

Textbook controversy— balance is the keyword

Last of a three-part series

When the Wilmington parents were asked whether the vulgar, obscene and pornographic stories in the high school textbook aroused them sexually, they all responded with an emphatic "No."

This is part of the problem. If the material were in fact pornographic it would have had a stimulating effect, at least on some of them. But probably they were ashamed to admit their feelings. Their inhibitions spilled over into their courtroom testimony, even though their other, equally natural emotions weren't so carefully guarded.

In the first place, few had read the book (or even pages 357-380) and nothing breeds fear like ignorance. Secondly, the mutilation of the textbook to exclude all possible objectionable references was called "selectivity," not censorship. But euphemisms won't help much either.

A more reasonable and balanced approach is sorely needed in Wilmington and other communities with textbook controversies. Translated, this does not mean that they should agree with the relatively liberal standards of a town like Chapel Hill. Small communities do, after all, have a number of valid arguments on their side.

The unwitting followers of Thomas Bowdler were properly repulsed by former President Nixon's profanity. It is commendable that they are fighting for higher standards of community conduct. And they are only asking for the same degree of community control that liberals were so quick to grant inner-city blacks in order to get minority-oriented textbooks in the urban schools. Citizens of Wilmington are asking for morality-oriented literature, but it is questionable whether, for all their laudable intentions, the means they are choosing are really in the best interests of the students.

The difficulties of the situation are compounded by the knee-jerk liberal defensiveness of the media. Mention the word censorship and any reporter in the nation will start shouting something about the principles of the Republic. But the other side can be equally paranoid. *Playboy* was denounced as "one of those counterculture magazines" when Hugh Hefner is, unfortunately, a bastion of the bourgeoisie.

Course plan worthwhile

At times, it has become one vicious cycle.

The undergraduates complain that they aren't getting much out of most of their courses. Either the professors are boring, or they're not getting deep enough into the material, or the material isn't worth getting into.

Students complain about a lack of academic freedom, and about those required courses which are in no way compatible with their interests or their abilities.

After four years, many students wonder how much they've gained academically. Were the four years of tuition worth whatever increase in intellectual ability was attained? Could the experience have been better?

Instructors, for their part, are also at times disillusioned. They wonder why, when despite their best efforts, students often just sit there in class, showing no signs of intellectual stimulation, no inclination to ask questions or start discussion.

Some instructors vow to themselves: "This is the last year I'm teaching undergraduates. It's a waste of my time and my ability. From now on, only graduate students."

These are not the pervasive attitudes of all students towards all instructors and vice-versa. But many classes on this campus are infected to varying degrees with these cynical attitudes.

Last spring, to the disappointment of many academic reformists, the Faculty Council voted against the four-course load. However, the council did recommend that departments study the possibility of granting varying course credits.

Last week, the Political Science Department took the lead and decided to study such a plan.

The plan under study would allow

students to receive from one to six hours for a course, depending on the projected concentration. Once in a course, students would also be able to ask their professors for four, five or six credit hours, provided the students would do extra work.

Both faculty and students in the department seem to agree that there are merits to the plan. Dr. James White, chairman of the study committee, said that the plan would allow "for students who want a thorough knowledge of a smaller subject than would usually be covered."

Brad Miller, a representative of the Undergraduate Political Science Association, noted: "The faculty seemed to see this as a chance for a more flexible curriculum and not as a threat."

A greater flexibility in curriculum and more academic freedom is what the plan is all about. It would allow both students and faculty in the political science department to mold the courses to their needs, instead of molding their needs to rigid, preconceived courses.

If a student is allowed to take courses he is more interested in for more than three credits, then he can probably cut out some of his boring, tedious elective courses in which he might just be dead weight. This plan then helps instructors as well as students.

Hopefully, the political science faculty will see the merits, and ultimately approve the plan. But beyond that, maybe other departments will also see the need to study similar plans.

Profanity has become the cutting edge of media-liberalization movements, even though its vocabulary is terribly limited and overworked, however emphatic. Instead of the Berkeley "Free Speech" movement, most Americans read "dirty speech" and thus allow a catchy example to defeat the whole purpose of the effort.

Despite the misunderstanding on both sides, the overall effect of the Wilmington parents' effort is self-defeating. Suppression only adds excitement to the forbidden textbooks, and resistance in following the local school board. Banning certain books or magazines will in no way decrease the amount of swearing or obscenity in our society.

The experience of today's youth is greater than their parents dare imagine. As Mary Freeman, student body president of one of the Wilmington high schools said, "I'm glad adults care about us, but I don't think they give us credit for having any sense. People our age know what is right and what is wrong, and no book will persuade us to use language or not to use it."

The worst aspect of the Wilmington effort is that it tacitly endorses an extremely restrictive and paternalistic education. The idea is that if students don't know about something, then it won't be possible for them to act that way. But not only are students already aware of the various types of antisocial behavior (through TV if nothing else), petty suppression only make rebellion all the more appealing.

Socrates said that the wise man is the one who knows what he does not know. North Carolina schools must teach its students how to handle life, not hide from it, and occasionally a good dose of big-city drug life and perversion is good for an isolated community. Realism, not romanticism, is the rule of an enlightened education.

As columnist James Kilpatrick suggests, the only way to handle community textbook controversies is for school boards to be more prudent in selecting the texts. They can best gauge community tastes and standards, so that useless and regressive conflicts need not arise. But the overall trend should be toward complete freedom of textbook choice. The symbol of an enlightened society is the owl or the eagle, not the ostrich.



'WHERE NOW, JUDGE?'

Garry Bickett

A Hobbit on the Hill



While sitting in my room listening to Led Zeppelin, my thoughts were abruptly diverted from "Ramble On" to an irritating and quite persistent rapping on my door. I envisioned the source of the rapping to be either my RA telling me to cut the volume or somebody trying to sell strawberry incense, so I ignored it. But it continued to persist and I surrendered. I found the source to be a gnarled staff firmly held by a three-foot-tall hobbit. Naturally my surprise was immense, not so much because hobbits supposedly exist only in books by Tolkien, but rather because the hobbit had an uncanny resemblance to a miniature Mickey Rooney.

"Good evening sir," said the hobbit. "Oblib Baggins at your service and the service of your family."

Having sat through four lectures of Philosophy 20, I realized that this could very well be either a dream or the work of Descartes' evil genius. Either way it was real, because it seemed real and was real in my mind or something like that, so I played along, somewhat amused.

"Your services are welcome in my humble room, Mr. Baggins," responded I. "Now, tell me, what brings you here?"

"California was too crowded," sighed Oblib as he walked past me to the refrigerator, obviously satisfied with his success in confusing my dream.

"Great, but why Chapel Hill?" queried I, trying to find order so I would wake.

Before answering, Oblib pulled a Schlitz from the refrigerator and popped the lid off a can of Pringles.

"Hobbits, my friend, are in a predicament. We have been forced out of the woods by civilization and we are now scouting for a new place to dig our burrows," explained the hairy toad hobbit between gulps of beer.

"So why here?" I repeated impatiently.

"Escapism," came the answer.

"Oh, you mean like alcohol and dope; that sort of thing," expounded I, beginning to see more clearly.

"No," sighed the hobbit, "I mean environmental escapism."

"Oh," I whispered, confused again.

"It's quite simple," said Oblib. "We hobbits don't want to have our lives complicated by poverty, pollution, industrialization and noise. We would rather live in a place fairly separated from all this, a place where we can sit around in a park with flowers in our hair without having kids running over us playing war and torturing their already castrated G.I. Joe dolls."

Oblib reached for another beer and found a cold piece of chicken to accompany it down to his protruding stomach.

"Chapel Hill," burped the hobbit "is such a place. Tell me, when was the last time you saw kids playing war in the Arb? When was the last time you saw a plane overhead or heard a train go by? When was the last time you stepped in a mud puddle with mud in it? When was the last time you really worried about something going on outside of Chapel Hill?"

"Well, I don't know," muttered I, pushed up against the wall by the interrogation.

"Face it," said Oblib. "You have everything you need here: food, friends, entertainment, education, and yet you are isolated from all the bad things. You can read newspapers, you can watch television, you can bring in speakers to talk about coal mines and lettuce, but all of these are

secondary accounts. You can ignore them simply by turning a page, flipping a channel, or walking out of a speech. If something is ugly, you don't have to look at it. Take advantage of these four years. I, myself, intend to stay longer."

With that Oblib set down his third beer, picked up his staff, and exited. I climbed back on the top bunk and returned my attention to "Ramble On."

A heavy rapping brought me to the door again, but this time, instead of a short, chubby hobbit, there stood a tall, bearded young man wearing a loose fitting tunic accented by several strings of wooden beads.

"Hey man, would ya like to buy some strawberry incense to help send a guru through college?"

Garry Bickett is a freshman interested in journalism.

Letters to the editors

Sutherland defends article

To the editors:

Metin Gurol's column (Oct. 19) concerning my article on the Cypriot tragedy seemed to miss the point. In this reply, I do not want to instigate an editorial dogfight; my only wish is to put what I was trying to do in perspective and point out some errors in Mr. Gurol's criticism.

The main thrust of my article was to present an emotional reality which we as Americans should understand, since we had a vested interest in the invasion. U.S. funds greatly helped to arm the Turkish forces.

Because the article was mainly a presentation of a Greek Cypriot's view of the island's dilemma, the tragedy was largely presented the way he saw it. If I had had letters from a Turkish Cypriot, I would have included these.

On a careful reading of what I inserted between the letters from this Cypriot, one sees that I was merely attempting to tie the letters together with a thread of historical background.

I acknowledged that both Turkish and Greek Cypriots have suffered at the hands of the other. Therefore, Mr. Gurol's closing comment about the massacre of "defenseless Turkish Cypriot villagers" is completely unwarranted. I even acknowledged the fact that Greek Cypriots were enjoying a standard of living equal to America's (as did the Cypriot letter writer), and that many Turks were indeed living in ghettos.

My lead to the story concerning the fact that Congress and the administration are still at odds on the Turkish aid veto was meant only to elucidate the static nature of the situation and not to argue who is right. Neither Greek nor Turkish Cypriots seem able to make the requisite concessions needed to end the controversy. Just as Greek Cypriots are not entitled to the whole island,

neither are Turks deserved of more Cypriot governmental power than their population merits.

Mr. Gurol incorrectly claims that after Sampson's assumption of power, "Mass slaughter of Turkish villagers began." This is not true; there was no killing of Turkish Cypriots until after the Turkish naval and air invasion began. During the coup, the only people killed were about 30 Greeks and Greek Cypriots. It would seem ironic then that the Turkish interference which was meant to save Turkish Cypriot lives precipitated both Turkish and Greek Cypriot deaths.

Mr. Gurol states that the Turks are "the rightful owners of the island." This is absurd when one considers that the large percentage of the islanders consider themselves descendants of early Greek colonists. Perhaps Mr. Gurol is referring to the Turkish conquest of the island in 1571. However, since 1878, Cyprus had been under British rule until 1960, when a republic was erected.

By far the most disturbing part of Mr. Gurol's column is his mention of the Turkish fighting spirit, because that indicates to me no solution for the presently divided island. The history of Cyprus has shown that it is very difficult for two groups of different religious, social and political backgrounds to live on one island compatibly, if not harmoniously. However, this does not call for more violence but rather for a more concerted effort at negotiations.

Bill Sutherland
Estes Park

Zionist actions called 'criminal'

To the editors:

I had always thought myself religiously tolerant. I was born in Lebanon, the interface of Western religions. My father, a Roman Orthodox, caused his mother endless grief by marrying a Maronite Catholic. He then added insult to injury by giving his children Islamic names in honor of friends in Haifa. I have continued in his eclectic footsteps by being confirmed in a Protestant Church and by serious readings in Vedanta and Buddhism.

However, in light of Rabbi Seigel's recent letter addressed to you, I must now re-examine my tolerance. For you see, I have

relatives on a mountain in Lebanon who live in those old stone houses. They don't have much—just a few fig and olive trees and a few grape vines.

Now, if the learned Rabbi believes his self-claimed pedigree from the venerable matriarch Sarah, may God have mercy on her soul; or his assumed special relationship with the Ultimate Ground of Being entitles him to kill my grandmother, uncles and aunts in order to put some rich American or Russian Zionists in those stone houses as was first done in Palestine and now more recently in Syria and Egypt and to let these Zionists eat from our olive and fig trees and grape vines without paying for them, then I must declare "his" religion not only "racist" but also criminal—albeit admittedly from an "Arab" point of view. I must also find a new name for the religion of the Jewish immortals who have been among those that have given the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve their highest ideals.

Walid Courie
112 Lewis

Lightfoot concert disappointing

To the editors:

Tyler Marsh's in-depth profile on Gordon Lightfoot was illuminating. I hope "Lightfoot—far from 'Sundown'" was not intended to be a critical review of Mr. Lightfoot's performance Thursday night. For if the story was supposed to be a profile, Mr. Marsh did an admirable job, but if it was supposed to be a review, he failed miserably. It is the latter vein that I wish to comment on. I may be in the minority, but I feel I paid about \$10 too much to endure Gordon Lightfoot in his alcoholic haze. He did entertain the crowd of 8,000. However, his music—or lack of it—was atrocious.

He butchered *Sundown*, did not play some of his major songs (the guitar-tuning excuse is rather weak since he could have done his best numbers in either half) and was so drunk after the intermission that he stopped one song on six different occasions.

Most of the crowd enjoyed his performance but not because of the music. It is difficult for me to believe that Mr. Marsh and 95 per cent of the people in attendance have no discretion whatsoever. I paid to hear good music and was severely disappointed.

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