

## Contemporary Censorship Pressures and Their Effect on Literature Textbooks

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# CONTEMPORARY CENSORSHIP PRESSURES AND THEIR EFFECT ON LITERATURE TEXTBOOKS

THE American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom and other groups have noted a marked increase in the number of school censorship incidents reported since the mid-1960s and, more recently, since the conservative victory in the 1980 elections.<sup>1</sup> Because such incidents affect elementary and secondary schools more directly than they affect colleges and universities, this topic has been discussed extensively in education journals but not in the journals most commonly read by the members of college and university English departments. Nevertheless, the censorship of high school literature anthologies, in particular, should concern these departments because of its impact on such issues as textual integrity, the high schools' preparation of future college students, and the colleges' preparation of future high school teachers. Without an understanding of the sources and extent of contemporary censorship pressures and their effects on the literature included in high school textbooks, college and university English departments are unlikely to contribute effectively to dealing with this issue.

It is certainly arguable in principle that not all works are appropriate required reading for compulsory high school courses, although there are bound to be intense disagreements about what should be excluded, for what reasons, and on whose recommendation.<sup>2</sup> Banning certain books, however, is quite different from altering literary works to conform to the extraliterary beliefs of various groups. Unfortunately even major publishers of high school anthologies (including Scott, Foresman; Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; Ginn; McGraw-Hill; Macmillan; and Allyn and Bacon) delete or reword material that certain groups deem objectionable, not only in popular fiction and adolescent literature, but also in standard works by authors like Chaucer, Shakespeare, Swift, and Twain. These alterations are usually not noted in the students' texts, or they are mentioned generally and inconspicuously on the acknowledgments page or in other introductory material. Often the alterations are not even acknowledged in the teachers' manuals. Some publishers who claim to inform teachers of alterations do no more than mention that alterations have been made, without specifying where or what the changes are.

The pressures that lead to this practice come, most commonly, from right-wing organizations, many of which are religiously oriented. There are hundreds of such groups of varying sizes throughout the United States, including Save Our Children, the Heritage Foundation, People of America Responding to Educational Needs of Today's Society (PARENTS), Parents Who Care, Citizens United for Responsible Education

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(CURE), Parents of New York-United (PONY-U), and Young Parents Alert. The most widely known and most influential of these organizations is Norma and Mel Gabler's Educational Research Analysts, which operates from its base in Longview, Texas, to supply textbook reviews and other materials to individuals and groups throughout the country. Like many other right-wing organizations, Educational Research Analysts maintains that the literary works presented in high school textbooks should be entirely free of profanity, nonstandard English, sexual references, conflicts between children and authority figures, women in nondomestic roles, socialism, criticism of the founders or the policies of the United States, criticism of religion, homosexuality, paganism, the depressing themes associated with literary realism and naturalism, ambiguities, and nontraditional moral values. In a frequently quoted observation, Mel Gabler summarizes his organization's philosophy: "Allowing a student to come to his own conclusions about abstract concepts creates frustration. Ideas, situation ethics, values, anti-God humanism—that's what the schools are teaching. And concepts. Well, a concept never will do anyone as much good as a fact" (Parker 23). Richard Carroll, president of Allyn and Bacon, comments on this philosophy from another perspective: "The Gablers have taken the word 'inquiry' and have made it dirty. For the Gablers, inquiry is something that children aren't supposed to do, and something that parents should be afraid of" (Parker 24).

Because the Gablers influence the Texas State Textbook Committee, which must approve all the texts used in the Texas public schools, they have been extremely successful in having "objectionable" material omitted. Mel Gabler frequently mentions that when Norma first appeared before the committee in 1961 the publishers laughed at her. His implication, which is perfectly accurate, is that they have stopped laughing. For over a decade the Gablers have routinely brought about the rejection of, or significant changes in, one-half to two-thirds of the textbooks proposed for use in Texas. The message to the textbook publishers is clear. As a 1981 American Association of Textbook Publishers survey indicates, it is not profitable to produce books that will

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be unacceptable in Texas or to produce two editions of the same book, so that the guidelines implemented by the Texas State Textbook Committee affect the textbooks used throughout the United States.

In addition to their work with the Texas State Textbook Committee, the Gablers have been associated with textbook challenges in other parts of the country. In 1974, for example, they supported the residents of Kanawha County, West Virginia, who opposed most of the 325 textbooks proposed for use in their schools, contending that the books were profane, unpatriotic, destructive to the family unit, pornographic, depressing, critical of authority, and antireligious. The Gablers not only provided advice, textbook reviews, and other printed materials developed by Educational Research Analysts but also undertook a speaking tour of the area. There is no evidence that they themselves advocated violence, but the Kanawha County textbook controversy involved shootings, beatings, school closings, boycotts, and strikes. Although no one was killed, a local minister reportedly asked the public to pray for the deaths of those who supported the “liberal” textbooks, saying, “I am asking Christian people to pray that God will kill the giants that have mocked and made fun of dumb fundamentalists. I know of several Biblical incidents where men tried to stop the work of God and died” (Davis). At the conclusion of the controversy, the Kanawha County Board of Education adopted textbook guidelines that are very much in line with the beliefs of Educational Research Analysts. These guidelines provide that textbooks shall “recognize the sanctity of the home and emphasize its importance as the basic unit of American society,” that they shall “encourage loyalty to the United States and the several states,” and that they shall not contain profanity, “encourage [students] to criticize their parents by direct questions, statements or inferences,” or “defame our nation’s founders or misrepresent the ideals and causes for which they struggled and sacrificed” (Jenkinson, *Censors in the Classroom* 23–24).

Right-wing organizations often group their ideological targets under the general heading of secular humanism, which they define as a school of thought that engenders contempt for God, country, family, the work ethic, and religion, while promoting situation ethics, disrespect for authority, cynicism, and social alienation. These groups point to “A Humanist Manifesto” (1933), whose signers included John Dewey, and to “Humanist Manifesto n” (1973), whose signers included B. F. Skinner, to support their contention. The manifestos place scientific evidence above religious faith and endorse situation ethics, one-worldism, sexual freedom, ecological conservation, and socialism. The right-wing groups are convinced that almost all teachers adhere to the beliefs of Dewey and Skinner and that humanism as defined in the manifestos, humanism in the Renaissance sense, the humanities, and humanistic education are all

essentially the same. They conclude, therefore, that the public schools are teaching the tenets of the manifestos in the name of humanistic education and in opposition to Christianity, traditional moral values, and patriotism (which includes belief in nationalism and free-enterprise capitalism).

Contending that the presence of secular humanism in the public schools violates the First Amendment’s separation of church and state, right-wing groups base their arguments on two Supreme Court cases that, they assert, establish secular humanism as a religion. In *Torcaso v. Watkins* (1961), the Court found for a candidate seeking a commission in the Maryland Office of Notary Public who had refused to make the required declaration of belief in God. In a footnote the Court observed, “Among religions in this country which do not teach what would generally be considered a belief in the existence of God are Buddhism, Taoism, Ethical Culture, Secular Humanism, and others” (Bryson and Dety 67). In context the Court appears to have used the term *secular humanism* to refer to something resembling, or developing from, some aspects of Unitarianism. In *United States v. Seeger* (1965), the Court found in favor of conscientious objectors who did not specify belief in a Supreme Being but claimed religious grounds for declining to serve in the military. The case contains no reference to secular humanism, but right-wing groups claim that the discussion of religions that do not require belief in a clearly designated Supreme Being defines secular humanism as a religion. Edward Jenkinson suggests that this contention may be based on a footnote in *Seeger* that ties it to *Torcaso*: “If he were an atheist, quite different problems would be presented. Cf. *Torcaso v. Watkins*, 367 U.S. 488” (*Censors in the Classroom* 100). The right-wing groups use these Supreme Court references to establish First Amendment grounds for eliminating from public school textbooks the wide array of topics and viewpoints that they classify as tenets of the “religion” of secular humanism.<sup>3</sup>

It is difficult to assess how these pressures affect the selection of materials for high school literature textbooks, because publishers are understandably reluctant to specify what literary works they considered and then excluded from their anthologies and what reasons they had for doing so. The Gablers, however, are less reticent, and they have noted the removal of Shirley Jackson’s story “The Lottery” from several literature anthologies at the behest of the Texas Board of Education. Not surprisingly, the use of “The Lottery”—or the film version—in public schools has frequently been challenged, largely because the work associates violence with religion. (That some challengers will not acknowledge the validity of this association is particularly ironic in view of the religiously motivated violence that has characterized several textbook incidents, such as the one in West Virginia.) A survey of several current high school anthol-

ogies confirms that few of them include “The Lottery,” though it was a popular selection in older editions (see also Bogert).

In addition to influencing the selection of works for high school anthologies, right-wing groups alter some of the works that do appear. Predictably, one of their most common targets is profanity, and the practice of deleting expletives (with or, more often, without ellipses) pervades the textbook publishing industry. Allyn and Bacon, for example, has removed the profane expressions from Tom Wolfe’s *The Right Stuff* (grade 12), and Ginn has deleted expletives from “Lord Randal” (grade 7), Jack London’s *Call of the Wild* (grade 10), and James Thurber’s “Secret Life of Walter Mitty” (grade 11). Publishers tend, understandably, to minimize the importance of such deletions, referring in promotional correspondence to “superfluous ‘hells’ and ‘damns’ ” and asserting, “In no way do such deletions alter the quality of the literature.”<sup>4</sup> It is undeniable, however, that the wholesale removal of expletives, regardless of their purpose or importance, does distort both the tone of these literary works and the portrayal of the characters.

For the same reasons that textbook publishers delete profanity, they also routinely edit out sexual references and innuendos. The deletions vary somewhat from one publisher to another; as Kenneth Bradford of the Virginia Department of Education observes, “In the ‘Prologue’ the Summoner is allowed to be ‘Hot and lecherous as a sparrow’ in Scott, Foresman, but not, for example, in Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; and he vanishes from Ginn and Company’s text” (5). The Wife of Bath’s line “Ye shul have queynte right ynough at eve” is, however, consistently translated as “You’ll get your evening rations right enough,” although, as Bradford points out, “the wife is definitely not discussing food” (5). Scott, Foresman deletes the lines containing Chaucer’s reference to “ballocks” and “a hog’s turd” from the Pardoner’s Tale, and McGraw-Hill has excised Swift’s references to the nurse’s monstrous breasts and to a huge cancerous breast full of holes, along with sundry other references to breasts, from the *Gulliver’s Travels* excerpt that appears in one anthology.

By far the most widely publicized victim of censorship is William Shakespeare, whose plays are routinely cut by several hundred lines to remove language judged too difficult for high school students, to shorten reading time, to fit the allotted number of pages in anthologies, and most important, to remove sexual innuendos. In the high school version of *Hamlet*, for example, the portions of act 3, scene 4, that deal with Gertrude’s sexual relationship with Claudius have been deleted, so that Hamlet’s response to the situation is hard to understand. As an anonymous editorial writer observed in the Sacramento, California, *Bee*, “Hamlet . . . may be missing his ribald streak, but for humor he now has an amusing incoherence” (12 Feb. 1985). Similarly, all refer-

ences to virginity and its loss have been removed from *Romeo and Juliet* in the major publishers’ texts. Among the lines routinely excised are these, from act 3, scene 2:

Lovers can see to do their amorous rites  
 By their own beauties; or, if love be blind,  
 It best agrees with night. Come, civil night,  
 Thou sober-suited matron, all in black,  
 And learn me how to lose a winning match,  
 Play’d for a pair of stainless maidenhoods:  
 Hood my unmann’d blood, bating in my cheeks,  
 With thy black mantle; till strange love, grown bold,  
 Think true love acted simple modesty.  
 . . . . .  
 O, I have bought the mansion of a love,  
 But not possess’d it, and, though I am sold,  
 Not yet enjoy’d. . . . (8-28)

Other sections usually deleted from Shakespeare’s plays include the Nurse’s bawdy remarks in *Romeo and Juliet*, Ophelia’s mad indelicacies in *Hamlet*, and part or all of the Porter’s scene in *Macbeth*. One of the publishers’ most common lacerations in Shakespeare’s language is the substitution of “I will be with thee tonight” for Romeo’s original “I will lie with thee tonight” (5.1.34).

Such changes are obviously detrimental to the sense of Shakespeare’s plays. Removing all the references to the physical aspect of love from *Hamlet* and from *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, materially alters the characters’ motivations and the significance of other events in the plays. In letters explaining these cuts, publishers defend their actions by referring to the excised lines as “vulgar sexual references that create problems in the classroom” and by arguing that “[n]o director forces his actors to slavishly recite Shakespeare’s play in total [sic]. Moreover, when a speech is omitted from a performance, a stage manager does not pop out and call it to the audience’s attention.” One of the fallacies in this argument is that contemporary directors do not, as a group, eliminate all elements that organizations find distasteful for extraliterary reasons. Publishers feel obligated to include Shakespeare’s plays in their high school anthologies because the current emphasis on teaching the classics would hardly allow them to do otherwise, but they also feel constrained to present the students with an incomplete and, in several senses, distorted version of what Shakespeare wrote.

In defending their policies on high school textbooks, publishers point out that alterations were common long before the New Right emerged and that some companies have recently restored some of the deleted material. Both statements are true: Scott, Foresman’s 1985 series restores several lines that had previously been deleted, including the entire Porter’s scene in *Macbeth*, and Harcourt Brace Jovanovich’s 1980 version of *Romeo and Juliet* is an improvement over its 1960 version. Accord-

ing to Maureen F. Logan, the 1980 edition includes 2,676 of the play's 2,994 lines, whereas the 1960 edition had only 1,146. Further, a survey of pre-1960 textbooks confirms that the Shakespearean works they include have been substantially cut to eliminate overt sexual references and bawdy wordplay. The fact remains, however, that publishers are still deleting many of Shakespeare's lines at a time when television programs, films, popular music, easily available books and magazines, and even some of the contemporary material in high school libraries and courses are at least equally explicit. While one could certainly argue, on the principle of textual integrity, that the high school versions of Shakespeare's plays should not have been bowdlerized even when the general social climate was more restrictive, the publishers' persistence in this practice despite society's present acceptance of other materials dealing with sexuality is an anomaly largely attributable to the continued influence of conservative groups.

Although right-wing pressures underlie many of the textbook publishers' decisions, left-wing pressures also affect the selection of material for high school anthologies and lead to alterations in some works. Here the focus is on including positive views of women, minority groups, the aged, and the handicapped and on encouraging critical thinking about materialism, elitism, and competitiveness. The leading left-wing group that deals primarily with educational matters is the Council on Interracial Books for Children (CIBC), which has extended its scope of activity to include the other issues mentioned. Much of the pressure from the left comes, however, from groups that deal with school-related matters in the course of their involvement with broader social issues, such as the National Organization for Women, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, People for the American Way, and the American Civil Liberties Union.

In part because of the changes in the social climate that these left-wing groups have helped bring about, more works by and about women and representatives of minority groups now appear in high school literature anthologies, including works that present a liberal perspective on feminist and civil-rights issues. Left-wing educational groups argue that pressure in this direction is not censorship; in a debate with Lee Burrell, for example, Robert B. Moore, director of CIBC's Racism/Sexism Resource Center for Educators, asserts, "We must distinguish criticism and pressure for *inclusion* of ideas, peoples, and perspectives from pressure for their *exclusion*. The former insures equal protection under the law and *supports* intellectual freedom" (15). Similarly, the publications of left-wing educational groups, unlike the publications of most right-wing groups, encourage readers to form their own views. The introductory section of CIBC's *Guidelines for Selecting Bias-Free Textbooks and Storybooks*, for example, states, "In sharing our insights we in no way mean to

imply that our guidelines are perfect, or final, or fool-proof, or to be followed unquestioningly. On the contrary, we urge readers to read with a critical, questioning mind" (2).<sup>5</sup>

Despite the policies of CIBC and similar organizations, the element of exclusion does sometimes enter into left-wing challenges to textbooks. There have been numerous debates at the high school level, as well as at the college level, about the substituting of works by women and minority writers for more traditional choices. Further, some left-wing groups and individuals have sought to exclude specific works that offend them; the most notable example is Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which they find offensive, despite its overall antiracist position, because it contains the word *nigger*. Finally, the strong overall positions taken by such groups as NOW and NAACP and the protests initiated by some individuals have contributed to publishers' decisions to delete or reword material that may seem derogatory to any group.

Some states have guidelines prohibiting the inclusion of racist or sexist material in textbooks used in the public schools. The guidelines adopted in California in 1974, for example, provide that "[d]escriptions, depictions, labels, or retorts which tend to demean, stereotype, or be patronizing toward females must not appear," and that "[d]escriptions, depictions, or labels which tend to demean, stereotype, or be patronizing toward minority groups must not appear" (*Guidelines* 70, 72). Since publishers are as concerned about sales in California as they are about sales in Texas, these guidelines have often been applied literally. Moreover, some publishers now have their own in-house policies prohibiting the inclusion of "expressions containing racial or ethnic statements that might be interpreted as insulting and stereotyping of the sexes, the elderly, or other minority groups or concerns" or of "passages that are considered to be overtly racist, sexist, or disparaging of any other group of people and are without defensible literary merit."

In accord with these policies, publishers eliminate or change offending passages regardless of the purpose or meaning those passages have in the original work. McGraw-Hill, for example, changes "nigger" to "Negro" in *Huckleberry Finn* (grade 9), Allyn and Bacon removes "piccanin" from Nadine Gordimer's "Train from Rhodesia" (grade 12), and Ginn removes the first and fifth stanzas from Richard Wright's "Hokku poems" (grade 7). Sometimes both right-wing and left-wing pressures affect the same literary work. In Patricia Zettner's story "A Perfect Day for Ice Cream," for example, various publishers eliminate the reference to Gloria Steinem and the word *pest* that a child applies to a sibling because home-and-family conservatives find militant feminism and portrayals of family conflict unacceptable, but these publishers delete the phrase *Kamikaze ball* as well, because it could be interpreted as ethnic derogation. Since California's liberal textbook

guidelines also discourage the use of materials that promote foods of low nutritive value, the publishers have changed the title of the story to "A Perfect Day" and edited out the trip to the ice cream parlor. Similarly, publishers have corrected the language of Mark Twain's characters in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, yielding to conservative pressure to remove poor grammar from textbooks to avoid encouraging students to use such grammar themselves, and have substituted *children* for *boys* in response to liberal pressure for sexually neutral language and the removal of any suggestion that girls have inactive or supporting roles in relation to boys.

Inevitably, some decisions that accord with one school of thought conflict with another. Certain right-wing groups, for example, oppose the inclusion of black literature per se, while others do not object to it directly but do object to making space for it by eliminating more traditional works. Further, responding to left-wing pressures to put works by black authors in anthologies, McGraw-Hill has included Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" in a high school textbook; but since right-wing groups object to material that focuses on negative aspects of the United States, such as social injustice, the publisher has eliminated all the derogatory references to Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama—a decision that does not coincide with CIBC's belief that "[t]he reality of exploitation of some groups by others should be honestly stated and explained" (*Guidelines* 29–30).

Although censorship has not affected the texts of the literary works taught at the college level, it concerns college and university faculty members because of its implications about *textual integrity* and its impact on the preparation of future college students. When twelfth-grade textbooks present the following year's college freshman with versions of *The Right Stuff* without expletives, Chaucer without bawdiness, *Hamlet* without overt sexual relations between Gertrude and Claudius, and "The Train from Rhodesia" without "piccanins," these textbooks are giving the students neither an accurate factual background in literature nor adequate preparation to discuss the complexities and controversial elements of the unadulterated literature taught in college. Further, the practice of using such textbooks, particularly when alterations have been without the teachers' knowledge, has implications for the preparation of future high school English teachers.

Some publishing companies that say they intend to be more specific about alterations in future editions of their texts have cited the influence of the NCTE's 1984 statement on censorship.<sup>6</sup> Several speakers at an ADE panel discussion on school censorship at the 1983 MLA convention urged similar statements from university and college organizations. At its summer meeting in 1985, the ADE voted to request that the MLA Committee on Academic Freedom appoint a task force to study the censorship of school textbooks and recommend appropriate action. Such an understanding is particularly

desirable because there has been no scholarly study of this issue and its implications for college teaching. Moreover, just as the vocal and sustained objections that the NCTE and other organizations have presented to textbook publishers over the years have helped counter the pressure toward adulterating high school textbooks, communication between college and university organizations and the publishing companies would not be without effect. Finally, as Diane Shugert, former chair of the NCTE Committee against Censorship, suggested at the 1983 ADE panel discussion, college and university faculty members have the prestige, verbal skill, and academic background to take a leadership role in countering censorship pressures in the local community, assisting high school teachers to recognize and deal with literary censorship, and influencing high school book-selection procedures.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Association of American Publishers et al., Burress, Fields, Kamhi, Marcus, and Mutter. For an opposing viewpoint, see Taylor.

<sup>2</sup> This issue has been discussed at length elsewhere. See Bartlett, Berkley, Hogan, Hove, Hung, Nocera, O'Neil, Small, and Yudof.

<sup>3</sup> Among the many sources that discuss Educational Research Analysts and similar groups in more detail are Hefley, Jenkinson (all works), and Martin. For additional discussions of secular humanism, see Duncan, Hitchcock, McGraw, Rhode, and Whitehead and Conland.

<sup>4</sup> In 1984–85, the Virginia Board of Education took a strong and well-publicized stand against textbook censorship after a member of the textbook-adoption committee alerted a member of the board that several of the literature anthologies being considered for use in Virginia contained alterations, including some texts whose publishers had asserted that no alterations had been made. The publishers' promotional correspondence quoted throughout this essay was addressed to the Virginia Board of Education.

<sup>5</sup> For a comparison of right-wing and left-wing goals and tactics, including arguments in favor of the liberal groups, see Massie. For a negative view of CIBC, see Gerhardt.

<sup>6</sup> The following is the text of the NCTE statement "opposing abridgement or adaptation as a form of censorship":

This resolution reflects concerns among teachers of English about the publishing practice by which important works of literature are abridged and sometimes altered for use in textbooks without adequate explanation by the publisher. In some instances, abridgement and adaptation may constitute censorship. Moreover, teachers can make informed choices in the textbook selected only when full information is provided about changes in texts.

RESOLVED, that the National Council of Teachers of English recommend that publishers present the complete text or sections of work which they choose to print, whether in a single text or in an anthology; and

that NCTE urge that if publishers do abridge or adapt a text, they clearly state in the textbook that these altera-

tions have occurred, and explain the nature and extent of the abridgement or adaptation in promotional information, teachers' guides, and other support materials.

National Council of Teachers of English

For a summary of the anticensorship activities of other organizations, see Shugert.

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Free Essay: Censorship may be protection from inappropriate materials, but it also limits free speech. For the limitation of free speech, it is reasonable... Also affecting that freedom is the influence that outside sources can have on your own thoughts and actions. People tend to rely more on television and other electronic media to give them false ideas or impressions. Currently, censorship in music is possibly the most relevant form of censorship. One of the more disturbing signs of censorship in music is a condition nearly snuck into the USA-PATRIOT Act that would allow the government "to hack private citizens' computers to delete what they consider to be illegal MP3 song files" (Blecha 179). Soviet Censorship and Translation in Contemporary Ukraine and Russia. Analyzing the impact of censorship on translation has become an integral part of researching ideological aspects of translation. Translation has an effect on the relationships between peoples, between people and power and between power and people. This volume looks into the role of translators in different historical contexts focusing on how their work affected their surroundings on how the context surrounding them affected their work. Their practice and their relevance through history help highlighting the changes around them. I possess a wide range of experience critiquing and editing academic literature including abstracts, articles, book chapters, proposals and thesis drafts. Censorship by religion is a form of censorship where freedom of expression is controlled or limited using religious authority or on the basis of the teachings of the religion. This form of censorship has a long history and is practiced in many societies and by many religions. Examples include the Galileo affair, Edict of Compiègne, the Index Librorum Prohibitorum (list of prohibited books) and the condemnation of Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* by Iranian leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Educational sources. The content of school textbooks is often the issue of debate, since their