Evans and Lynch have merely scratched the surface. Teachers, textbooks, and materials must be related to some articulated notion of a curriculum and that curriculum to the conditions within the disciplines of knowledge.

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